

opposition is reduced to two tenses: the PRESENT TENSE and the PAST TENSE, which typically refer to present and past time respectively.

NOTE Future meaning is conveyed by various means, including the present tense: *Tomorrow is Tuesday*. Cf 4.13ff.

Stative and dynamic senses of verbs

4.2 We draw a broad distinction between the STATIC and DYNAMIC senses in which verbs are used to refer to situations (cf 4.11). Verbs like *be*, *have*, and *know* have stative senses when they refer to a single unbroken state of affairs:

I have known the Penfolds all my life.

Verbs like *drive*, *speak*, and *attack* have dynamic senses, as can be seen when they are used with the present perfect to refer to a sequence of separate events:

I have driven sports cars for years.

NOTE [a] A verb may shift in sense from one category to another. *Have*, for example, is usually stative: *She has two sisters*. But it has a dynamic sense in *We have dinner at Maxim's quite frequently*.

[b] Dynamic verb senses can regularly occur with the imperative and progressive, but stative verb senses cannot:

Learn how to swim. **Know* how to swim.

I am learning to swim. **I am knowing* how to swim.

In general, only dynamic senses follow *do* in a pseudo-cleft sentence (cf 18.20):

What she did was (to) *learn* Spanish.

*What she did was (to) *know* Spanish.

Tense

Simple present tense for present time

4.3 (a) The STATE PRESENT is used with stative verb senses to refer to a single unbroken state of affairs that has existed in the past, exists now, and is likely to continue to exist in the future. It includes the 'timeless present', which refers to 'eternal truths' such as *Two and three make five* or to less extreme instances of timelessness, such as *The British Isles have a temperate climate*. It also includes more restricted time spans:

Margaret *is* tall.

He *does not believe* in hard work.

We *live* near Toronto.

This soup *tastes* delicious.

(b) The HABITUAL PRESENT is used with dynamic verb senses to refer to events that repeatedly occur without limitation on their extension into the past or future. Like the state present, it includes the 'timeless

present', such as *Water boils at 100°C* and *The earth moves round the sun*, and more restricted time spans:

We *go* to Brussels every year.

She *doesn't smoke*.

She *makes* her own dresses.

Bill *drinks* heavily.

Whereas the state present always refers to something that applies at the time of speaking or writing, this is very often not so for the habitual present: We can say *Bill drinks heavily* when Bill is not actually drinking.

(c) The INSTANTANEOUS PRESENT is used with dynamic verb senses to refer to a single event with little or no duration that occurs at the time of speaking or writing. It is used only in certain restricted situations; for example, in commentaries and self-commentaries (*Black passes the ball to Fernandez; I enclose a form of application*) and with performative verbs that refer to the speech acts performed by uttering the sentences (*I apologize for my behaviour; We thank you for your recent enquiry*).

NOTE It is a sign of the habitual present that one can easily add a frequency adverbial (eg: *often, once a day, every year*) to specify the frequency of the event.

Simple present tense for past and future

4.4 There are three additional kinds of uses of the simple present that are best seen as extended interpretations of the basic meanings of 4.3.

(a) The HISTORIC PRESENT refers to past time, and is characteristic of popular narrative style. It conveys the dramatic immediacy of an event happening at the time of narration:

Just as we arrived, up *comes* Ben and *slaps* me on the back as if we're life-long friends.

It is used as a stylistically marked device in fictional narrative for imaginary events in the past:

The crowd *swarms* around the gateway, and *seethes* with delighted anticipation; excitement *grows*, as suddenly their hero *makes* his entrance...

(b) The simple present is optionally used to refer to the past with verbs of communication or reception of communication to suggest that the information communicated is still valid:

Jack *tells* me that the position is still vacant.

The Bible *prohibits* the committing of adultery.

I *hear* that you need an assistant.

I *understand* that the game has been postponed.

(c) In main clauses, the simple present typically occurs with time-position adverbials to suggest that a future event is certain to take place: