Unit 6: Verbs

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Introduction to Verbs

Verbs

Verbs are words that show an action, an occurrence, or a state of being. Almost every sentence requires a verb (though we have studied in a previous unit the nominal sentences and shown how the copula is a replacement for the verb). There are two types of verbs: Transitive verbs and Intransitive verbs.

Transitive Verbs require a direct object (noun, pronoun or noun phrase). For example, the verb "like" requires two nouns a subject (that which "likes"), and an object (that which is "liked"). Intransitive verbs do not require a direct object. For example, the verb "play" only requires a subject - that which "plays."

The basic form of the verb is called the infinitive. The verb is conjugated to produce several different forms which are called verb tenses.

English Verb Tenses

In English, there are three verb tenses: Past, Present and Future; and there are additional aspects that give extra details: Simple, Perfect, Continuous, Perfect Continuous. These details include what actions happened first, whether a past action has an impact on the present, the length of time the action occurred, etc.

Past Tense

- Simple Past "I ate"
- Past Perfect "I had eaten"
- Past Continuous "I was eating"
- Past Perfect Continuous "I had been eating"

Present Tense

- Present Tense "I eat"
- Present Perfect "I have eaten"
- Present Continous "I am eating"
- Present Perfect Continuous "I have been eating"

Future Tense

- Future tense "I will eat"
- Future Perfect "I will have eaten"
- Future Continuous "I will be eating"
- Future Perfect Continuous "I will have been eating"

Verb Tenses in Other Languages

You may think "what other tenses can there be? Past, present, future... that's all one needs." To give an example, we can look at Spanish. Spanish has 18 verb tenses (compared to English's 12). The Conditional tense in Spanish is expresses the equivalent of "would + verb" construction in English (e.g. "I would eat"). A related tense is the Conditional Perfect (e.g. "I would have eaten"). Although we can still express these ideas in English, we don't consider them tenses.

We will find a similar situation in Coptic.