

The Present Perfect Tense: A Challenge for Palestinian EFL Learners

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Abstract

The present perfect tense is one of the most challenging English tenses for Palestinian EFL learners. The lack of a counterpart of this tense in Arabic, the interference of L1 into L2 acquisition, the absence of a through methodology that would help learners capture the semantic and pragmatic use of the perfect tense have all contributed to the difficulties facing EFL Palestinian learners when dealing with this tense. This paper aims at introducing a new pedagogical perspective towards facilitating the learning of the present perfect.

Key words: Palestinian EFL Learners, present perfect tense learning

1. Introduction

The present perfect tense poses a great challenge for Palestinian EFL learners. It is considered one of the most difficult tenses of English from the viewpoints of both learners and teachers (Murcia & freeman, 1983; Matter, 2001; Liszka, 2004; BaSaeed, 2013). The difficulty in mastering this tense arises from the fact that Arabic (native language in this paper) lacks the use and structure of the perfect tense and aspect as there is no counterpart of this tense in Arabic except completed/non-completed actions. So, learners do not only lack the structure, but most importantly the semantic and pragmatic concept which, due to many other factors, is deluded and miscommunicated; moreover, errors in the use of this tense may also be attributed to errors of training that are caused by improper teaching.

Based on previous research (Lado, 1957; Lightbown&Spada, 2000; Liszka, 2004; BaSaeed, 2013), it has been proven that one of the factors that makes it difficult for EFL/ ESL learners to fully acquire a second language is the influence of their L1. Learners in the first stages of their second language acquisition rely firmly on rules of their first language, making one-to-one way

matching of the grammatical rules of their target language with their first language in a trial to alleviate the burden and build up on previous grammatical knowledge. This strategy has proved to be effective in some aspects, and thus it has been referred to as ‘positive transfer’. However, as no two languages are similar, it is not always the case that learners will succeed in making this one-to-one match; sometimes they rely on employing other structures from L1 as substitutes for structures in L2. This is the case with Palestinian EFL students when dealing with the present perfect; they either use the present or the past tenses as substitutes of the perfect tense. One may use the simple present where the simple perfect should be used (*I am sick for a week instead of I have been sick for a week), or the present progressive where the present perfect progressive should be employed (*I am waiting for two hours instead of I have been waiting for two hours). Another type of errors would also include the use of the present perfect with definite time adverbials instead of the past tense (*I have seen him yesterday instead of I saw him yesterday). This point is supported by Matter’s (2001) study in which he investigated the writing of EFL Arab learners. He found out that learners avoid using the present perfect in English and substitute it with the simple past. He amounts to the argument that Arab learners’ avoidance of the present perfect tense in English is not a reflection of Arabic interference. Yet, this avoidance results from the fact that they are notable to “establish proper form/meaning, tense-aspect association.” (P.104). This is an indication that this type of error is not a type of interlingual error, rather it is intralingual error, resulting not from L1 interference into L2 but rather from the complexity of the target language itself. Thus, learners make this type of interference mainly because they lack the understanding of the semantic and pragmatic features of the perfect tense/aspect; they are not fully aware that this tense is not completely past nor present, but a mixture of past and present, and therefore they fail to conceptualize the concept of “current relevance” (McCoard,1978). No efficient mastering of the tense can be achieved unless teachers as well as learners understand this subtle point. Although it is easy to teach the form of the perfect, knowing when and where to use it is a difficult matter.

An asterisk indicates that the sentence is ungrammatical.

1.1. Methodology

1.1.1. Problem of the Study

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The present paper discusses the difficulties that Palestinian EFL learners face when learning the present perfect tense. A number of causes can be traced from Palestinian EFL Learners' inability to attain proficiency in using the present perfect tense in English.

First of all, Arabic doesn't have a perfect tense; therefore, when Palestinian EFL learners need to use the present perfect, they end up using other tenses from Arabic. Since Arabic lacks the structure and concept behind using this tense, learners are left with no idea on when, where, and how to use this tense. Second, even though Palestinian students start their English education at an early stage, still full competency in English is hardly attained; their language proficiency is very weak and doesn't meet their needs. There are many reasons for this phenomenon such as the unsettled political situation, a very poor educational system that lacks well-qualified and trained teachers, appropriate classroom settings, and teaching materials and aids. What add to the problem are the crowded classrooms and the lack of chances to practice the language outside classrooms. No real or authentic settings are available to enhance their language competence. Third, the present perfect is a problematic and complex tense that relates past and present time as viewed by the speaker. Thus, it behaves deictically since it depends on the point of reference of the speaker. For example, both of these two sentences are grammatically correct: 'I have seen him this morning' and 'I saw him this morning'. These two sentences, though grammatically sound, cannot be used interchangeably without limits and conditions. They are situationally and timely different. The first sentence can only be used when the conversation is taking place during the morning and not crossing that time. The second sentence can only be used only after the morning period is over, e.g. in the afternoon, evening, or at night. This deictic nature of the present perfect, if not addressed and conveyed accurately, can result in confusion and errors. Fourth and most importantly, the teaching materials and textbooks used in the Palestinian teaching context do not capture the differences between Arabic and English grammars. English grammar should not be taught using a set of "globally accepted sequence of restricted rules" (BaSaeed, 2013: 20), rather the teaching methods should be more flexible and should suit the nature of learners' first language as well as the context. Moreover, they do not rely on authentic and communicative real-life situations that provide the chances for learners to use and shift the tenses as the discourse requires. Rather, each of the English tenses is introduced separately with very controlled and tailored examples and exercises that only stress the new grammatical form.

Having taught English for Palestinian EFL learners over the years, I can fairly state that the difficulties they face in mastering this tense is not solely due to the lack of this tense in Arabic, rather it is due to the absence of a clear and suitable methodology that help construct the semantic and pragmatic meaning of the present perfect. EFL Palestinian learner fail to grasp the concept of “current relevance” or “time reference to the present” when dealing with the present perfect. This is mainly contributed to limitations in the teaching approach to this tense. This is consistent with research findings indicating that instruction of the present perfect has not always been successful (Liszka, 2004; BaSaeed, 2013; Bardovi-Harlig, 1997). The challenge is to help learners comprehend and use this tense meaningfully in their discourse. From my teaching experience, when the present perfect is introduced to EFL learners, the procedure goes like the following: first the rule of the perfect is introduced (have / has + Past participle), then adverbials such as since, for, just, already, never, and ever are introduced to learners as keywords or flash lights that are mostly used and associated with the present perfect; finally, the learners are given exercises in which they have to choose the correct verb tense or form, without providing any authentic or real contexts. Moy (1977) indicates that this can create a problem for learners when it comes to determining which tense to use. He provides an example in which the adverbial “three times” can be used with both the present perfect and the past simple:

I visited Hong Kong three times.

I have visited Hong Kong three times. (p.304)

In these examples both tenses can be used, and thus teaching learners that this adverbial phrase “three times” is always used with the present perfect is incorrect and doesn’t help construct a clear concept of when to use this tense.

To help overcome this problem, the researcher suggests a grammatical model that help construct the right concepts in the learners’ minds as well as provide an aid to grammar teachers. This model depends on helping learners mainly capture the concept of “present relevance” as suggested by Inoue (1978) as well as not only does it create associations between language forms with their meanings and uses, but it also distinguishes it from other related tense forms. For example, distinguishing and capturing the relationship between the simple past and the present perfect tense. Even though the former is associated with past and the latter with current

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relevance, still they are both connected in that they both share the one semantic feature: “anteriority”. Both encode events prior to the moment of speaking; therefore, it is important that the learners learn both of anteriority and current relevance to understand the meaning and use of tense forms (Bardovi-Harlig, 1997).

The present perfect, due to the semantic overlap with the past and the present simple, depends mainly on previous form meaning associations, therefore, the present perfect should be introduced together with other form meaning association as a holistic approach to grammar teaching and learning. Thus, the meaning of the present perfect is constructed through the reconstruction of already existing form meaning associations, including the past simple, present simple and present progressive.

1.1.2. Objectives of the Study

- Explain the nature of the present perfect and show how challenging it is for Palestinian EFL learners; and
- Develop a new technique and method for teaching the present perfect to Palestinian EFL learners.

1.1.3. Questions of the Study

- Why does the present perfect constitute a problem or a challenge for Palestinian EFL learners?
- What teaching techniques and methods can overcome this problem?

1.1.4. Significance of the Study

English is a lingua franca and has become the medium of education and communication in many non-English speaking countries including Palestine. To meet this demand, it has become necessary to improve our English language teaching programs by suggesting new and suitable approaches to tackle some serious and challenging problems that face EFL Palestinian learners in grammatical areas such as the meaning and efficient use of the present perfect.

2.0 The Present Perfect in English

From the researcher's teaching experience as a grammar teacher dealing with the tense/aspect of the present perfect, the following definition is formulated: "The present perfect refers to a state or an action that occurred or did not occur at unspecified time before now and has a strong connection to the present moment". By examining the previous definition of the present perfect, one can notice that this tense functions through constraints or conditions that should work all together to deliver a semantic and pragmatic meaning. In examining the following interchange between two friends:

Ali: Would you like to have breakfast with me?

Sami: No, thanks. I have had my breakfast.

From Sami's response, one can notice that the present perfect has been used. If one tests this sentence over the definition, we can see that there was an action that took place "having eaten breakfast", and obviously we do not know exactly when, so it is unspecified. The speaker is not interested in showing the exact time of the event; otherwise, he could have used the past tense with a definite time indicator- last night- ago, yesterday, when I was a child, etc... The connection to present time can be viewed from the fact that Sami is not hungry, and that he will not join Ali for breakfast. It is also obvious from the previous interchange that meaning confines the grammatical structures we employ in discourse. This goes in line with Murcia & Freeman's (1983) view that the present perfect "often expresses how the speaker views himself relative to the event(s) he is talking about." To make a choice between the present perfect or the past simple depends on the "view point" of the speaker towards past events (C.S. Smith, 1983 in Bardovi-Harlig, 1997). Thus, it becomes important to understand the deictic or pragmatic as well as the semantic nature of the tense (Binnick 1991; Givon 1984, cited in Bardovi-Harlig, 1997). This point of view is evident when shared time adverbials are used such as for phrases; for example, the choice between sentences (a) and (b) below depends on the viewpoint or interpretation of the speaker towards his/ her relation to the action. If the speaker captures the meaning of 'still engaged' the first sentence is the right choice, but if he/ she captures the meaning 'seize to engage' then the second sentence is the most appropriate.

- a. I have worked here for ten years
- b. I worked here for ten years

The present perfect also expresses “current relevance” (Inoue, 1979; McCoard.1978 as cited in Bardovi-Harlig, 1997). Comrie (1967) in the same source refers to current relevance as “the continuous relevance of a past situation” (p.52). In the same respect Inoue (1978) claims that present perfect has one basic meaning “existential sense” which means that the event or state that existed in the past has some connection to the present. Dowty (1979) stated that “the perfect serves to locate an event within a period of time that began in the past and extends up to the present moment” (p. 341). Thus, the meaning of the present perfect can be seen as a past time connection or relation to the present time. By using the present perfect, Suh (1992) mentions that the “speaker brings what happened in the past to the realm of the present” (p.82). McCoard (1978) provided a meaning of the present perfect as “an identification of prior events with the ‘extended now” (p.19), whereas he defines the past tense as “time which is conceived of as separate from the present” (p.19). Moy (1977) also differentiates between the present perfect and the past simple stating that “with the perfect, our interest is not primarily in the time of the action, but in the fact of its occurrence and in its result...” (P.305). Suh (1992) also pointed out that the present perfect and the past simple share a common feature that is the [+anterior] and differ on one feature [current relevance] with the present perfect carrying the feature [+ current relevance]and the past simple [- current relevance].

The meaning of the present perfect is embodied in the meaning of the present perfect progressive which also has the notion of progressive action (Comrie, 1976; Johnson, 1985). The present perfect progressive refers to “a situation or habit that began in the past (recent or distant) and that continues up to the present”. (Murcia &Freeman, 1983, p.61) For example, “She has been studying for three hours”. The present perfect progressive focuses on the uncompleted activity itself which has covered a continuous period of time till the moment of speaking. The present perfect simple, on the other hand focuses on the result and the completeness of the activity as exemplified in the following: “She has studied”. Thus, the former example focuses on the duration of the activity, while the latter on the result of the activity.

The present perfect can also have a connection not only to the past and present but also to the future, for example, “they have been married for 16 years.” This sentence implies that the couple got married 16 years ago, are still married and will continue to the future.

It can be understood from the previous discussion that the present perfect has a past, present and future connections, and thus we can arrive to the ultimate conclusion that the meaning of the present perfect cannot be viewed as a separate unit of meaning, rather as a reshaping of already existing tense relations. This connection is achieved by the existence of first: the feature “nonspecific”. The nonspecific nature of the present perfect is intrinsic to the meaning of this tense; this “nonspecific” nature should be conceived with or without the existence of time adverbials. This point should be stressed by teachers even before they introduce time adverbials exclusive with this tense. These would include: up till now, at the present, so far, lately, (Suh, 1992). Moreover, recently, already, yet, and since also have a sense of present. On the other hand, the present perfect due to its nonspecific semantic nature does not occur with specific time adverbials that indicate specific past time. For example,

*I have met him yesterday.

I met him yesterday.

*She has been to Italy last month.

She has been to Italy recently

The use of the present perfect as it implies not mentioning the exact time is inconsistent with the use of specific time adverbials. This conclusion can be stressed pedagogically by grammar teachers when dealing with the difference between the present perfect and the past simple tense.

It is also important that this tense should be introduced in the discourse level and out of the boundaries of the sentence level. For example,

Shimaa: Have you seen Prof. Imtiaz this morning?

Marya: Yes, I have.

Shimaa: When did you see him?

Marya: I saw him ten minutes ago.

In this interchange, we notice that there has been a shift in tense from the present perfect tense to the past simple tense. The shift is also due to the non-specificity condition that should be abided with in the use of the present perfect. In the first two sentences the interlocutors are interested in

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whether or not the event has occurred, not in the exact time of occurrence. When, the need aroused for more specific information, the shift has been made to the past tense.

Second is the feature of “one time unit”. As long as the meaning of the present perfect embodies the features “unfinished”, “continuous”, and past- linked- to the present and may also extend to the future. Then time should be viewed as a continuous, unbreakable unit that involves the speaker. For example, in this sentence “I have seen Ali today” the speaker thinks as follows: at an unspecified time the action of seeing Ali occurred and he is still in the same time zone of today- today, which is still going on. So the speaker has the sense of “one time unit”, in which he is still involved.

The learning and teaching of the present perfect should stress not only form (have + past participle), but also its semantic and pragmatic functions. In addition, a holistic approach to grammar learning and teaching should be introduced in order to help learners distinguish the meaning and use of the present perfect from other semantically neighboring tenses.

2.1. Contexts for the Present Perfect

According to Davydova (1977:1), some scholars distinguish as many as three dominant contexts for the present perfect. These contexts are (i) resultative contexts, (ii) extended now or continuative contexts and (iii) experiential contexts. They are illustrated in (1) through (3):

(1) resultative context

He has broken his arm.

(2) extended-now context

/ have lived in Hamburg since 2001.

(3) experiential context

I have never been to Russia.

In addition, some researchers single out a context of recent past and its subtype, a hotnews context, as a distinct semantic environment requiring the present perfect in Standard English

(4) context of recent past

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The Prime Minister has resigned recently.

One more situation can be added:

(5) When the statement about the action is in the same time period or time zone of the action itself:

I have seen prof. Imtiaz this morning. [It is still morning]

I saw prof. Imtiaz this morning. [It is not morning anymore]

In a nutshell, the resultative context suggests that a past action results in a change of state at the moment of utterance, whereas the extended-now context implies that a situation that started in the past still obtains at the moment of utterance and that there is no change in status. In contrast, the experiential context typically refers to a situation or an event that occurred once or several times prior to the moment of utterance in other words, it refers to repeated actions at interrupted intervals with a potential future occurrence. The context of recent past is taken to describe a recent event like hot news. Finally, the “one time zone” implies the unified and extended nature of time when using the present perfect. All these contexts share one feature in common: a past relevance to the moment of speaking. This goes in line with Inoue’s (1978) claim that the present perfect tense has one basic meaning “existential sense”, which means that the present perfect tense implies that the event or state existed in the past has some connection to the present. In the light of Inoue’s analysis, Riddle (1988) states that

.... the present perfect describes a situation (including states and actions) which had its starting point in the past, in a special existential sense. It is used only when the speaker wants to emphasize that some aspect of the situation still exists, i.e. either the situation itself or its results. (p.6)

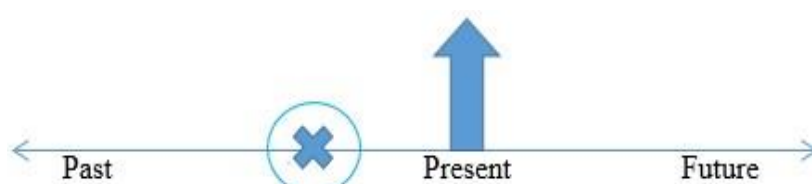
Based on these distributional contexts of the present perfect, the teacher should start providing examples with illustrative time lines for each context. To reach accurate understanding, the present perfect should be introduced together with the simple past. The present perfect can be best taught in contrast with the simple past tense since it is the area that creates confusion and which is used as a substitution for the perfect tense by most Palestinian EFL learners.

The difference between the two tenses can be easily resolved by using real life situations that are related to the learners' real life. For example, providing sentences that can reflect meanings derived from their everyday discourse. The tenses of these sentences will be clarified using time lines or time frames as well as illustrative pictures. Moreover, the teacher is also recommended to use time adverbials later after introducing these two tenses.

3.0. Procedure

To help teachers as well as learners capture the tense-aspect meaning of the present perfect, the researcher will provide two diagrams which will help distinguish between the past simple tense and the present perfect.

Diagram 1



The horizontal line with arrows represents the dimension of time extending from the past to the present and the future. The vertical arrow represents the present moment or now as well as a separation mark or partition line that segregate the past from the non-past zone (the present and the future). The circled (x) mark on the left of the partition line represents the past action or event. The circle indicates that the action is enclosed or contained, and therefore, it has no influence on or relation with the present time.

We can have other enclosed circles with past actions to the left of the partition line and they can stand at different positions from the present time. e.g. they will be closer to the present time arrow in case of time adverbials like “two minutes ago” and farther away with “yesterday, or last year..etc.” Thus, according to this diagram any action can start and finish in this enclosed circle, and thus has no connection to the present moment. By using this enclosed circle, students become aware of the nature of the past time as a disconnected action from the present time.

Therefore, it becomes easier for them to capture the fact that time adverbials such as “ago, yesterday, last etc...” are used exclusively with completed and disconnected actions that took place and have no relation with now.

Thus, sentences like,

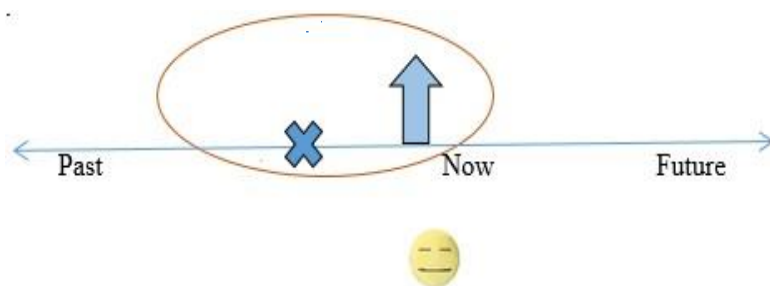
*I have seen him yesterday.

*They have visited Jerusalem last week.

*I have seen him two minutes ago.

are ungrammatical because using these past time adverbials with the present perfect violates the very nature of the present perfect as continuous, unfinished and linked- to- the- present.

Diagram 2.



In this diagram, the horizontal line with arrows also represents the dimension of time extending from the past to the present and the future. The vertical arrow represents the partition line that segregates the past from the non -past zone (the present and the future).

The face beneath the present time arrow indicates the speaker’s involvement in or point of view towards the action. The big oval shape has two functions: first, it captures the idea that the past action is still existent, relevant or continuous. Second, it represents the “one unit” time zone extending form the past to the present and also to the future. The action may occur at any point before now, the time of the occurrence is not important, but as long as the action is not contained in an isolated circle as in diagram (1), then the pastpresent connection is preserved. This “one

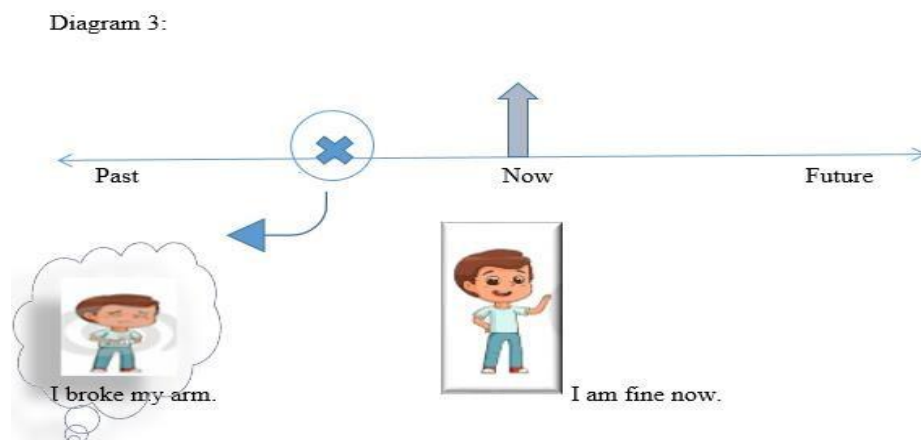
unit” time zone represented by the oval shape can stand for a wide range of time periods; for example: “this morning, this afternoon, this evening, today, this year, this semester, all my life”.

Now we can exemplify with the following pairs of sentences:

- a. I broke my arm.
- b. I have broken my arm.

In the first sentence, the past time is used as indicated by the past verb “broke”, thus according to our analysis it can be demonstrated using diagram 1. The action is therefore enclosed in the circle and has no connection to the present moment. It is just a mere statement of a past incident. The speaker thinks of this action as having occurred at some time in the past, a time separate from the present, and apparently, s/he is not interested in exact time of occurrence.

Diagram 3



The second sentence, on the other hand, is in the present perfect tense, thus it should be modeled using diagram (.). The action occurred at an unspecified time before now, but it is still affecting now as the influence of the action can be seen to spread from the past to the moment of speaking using the oval diagram that covers a wide range of time span. The speaker in this sentence is temporally influenced by the action as depicted by the sad face in the diagram.

Diagram 4



I saw him this morning

a. I have seen him this morning

We can notice that the adverbial time phrase “this morning” is used in both of the preceding two sentences. The choice of the verb tense depends on whether the action “seeing” took place within a past time frame – a period of time before now and was completely separated from now as represented by figure 1- or within a present time frame- a period of time starting before now and including now as in figure 2.

3.1. Time Adverbials

Introducing time adverbials, according to this approach to the present perfect, is only recommendable after making clear the semantic and pragmatic concepts of the present perfect and the past simple. In tackling these two tenses, teachers are recommended not to start with time adverbials from the very beginning as a magical way of distinguishing between the two tenses.

Unfortunately, teachers in Palestine rely unconsciously on this strategy as a simple way to help their students capture the differences, but unaware of the fact that they are diverting them from being able to grasp the semantic and pragmatic meaning and only rely on key words for making the distinction. Therefore, the learners are left helpless as to choose the right tense when there is no time adverbial in the sentence, as well as, when they are given a productive task in either speaking or writing.

What adds to the problem is the fact that some time adverbials are not exclusively used with one tense; rather they can be used with the past tense and the present perfect as well. These would

include: today, this morning, this afternoon, this evening, tonight, this week, this month, this year, this semester, recently, for, ever, never, already, etc...

To introduce time adverbials, first, the teacher writes on the board some time adverbials e.g. “last night – since- yesterday- this afternoon- when I was a child- within the last few days”, then s/he explains their meanings and asks students to use them in sentences of their own. The teacher writes the students’ sentences on the board without any correction. After that s/he draws the time line diagrams and asks the students to come to the board and show how their sentences fit the time frame of the tense. By following this procedure, the students will inductively understand the meaning-tense relationship between tense and time adverbials.

Next: The teacher provides pairs of sentences and ask the students to match them with either diagram 1 or 2:

1. a. I have called him twice this afternoon. Diagram (2) [The students recognize that it is still afternoon].
 1. b. I called him twice this afternoon. Diagram (1) [The students recognize that they are not in the afternoon, probably in the evening or at night]
2. a. My friend sent me three letters this week. Diagram (2) [said at the end of the week]
2. b. My friend has sent me three letters this week diagram (1) [still in the week].
3. a. I have never been to Canada. Diagram 2[not in my life time, the period of time is still not ended]
3. b. Beethoven never heard his music. Diagram 1[not in his life time, the period is ended].
4. a. I have been a teacher for three years. Diagram 2 [I am still a teacher]
4. b. I taught for three years before I moved to this city. Diagram 1 [I am not teaching any more]

4.0. The Present Perfect Continuous

The present perfect continuous and present perfect simple share the element “present”, but whereas the present perfect simple describes an a situation (action or event) that is completed and relevant to the time of speaking and focusing on the result rather than the duration, the present perfect continuous describes an activity that began at some point in the past and still incomplete as it is continuously going on without any interruptions. The main focus of the

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present perfect continuous is on the uninterrupted, continuous, durational, and incomplete sense of the action. Thus, the present perfect continuous and the present perfect simple differ in that the former signals incompleteness whereas the latter indicates a completed non-fragmented action, (Murcia & Freeman, 1983). For example,

I have swept the floor. [The floor is clean]

I have been sweeping the floor. [The speaker has been continuously engaged in an uncompleted or just completed activity without any focus on the result].

In the first sentence, the speaker is trying to show him/herself aloof of the activity, so rather than describing his/her involvement in the action, s/he focuses on the result “the floor is swept”. In the second sentence, we cannot tell whether the mission was accomplished or not since the focus was not on the result rather on the activity that the speaker was continuously involved in and that this activity has been going on over a continuous span of time. To mark the difference between the two sentences on the time frame, we introduce a third diagram for the present perfect progressive that has a spiral line which represents the continuous nature of the action.

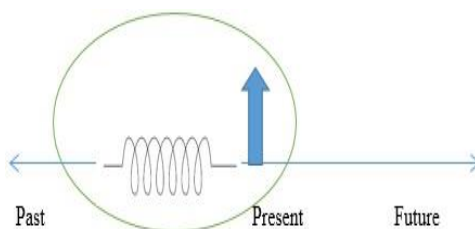


Diagram 5

The present perfect continuous doesn't necessarily in all cases mean that the action is going on at the moment of speaking, e.g., we may wake up in the morning to see the ground is wet and say: “It has been raining” even though the rain may have stopped long ago. The focus here is on the nature of the activity- For the ground to get this wet, the rain must have been going on continuously as it takes time to have this result. However, in cases where one notices that the ground water table higher than the level of last year, one may say “it has rained a lot this year.” This is said in the summer time when there are no indicators of rain on the surface ground. The

present perfect here expresses a cumulative action that was completed in the past but with present relevance. In another instance a sentence like “I have been studying all day”, may be said when the speaker is not studying at the moment. Thus, one concludes that people tend to use this tense when the action is or has been going on continuously and the focus is on the duration and continuous nature of the activity. So, if the speaker is interested in showing that the action is time consuming, a preference of the perfect progressive is dominant, whereas if the result rather than the duration of the action is more prominent, then the present perfect simple is more appropriate.

5.0 The Present Perfect Progressive Vs. The Present Progressive

An important differentiation should also be made between the present progressive and the present perfect progressive. The present progressive describes an action that is temporary focusing on the moment of speaking, whereas the present perfect progressive focuses on the duration of this continued action, for example,

A mother gets into her son’s room and asks her son, “What are you doing?”

The son replies: “I am reading.” [Apparently the mother can see that for herself. She gets the implicature that her son wants to be left undisturbed, and decides to leave the room] (the present progressive is pictorial in the senses that it conveys nothing but a statement of the present state of the action).

The son then tries to repair his sentence and says: “I have been studying for five hours now.” [Here the son is providing additional information, not just a statement of the action that he is involved in at the moment of speaking, but also the duration of the action]. (The mother in this case is more involved and she would respond in a way that shows support and rapport for her son). The present perfect continuous is just like watching a video of the action from the very start to the end.

The present continuous only focuses on describing the action that is going on at the moment of speaking, whereas the perfect continuous focuses on the action that is taking place as well as for how long it has been going on. The choice of either tense has its semantic as well as its pragmatic implicature. We can sum up by stating that the present continuous focuses on a

description of a continuous, incomplete action at the moment of speaking, whereas the present perfect continuous describes the same type of action together with its past extension.

12:00

12:30



He is dancing.



He has been dancing for 30 minutes.

Image Source:

<https://www.google.co.in/search?q=images+for+present+continuous&espv=2&biw=1270&bih=635&tbm>

Conclusion

The present perfect is one of the areas of difficulty for Palestinian EFL learners not just because Arabic takes the form of this tense, but because of the complexity of this tense in English. The present perfect is an intermediate tense that has special semantic and pragmatic implicature and meanings that can result from the reshaping of other tenses of the language. To handle the complexity and peculiarity of this tense, a clear comprehensive and holistic approach to the present perfect was suggested.

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