

THE DEFECTS IN THE TEACHING OF THE ENGLISH TENSES IN PAKISTANI SCHOOLS AND COLLEGES

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Abstract

English has got the status of the international language for it is holding the prestigious status of either educational or official language in almost all the countries of the world. In both situations it needs to be taught and learnt for educational and official purposes. Being one of the most complicated languages of the world its grammar has to be taught and learnt to enable the learners to speak and write correct English. Grammar deals with written as well as with spoken English. Tenses occupy the most prominent position among the grammatical element or categories of the English Language. The English Tense is the pedagogy of the English Language, what the key is to the lock. But unfortunately, a very poor and defective system of teaching tenses has been adopted in Pakistani School and Colleges. Still the old outdated and traditional way of teaching tenses is in vogue, or in other words language particular rules are substituted with language general rules, with the result that majority of students in these school and colleges cannot express themselves in English.

Keywords: tenses, teaching, translation, mistakes, foreign language, learning SL, Grammatical category

Introduction

Being the medium of education and official language English holds a very important position in Pakistan. Having such an indispensable status, it has to be taught and learnt thoroughly and more and more attention must be paid to its Phonological and especially grammatical aspects, for grammar deals with the formation of word (Morphology) and their arrangement within sentences which are extremely important for the correct usage of English. Words from various word classes can be combined to make meaningful sentences where the use of the tense is needed to refer to the time of the message delivered through a sentence. It shows that the English Tense is the kernel where from all other grammatical system emerges or it resembles the foundation upon which a grand edifice might be erected. In spite of such an obligatory role the English Tense plays in the processes of getting mastery over the language, a very defective and archaic method of teaching the English Tense has been adopted and consequently, students are unable to produce grammatically correct sentences even after the completion of their graduation, which in-turn produces fear in the minds of students or more clearly they are obsessed with English phobia.

As far as the teaching and function of grammar and tense are concerned, (Madhuri, 2010) is of the opinion that grammar, especially tense, is taught for its own sake not as a means to an end, which in this case is to enable students to communicate effectively in any linguistic situation. One of the most basic functions of grammar and tenses is to help students produce correct and intelligible utterances as well as to understand when produced by others. (Chomsky, 1959) claims that grammar is somewhere in the brain and can be used to make and understand sentences. Tense being an integral part of grammar, has a prominent role in a language activity which is to sharpen the competence of a learner so that he might distinguish between grammatical and ungrammatical sentences as well as to be able to produce and understand complicated sentences.

This article deals with the major defects and flaws which exist in the teaching learning process of English Tenses in Pakistani Schools and Colleges. Moreover, efforts have been made to point out the reasons responsible for these defects and suggest remedies to these flaws.

Research Questions

1. What is the effect of Teaching English Tenses with the help of Urdu?
2. Is the method of Teaching English Tense ineffective?
3. Does tense classification based on Traditional Grammar cause misunderstanding among the learners?
4. Does any contrast exist between the definition of various aspects and the functions allocated to them?
5. What are the reasons behind the defects in the teaching system of the English Tense?

Research Objectives

1. To find out the effect of Teaching English Tenses with the help of Urdu
2. To know that the method of Teaching English Tenses adopted in Pakistani Schools and Colleges is ineffective

3. To find out the misunderstandings caused by the classification of Tenses based upon Traditional Grammar
4. To find out the contrast that exists between the definition of various aspects and their functions
5. To know the reasons behind the defects in the teaching learning system of the English Tenses

Research Methodology

(Huddleston, 1988) in his “English Grammar and outline” has made a distinction between the grammatical category of tense and the semantic category of time as well as the complex relation between tense and time both at language general and language particular levels. He concreted to define the past and present tenses in English as to show past and present time respectively. He defines tenses by their place in the world paradigm and labels of the past and present are assigned to them on the basis of their primary use. The semantic function of the tense according to him is to relate the time of the situation to the time of utterance, so tense involves the grammaticalisation of time relations. Understanding Syntax by Maggie Tallerman defines tense as grammaticalised expression of location and time or representing grammatically different contrast in time.

(Huddleston, 1988) classifies the English Tense into Present and Past. According to him the present tense has the major function of locating a situation in present time, for example: *He lives in Berlin.*

This tense shows a habitual action also for example: “*Kim washes his hair with zoom shampoo*”. It is also used for showing futurity for example: *The match starts tomorrow.* (Presently arranged and schedule) it is also used in running commentaries and demonstration for example: “*Pantene shampoo removes dandruff and makes the hair strong*”. Futurity in subordinate clauses is one of the other functions of present tense. Past tense is defined as the tense which locates a situation in past time for example: “*Kim lived in Berlin*”. It is also used for past habits, for example: “*Kim washed her hair with zoom shampoo*”, or “*Kim used to wash her hair with zoom shampoo*”.

(Huddleston, 1988) classifies tenses into aspects, the term used both for a grammatical category of the verb and for the type of meaning expressed by that category. He further claims that aspectual meaning does not convey the temporal location of the situation but it shows the temporal flow or segmentation of a situation. He focuses upon the following aspects:

1. *Progressive*: it is called progressive because it presents a situation as being in progress. The situation is looked at some point or period of time and is not taken in its temporal locality, it is considered as impermanent as progressing towards its end. For example, *it was raining when I woke up.* Presents the rain to be in progress at some intermediate point or period in the past. Similarly, Kim is washing her hair with zoom shampoo. Shows the action of washing hair as in progress at the time of speaking or is occurring simultaneously with the utterance. Present and past progressive aspects are in clear contrast with their non-progressive counterparts which present a situation as habitual or repeatedly occurring. For example, it rains heavily in the month of July.

(present simple showing the general state of raining in present time) It rained yesterday.
(past definite) I use to play hockey when I was young. (past indefinite or habitual)

2. *Perfect/perfect progressive*: This aspect shows a completed event which still has present time importance. Completeness is closely associated with pastness so perfect and past aspects are semantically similar with the deference that in perfect aspect the stress is laid on the current resultant state whereas in past tense it is on the past situation itself. It is through this aspect that the past situation is presented as closely connected with the present time. The past counterpart of present perfect is past perfect where double dose of pastness is used and where the description is not simply past related to time of utterance but it is past and related to some contextually given time which is itself past in relation to the time of utterance. For example: *She had written the report before we arrived.*

(Huddleston, 1988) Opines that present perfect progressive indicates a period that has taken start in the past and is still in progress in the present whereas past perfect progressive shows an event which took start in the past and was going on up to some point in the past e.g.

Kim is/was writing to Chris. (Ongoing action/ progressive aspect)

Kim has/had written to Chris. (Perfect aspect)

They have been/had been enjoying better weather lately. (Perfect progressive)

Defects in the teaching learning system of English tenses

1. Methodology of Teaching Tenses

The first and probably the most basic defect of teaching the Tenses lies in the methodology adopted in these schools and colleges. In most of the schools and colleges English is taught with the help of Urdu grammar. Students are taught to translate their ideas from their mother tongue into Urdu which is then translated into English or from English into Urdu and then to the mother tongue of the learners. For each Tense and aspect certain Urdu words i.e. “ta hai, ‘te hai’, ta hon”, for present simple, “raha hain’, ‘rahi hain’, ‘raha hon” in present progressive, “chuka hain, ‘chuky hain’, ‘chuke hain” in perfect, “ta raha hain, ‘ te rahi hain” in present progressive etc. are taught to students which they have to memorize for identifying various tenses and aspects which puts extra burden upon the learners. Moreover, greater attention is paid to translation and for this purpose GTM (indirect) method has been adopted. Such an approach to the teaching of the English Tenses hampers the learning process of these Schools and Colleges because they consume most of their time in translating their ideas into Urdu and in turn into English and vice versa such as “Tenses Made Easy by Afzal Anwar Mufti”, “Pak United English Translation by Afzal Anwar Mufti”, “ Pak English Grammar Composition by Fazl-ur-Rahman Butt” etc.

2. Wrong Classification of Tenses or Traditional Grammar base classification of the Tenses

The first and perhaps the most basic defect lie in the misconception about the classification of the English Tenses. Student are taught that English has Twelve Tenses namely

No	Table of English Tenses			
1	Present Indefinite	Present Continues	Present Perfect	Present Perfect Continues
2	Past Indefinite	Past Continues	Past Perfect	Past Perfect Continues
3	Future Indefinite	Future Continues	Future Perfect	Future Perfect Continues

There is no concept of making difference between Tenses and their aspects, is therefore the first factor that creates confusion in the mind of the students throughout the country.

3. Contrast between the definition of various aspects and the function allocated to them:

The second defect lies in the definition of various tenses and the misconception about the function allocated to them. Tense is defined as a word derived from the Greek word Tempus which means time or age which is based upon archaic and traditional grammar.

Let's have a glance at the definition of the English Tenses and various aspects (traditionally called Tenses) as well as the functions associated to them in schools and colleges or in grammar books.

- a. *Present Indefinite Tense:* The Tense which is used to show something which is indefinite or whose time is unknown. It also shows,
1. *Habit e.g. "He takes a bath in the morning".*
 2. *Custom e.g. "The Muslims bury their dead".*
 3. *Universal truth e.g. "The sun rises in the East at 7 O'clock in the morning".*

As the name suggests that this Tense must show an action which is not definite or whose occurrence is unspecific and unknown but the definition given by the traditional grammar shows a clear contrast between the name and the function of the Tense. It might be illustrated by discussing the above examples, such as; He takes a bath in the morning. The sun rises in the East at 7 O'clock in the morning. Now there is a clear contrast between the definition and the mentioned examples, for the definition shows indefiniteness of time but in these examples the phrases 'in the morning' and 'at 7 O'clock indicate a specific time.

- b. *Past Indefinite:* This Tense shows such an action which has been completed in the near past. Such as, "He went to Lahore yesterday", "My cousin did master in 2006". Now there is clear contrast between the name and the definition given. The name suggests that this tense shows something indefinite or habitual but the definition and the examples which are given, show a specific time or point of time in the past.

- c. *Present Perfect Tense:* Traditionally this tense is defined as to show an action that has just been completed, for example, "He has gone to Lahore", "The Principal has fined the students". Here it is not clear whether the action is over or not. As it is clear that both Tenses (Past Indefinite and Present Perfect) show the same ending time which is a basic flaw followed by Traditionalist so, it creates confusion among learners that which basic path has to follow.

d. *Perfect Continuous Tenses*: These are defined as “Present Perfect Continuous” is a Tense which shows an action that begins in the Past and is still in progress having certain Urdu words at the end of a sentence without specifying timing words, for example, (It has been raining) which is confusing for the students and are not able to differentiate between the so called Continuous and Perfect Continuous Tenses i.e. “Continuous” Tense shows as action which is in progress, with the result that the learners get confused when they come across such sentences as, (it has been raining or it is raining.) Because there is no clear cut difference between the two sentences as for as time frame is concerned. The same is the case with “Past Perfect Continuous” shows an action which began in the past and was still in progress at a given moment in the past and Past Continuous shows as action that was in progress in the past e.g. (It was raining vs. It had been raining.)

e. *Past Perfect*: it shows the action which started and completed in the past or which took place in the distant past. But often such examples as compound sentences e.g. (The patient had died before the doctor came.) create confusion on the part of learners. There is a clear contrast between the definition and the mentioned example. Besides learners are not told about the reason of using the Simple Past in the second part of such sentences.

The defects mentioned above have not occurred recently and immediately but have come into existence since the time English got the status of the official and educational Language of Pakistan. As English got its present status on account of British rule in the sub-continent, the people of the land tried to learn it in order to make progress in their social life and they adopted indigenous ways to teach and learn English. Due to the absence of access to the real grammatical rules and methodology of teaching and learning English they applied the rules of Oriental Languages to English which resulted in the emergence of several defects in the system of teaching and learning English. These defects still exist in the system and unfortunately no serious steps have been taken to remove them with the result that the students throughout the country consume a lot of time in learning English and receiving diplomas, certificates and degrees in the Language but with no real and up to date knowledge. Almost all the students can neither speak nor write correct English which can undoubtedly be associated with the defects mentioned above. This portion of the article has taken into view the reasons which are either in one or the other way responsible for the emergence, gradual development and existence of these defects.

Reasons behind the defects in the teaching system of English tenses

1. Defects in Syllabus, examination system and paper pattern
2. Misconception about Translation
3. Negligence or un-awareness of the function and use of the English Tenses

1. Defects in Syllabus, examination system and paper pattern

The first and probably the most serious defect lies in the syllabus designed for the teaching of English because it puts greater importance upon translation. It aims to enable the learners to translate a passage from English into Urdu and vice versa which has limited the scope and function of the English language. Even within Translation it is the indirect method which has

been adopted which is more difficult to learn for the learners of the English Language. Another fault lies in the course designed for SSC and HSSC level because it is still not clear that what is the function of the Text Book in the teaching learning process of the language and whether it is to enhance the learner's communicative skill or to develop the literary taste. The whole Book seems to have been designed for the purpose of promoting the learner's skill of word by word or sentence by sentence Translation in a Traditional way which is defective, confusing and troublesome. Such an approach to translation leads to the application of the rules and regulations of Urdu grammar or Tenses into English and that is which seems to be the root cause of all confusion. It is true that some portions of exercise at the end of every lesson or poem has been allocated to grammar and even there is discussion on Tenses but once again the discussion follows the defective system mentioned earlier.

The next factor responsible for these defects is defective exam system and wrong paper pattern. Very little focus is paid to grammar and the correct use of tenses in the English papers for a very small space is allocated to English grammar and tenses and even within this space greater part is given to the translation of Urdu sentences into English and English into Urdu according to the traditional way of tenses. The same is the case with the papers in the professional exam because these papers too have certain Urdu sentences which are to be translated into English.

In this respect the role of the Administrators, Teachers and Grammar Books written and taught here cannot be ignored. Administrators are responsible in the sense that very often they assign the duty of English Teaching to such teachers whose subject is not English only to fill the vacancy. In order to fulfill their duty and prepare students for exams and other tests they have to depend upon Traditional Grammar Books as well as they are compelled to write Guides/Keys such as 'Tenses made easy', 'Pak United Translation', 'Pak English Grammar and Composition', and so many others, in the defective Traditional way. Actually, the most important factor in this connection is curriculum designing for text books, grammar books and keys are composed in such a way as to achieve the goals and objectives specified in the curriculum and syllabus. Even teachers are trained to be helpful in the achievement of these goals so, they have to teach the English Tenses as well as design papers according to the rules of Traditional Grammar.

2. *Misconception about Translation*

Another factor which has led to adopt the defective system of teaching and learning English Tenses is the misconception about Translation. Unfortunately, it is considered necessary to translate a passage sentence by sentence or word by word into Urdu or English exactly in the same tense which is something unfeasible. As (Catford, 1965) defines translation as a language activity through which a text or a portion of text in source language is transferred to the target language with the help of the words or expressions which can replace the original ones. Thus translation is neither a complete transference nor complete trans-coding of meaning but substitution of meaning. An Italian proverb says, "A translator is a traitor". Because a translator has to face many problems such as finding such words in the target language which have the same meaning as is found in source language. It is a fact that languages can never be similar so it is almost impossible to find such words in the target language which might be equivalent to those of the source language, despite of cultural similarities for example: good morning, good afternoon, good evening etc. have no direct alternative in Pashto and Urdu however subuh

bakhair, dopahir bakhair, sham bakhair, in Urdu and sahar mo pakhair, garma mo pakhair and maham mo pahair in Pashto can replace these English expressions. Word by word translation as prevailed in Pakistani school and colleges also creates problems cultural differences for example: “*Mera sar chakkar kha raha hai*” whose word by word *rank-bound* translation can be “**My head is eating circles*” or “*Use dekh kar mera dil bag bag ho gaya*” as “*My heart became garden garden when I saw him*”

3. *Negligence or un-awareness of the function and use of the English Tenses*

Next, perhaps in number but not in importance is negligence or un-awareness of the function and use of tenses on the part of paper and syllabus designers, writers of grammar books for this level and the blind pursuit of the same pattern and the way of teaching prescribed there by the teachers. In this connection both teachers and designers of syllabus, paper and grammar books are responsible for either intentionally or un-intentionally they are misleading students and are pushing them into the close alleys. Most of the designers, writers of grammar books and even English Teachers who teach in Schools and Colleges seem to be either unaware of the function and use of the English Tenses or they intentionally neglect their function and correct use so that students might be prepared for the task given in syllabus or book. Most of them follow the tense pattern shown in the Traditional Grammar books which circle round translation form English into Urdu or the vice versa without knowing the function, techniques and types of translation as well as the influences of cultural and social differences of a nation over translation. Majority of them are unaware of the correct use of tenses and their function in Modern English. They assign such functions to tenses which not only make tenses look awkward and confusing but also make them difficult to learn or understand.

Recommendation

As the above mentioned factors have led to the failure of learning the English Tense completely which has hampered the progress of the learners in their academic carrier, it is essential to recommend such steps which can be helpful to tackle these problems, and some of the recommendations have been discussed below.

1. *Right classification of Tense according to Modern Grammar*

The first step to be taken is the right classification of English Tenses as recommended by Modern Grammarians. According to Modern Grammar English has only two tenses namely Present and Past while the rest are called their aspects. It is therefore important to teach students how to differentiate between tense and its aspects. Students must be taught tenses in such a way as to enable them to understand tenses to the full extent. If the classification tenses and their aspects is taught through graphs and diagrams as given below it might be helpful to students to understand and use tenses easily.

<i>S.No</i>	<i>Tenses</i>		<i>Examples</i>
1	Tense	Simple present	It snows in Kaghan Valley.

	Aspects	Present progressive Present perfect Present perfect progressive	She is sleeping right now. I have already eaten. I have been studying for two hours.
2	Tense	Simple past	It snowed day before yesterday.
	Aspects	Past progressive Past perfect Past perfect progressive	She was sleeping when I arrived. I had already eaten when they arrived. I had been studying for two hours.

2. Correct definition of various aspects and their correct function and use

Simple Present: In traditional grammar it is named as present indefinite but the title is irrelevant because the term indefinite means something unspecified or unknown. Even the definition given in traditional grammar and the function associated to it are contradictory for this aspect is taught to be used to show such actions whose time of occurrence is not specified and examples like, “*I get up early in the morning every day*”, “*The Muslims bury their dead.*”, “*The sun rises in the East.*” are given for illustration but getting up in the morning every day is not something indefinite. In the same way, if the *Sun rises in the East* so, it is quite clear that it rises in the morning which is specific. This aspect must be defined as the aspect which shows the repetition of an action as happens in case of habits, customs and universal truth.

Simple Past: It shows an action that happens somewhere in the past and has no present time importance. It can be classified into two kinds past definite or past historic and past indefinite or past habitual where the former shows such actions which happen at specific points in the past whereas the later shows past habits. This difference can be proved with the help of these examples: Ali went to Karachi last week. (Past definite) We used to play cricket when we were students. (Past indefinite) Now students should be made aware of the difference between the two aspects with the help of proper definition and function. If the two aspects and the difference between them are taught with the help of the following diagrams it would be easier for students to understand and use them correctly.

I saw Hassan in town.

past-----*-----now

(at one particular time in the past. It began and ended in the past)

Present Perfect: This aspect must be defined as the aspect which shows an action that occurs somewhere in the past but still has present time importance. The difference between Present Perfect and Simple Past ought to be illustrated with examples such as,

- (a) The principal fined the students SP but the fine was paid or omitted and the case is over. There is no Present time importance.
- (b) The principal has fined the students (Present Perfect) but the time of occurrence has not been mentioned but it has present time importance. (current relevance)

I have already eaten.

Past----------*now*

(I finished eating sometime before now and have no appetite. The exact time is not important)

Past Perfect: This aspect shows an action that is twice removed from the time of speaking i.e. it is used for the action between which time speaking there is another event. Or it is used to show two actions wherein one occurs before the other one. That's why it is called past in past or pluperfect e.g. The patient had died before the doctor came = when the doctor came the patient had died.

He had already eaten when they arrived.

Past----------*-----now*

(the eating was completely finished before another time in the past)

Present progressive and Present Perfect progressive:

Present Continuous is defined in modern grammar as an aspect which is in progress without knowing or stating the starting as well as ending point whereas present perfect progressive shows an action which is in progress but its starting point is known or mentioned. For example: Ali is playing hockey. (Present progressive) Hussain has been playing hockey since morning/ for two hours. (Present perfect progressive)

She is sleeping right now.

Past----------*now*

(both starting and end point are unknown, is in progress at the present time)

She has been painting the ceiling since morning.

Past----------*now*

(end time is not known though starting point has been mentioned, the activity has not been finished)

Past Continuous vs Past Perfect Continuous: Past continuous must be defined as the aspect which shows an action which was in progress somewhere in the past. Its starting point is not known whereas the ending point is either unknown to the speaker or the action might be left incomplete. For example: The boys were playing cricket. (Past Continuous) which was left incomplete due to rain etc. or the speaker left before the end of the game and knows nothing about the result that's why it is called past imperfect. It is also used as a background to an event that occurs at a certain point in the past. For example: One night when it was raining by dogs and cats they reached our guest house.

The boys were playing cricket when I arrived.

Past----------*-----now*

(Game began at some point in the past and was in progress at a particular time in the past i.e. my arrival but nothing has been said about the result)

Past Perfect progressive: is used to show such an action that was in progress since a specific point in the past but whose ending point is unknown. For example, “*Abbas had been learning English Language for two months or since September*”.

Abbas had been learning English Language for two months or since September.

Past*-----*-----now

Starting point September

(*Event in progress: studying in the past since the month of September but ending point is unknown*)

Futurity: In English futurity is shown through Simple Present and Present Continuous or Progressive having temporal adverbs: for example,

General Bajwa visits China next week.

General Bajwa is going to visit China next week.

She is leaving the country tomorrow.

The use of Present Simple for Futurity shows pre-planned and pre-arranged program or action whereas Present Progressive for this purpose shows personal intention. Preplanned program can be delayed or canceled in some indispensable situation only but personal intention implies no obligation. In Modern English Grammar there is no Future Tense although it has futurity which is shown through the use of Present Simple and Progressive. It does not allow the use of ‘will’ and ‘shall’ for this purpose because they belong to a sub-class of Auxiliaries called Modal Auxiliaries which show possibility, probability and doubt.

Teaching Methodology should have to be adopted in a modern way where the function of each tense and their aspects is taught through the use of English sentences and after each tense and aspect there is a set of sentences related to the concerned tense or aspect. These sentences are given for practice in order to increase the command of the students over English as given in various English Books such as Living English Structure by W. Stannard Allen, ‘Understanding and using English Grammar’ by Betty Schramper Azar, English Grammar in Use by Raymond Murphy etc.

Moreover, (Catford, 1965) theory about classification of translation is to be followed. According to Catford translation has several types:

1. Full translation which is to translate the entire text to a target language.
2. Partial Translation is translation of some part or portion of the actual text and the rest is left un-translated.
3. Restricted Translation is replacing an SL textual material by equivalent TL textual material at only one level. (grammatical or phonological)
4. Phonological Translation is the replacement of SL Phonology by the TL Phonology whereas Graphological is the replacement of SL Graphology by the equivalent TL Graphology.

5. Grammatical translation and lexical translation: In the former the SL grammatical items are replaced by the

TL grammatical items while in the latter the lexeme of SL is filled by those of TL. He declares total translation as misleading because it is rank-bound i.e. the selection of TL equivalent is confined to one or more ranks in the hierarchy and recommends rank-free translation.

Conclusion

The role played by tenses in the pedagogy of English language can never be repudiated for it is through full command over tenses that one can convey and understand ones ideas correctly. The greater is the degree of the command over tenses, the higher is the level of writing, speaking and understanding the language. Having such an indispensable role in the process of learning English language, tenses have to be taught by teachers in such a way which may lead learners to achieve their goals. As English is one of the key languages of the world, it is dynamic not static for research on all its aspects including teaching methodology, tenses, aspects and their functions is going on with the result that newer and newer techniques are being introduced which might be helpful in the field of teaching and learning English tenses. English is taught with the help of English exercise so that learners might be able to translate their ideas into English immediately. Traditional grammar has been given up due to the confusion it creates and modern approach to classification of tense had been adopted in advance countries. Modern techniques in grammar have brought about harmony between the definition of aspects and their functions which has made tenses easier to learn as compared to the traditional approach that creates confusion on part of the learners on account of the contrast which exist between the definition of various aspects and their functions. Being a key to modern science and technology English teaching and learning programs throughout the world are constantly judged and critically analyzed such as course design, examination system, paper pattern, purpose of learning and teaching English (communicative or literary), teaching methodology and way of translation. These factors help the course designers to adopt best possible approach to the function and use of English tenses for the purpose of communication both written and spoken.

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