

Using of the Forms of Simple Past Time and Present Perfect between CEFR A2 and B2 Learners

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Abstract: This essay had focused on the use of “*I did*” or “*-ed*” and “*I have*” or “*I has*”, with two specific target levels in mind: CEFR A2 and B2 learners. Firstly, this essay briefly compared and contrasted both tenses. After that discussing the main problems of both of form that learners experience with Chinese learners, this essay draw attention to Chinese students’ confusion of “*I did*”, and the focus will move to a discussion on some meanings and problems of the present perfect tense and past simple with learners that learners often experience when discussing these two tenses.

Keywords: Forms; Learners experience; Negative statements; Simple past; Present perfect; Chinese learners; Tenses; Language context

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1. Forms and Meanings

The “*-ed*” or “*I did*” is a regular form of the past simple that is formed by adding “*ed*” to the root verb (Aitken, 1992, p.33), and its two main meanings describe the events that happened “historically” as a truth, and “as a hypothetical future marker especially in *if* clauses” (Aitken, 1992, p.36) ^[1]. We use the past simple to talk about definite time in the past (often we specify when something happened, such as *yesterday, three, weeks ago, last year, when I was young*). We usually say “*did you watch that film of November?*”

In contrast, the “*I have*” and “*I has*” present perfect is formed by the main verb in a past participle form, and is used to combine the past with the present, focusing on the events or results at the time of speaking or doing (Parrott, 2010, p.236) ^[10]. We use the present perfect to talk about time up to now. That is, events that took place in the past but which connect with the present. The present perfect is often used with time expressions which indicate time up to now (Kuczaj, S.A. 1977) ^[6]. For example, “*today*”, “*this year*”, “*in the last six months*”; we say “*I have not seen her since January 1995*”, but we do not say “*I did not see her since January 1995*”.

2. How are There Meaning Experienced in Chinese?

English has many tense. Speakers are putting the verb

in a different form and without giving any additional information. It indicates when the action of the verb takes place in relation to speech time. For example, ^[4] “*I did study*” and “*I have studied*” which are past simple tense and present perfect tense in English. In contrast, in Chinese. It unlike English, Chinese verbs do not have tense to indicate when an action takes place (Christensen, 2011). For instance, “*wo qu mai shu le*” translate to English is “*I bought a books*” or “*I have bought books*”.

3. “-ed” or ‘Have/Has’: Problems of Form for Chinese Learners

In affirmative sentences, learners often use irregular verbs as regular verbs. For example, learners frequently say (1a): “*I runned*”. Similarly, learners might change the verb to an irregular verb, which is not an obvious error, for example, “*I think*”, (1b): “*I thunk*”. Moreover, learners might think that full verb patterns are combined with the auxiliary verbs and modal verbs, resulting in statements such as (1c): “*I did not can*” for “I could not” or even (1d): “*I did not was*”. Aitken (1992, p.37) ^[11] also pointed out that learners may not use *do* as an auxiliary with the main verb *do*, so (1e): “*I did not it*” is used for “I did not do it”. When A2 learners talk to native English students or teachers and negotiate negative statements, they might make mistakes in negative sentences, as seen in (1d) and

(1e).^[3] These are common mistakes at this level. Furthermore, when the learners are referring to requests and questions, they often use the simple present to represent the simple past, according to Cowan (2008). For example, they would say “*I want to ask something last night*”. The learners often forget the simple past form.

On the other hand, learners usually forget to change the form of verb to past participle after “*have/ has*”. For example, learners would say: “*I have finish dinner*”. Another error is “*I have read a book last week*”. We do not add specific time in using present perfect tense. Another problem with using “*have/has*” are a common mistake in Chinese learners. Tregidgo (1984) pointed out that many problems in English are concerning the problem of the present perfect^[12]. For example, the statement “*I have finished my homework last night*” is used for “*I have finished my homework*”. Related to a specific time, the teacher can consider some time of words when they are teaching the present perfect. According to Scrivener (2010, p.166) “Time words are: already, yet and always”^[11]. Hence, the statements read as “*we have already booked the study room*”, “*have you taken medicine yet?*”, “*I have always split money with him*”. A further problem for B2 students in their speech is that they might omit the auxiliary verb “*have/has*”.^[11] For example, they would say “*I just seen him*” (Scrivener, 2010). This problem of the present perfect should be corrected in the Chinese EFL class.

4. “-ed” and “Have/Has” Problems of Meaning for Chinese Learners

Chang (2001) pointed out that Chinese learners use different expressions of the concept of time in Chinese and English, which means that verbs are not used to express time relation^[2]. Hence, the statement “*I have seen her three days ago*” is used. Secondly, Dulay and Burt (1973) stated that second language learners would learn grammar from the mental picture of grammar that they have from their own language^[5]. In Chinese, it does not change verb to indicate when an action takes place. Therefore, Chinese learners would get confused when using meaning of the past simple tense and meaning of the present perfect tense. For instance, “*I was in Stirling since 2015*” for “I have been” or “*did you finish the homework yet?*” for “*have you finished*”. Interestingly, Aikten (1992, p.38) explained that is “standard American usage”, but in British English, people are required to use the present perfect^[1]. Furthermore, when they want to transfer the issues that have happened at the present perfect tense from their first language to English, Chinese learners also use the simple

past tense. A typical error might be: “*wo men chi wan fan le*” for English is “*we finished dinner*” but this sentence transfer to English correctly should be “we have finished dinner”. This might be because of the direct translation. This indicates that Chinese learners combine the meaning of the past simple and the present perfect together in their minds.

5. What to Teach at the A2 Level with Past Tense and Present Perfect

This essay proposes that what is taught depends on the learners’ problems with tense and their needs. As this essay mentioned above, the learners should be taught the correct form of the verb and how to recognise the difference between the present perfect and the past simple tense. The irregular verb form should be stressed, and the learners should be given more examples of irregular verbs. In terms of the meaning and function of the past simple, the range of the past simple tense should be limited.

With regards to “-ed”, the learners should be taught which language to use for events that have occurred in the past, for example, “*They bought the painting in 1989*” (Scrivener, 2010, p.135)^[11]. What to teach A2 level that should be interesting and not complicated. I would teach both form together. I would ask learners use “-ed” tell their life story with specific dates or other past time. In terms of usefulness and function, this will help students to describe their real life and also to express things were takes place in the past.

With “*have/has*”, I would aim for pronunciation of sentence stress. For A2 level students who might have confusion of two tense. Therefore, I would ask them to read sentences that included present perfect simple tense and also speak the same sentences to others. Students can through the sounds to memorize the form of simple present perfect (Pintrich, P. R. and Smith, D. A. and Garcia, T. and McKeachie, W. J. 1993)^[16].

6. What to Teach at B2 Level with and Present Perfect

At the A2 level, many problems related to meaning are focused on the students’ contextual misunderstandings and making mistakes with the meaning of tense (Politzer, R. L. 1983)^[14]. Therefore, at the B2 level, learners should be familiar with the use of both tense than A2 level learners.

According to Tregidgo (1984), the present perfect and the past simple tense have relationships between past issues and the present time^[12]. Meanwhile, when looking at

the position of the speaker, the action has happened in the past. Specifically, for the simple past, the action finished during a period of time in the past; for the present perfect, the action is already finished but it is being pointed out now (Kirsten, 1986) ^[8]. Teachers should make sure that B2 level learners can write form of past simple grammatically and identify the irregular and regular verb. It is teaching B2 level students with simple past tense (Politzer, R. L. and McGroarty, M. 1985) ^[15].

Kaluza (1979, p.141) ^[7] discussed the meaning of “*have done*”, (a) meaning is illustrating in the present moment of speaking that the action is already completed, for example, “*I have done my assignment*”. The second meaning is that it is in relation to a moment “*before*” (a), for example, “*my work was actually being done before the time*”. There are many meaning of present perfect tense. In addition to, we choose the continuous form to emphasise that something is short-term (Oxford, R. L. 2006) ^[13]. For example, “*I have been working here for just a few days*.” Furthermore, we can choose the continuous form to stress that something is repeated, for example “*I have been using the swimming pool since we moved into the other city*.” Follow these different meaning of present perfect tense. I believe that B2 level learners can improve their writing with using this tense.

7. Conclusions

This essay outlined the problems with form and meaning when students are faced with “*-ed*” and “*have/has*”. This essay also discussed some of the main problems that students face when dealing with both form and meaning in English, and the English language knowledge that is covered in class and textbooks. It is necessary to establish the fundamental English language concepts when the learners are beginners or just starting to learn the English language as their foreign language. Both forms should be taught at the same time, rather than individually. This benefits the students as it can help learners to separate the two different tenses and to compare them in different contexts (Polkinghorne, D. E. 2005) ^[17]. When they have been taught in those two tenses, the teachers also need to ensure that learners can recognize meaning of two tenses clearly. Therefore, learners are able to use them in their speech and real conversation with others. The challenge for teachers is to recognize the errors when learners use the wrong tense to represent the other tense. Furthermore, the teachers are required to use clear examples to express

both forms, and how “*-ed*” and “*have/has*” tenses can be used when learners are faced with the real English language context.

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