

Tense Maintenance: The Use of the Present Perfect Tense among Bauchi State Secondary School Students

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Abstract: *This paper tries to investigate and find out the extent to which students of secondary school level in Bauchi State maintain their use of tenses in their day to day interactions. The use of present perfect tense was selected in this respect and comparative analysis of their achievement in the use of the tense when they were introduced to teacher talk strategy and the traditional teaching method was made. Fifty six (56) students were used as sample for this study. The study discovered that teacher talk strategy seems to be learner centered rather than the traditional method which is teacher centered. Learner centered approach as an activity based approach which provides direct and real life experience was recommended to the teachers of English as a second language. The approach broadens the learner's scope of knowledge and stimulates students' interest and motivation and enhances meaningful learning accompanied by improvement of high proficiency and competency in their usage of present perfect tense.*

Key words: *tense maintenance, present perfect tense, teacher talk strategy, learner centered, pedagogy.*

I. Introduction

Language has been an integral part of human development and interactive process which manifests itself in verbal and symbolic forms. It serves as a vehicle of interaction through which we understand ourselves. It is obvious that no single sentence, spoken or written, is without a verb. Tense is the pivot of the intended communication of a sentence. Despite the importance attached to the tense in bringing out the meaning of the verb, with our students of senior secondary schools, tense has gone berserk. They are only comfortable with the choosing game of true or false or option from A – E which gives them less than 50% chance of passing their leaving school certificate. It is against this background this paper explores the status of tense aspect in English of which Perfect Tense has been emphasized through the exploration of some strategies of teaching second language learners of English.

II. Review of Related Literature

Tense as defined by Yule (2006) "is the relationship between the form of the verb and the time of the action or the state it describes" (p 17). By tense we understand the correspondence between the form of the verb and our concept of tense. The word **maintenance** refers to the act of keeping standard form of language which is at most generally accepted for use in the government, the law, business, education, and literature. The main aim of teaching grammar in every language is to help students learn how to use grammatical structures accurately, meaningfully, and appropriately. The use of present perfect tense presents long term learning English language challenges to ESL students. For example, learning when it is appropriate to use the present perfect tense represents a formidable challenge for second language English learners.

Leach and Svartvik (2002) have seen tense aspect concerns the manner in which a verbal action is experienced or regarded is complete or in progress (p 66). They have also formed tense aspect and maintenance as relax the happenings described by the verb to time in the past, present or future. The term aspect and tense overlap in meaning and this gives a great problem in English learning. The aspect refers to a grammatical category which reflects the way in which the verb action is regarded or experienced with respect to time. Unlike tense, aspect is not deictic, in the sense that it is not relative to the time of utterance. Riggeaback, Samuda and Wisniewska (2007: 1/48) are of the view that "English has two simple marked aspects: the progressive and the perfect". The two aspect constructions of English (the perfective and the progressive) can be seen as realizing a basic construct between the action viewed as complete and the action viewed as in complete. English language to an L2 learner is full of problems more especially in maintenance of the tense. Maintenance of the tract of tense in using present perfect is peculiar. If someone makes too many mistakes, he could be difficult to understand, so a reasonable level of correctness through tense maintenance is important. Tense maintenance is an aspect of correctness in communicating perfectly and effectively.

Quirk, Greenbaum, leech, and Svartrik (1985:173) have this to say about tense.

Time can be thought of as a line on which is located as a continuously moving point, the present moment, anything ahead if the present moment is in future, and anything behind it, is in the past.



From the above prescription, we now realise that the tense of a verb indicates when the action took place, is taking or will take place. In a nutshell, the tense indicates times of which the action of verb occurs. The present tense is used for actions taking place in the present, the past tense is used for actions that took place in the past, and the future for actions that will take place in the future. Tense is a term used in grammar to indicate the time of action or event. Verbs are the essential part of a true sentence. At the same time, tense is the most essential aspect of every verb. It is the tense that exposes the listener or reader to the state of the action of the verb. This significance has continued to manifest itself in the daily interaction of human life. Communication cannot take place without the definite tense aspect of a given verb in the sentence. Writer or speaker intention could hardly be realised or perceived without specified use of the tense. So, it is an unavoidable aspect in either spoken language or written English.

Committing mistake in the presentation of tense at the kindergarten and elementary stage of primary school is a pardonable offence. Mistakes of such nature could not be condoned at the senior secondary schools. This very reason makes the study, mastery, and the maintenance of tense compulsory. The learners of English language at the SSS level are adolescents. They are now incorporated in to the affairs of the society. A person with his calibre needs to know how to manipulate his verbs according to the tense usage of the action. Tense appropriately used is the basis of the standardization of every language, English inclusive. That is why the use of English gained a highly recognized position in the curriculum of the senior secondary schools and extended to the colleges and universities all over the nation.

III. Functions of The Present Perfect Tense

A tense is said to be perfect when the action is over and complete. The present perfect tense shows an already recently completed action. It is formed by the use of have/has plus past participle. It is usually termed as “en” or “ed” participle. In teaching English language present perfect tense is considered very important so as to help the learners of English language to understand the time of the perfection and completeness of an action. The aim of every English L2 teacher is to introduce the learners the way to develop and improve their speech and written competency. The learning of present perfect tense therefore cannot be over emphasized. The teacher is in the position to expose the students to the correct usage and rules governing the formation of the present perfect tense through various pedagogies.

There are four major functions realized in the usage of present perfect tense. The functions are here presented with examples:

1. **Present Perfect Tense:** shows the completed action in the recent or immediate past. In another way it indicates a just concluded action. This is why sometimes it is conveyed with the word just. However, a perfect user knows the action is completed in the recent past even without physically presenting the word just. Examples:
 - i. Janet has just gone out.
 - ii. We have finished the class work.
 - iii. I have just returned home.

2. **Present Perfect Tense:** is used to show that the action which began in the past has continued up to the present. Examples:
 - i. I have lived in Khartoum since 2013.
 - ii. Bilkisu has worked in the college for 10 years.
 - iii. They have studied English for 3 years.

3. **Present Perfect Tense:** also shows that an action completed in the past has implication for the present. Performance of certain action in the past resulted or gave birth to another completed action present situation. For instance, Mary may give some story about the United States of America and in order to convince you to trust her information I can say “She lived in New York for two years”. By implication, she can now tell you a lot about New York or America. See further examples below:
 - i. You have walked a long distance.
 - ii. She has driven for 3 years.

- iii. It has bitten the frightened girl.
- 4. **Present Perfect Tense:** expresses past action without specification unspecified action is the one which no time marker is attached to it. Examples:
 - i. She has never been to Jos.
 - ii. Have you ever seen her before?
 - iii. They have always waited for their turn.

IV. Some Mistakes Realised in Students' Use of Present Perfect Tense

We are going to see some grammatical deformities in the learner's use of the present perfect tense. These mistakes are occasioned by the non application of the appropriate rule of the present perfect tense which the "ed" or "en" participle has not been added to the verbal node. In the following cases the "A" sentence represents the learner deformed grammar in the sentence while "B" sentence denotes the proper grammar or correct usage of the tense in question.

- 1A. The rain has lessen the number of the participants.
- 1B. The rain has lessened the number of the participants.
- 2A. The technologist has acquire knowledge.
- 2B. The technologist has acquired knowledge.
- 3A. The engineers have mobilize the steam engine.
- 3B. The engineers have mobilized the steam engine.
- 4A. These countries have develop.
- 4B. These countries have developed.
- 5A. Scientists have try to make things easy.
- 5B. Scientists have tried to make things easy.
- 6A. Democracy in Nigeria has already go a long way.
- 6B. Democracy in Nigeria has already gone a long way.
- 7A. The multilingual nature of Nigeria has lead to tribalism.
- 7B. The multilingual nature of Nigeria has led to tribalism.
- 8A. You have get nothing to offer.
- 8B. You have got nothing to offer.
- 9A. I have choose my career.
- 9B. I have chosen my career.

English language teaching and learning must go simultaneously. Isyaku (2002:3) says that "The purpose of teaching is for learning to take place which is visualized in form of students' achievement as a result of using effective teaching strategies". In the same vain Denga (2001:73) has this to say "The unique characteristics of learning process is where the strategies of teaching English language is imparted and acquired". The two scholars assert that the inductive activities of English aspect, rather than the conclusive were among many factors taking responsible to maintain tenses while speaking. It is widely known that many students loose precious marks due to their inconsistency in the use of tense in writing. The learners usually start a sentence with one tense and end it with another. This disturbing trend may persist largely if measure is not taken. Now we are going to observe a teacher talk method used by the professionals in the trade of teaching and its influence on the performance of the students.

Teacher Talk

Teacher talk method of teaching emanated from the traditional lecture method by Coulthard and Brazil in 1982. Lecture method is the traditional way of teaching where teacher is seen as the embodiment of knowledge and imparts it by mere telling his/her students; the teacher addresses the students about the subject matter while they listen attentively. The two scholars were of the view that if the method is modified it would yield exorbitant result. The effectiveness of this way of imparting knowledge to the learner has been very significant. It enables the teacher help students realize their dream.

Since teaching includes communication of information, the modification to this method is necessary. The major aim of every teacher is to help his/her students gain better understanding of the concept, subject, topic or event. The teacher would find it necessary at times to arouse the learners' interest more especially where the phenomenon entails, outdoor interaction like the use of present perfect tense, the teacher talk method becomes inevitable. The instructor should be meticulous enough to use ideas and words which encapsulate the day-to-day interaction of the students. This will help in systematic delivery of the teacher's goods by adopting a suitable order. The teacher must be clear and distinct, and make use of illustrations where possible. It is the duty of the teacher to share the whole classroom interaction according to soliciting, reacting, structuring, and

responding. It is of great interest to classroom researchers the question of how teacher talk is distributed. To what extent is the teacher's speech directed to the students as opposed to teaching them a lone to discuss research or assignment of time to explanation, management instruction, and invites questions and asks the learners at intervals, and also devise some suitable activities besides listening.

The method enables the teacher to evaluate input of the learners and measure their output competency. The general nature of teacher speech in classroom, especially phenomenon of tense maintenance could influence the opportunities that learners have to participate and assimilate instructional content. The interactions between the teacher, facilitator, adviser, and the learners as participants, are what is known as move. The move is the entailment of soliciting from the teacher, responding from the learners, structuring from the teacher, and reacting from the learner. The students would not attain fluency in English language present perfect tense unless the teacher provides conducive atmosphere to teaching/learning as above.

V. Objective of the Study

The objective of this study is to discover whether teacher talk strategy of teaching has more impact on the students' maintenance in the use of present perfect tense and then give preference to the profound way in teaching our students of English L2.

Research Question

Do students ability to maintain their use of present perfect tense relate to the method employed in teaching the concept?

Hypothesis

There is no relationship between students' performance in the maintenance of the use of present perfect tense and the method employed in the teaching exercise.

VI. Methodology

The data for this research were collected by using simple percentage and average. For each exercise a table was designed in which the marks obtained were calculated in terms of average score and percentage score. A sample of fifty four (54) students was selected from the total target of the Bauchi State students. The sampled students were selected because the research is a case study in nature, so the use of the all schools would be unrealistic. These students were also selected due to the fact that they study English language as a second language. Sample random sampling technique was used to draw the sample from the target population. Furthermore, a random sampling frame was drawn from the population using a mechanical means (Lottery Method) to group the sample population into three, each consisting of eighteen (18) students with equal number of male and female.

The researcher exposed group I to teacher talk strategy to what and how of the use of present perfect tense. The teacher brought the concept and asked the students about it. The students answer the questions probably wrong and bit by bit the teacher carries the students to most likely answer to the concept. The teacher provides the learner opportunity for co-operative learning among themselves. The teacher assumes normal discussions with learners towards right arrival at the correctness of the concept. At the end of the six weeks training the students were asked to answer ten questions and the questions were graded as t10 marks each. The method was found to be very stimulating and helped the students in the pursuit of their interest. The strategy enlivened the classroom activities which lead the learners became valuable source of reference. It eventually decreases the amount of low proficiency and eliminates the sense of in competency in the mind of the learners. The second group was introduced to concept present perfect tense through the traditional teaching pedagogy. In another words, we can say that group two were not exposed to any treatment but they attend normal classroom lessons. The learners listened and asked questions while the teacher responded adequately. At the first instance the researcher as a teacher expressed to the students the importance and significance of tense maintenance and its vital role in our daily communications. After a period of six weeks they were also given a test for assessment of their proficient and competency in the use of present perfect tense. The difference was very little from the pretest result. The assessment was marked and scored as show on the table in tabulated form below.

Research Design

The research design used in this work was pre-test, post test control design. The design made use of three groups where all the groups were pre-tested before the instruction and were also post-tested after the exercise.

Research Instrument

A written test on English achievement on the concept tense maintenance in the use of present perfect tense was designed by the researcher. The test consists of twenty (20) questions structured from the concept for the respondents to freely and briefly respond. The reliability of the test items was calculated using split-half-method. It was found to have reliability co-efficient of 0.98. Immediately after a period of six weeks intensive teaching programme, the above test was administered to the students and the results analysed below.

Data Analysis

The hypothesis was tested using T-test statistical tool at $\alpha = 0.05$ and the degree of freedom $df = 38$. The result summary is shown on the table below.

MEAN	VARIANCE	T – VALUES	
		T – Calculation	T - Critical
$X_A = 29.5$	$S^2_A = 12.37$	3.84	1.68
$X_B = 25.7$	$S^2_B = 7.17$		

From the above table, the analysis shows that the weighted scores ($X_A = 29.5$) of the experimental group exposed to teacher talk teaching strategy is higher than the other group which was exposed to traditional teaching method ($X_B = 25.7$). In the same vain, the variance ($S^2_A = 12.37$) of those exposed to the teacher talk teaching pedagogy is higher than that of those exposed to normal traditional teaching method ($S^2_B = 7.17$). The t-calculated ($t = 3.84$) is greater than the t-critical ($t = 1.68$) as such the null hypothesis is rejected and the alternative hypothesis is accepted.

The hypothesis was tested by using t-test statistical tool. The results of modified teacher talk method of teaching were compared to the results of the other groups. The results showed that null hypothesis was rejected and the teacher talk method of teaching yielded more proficiency than that of the other groups. Being the difference manifested itself, it shows that there was relationship between teaching pedagogy and the student competency in tense maintenance. The relationship between the method employed in teaching and the students' performance was positive. The teacher talk which was a modified lecture method of teaching yielded much result in the competency in the maintenance of present perfect tense. The experiment showed that teaching strategies have impact on the learners' use of present perfect tense and teacher talk proved to be effective to the students as there was a great significant positive difference between the other groups and those who were given treatment by the use of teacher talk.

VII. Discussions of Findings

The value of t-calculated is greater than the critical value of t and therefore the null hypothesis (H_0) is rejected and the alternative hypothesis stating that there is significant difference between the mean achievement scores of the students exposed to the task of tense maintenance by the use of present perfect tense through the use of teacher talk method over the other groups is accepted. Now we can conclude that there is preference for the said method. The finding is in agreement with Denga (2001) which showed that teaching strategy affects the students' achievement. It is also in line with Piaget (1964) who asserts that child's experience helps him understand. Teacher/student interaction is the child's concrete experiences that draw the expertise usage of present perfect tense. The success of the result can be attributed to the strategy used since it is activity based where the learners were fully involved in both the teaching and learning process.

The finding also agrees with Richards (2000) who views, learning by doing as an effective strategy that provides direct and real life experiences, acquisition of first hand information, which broadens the scope of learners' knowledge, stimulates interest of the students and motivation which enhances meaningful learning accompanied by exorbitant improvement of students' proficiency. By implication the teacher student interaction is seen through this modified lecture method as activity related pedagogy which leads the students to discover and learn better how to maintain their use of present perfect tense.

The data were analysed by using T-test statistical method. The performances of the groups were compared at $\alpha = 0.05$ level of significance.

VIII. Conclusions

The probability for higher proficiency of the students exposed to teacher talk method of teaching in tense maintenance in present perfect tense over those who were not exposed to the method would possibly be based on the fact that teacher talk strategy was interactive in nature. This agrees with Swain (1996a) who asserted that "Students benefited more from the activity based strategies". Each group was tested and scores were analysed as tabulated above in the form of tables which provide a vivid explanation of the idea to the reader. The findings of the work observed that the modified lecture method in the form of teacher talk method of

teaching is activity based teaching pedagogy and therefore yielded much proficiency in the students/learners performance in the maintenance of present perfect tense.

IX. Recommendations

- Teachers can help their students improve their level of language competency in the use of present perfect tense by encouraging them to participate in as many activities as possible.
- Teachers of Senior Secondary Schools students should not dominate the classroom activities but allow the learners considerable chance to improve their usage of present perfect tense.

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