



## TEACHING TENSES -A COMPARATIVE METHOD

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### ABSTRACT



The paper tries to study the grammatio-pedagogical approaches to English Tenses. The teaching of Tenses in a comparative method can be done, focusing on their structure and meaning. As English has many intricacies in its spelling, verb forms, structure and use of tenses, an attempt is made in this paper, emphasizing on the teaching of Tenses, making the teaching - learning process easy. The prime focus is on the usage of Tenses amidst Indian linguistic milieu.

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In the present globalized scenario, English has gained immense importance than earlier. The study of English has been compulsory in spite of one's love for one's mother tongue. English being the 'Library language', it has truly become global and thoroughly serviceable in its spoken and written form than any other language. In the wake of Information Technology, the world has become a global village and English has become the medium of communication across the countries. Competency in English enables us to have an edge over the other nationals in getting employed in reputed multinational companies. Hence, it may not be an exaggeration to state that without English, man's

survival becomes difficult, if he desires to lead a decent, dignified and economically stable life.

Accordingly, the concept of teaching English is also changing. English is no longer taught as literature but as functional English. Most of the English Teachers find it difficult to teach correct usage to the learners, particularly, at the college level, as there is a cross section of learners with different backgrounds at their schooling. As such, the mother tongue influence is reflected on students of vernacular media. Common syllabus in the higher classes hinders them to cope with the heavy syllabus. A little opportunity is provided to them to acquire language by being exposed to and use it regularly.



Most of the students depend on readymade notes given by the teachers or the guides that are available in the market. Thereby, many qualified people, even after completion of their professional courses, are unable to use acceptable and appropriate English in their spoken or written communication.

Some of the factors that are responsible for this sad /pitiable state are:

- a) Learning English as a second language is not as natural as learning one's mother tongue. For, the native speakers of any language imbibe their language naturally. This is not so in the case of learning English as a second language / foreign language. Therefore, one has to learn his / her second language deliberately to gain command and control of the different components of the English language such as Phonology (the sound system i.e., pronunciation) Morphology (Patterns and parts of words) and Syntax (the patterns of the phrases and sentences). Hence, it becomes difficult for the people to master the components of a second language as they already possess their mother tongue which serves as a barrier. For example; A Hindi speaking student is likely to say "Though I gave the examination, yet I failed" instead of saying "Though I took the examination, I failed" on the analogy of his linguistic pattern with which he is already familiar with. Similarly, a Telugu speaking student says, "you are going a? Coming a?" instead of asking 'Are you going home?, 'Are you coming?' in the rising tone to sound a statement for asking a question.
- b) Mother Tongue is acquired by exposure and imitation and thereby, the learner is able to intuit what is correct and what is incorrect; whereas, it is not so in the case of learning a second language. A very important aspect of language acquisition is that exposure to English language and its usage. In Indian context, particularly in the districts and the rural areas, the learners have a little opportunity to use English outside their

academic institutions. So, they are unable to understand the intricacies of English in the aspects of spelling, verb forms, structures and tense aspect.

- c) While teaching, the teachers also follow lecture method, which makes the learners mere passive listeners. If it is interactive, the learners in the initial stage may feel hesitant but will put their efforts gradually and improve their language skills.
- d) Lack of reading habit among the learners would also deprive them from increasing their vocabulary.
- e) Size and strength of the classroom also makes the teaching and learning ineffective.
- f) Learners don't get properly motivated, which is a very important factor in teaching - learning process.
- g) To make learning more effective, the learner must be given the knowledge of grammar.

Every Language has got its own grammar whether it is one's mother tongue or second language. Knowledge of grammar is more important to a second language learner than to a native speaker, who intuitively internalizes the grammar of his / her mother tongue. It is essential to make an utterance or a statement acceptable and intelligible in speech or writing within or outside the group. Chomsky says, "Grammar is a device that generates (enumerates) an infinite number of correct sentences of a language and a number of incorrect ones. Grammar is a system consisting of Phonology (i.e. sounds of English vowels, and consonants represented by alphabet), Morphology (word form – beauty, beautify, beautiful, beautifully), Semantics (meaning and meaning relationships in language) and Syntax (word relationships, order and sequence.)"

The teaching of Tenses in a comparative method can be done, focusing on their structure and meaning. As English has many intricacies in its spelling, verb forms, structure and use of tenses, an attempt is made in this paper, emphasizing on the teaching of Tenses, making the teaching - learning process easy. In English, Tense of the verb aspect is given more prominence. There are twelve forms for



each English verb (V 12) i.e., Simple Present, Present Continuous, Present Perfect, Present Perfect Continuous, Simple Past, Past Continuous, Past Perfect, Past Perfect Continuous, Future; Future Continuous, Future Perfect, Future Perfect Continuous Tense; whereas, in Indian Languages like Telugu and Hindi, there are only three forms. As

**Type – 1**

Simple Present Tense is used to sound a statement casual while use of Present Continuous Tense shows some concern.

| Simple Present Tense                                 | Present Continuous Tense  |
|--|---|
| 1. She always asks questions in the class (approach) | 1. She is always asking questions in the class (a sense of interruption)        |
| 2. My car always breaks down (Statement)             | 2. My car is always breaking down. (shows irritation)                           |
| 3. Sunil always comes late to the class (Statement)  | 3. Sunil is always coming late to the class (Shows emotion, concern and puzzle) |

**Type – II**

Simple Present Tense is used for expressing habitual action / situation that we see as permanent, whereas, present continuous is used to express a situation that we see as temporary.

| Simple Present Tense                                    | Present Continuous Tense                                    |
|---|---|
| 1. I work at Seema Engineering College. (Permanent Job) | 1. I am working at Rajiv Institution presently. (Temporary) |
| 2. They live in a very nice flat.                       | 2. They are living in a small flat now.                     |
| 3. Umesh Gupta is very sociable.                        | 3. Amit is being very sociable today.                       |

**Type – III**

Present Perfect Tense is used to describe the past event without mentioning the definite time i.e. to show completed action, and connect the past with the present and also when the focus is on the completion of an action; whereas, simple past is used to describe the completed action or an event with definite time.

| Present Perfect Tense   | Simple Past Tense  |
|---|--|
| 1. I have seen the Taj Mahal. (Focus is on completion of event / action)      | 1. I saw the Taj Mahal in the month of October 2006.                               |
| 2. I have waited for you since 2 o'clock (past is connected with the present) | 2. I waited for you for 2 hours.   |
| 3. I have talked to him recently (indefinite time of action)                  | 4. I talked to him today morning at 10 o'clock (definite time on a particular day) |
| 5. I have read the novel (I know the story)                                   | 6. I read the novel in 2008.   |

**Type – IV**

Present Continuous Tense is used to describe the work in progress and also to describe planned future actions; whereas, Present Perfect Tense describes the completed action without mentioning specific/definite time.

| Present Continuous Tense  | Present Perfect Tense            |
|---|----------------------------------|
| 1. He is working for Infosys.   | 1. He has left Satyam Computers. |
| 2. I am going to present a paper on the 5 <sup>th</sup> of August 2015. | 2. I have presented a paper.     |

**Type – V**

Present Perfect Continuous Tense is used to describe an action which was started long ago and continued at the time of speaking and time adverbial phrase is used; whereas, Present Perfect Tense describes the completed action.

| Present Perfect Continuous Tense   | Present Perfect Tense   |
|--|---|
| 1. I have been teaching English in Sreenidhi Institute of Science and Technology since August, 2012. | 1. I have taught English in Vaagdevi College Engineering for ten years. |

**Type – VI**

Past Continuous Tense is used to describe the action that commenced in the past and was in progress at that time; whereas, Simple Past Tense describes the action that was already completed.

| Past Continuous Tense                             | Simple Past Tense                                       |
|---|---|
| 1. I was watching Television, when you called me. | 1. I watched television for an hour yesterday at 7 p.m. |

**Type – VII**

While describing the two past events in a clause structure, the first completed action must be described in the Past Perfect Tense, the action that is completed later in the Simple Past Tense.

Ex: When I had reached the station, the train arrived.

After I had completed my assignment, I submitted it in the department.

**Type – VIII**

In the Present Perfect Continuous Tense, only time expression (time adverbial phrase) is used ;whereas, in the Past Perfect Continuous Tense, there are two time expressions, one denoting the duration of an action and another denoting the end of an action(time expression) .

| Present Perfect Continuous Tense  | Past Perfect Continuous Tense   |
|---|---|
| 1. He has been studying English for a longtime since he was a child. (time adverbial phrase are used) | 1. He had been studying English for twelve years when he joined B.Tech in 2014.(Duration and point of time) |

**Type - IX**

The Simple Future Tense is used to talk about things we cannot control. It expresses the future as fact.

Ex: I shall be twenty five years next Sunday.

We will come to know our examination results in the last week of this month.

**Type - X**

We use the Future Continuous Tense to talk about actions which will be in progress at a time in future.

Ex: I will be going to Delhi this summer.

We will be writing our end exams next month.

Please don't come at 9 a.m. tomorrow, I will be watching cricket match.

**Type -XI**

The Future Perfect Tense is used to talk about actions that will be completed by a certain time in future.

Ex: I shall have written my assignment by next week.

By the end of the year, I will have worked here for five years.

**Type -XII**

The Future Perfect Continuous Tense is used for actions that will begin in future, will be in progress over a period of time that will be in continuation in future.

Ex: I will have been writing my final year exams in 2015.

They will have been staying in Srinagar for 5 years in next May.

**NOTE:** *Of all the 12 forms of verb in tense, only 10 are regularly used. The last 2 are very rarely used. Generally, instead of these two, the Simple Future and Future Continuous are used.*

**CONCLUSION**

Having cited few examples, it is felt that, if tenses are taught in this manner by explaining the meaning, the learners may use tenses appropriately. The teachers must try to motivate the learners to use tenses extensively by giving them enough practice. As English has become more functional now, English teachers have to shift their paradigm by focusing on language rather than on literature. In this context, it

is apt to recall the words of Rabindranath Tagore: "Teaching language as literature is like using a sword for shaving the beard. It is bad for the sword and harmful to the chin". Prof. I. V. Chalapathi Rao rightly pointed out, "Grammar is the soul of the language. Even when the structural method is followed by experts, teaching of grammar is inescapable. Verbs are the main springs of language. Nouns are building blocks and Adjectives and Adverbs are the pigments which give colour to our sentences". Therefore, learning of Tenses in a proper way is a must for speaking and writing good English.

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