

Present Perfect Simple and Progressive Tenses in
English and Persian
A Contrastive Analysis of Linguistic Systems

Mohammad M. Fallahi
Iran University of Science and Technology
Narmak, Tehran, Iran

Introduction

James (1988) has characterised CA as being a form of interlingual study, or of what Wandruszka (1971) has called "interlinguistics". As such, and in certain other respects, it has much in common with the study of intralinguistics. The latter, by definition, is not the study of two languages, but the exploration of the over-generalization or faulty application of rules within the structure of the target language. The concern of this paper is the effects of both interlingual and intralingual transfers on native speakers of Persian learning the present perfect simple and progressive tenses.

1. The Structural variations of the present perfect simple tenses

The present perfect simple in English is a verb phrase constructed with the auxiliary have followed by the past participle of the principle verb, e.g., "I have written two letters today."

In Persian, the present perfect simple is formed by using the past participle of the main verb accompanied with the personal enclitics *¹including /æm/'/i/'/æst/'/im/'/id/'/ænd/. Examples are :

nevešt-e æm : I have written;	nevešt-e im: We have written;
nevešt-e i: You have written ;	nevešt -e id: You have written ;
nevešt-e æst: He has written;	nevešt-e ænd : They have written ;

2. The structural variations of the present perfect progressive tenses

The English present perfect progressive tense is a verb phrase composed of have been followed by an-ing form, e.g.: have been listening. The Persian school grammars declare that

*¹Moynes (1970, P.40) calls these endings the "copula enclitics" and Mace (1971, P.162) identifies them as the "short forms" of budæn "to be". These forms are distinct from the "long forms" of budæn (i.e., hæstæm, hæsti, hæst, hæstid, hæstænd) and are written not as suffixes but detached, i.e. with their own "alef."

to form a present perfect progressive tense, the prefix *mi-* is added to the present perfect simple such as : *mi-nevešt-e æm*: " I have been writing". However, this form is not used in formal language and does not even occur frequently in speech today. The modern language employs the present simple or progressive forms to express the time reference of the English present perfect progressive tense. We will discuss it in details in the forth-coming types C and D of the usage variations. Nevertheless, examples are :

1. The tap has been dripping since last week :
ob-e šir æz hæfte-ye gozæšt-e ček-ke mikonæd.
2. The children have been watching television for two hours :
bač-če ha do saæt æst ke (darænd) televiziyon tæmaša mikonænd.
3. The usage variations of the present perfect simple and progressive tenses

The tense *2 forms and their time references are not expected to be the same in any two languages. Even within a single language, there is not always one-for-one correspondence relationship between the tense forms and their time references. A tense form may in fact, have more than one time reference, or conversely, one time reference may be represented by more than one tense form. This definition remains true with the present perfect simple and progressive tenses in English and Persian. The following discussion attempts to exemplify the complexity existed in this relation. To make a contrastive analysis, the whole inventory of the present perfect is classified into four categories as the following :

*2 Time and tense do not mean the same thing. They are different concepts. In Swan's definition (1988:604), "the verb-forms which show differences in time are called tenses." The statement of Verma (1972, P.28) seems more suitable for the purpose of our study. He describes that :

... time is a continuum. Tense, on the other hand, is a formal grammatical category that languages use to cut up time into convenient segments. Tense provides a kind of grid in the form of verbal and adverbial markers, through which we view the continuum of time, segmented along lines laid down by the system of languages.

Type A

This class represents a group of present perfect simple in English corresponding closely to the present perfect simple in Persian. The contrastive exemplifications are :

- (1) Has your sister sold her colour TV yet ?
aya xahær-e to televiziyon-e rængi-ye xod-ra foruxt-e æst ?
- (2) Ali has gone to the cinema twice this week.
æli in hæfte do-bar be sinema ræft-eæst.
- (3) I have written six letters today.
mæn emruz šeš ædæd nam-e nevešt-e æm.
- (4) Have you ever seen an astronaut ?
aya ta-behal fæza-næværdi-ra dide-i ?
- (5) I have done so much work within the last few days.
dær ærz-e cænd ruz-e gozæšt-e xeili kar kærd-e-æm.
- (6) I can't go to the park because I have broken my leg.
mæn ne-mitæ-vanæm be park berævæm ċun payæm šekæst-e æst.
- (7) She has put on her new dress tonight.
U emšæb lebas-e taz-e-æš ra pušid-e æst.

As far as interlingual relationship is concerned, there are not intricate differences among the time references concerned with this category. All structures of English and Persian exemplified in (1) through (7) signal the properties of the present perfect, i.e., they imply the connection between the past and the present time sphere. Having the fact that, there is a one-for-one time-reference relationship between the tense systems of the two languages, it follows then that this group of perfective patterns may not be most difficult tense construction for Persian speakers to master.

As regards intralingual analysis, there is a possibility of confusion between present perfect and preterit for Persian speakers. Nevertheless, there will be no technical error if preterit is employed in (1), (2), (3), (4), (5), and (7). It is because, the averbials yet, twice this week, today, ever, within the last few days, and tonight which have been utilized with present perfect in these sentences, can be used with preterit as well. Examples are illustrated below :

Did your sister sell her colour TV yet^{*3}? (1)

Ali Went to the cinema twice this week. (2)

I wrote six letters today. (3)

Did you ever^{*4} see an astronaut ? (4)

I did so much within the last few days .(5)

She put on her new dress tonight. (7)

As for the example (6), the present perfect is obligatory in this sentence. In most cases, using preterit with construction containing two non-synchronal actions gives rise to mistakes like the following :

* I can't go to the park because I broke my leg. (6)

Type 8

In this category, the present perfect simple in English corresponds to the present double-function tense (simple present, present progressive) in Persian. Examples are :

(8) We have known each other for five years .

ma mod-dæ t-e pænʃ sal æst ke hæmdigær-ra miʃenasim.

(9) His sister has lived in Tehran since 1367.

Xahær-e u æz sal-e 1367 be-bæd dær tehran Zendegi mikonæd.

^{*3}Swan (1988:579) has asserted that "when yet is used to talk about whether or not an event has happened, it is used with the present perfect in British English. The past simple is common in American English, e.g.

1. Have you called Annie yet ?

(British English)

2. Did you call Annie yet ?

(American English)

^{*4}"Ever can also be used with a past tense, e.g., Did you ever meet Jake Allwright at university ? " (Swan : 210).