

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 ^{*1}including /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

^{*1}Moynes (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 cun 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).

- (10) Ali has been in the hospital for two weeks.
ali do hæft-e æst ke dær bimarestan bæstæri
æst.
- (11) I have attended Azad University for three years.
mod-dæ t-e se sal-æst ke (mæn) be danešgah-e
azad mirævæm.
- (12) Reza has owed me 50 dollars since last month.
reza æz mah-e gozæšt-e pæn jah dolar be mæn
bedehkar æst.
- (13) He hasn't worked for years.
u salhast ke kar ne-mikonæd.
- (14) They have known me all my life.
an-ha hæme-ye omr mæ ra mišenasænd.

The term "present perfect" suggesting a completed action is quite misleading for this category of perfective construction. If this tense is to describe an action that is "completed", then our examples in (8) through (14) indicate states or actions that started in the past, have continued up to the present and still lasts at the moment of speaking and may even continue in future.^{*5} The time adverbials are limited to since + time expression, for + time expression and rarely other adverbials like all my life. Most grammarians have recognized this contradiction and sought to set up two subcategories of present perfect--the continuative and the resultative (see Swan, 1988: 493; Quirk et al, 1987: 190 and 193-4).

*5 Swan (1988: 245) declares that :

For is used to say how long an action or situation lasts. It can be used to talk about the past, present or future :

1. I once studied the guitar for three years.
2. That house has been empty for six weeks.
3. We go to the seaside for a week every August.
4. My boss will be away for the next ten days.
5. By next Christmas I'll have been here for seven years.

When for is used to talk about a period of time continuing up to the present, it is used with the present perfect tense, not the present :

A Persian speaker is confronted with real learning difficulties when trying to master this category of the present perfect. He has to deal with a tense for which his native language substitutes the simple present with or without connotations of the present progressive time reference. As a result, he often comes up with errors as follows :

- * We know (or * are knowing) each other for five years (8)
- * His sister lives (or * is living) in Tehran since 1367.(9)
- * Ali is in the hospital for two weeks. (10)
- * I attend(or * am attending) Azad University for three years. (11)
- * Reza owes (or * is owing) me 50 dollars since last month. (12).
- * He doesn't work (or * is not working) for years. (13)
- * They know (or * are knowing) me all my life. (14)

The students may even be affected by the intralingual aspect of language learning and possibly attempt to use the simple past for the present perfect. In fact, it is possible to substitute the preterit for the perfect in (8), (10), (11) and (13), but in all cases, that would end in a change in meaning :

- We know each other for five years. (8)
- Ali was in the hospital for two weeks. (10)
- I attended Azad University for three years. (11)
- He didn't work for years. (13)

1. I've known her for a long time. (Not: * I know her for a long time.)
2. We've lived in this street for fifteen years (Not: * we live in this street for fifteen years.)

When we are talking about a particular past moment, we use for with the past perfect to refer to a period of time continuing up to that moment :

1. When she arrived, I had been waiting for two and a half hours.
2. I met her last Christmas, but I had known her by sight for years before that.

As for (9), (12), and (14), the present perfect is obligatory because the substitution of the past tense will result in errors :

- * His sister lived in Tehran since 1367 .(9)
- * Reza owed me 50 dollars since last month. (12)
- * They knew me all my life. (14)

Type C

This category introduces a group of present perfect progressive tenses in English corresponding to the time reference of the present double-function tense(simple present/ present progressive) in Persian. Examples are :

- (15) How long have you been smoking ?
Ce moddæ tist (moddæ t æst) ke sigar mikesi ?
- (16) The telephone has been ringing for two minutes.
telefon do dæqiq-eæst ke zæng mizæn-e (mizænæd).
- (17) It has been raining non-stop since Tuesday.
æz sesænb-e layænqæt baran mibar-e (mibaræd).
- (18) Someone has been stealing my books.
kæsi ketabha-ye mæra midozd-e (midozdæd).
- (19) Who has been visiting him lately ?
Ce kæsi æxirænu-ra molaqat mikon-e (mikonæd).
- (20) Ever since I gave up smoking, I have been putting
on weight.
æzvæqti ke sigar-ra tærk kærde æm daræm ċaq
miævæm.
- (21) I have been waiting for you foran hour.
yek saæt æst ke montæzer-e to hæstæm.
- (22) Since when have you been participating in this
program ?

Note that for is generally dropped in the expression(for) how long :

How long have you been waiting (for)?

æz key dæ r in bæ rnam-e šerkæt mikoni ?

- (23) She has been hurting her husband ever since they were married.

æzvæqtj ke anha ezdevaj kær d-e ænd u (dar-e/daræd)
šohæræš-ra æziy-yæt mikon-e (mikonæd).

This category shares all the basic properties of the present perfect simple discussed before in type B. By virtue of what we have argued, the present perfect progressive in (15), (16), (17), (19), (20), (21), (22), and (23) cannot be replaced by the simple present mainly because of the adverbials : how long, for + time expression, since + time expression, lately, and ever since. Similarly, any tense substitution in (18) results in a change in meaning. Examples are :

- * How long do you smoke ? (15)
- * The telephone rings for two minutes. (16)
- * It rains non-stop since Tuesday. (17)
- * Who visits him lately ? (19)
- * Ever since I gave up smoking, I put on weight. (20)
- * I wait for you for an hour. (21)
- * Since when do you participate in this program ? (22)
- * She hurts her husband ever since they were married. (23)

Someone is stealing my books. (18)

Type D

This category has comparatively low frequency of occurrence and exemplifies a class of present perfect progressive tenses in English corresponding to the time reference of the past progressive in Persian. Examples are :

- (24) She has been working all day and she is tired out now.
u hæmey-e ruz-ra kar mikærd væhala xeili xæst-e æst.
- (25) I have been reading some of your poetry this morning.
(they are not bad.)
mæn emruz sobh bæzi æz æšar-e to -ra mixandæm.
(bæd nistænd.)

The Persian learners of English may invariably use the past progressive tense instead of the present perfect progressive pattern in (24) and (25).

However, such a substitution probably results in a little or no change in meaning :

She was working all day and she is tired out now. (24)

I was reading some of your poetry this morning. (They are not bad.)

Conclusion

Both interlingual and intralingual transfers frequently manifest themselves to the native speakers of Persian who learn present perfect simple and progressive tenses in EFL/ESL environments. In attempt to allocate the syllabus design for our students, it seems that these important dimensions are overlooked. Apart from establishing grammars for the two given tenses, a pedagogically oriented CA has to devise additionally a transfer grammar on the systematic distinction between the interlingual and intralingual interferences. It appears then that these two contrastive entities associated in a learning task seems to add more to our understanding of the grammatical mechanisms involved.

References

- James, C. Contrastive Analysis. Longman, 1988.
- Moyne- J.A. The Structure of Verbal Construction in Persian. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, Harvard University, 1970.
- Quirk, R. And Greenbaum, S. A Concise Grammar of Contemporary English. New York, Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc. New York, 1973.
- Quirk, R; Greenbaum, S; Leech, g; & Svartvik, j. A Comprehensive Grammar of the English Language. Longman, 1987.
- Swan, M. Practical English Usage. Oxford University Press, 1988.
- Wandruszka, M.W., Interlinguistik, in James Carl, Contrastive Analysis, Longman, 1988.