

ASPECTS: LINGUISTICS APPROACH IN EXPLAINING ENGLISH TO INDONESIAN LEARNERS

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Abstract

Bahasa Indonesia, one of Malay varieties, has no tenses marker. Meanwhile, English which is taught at schools and universities in Indonesia has complicated -full of exceptions- tenses marker. The diversity of both languages in grammatical system, such as tenses, becomes a priority and a point of attention in teaching and learning English in Indonesia. Students are familiar with tenses names and sentence formulas but mostly encounter problems in the use of them. The absent of tenses marking system in Bahasa Indonesia is considered as the main reason for students' failure of doing analogy. Most teachers have introduced that English has sixteen or twelve tenses. Rules and exceptions of the agreement system in English come into a complicated thing for the learners such as third singular subjects in present tense. Linguistics and typological approach between Indonesian and English language in teaching English grammar should come to a consideration. Therefore, rather than explaining English has twelve tenses with out comparing to Indonesian grammatical system, this article puts forward the introduction of aspects in explaining English tenses. By reintroducing that English has only two tenses which are present and past tense, while the continuous and perfect are aspects in English, teachers and students could do simplification in understanding complicated English tenses.

Keywords: *tenses, aspects, deixis, typology of language.*

Introduction

Tense is the main issue in teaching and learning English. Tenses is what comes first as someone starts to learn English. More grammar books also begin the chapter by introducing tenses for example *English Grammar* by Betty S. Azar, *English Grammar in Use* by Raymond Murphy, and *Interactions* by Elaine Kim and Darey Jack. Those books are mostly used by teachers, as well in Indonesia, for teaching English for general purposes. English Structure or English Grammar subject. Most teachers or instructors explain that English has twelve or sixteen tenses. However, linguistically, English has only two tenses, present and past tense (Palmer, 1971; Givon, 1984; Payne2002, Downing and Locke, 2006). The absent of explanation on *aspect* as one of grammatical categories makes the more types of tenses and this fact inflicts a complicated explanation of English tense.

The teaching of English grammar for Indonesian learners is complicated. By considering that Indonesian Language, a Malay variety and part of Austronesian language family, which is not familiar with tenses in its grammatical system, tenses will be the point of interest in teaching English. According to Payne (2002) English is a language that pay more attention on tenses whereas Austronesian and African generally pay more attention in aspect. Therefore, Indonesian and the Malay varieties are considered as languages which have no tenses. In other hands, the unfamiliarity of tenses system for Indonesian could becomes a problem in learning English. Complicated tense form and use which is analogically absent to Indonesian logical system in sentence or utterance formulation can be solved by framing the concept of aspect which is more familiar in Indonesian or Malay language system. Current practices of teaching of English that has communicative orientation should emphasis on how meaning adopted by the learners which grammatical system strongly operates syntactically an underlying meaning of a language, such as the aspect.

Review of Related Theories

Since 1960s, Transformational-generative approach which is primarily concerned with syntax and semantics, was dominant and became an orientation demanded a native or native-like command of the language under study, exclusively with English (Mallinson and Blake, 1981). Various methods which were popular in teaching English for different countries as the effect of advancement teaching method in the United States resulted the comparison of languages by their structural characteristics. The classification of languages that are based from their structural characteristic such as pattern and principles which have been

identified as central in language such as the structure of simple sentence and its constituents is an applying of language typology (Lehman, 1978; Mallison and Blake, 1981). Through this approach, English and Bahasa are categorized as nominative-accusative languages according to their morpho-syntactic level, as well as the both languages have the same word order, SVO. However, English, in morphological level, is categorized as polysynthetic or incorporative language and Bahasa is an agglutinative language. As the result in this level, it is seen that Bahasa does not have tense markers as what English has. There is also a difference on implementation of aspect system which Bahasa tends to indicate the aspects lexically whereas English has periphrastic aspect. Of this fact English, in teaching that language for foreign learners is simply introduced that has twelve or sixteen tenses. The practices of English teaching in Indonesia, of its communicative orientation are still under lied of transformational-generative approach.

Tenses, Aspect, and Modal

The terms of Tense, Aspect, and Modal are derived from the syntactic or grammatical categories in which its operation based on verb. TAM is an obligatory component of simple sentences that in fact constitutes one for the major devices coding the connectedness- or coherence- of sentences in their wider discourse context. According to Givón (1984:271) "TAM is thus intimately involved in the grammar of complex constructions and complex discourse functions, so that the label 'simple' as applied to the common TAM markers that may appear, as various options, in simple clauses, is to some extent illusory. The operation of TAM crosses linguistically in form of morphological, periphrastic or lexical level involves semantic and pragmatic domain. In this analysis which focus later on English that its tense is marked morphologically and its aspect in periphrastic form, the elaborating of concept is restricted into grammatical aspect that ignores lexical aspect of English verbs.

Tenses in English

Tense is the grammatical expression of the location of events in time (Downing and Locke, 2006). The occurrence of an event is laid under time and space. It is important to notice that there is an abstract event which is happening in a mental state, not in a span of time. By stating this, a real event in real time that is occurrence in the time frame, not in mental frame, is referred in a grammatical system by marking of its verb (*goes/went*). For this fact, English has only two tenses, present and past (Palmer, 1971, 1991; Downing and Locke, 2006). Future tense -commonly known- which is not marked by inflectional verb but by the present of modal (*shall or will*) happens in the mental state or in semantic level only.

Aspects in English

Aspect is concerned with the way in which the event is viewed regard to such considerations as duration and completion when encoded by a verb (Downing and Locke, 2006:369-370). Aspect describes the internal temporal shape of events or states (Payne, 2002:238). Verhaar (2010) says that aspect deals with the meaning of verb which is correlated with the commencement, ongoing, occurrence, repetition, perfection, or result of a circumstance or an action. The definition given by Downing and Locke is derived exactly to the system of English grammar which is focus on duration and completion (progressive and perfect). The rest of two definitions express the semantic and functional of the aspect, not only grammatical aspect. Of time and space for the occurrence of an event or action, the event or action itself by the natural law of tempo will have the beginning, the duration and the end. Payne (2002) suggests some kinds of aspect in general which are: 1) perfective, 2) imperfective, 3) Perfect, 4) Pluperfect, 5) Completive, 6) Inceptive, 7) Continuative/Progressive, 8) Punctual, 9) Iterative, and 10) Habitual. Nevertheless, in this paper, the concept of aspect which is promoted by Downing and Payne will be operational in discussion session. They have divided into two aspects: perfect aspect and progressive aspect.

Teaching Grammar

The teaching of grammar is an essential point of foreign language teaching. Grammar as a system of rules which governs the conventional arrangement and relationship of words in a sentence should be taught in appropriate techniques. Grammar competence that is necessary for communication especially for the new tradition of CLT because grammar include structural dimension, semantic and pragmatic dimension. Brown (2004) has quoted Murcia (1991) for consideration of some variables that determine the importance of grammar: age, proficiency level, educational background, language skills, register, needs and goals.

	Less Important	Focus on Form	More Important
Learner Variables			
Age	Children		Adults
Proficiency Level	Beginning		Advanced
Educational Background	Prefliterate No formal education		Literate well education
		Adolescents some formal education	
		Intermediate Semiliterate	

Instructional Variables

Skill	listening, reading	Speaking	Writing
Register	Informal	Consultative	Formal
Need/Use	Survival	Vocational	Professional

This suggests that teaching grammar for adult in advanced level of professional education especially in for writing is more important. On the other hand, teaching grammar is considered less important for children or for informal register.

Discussion

The claim that English has twelve or sixteen tenses is by combining the tense and aspect of its grammatical categories. Present continuous is the combination of present tense and progressive aspect as well as present perfect that has present tense and perfective aspect. In her book "Fundamental of English Grammar" (third edition) 2006, Betty S. Azar explains tenses implicitly by introducing *Present Time* for chapter 1, *Past Time* for chapter 2 and *Future Time* for chapter 3. In contrast, she explicitly gives the overview of verb tenses in chapter one of her book "Understanding and Using English Grammar" (2009) by giving sub-heading namely: the simple tenses, the progressive tenses, the perfect tenses, and the perfect progressive tenses. This book also gives the summary Chart of Verb Tenses that mentions 12 types of tenses:

Simple Present	Present Progressive	Present Perfect	Present Progressive	Perfect
Simple Past	Past Progressive	Past Perfect	Past Progressive	Perfect
Simple Future	Future Progressive	Future Perfect	Future Progressive	Perfect

This chart has been adopted from Betty (2009) Understanding and Using English Grammar pp. 6-7.

The mixed naming for aspect and tenses in two of Betty's book could cause misunderstanding although she never explicitly mentions number of tenses for "Fundamental Edition".

"Interaction" book 1 and book 2, introduce nine tenses that is implicitly named with tenses such as simple present tense, present continuous tense, simple past tense, past continuous tense, simple future, future continuous tense, present perfect tense, present perfect continuous tense, and past perfect tense. The presented materials in these two books are also arranged chronologically which also have communicative orientation. In contrast, Raymond Murphy in his book "English Grammar in Use" Intermediate edition only introduces two tenses at the earlier chapters, present and past. The book implicitly divides between tense and aspect. Moreover, Future is mentioned after present tense with the aspects and past tense with the aspects and the book also explains present tenses for the future expression. Raymond clearly combines present and past and separates future into different category. The "Interaction" model and "English Grammar in Use" can be shown by charts below.

Simple Present Tense
Present continuous Tense
Simple Past tense
Past continuous tense
Simple Future
Future continuous tense
Present Perfect Tense
Present Perfect Continuous
Past Perfect

Model of Interaction 1 & 2. by Kirn et al and Warner et al.

Present and Past	Present Continuous
	Present Simple
	Past Simple
	Past Continuous
Present Perfect and Past	Present Perfect
	Present Perfect Continuous
	Past Perfect
	Past Perfect Continuous
Future	Present Tense for Future

Model of English Grammar in Use by Raymond Murphy

Another source that is similar to the explanation in English Grammar in Use by Raymond Murphy is on the website of British Council (<http://learnenglish.britishcouncil.org/en/english-grammar/verbs>). This website clearly names aspect for continuous and perfect. The further explanation is shown by the use in the frame of time such as talking about the present, talking about the past and talking about the future.

Present Tense
Past Tense
Continuous Aspect
Perfect Aspect
Talking about the present
Talking about the past
Talking about the future

British Council Model

The explanation of future use, according to British Council Website, obviously depicted the function of modal which applies the present tense. "When we know about the future we normally use the present tense". The use of *will* to talk about future usually has meaning of predictions, want, offers, and promise. The employing of (be) going to is functionally for expressing plans, intentions, and something likely to happen. In conclusion, British Council strongly excludes future as part of verb tense but rather put it in description of use that employ modal for expressing future meaning.

It seems that the combination of tenses modal and aspect causes the simplification that English has sixteen tenses (see the table below).

		Aspect				
		Modal	Perfect	Progressive	Perfect Progressive	
Tense	Present		Present Perfect	Present Progressive	Present Progressive	Perfect
		Future	Future Perfect	Future Progressive	Future Progressive	Perfect
	Past		Past Perfect	Past Progressive	Past Perfect Progressive	
		Past Future	Past Future Perfect	Past Future Progressive	Past Future Progressive	Perfect Progressive

Model TAM

The structure of a Past Future Perfect Progressive is easily constructed by combining the categories for example: *She would have been cooking*, but how this event can be shaped in the frame of time. The failure of the framing logically could result this structure of Past Future Perfect Progressive unemployed in natural language use. This reason brings that the useable tenses in English is only twelve.

The two grammatical aspects in English, perfect and progressive or perfect plus progressive can be understood slightly by Indonesian *sudah* and *sedang*.

She is walking.	Dia sedang berjalan.
She has walked.	Dia sudah berjalan.
She isn't walking.	Dia tidak sedang berjalan
She hasn't walked	Dia belum berjalan

It is important to notice that the use of *sudah* and *sedang* is the analogy of the English aspect into Bahasa perspective which is only in semantic level. The meaning of aspect of its perspective into time span which deals with duration and completion can be the base of the analogy (Downing and Locke, 2006). Bahasa Indonesia has lexical showing aspect of perfect

Saya habis menonton	'I finished watching'
Saya telah menonton	'I have watched'

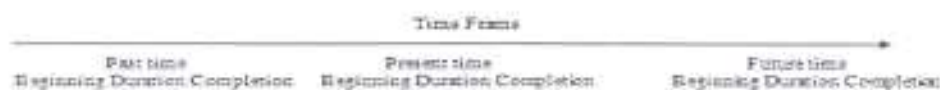
Mereka sudah makan	'I have eaten'
Jono selesai bekerja	'John has done working'
Meri telah pergi	'Mary has gone'
Hanculah harapan ku	'My hope has gone'

The words *habis*, *telah*, *sudah*, and *selesai* are lexical aspect in Bahasa Indonesia. These words can be categorized as completive (1)(4), anterior (2)(3)(5), and perfective (6). According to Hopper and Cumming in Muslim (2009), *-lah* is a suffix that marks perfective in Indonesian or in Malay language but this form mostly found in literary works and rarely found in everyday use language. In contrast, *telah* dan *sudah* can indicate the perfective in Bahasa but *sudah* is categorized as peripheral lexical instead *telah* that is grammatical because it cannot be clausal, cannot follow by negation, and cannot construct interrogative (Verhaar, 2010). In conclusion, the analogy of perfect that can be associated with Bahasa is the lexical *sudah*, *habis*, *selesai* and *telah*. The analogy of progressive can be associated with lexical *sedang* or *tidak sedang* for negative form.

Finally, it becomes convoluted to find the analogy for Indonesia structure of the combined aspects such as in present perfect continuous. According to Downing and Locke, the combination of perfect and progressive aspect can be divided into five:

- a. Continuous state lasting up to the past
I have been wanting to meet him for ages.
He has been hearing better since he got the hearing-aid.
- b. Continuous habitual process.
The government has been spending beyond its means.
She has been going to therapy since she was about two.
- c. Iterative occurrence lasting up to the present.
You have been coughing since you got up.
- d. Unbounded situation lasting up to the present.
We have been waiting here for some time.
- e. Normally bounded situations become unbounded.
I have been fixing the lamp.
So people have been taping this talk?

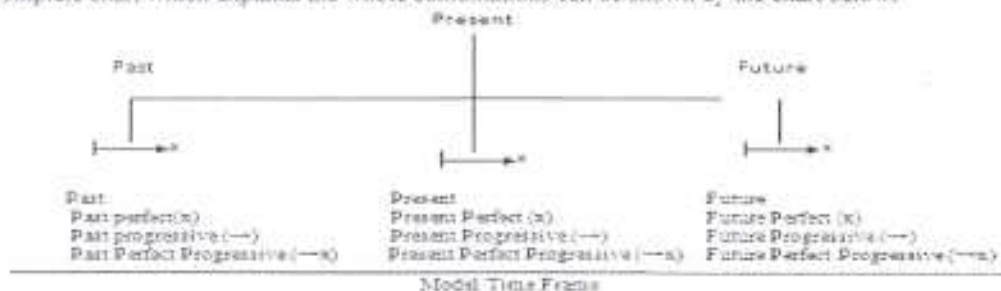
Employing the analogy of aspect concept could work to explain this combined aspect by using chart. An event will take a place in a time span and it will result present time, past time, and future time. An event which is happening in present time, past time or future time, will have a beginning, duration, and completion.



In explaining this chart, there are some notations to use. They are

- | = beginning
- = duration
- X = completion

The complete chart which explains the whole combinations can be shown by the chart below.



This chart is better to be tested for further use because this chart is only limited by the analogy of grammatical aspect, not all aspects in English. This chart also suggests the introduction of three types of time frame -not tenses- which are present time, past time, and future time.

The last explanation of combined aspects is by using temporal deixis of Indonesian analogy. A deictic word is one which takes some elements of its meaning from the situation of the utterance in which it is used (e.i. the time, the speakers, the place, and the addressee) (Yule, 1996). *Yesterday* is related to the past time event and *now* is used to point the event at the present time. Activating the sense of deictic expression in Bahasa could help learner to understand the aspect system that is absent in Indonesian system, for example:

I have been waiting for you	' <i>Sudah sejak tadi</i> saya menunggu mu'
I had been waiting for you	' <i>Dulu</i> , saya sudah menunggu-nunggu mu'
I will be waiting for you	' <i>Nanti</i> , saya akan menunggu kamu'

The fact that less familiar in deixis forms in Bahasa for English learner could be a new problem. Therefore, teachers need to activate students' sense for some temporal deictic words in Bahasa which later useful for its analogy.

Conclusion

Complicated tense form and use which is analogically absent to Indonesian logical system in sentence or utterance formulation can be solved by framing the concept of aspect which is more familiar in Indonesian or Malay language system. The activating of aspect system is to make it different with the tenses. The fact that tense is more familiar than aspect; tenses should be re-explained by introducing them only two, present and past (model TAM chart). Time frame explanation could be use to avoid misconception on tenses where aspect could be introduced by the event frame (beginning, process, and end). The last is by activating temporal deictic expressions on *Bahasa Indonesia* which is useful for analogy of combined aspect.

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