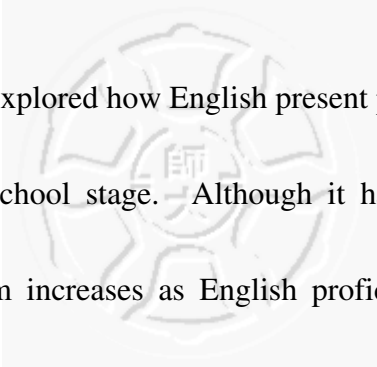


Chapter Five Pedagogical Implication and Conclusion



In this study, we have explored how English present perfect is used by Taiwanese EFL learners at the high school stage. Although it has been partly attested that accuracy of using this form increases as English proficiency grows, learners of a higher proficiency level are still unable to use present perfect freely. As Guiora (1983) points out, Chinese speakers may be faced with establishing an entirely new hypothesis of how time is used and referred to when acquiring English. The highly marked present perfect in particular places great difficulty on learners. The present study shows that an instruction that simply emphasizes association of the present perfect with adverbials is inadequate for learners to acquire the uses of this form. To develop learners' knowledge to use the English present perfect, a more comprehensive instruction must be provided. Moreover, activities that involve learners to identify and use this form need to be adopted largely, as proposed by Tamada (1997). Also, spontaneous production should be included in the assessment of students' use of the present perfect.

In this chapter, we will first review how present perfect is improperly introduced in EFL grammar books commonly found on the market in Taiwan. Then we will propose several guidelines of teaching the English present perfect, followed by some activities that English teachers can adopt in the instruction. After that, we will

discuss some ways assessment can be designed. In the end, we summarize the research findings and pedagogical implications. Some limitations of the present study are also discussed, and suggestions for further research are then proposed.

5.1 Inadequacies in EFL Grammar Books

The problem of strong association of the present perfect with adverbials in the traditional instruction has been pointed out earlier. Such instruction is insufficient to equip EFL learners with the ability to judge and to use present perfect correctly. As reviewed in the last chapter, the inadequacies of general grammar books that Taiwanese students often use are brought up here.

Overemphasis of the adverbials

The usage of each function of the present perfect is too often associated with a list of adverbials. The examples and drill questions are mostly with such adverbials to enhance learners' concept that this form will co-occur with the adverbials. However, the list can never be exhaustive; on the other hand, constantly resorting to such adverbials may impede learners' real understanding of the use of the present perfect. In addition, these time adverbials may co-occur with other tenses, so the rule cannot be absolute (Walker, 1967). The effect of such instruction was observed in the writing task of the current study: learners were unable to produce present perfect whenever it was appropriate, for the basis of judgment was lacking in the

spontaneous production.

Lack of a pragmatic view

A very important reason that a speaker uses the present perfect is its pragmatic function. Both simple past and present perfect are allowed in some contexts, but the speaker's viewpoint determines his/her adoption. When he/she regards the event as current relevant, he/she uses the present perfect rather than simple past (Givon, 1993). Domestic grammar books fail to compare the uses of these two forms and give learners a clearer idea of the difference of using either one. As a result, learners prefer to use simple past for its simplicity because they cannot perceive the difference. Furthermore, without the knowledge of the pragmatic function of the present perfect, learners often cannot grasp the complete meaning of the present perfect.

Lack of contextualized examples

The examples of present perfect often occur in isolated sentences. However, the use of this form heavily depends on the contexts. When the learners are deprived of other clues from the contexts, they are unable to perceive the purpose of using present perfect. Moreover, present perfect also carries discourse function. Introducing this form in single sentences disables learners to acquire certain features of the present perfect.

According to the above analyses of the teaching materials, inadequacies in traditional instruction of the present perfect may be one of the reasons of students' difficulty in acquiring this form. Since instructional materials are the basis of L2 input for Taiwanese EFL learners, these defects can defer learners acquiring the English present perfect. Therefore, it is necessary for teachers to supplement more information about this form in their classes.

5.2 Guidelines in Teaching English Present Perfect

After examining the local teaching materials, it is found that there are underlying defects in the traditional instruction of the English present perfect. To approach the teaching of the present perfect, there are some guidelines to follow. First, teachers should give a detailed explanation of the concept of time viewed in the use of present perfect. The idea of reference time must be introduced to the learners. And most important of all, the core feature of 'current relevance' has to be mentioned explicitly. Then the functions of the present perfect can be developed from this basic concept. When introducing the four uses, teachers should give full-length description instead of simplified rules. The reasons why the present perfect is used under the circumstances need to be explained, since simplified rules do not help the learners to comprehend the intention of the speaker. Only after the explication of the rationales to use present perfect should the adverbials be introduced. Thus learners will

understand why certain adverbials are constantly associated with some uses.

Next, examples must come in contexts. Full contexts provide learners sufficient clues to justify the use of the present perfect, and give a clearer picture of the meaning this form carries. Furthermore, the speaker's pragmatic strategy can only be detected in the context. Therefore, it is a better way to present the English present perfect.

With respect to exercises on present perfect, identifying what functions this form serves provides a useful way for students to learn its functions in contexts. Moreover, comparison between the uses of simple past and present perfect provides an effective way to distinguish the different perspectives (Walker, 1967). Students should be given opportunities to judge why certain tense/aspect is more appropriate than others on certain occasions. Besides, interviews enable students to use the form in a meaningful and communicative way. Last, extensive reading of news reports can provide learners examples of how present perfect achieves the function of attracting readers' attention. Teachers should raise learners' attention explicitly and encourage them to ponder on the adoption of such form.

In the part of assessment, blank-filling exercises of mixed tenses/aspects offer learners the chance to testify their concepts of appropriate use of tense/aspect. Also writing serves as an adverbial of how well learners know about the use of the present

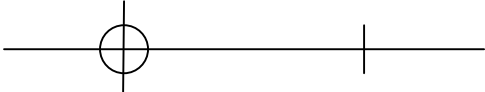
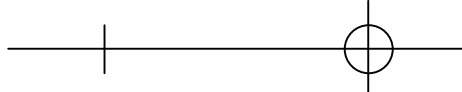
perfect.

5.3 Instruction of Present Perfect

This section will present a model instruction of the English present perfect, starting with introduction of time concept, and then the functions the present perfect serves, moving to practice. A comparison between the present perfect and the simple past should be included at every step to assist learners to differentiate the purpose of using either form. Materials used for the introduction and exercises should reflect learners' L2 proficiency.

5.3.1 Concept of Time

To facilitate students' understanding of event time, speech time, and reference time, diagrams are helpful.

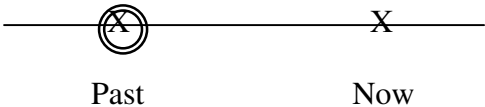
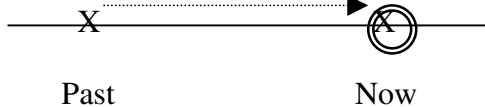

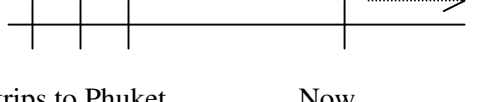
Simple Past	Present Perfect
<p>Simply reporting a past happening:</p> <p><i>Ex. We went to the movie last Saturday.</i></p> <p>Something happened</p>  <p>Past (specific) Now</p>	<p>Viewing a past happening from speaker's perspective now:</p> <p><i>Ex. We have seen the movie.</i></p> <p>Something happened ←-----</p>  <p>Past (indefinite) Now</p>
<p>Point: events were anchored in the past.</p>	<p>Point: events have current relevance.</p>

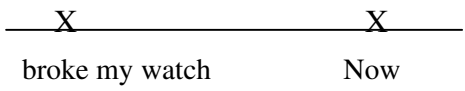

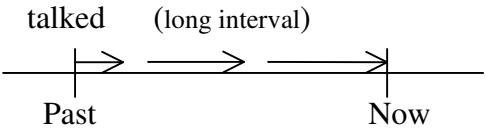
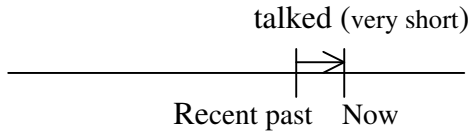
Teachers should incorporate the idea of a specific time for the simple past and an indefinite time for the present perfect, so that learners would understand the anchor of

time in each form. Moreover, teachers should explain explicitly the pragmatic strategy the speaker adopts when introducing the time concept, that is, the current relevance of events.

5.3.2 Introduction of Functions

Before going into each function, it is important to introduce the core meaning of the present perfect. From this idea of ‘current relevance’ develop the various functions; therefore, it is the most essential feature for the learners to grasp. Again, diagrams can display the ideas clearly and easily.

Simple Past	Present Perfect
<p>1. Reporting completed events or states at a past time.</p> <p><i>Ex. My father smoked before.</i></p> <p>(My father quit smoking some time before now) (My father doesn't smoke anymore.)</p> 	<p>1. Reporting events or states starting in the past and continuing to now.</p> <p><i>Ex. My father has smoked since his teens.</i></p> <p>(My father started smoking.) (My father still smokes)</p> 
<p>2. Expressing repeated events in the past that are not likely to recur.</p> <p><i>Ex. We went to Phuket many times before the tsunami.</i></p> 	<p>2. Expressing repeated events in the past that are likely to continue in the future.</p> <p><i>Ex. We have been to Phuket many times.</i></p> <p>(I may go again)</p> 

<p>3. Reporting completed events.</p> <p><i>Ex. I broke my watch yesterday.</i></p> 	<p>3. Reporting complete events which have some effect on the present.</p> <p><i>Ex. I have broken my watch, so I don't know the time.</i></p> 
<p>4. Referring to the past in general</p> <p><i>Ex. We talked on the phone.</i></p> 	<p>4. Referring to the very recent past</p> <p><i>Ex. We have just talked on the phone.</i></p> 

It is better to present the examples in a context. For example:

(85) A: It is reported that smoking shortens longevity.

B: No way! My grandfather has smoked since his teens, and he is 83 this year and still going strong!

A: I guess he's an exception.

A context means more to the students, and it is easier to grasp the use. The adoption of examples and contexts is up to the students' proficiency. Also, teachers should explicitly explain what the effect of using either form is at the present.

5.3.3 Activities of the Present Perfect

Four activities are introduced here; the use of words should cater to learners' proficiency level.

Recognition: Teachers can provide students with articles using different functions of the present perfect and ask them to identify the function of each instance. This

activity can make students realize how present perfect is applied to serve certain function. Following is an example:

(86) Identify and label the present perfect uses in the article with one of the following meanings -

- (a) Indefinite time in the past
- (b) Unfinished event in the past, continues to present
- (c) Repeated events in the past, likely to continue
- (d) Recently completed event

The Rock 'n' Roll Hall of Fame Museum in Cleveland *has just opened*, to the delight of many rock 'n' roll fans. _____ Investors *have spent* \$90 million on a 150,000 square foot building for the museum. _____ Many people believe that rock 'n' roll *has only been* in existence for forty years, but the director of the museum assures people that this musical form have actually been around for an entire century. _____ The director reminds us that Chuck Berry, whom many people think of as the father of rock 'n' roll, has played music for a while now – and he's still going strong. _____ The collectors *have gathered* an impressive assortment of rock 'n' roll memorabilia – Pete Townshend's (The Who) guitar; John Lennon's (The Beatles) "Sergeant Pepper" vest, and clothes from Carl Perkins. _____ Many rock 'n' roll fans *have visited* the museum several times. _____

Comparing: This activity enables students to see the speaker's intention in using certain tense/aspect. The present perfect can be put together with simple past for the learners to choose from. This is a good practice for learners to see the pragmatic function of the present perfect. Teachers' explicit explanation is also necessary.

(87) Tick the best sentence for the speaker to use.

Speaker's point...	He/She will use...
1. I'm telling you this just after I heard the news.	<p>___ a. A shark has attacked a swimmer on the western coast.</p> <p>___ b. A shark attacked a swimmer on the western coast.</p>
2. It's 7:30 a.m. The postman usually comes between 7:15 and 7:45 a.m.	<p>___ a. The postman hasn't come yet.</p> <p>___ b. The postman didn't come this morning.</p>
3. I'm still studying math with the same teacher.	<p>___ a. I've learnt a lot from my math teacher.</p> <p>___ b. I learnt a lot from my math teacher.</p>
4. Alice is a good friend of mine.	<p>___ a. She has known me since we were children.</p> <p>___ b. She knew me when we were children.</p>
5. Mike didn't get the job.	<p>___ a. Mike has applied for a new job.</p> <p>___ b. Mike applied for a new job.</p>

This activity can be designed the opposite way:

(88) What does the speaker mean?

He/She says...	He/She means...
1. She has sung in a coffeehouse.	<p>___ a. She couldn't make it to the party.</p> <p>___ b. She has experience as a singer.</p>
2. I saw Bill several times today.	<p>___ a. We keep meeting each other at the corridor.</p> <p>___ b. He looked fine to me. Don't worry about him.</p>

3. They have called an ambulance.	___ a. What delayed the ambulance? It's an emergency! ___ b. You don't need to get a phone.
4. This was a good year.	___ a. I wish I have as good a new year. ___ b. I have made a lot of progress this year.
5. I have been to Mount Everest.	___ a. You can ask me if you need some information. ___ b. The vacation last year was marvelous.

Interview: This activity offers the opportunity to practice using present perfect orally and achieve the communicative purpose as well.

(89) Ask your partner some questions about his lifetime experiences:

(A) Have you ever been to any theme parks? What's the most exciting ride you have tried? Did you see the animal shows there?

(B) Have you ever read any detective stories? Have you ever solve any mysteries by yourself?

Teachers can design their own questions. It is particularly useful to incorporate this activity to the lessons concerning personal experiences.

Extensive Reading:

Teachers can provide learners with news reports for extra reading and ask them to think about the function the present perfect serves. The following example is a news

clip on January, 3, 2005, from *Voice of America*.

- (90) A new study *has found* that people who eat fast food are much more likely to develop insulin resistance than those who don't.

Investigators followed more than three thousand people who reported their fast food eating habits. After 15 years, the U.S. researchers found that those who ate at least two meals per week at a fast food restaurant were four-point-five kilograms heavier, and they had more than a 100 percent risk of insulin resistance compared to those who limited their intake of fast food to one meal or less per week.

Dr. Alan Rubin *has written* a number of books on diabetes-related topics. He said the connection between insulin resistance and diets rich in fat *has long been suspected*. "They wanted to have a study, which very clearly showed that there was something going on in the fast food that pointed to insulin resistance, and I think this study does a very good job of doing that," he said.

Teachers can point out the use of present perfect in the topic position and the shift of tense in the body paragraph to students, and explain the effects of adopting present perfect in news reports. Since present perfect often occurs in isolated and scattered sentences in the textbooks, a news report can provide learners a chance to notice the discourse function of present perfect in a written genre, as well as its effect of expressing vividness to attract readers.

5.3.4 Evaluation of Present Perfect

After the presentation and practice of the present perfect, it is evitable to assess learners' understanding of this form. But cautions must be taken in designing such tests. If the test items are all about the present perfect, the test will look awkward and purposeful. To elicit learners' judgment of appropriate tense/aspect use, a

blank-filling paragraph requiring mixed tense/aspect will be more proper. Learners must observe the context to find out what to use, which can test their comprehension of the time and of the function each form serves. An example is provided below:

(91) Dear Mom,

Sorry that I _____ (not/write) you last week, but I (be) so busy lately at the hospital. Three of the doctors _____ (be) sick and so I _____ (have to) fill in for them all last week.

Daniel and I finally _____ (go) to see the opera. I _____ (never/see) such a crowd at our local theater! Our seats _____ (be) good, and we could see the actors very well. We _____ (be) all surprised, though, when the leading actor _____ (slip) and _____ (fall) during the first act. He _____ (break) his arm and they (take) him to the hospital immediately.

I _____ (not/make) airplane reservations for the New Year yet, but I promise I will. I can't wait to see all of you again.

Love,

Jean

A controlled writing or speech can also be used to assess learners, but chances are that they paraphrase the use of present perfect with other simpler tenses; therefore, their true understanding cannot be revealed.

5.4 Summary

The purpose of presentation and assessment of the English present perfect is to help students grasp the meaning of this form. More importantly, equipping the learners with the pragmatic function of the present perfect means more than familiarizing them with the mechanical accuracy. Therefore, it is suggested that

materials used for both presentation and assessment should be discourse-based. Supplementary reading materials are needed to provide learners with more input of this form. The design of the activities and tests must take into consideration both the difficulty level and naturalness of the materials. As a result, learners are able to perceive how present perfect is actually used in the real life.

5.5 Conclusion of the Present Research

This study explores how English present perfect is used by 140 Taiwanese EFL learners in the first and third year of the senior high school. The experiment included a blank-filling test and a writing task. The results demonstrate how learners use present perfect and what factors may influence their judgment.

Generally speaking, the simple past appears easier than the present perfect to the learners. During the years they have been exposed to English, they have more exposure to simple past than present perfect. Moreover, simple past is cognitively easier and less marked in the English tense/aspect system. However, learners use more simple present than simple past for present perfect. The temporal adverbials like *now* and *always* in the test contexts may largely be responsible for this tendency. Next, learners' perception of the discourse function of the present perfect is assumed to be underdeveloped, but it cannot be determined in the experiment. The two items designed for this purpose fall in the 'resultative' function, yet it is a use that learners

do not perform well. Therefore, both their inability to use ‘resultative perfect’ and their unawareness of the discourse function present perfect serves can be responsible for their poor performance. The writing task fails to detect learners’ perception of this function as well, for it is restricted to the topic. The sole basis of this statement is the former analysis that learners still decode tense/aspect at the sentence level.

As for the functions the present perfect serves, learners have distinctly better performance on the ‘experiential’ use. Their knowledge of the ‘continuative perfect’ is simply limited to its association with *for* and *since*; beyond such structure, learners are not able to use this function, which gains support from their performance in the writing task. Their performance of the ‘resultative perfect’ varies, too, depending on the presence of the adverbials in the contexts. Yet learners make progress on the more difficult uses of present perfect as their proficiency grows. Learners in the third grade make significant improvement on the ‘continuative perfect’ and ‘resultative perfect’. In other words, learners are acquiring the present perfect gradually, though it seems to be a very long and slow process. However, ‘perfect of recent past’ still remains a difficult use to learners of higher proficiency. They even perform worse on this part, but the difference does not reach a significance level. In the recent past contexts, learners tend to use simple past instead of present perfect.

Learners’ heavy reliance on the adverbials is partly the influence of their first

language, Chinese, a language that marks time solely with extra adverbials. Though part of the reason comes from the customary use of additional adverbials to indicate event time in Chinese, another possible explanation is that the traditional instruction of the present perfect strongly associates this form with the adverbials. It is also observed that learners seem to be able to use other tenses correctly with the presence of these adverbials. They do not overuse present perfect at seeing such triggers. Such performance implies that learners may have acquired simpler tenses like simple present and simple past, and they are thus not affected by such adverbials. On the contrary, they have not acquired the more difficult present perfect; therefore, they rely on these adverbials as clues. Influence of Chinese is also found in the combination of instantaneous verbs in perfective with duration of time in English. Such use is not allowed in the English present perfect but is customary in Chinese. The Chinese aspectual markers *le* and *guo* do not actually facilitate learners' acquisition of the English present perfect because their uses are not totally parallel. Learners have to undergo restructuring a new concept of time and adoption of perspectives.

Finally, learners' writings reveal that they prefer to use simple present and simple past. The use of the present perfect is impoverished and restricted to certain fixed pattern. Learners use the 'continuative perfect' the most, in spite of its low accuracy rate in the blank-filling test. However, their use falls within the structures of "for (a

period of time)” and “since (a point of time)”. Moreover, learners’ use of the ‘experiential perfect’ corresponds to their performance of such use in the elicitation test. Yet the structures they use are very limited as well. The rare occurrences of the ‘resultative perfect’ indicate that learners are not familiar with this use. As to the misuse for the present perfect, simple present and simple past take up the majority of errors. This tendency shows that learners prefer simple present when the events have current relevance, and use simple past when the events show anteriority. As a whole, it can be seen from the spontaneous production that learners are far from fully acquiring the present perfect.

In addition to the examination of the use of the English present perfect by high school students, we also demonstrate how inappropriately traditional instructional materials present this form, and in view of these defects we offer some suggestions for teaching present perfect. Furthermore, we bring up the need for giving full contexts in general EFL/ESL instruction.

The main deficiencies of existing pedagogy of the present perfect include overemphasis on the adverbials, lack of introduction of the pragmatic purpose of using such form, and lack of full contexts for examples and test items. These defects, mingling together, impede Taiwanese learners to acquire the present perfect effectively. To facilitate learners’ acquisition of this structure, several guidelines are

proposed and a more effective instruction is presented. Teachers must give learners a complete and clear introduction of how time is viewed in the English present perfect. Then they need to give a thorough explanation of how present perfect is used for different purposes instead of just simplified rules. Most important of all, teachers have to contextualize their examples in order to provide learners a better understanding of the underlying reason of using present perfect. To assist learners' comprehension, it is helpful to compare the difference of using simple past and present perfect. Next, a variety of meaningful exercises give learners opportunity to check their knowledge of the present perfect. Last, a test requiring uses of mixed tense/aspect appears more realistic and suitable to ensure that learners are able to use different tenses/aspects appropriately.

5.6 Limitations and Suggestions for Further Research

There are several important issues for investigating the use of present perfect which fail to be covered in the present study. One of them is the limitation of test types. The present research adopts a quick elicitation test and a writing task. However, a long term observation may collect more evidence of Taiwanese learners' progress on the use of the present perfect. Moreover, learners of advanced proficiency can be included to see if they have at last acquired this form, and on average how long Taiwanese learners need to acquire it.

Secondly, the tendency of using more simple present and simple past for present perfect is analyzed based on contexts in the tests. However, how learners really judge the use is unknown. If a think-aloud protocol can be conducted at the same time, more information will be obtained concerning learners' use of tenses/aspects.

Thirdly, though it is found that learners tend to transfer the customary use in Chinese of instantaneous verbs in perfective aspect with duration to English present perfect, the low accuracy rate in this use may result from the difficulty in transforming an active action into a passive state. Such transformation requires advanced proficiency, for learners need to know not only the specific verbs but also how to use them under the circumstances. Therefore, learners' poor performance cannot solely attribute to the L1 transfer.

Finally, as mentioned repeatedly, learners' awareness of the discourse function of the present perfect is not detected in this study. More items covering various uses and also carrying the discourse function should be included to provide stronger evidence. Writings of certain genres that require a general coverage using present perfect can be designed to test learners' familiarity with such function. These inadequacies are worthy of further research.