

EFFECTIVE PEDAGOGICAL APPROACHES TO TEACHING NARRATIVE TENSES IN EFL CLASSROOMS: PAST SIMPLE, PAST CONTINUOUS, AND PAST PERFECT

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ABSTRACT

This article examines effective approaches to teaching narrative tenses—specifically the Past Simple, Past Continuous, and Past Perfect—in English language instruction. These grammatical forms are frequently confusing for English language learners because they require a complex understanding of aspect, background positioning, and relative chronological order within a unified text. Learners often struggle to differentiate between the functional boundaries of these tenses, which leads to grammatical and communicative errors such as narrative flattening or chronological distortions. The article discusses the linguistic and conceptual background of these forms and identifies common learning difficulties such as aspectual overgeneralization, translation interference, and lack of contextual timeline awareness. Furthermore, it presents a range of pedagogical strategies including timeline mapping, contrastive analysis, visual storytelling aids, communicative role-plays, and task-based learning. The study emphasizes that effective grammar teaching should combine explicit conceptual explanation with meaningful communication practice in order to improve both accuracy and fluency in learners' language use.

Keywords: narrative tenses, Past Simple, Past Continuous, Past Perfect, temporal backgrounding, timeline visualization, EFL methodology, communicative language teaching.

INTRODUCTION

Grammar is a fundamental component of language learning, and its effective teaching plays a crucial role in developing learners' communicative competence. Among various grammatical structures in English, narrative tenses—comprising the Past Simple, Past Continuous, and Past Perfect—represent a common area of difficulty for second language learners. These forms originate from distinct aspectual categories but function as an integrated structural system with different semantic roles when building stories, reports, or historical descriptions. The interaction of these three tenses creates a multi-layered narrative depth: the Past Simple reports completed sequential events, the Past Continuous establishes the ongoing background atmosphere, and the Past Perfect marks a relative "past-in-the-past" anchor point.

Despite the apparent simplicity of individual structural rules (V₂, was/were + V-ing, and had + V₃), learners frequently confuse these forms due to differences between English and their first language structures, lack of contextual exposure, and reliance on memorization rather than meaningful understanding. For example, a learner might fail to perceive the semantic distinction between "When she arrived, the meeting started" and "When she arrived, the meeting was starting", treating both timelines as interchangeable. Therefore, identifying effective teaching strategies for narrative tenses is essential for improving learners' grammatical accuracy and communicative performance in English.

The difficulty of narrative tenses can be explained through both linguistic and pedagogical perspectives. Linguistically, these tenses are derived from verb aspects, where the continuous form expresses an active, ongoing background frame, the simple form expresses a completed core action, and the perfect form expresses a retroactive cause or background event. However, learners often fail to perceive this semantic distinction and instead treat all forms as interchangeable past labels, which results in frequent narrative errors.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, narrative tenses represent a challenging but essential area of English grammar for second language learners. The main difficulty lies in understanding the distinction between foregrounded events, background descriptions, and their prior causes. Effective teaching requires a combination of contextual learning, contrastive analysis, visual support, communicative practice, and task-based learning. When these methods are applied together, learners are more likely to develop a deep understanding of grammatical meaning rather than relying on memorization. As a result, their fluency, accuracy, and communicative confidence in English significantly improve.

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