



Teaching Functions in the Context of ELT: An Overview of Tense

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Abstract

This paper focuses on teaching functions of absolute tenses in addition to forms and meanings in the context of English Language Teaching (ELT). There is need to incorporate teaching functions of tense instead of teachers to concentrate on forms and meanings only. Observations indicate that L2 learners face too many challenges in respect of reasons or specific functions for using linguistic elements such as absolute tense. For instance, "will" is mostly taught to be future tense marker and it simply tells us about the action which is to take place in the future. However, if the language practitioners limit the teaching of English tenses on only form and meaning, it is tantamount to damaging the integrity of the communication due to inadequate linguistic competence for the various functions the absolute tenses perform. So using the form of language such as "will" and other absolute tenses could be difficult. Therefore, teaching English tense is not all about focusing on forms and meanings only but functions should also be inclusive. The method employs in this work is secondary which depends on sources of information from journals, textbooks, seminars and e-materials. The result unveils that teaching absolute tense with more focus on functions is quite significant since it demonstrates why each form of tense is used in English. This paper intends to equip practitioners, researchers, L2 learners, curriculum developers and any interesting individual or organisation with the idea of functions for teaching or using absolute tenses in English.

Keywords: Teaching, L2 learners, Tense, Absolute tense, Timelines, PPP method

Introduction

English language Teaching (ELT) is a latest linguistic course that comprises of theory and practice. Its main aim is to familiarise learners, practitioners and researchers with the sub-branches of linguistics and encourage them to consider how they relate to teaching and learning. ELT covers the following areas: sounds and sound patterns (phonetics and phonology), word and sentence structure (morphology and syntax), and linguistic meaning (semantics and pragmatics). Emphasis is placed on applying the theories, methods and techniques from each of these sub-disciplines to the analysis of language data which include linguistic elements such as absolute tense (Winchester, 2017). Therefore, the reasons for not only teaching but also functions of absolute tenses in our daily life are provided and fully addressed in this paper. This is an attempt to improve the teaching and learning the functions of absolute tenses for a better comprehensible Input.

Methodology

This study is significantly a review paper, which deals and focuses on the major concept of opinion. Therefore, efforts are made to source relevant information from theoretical and primary research works such as journal articles, Textbooks, Seminars and e-materials from Internet. These are all used in addressing the major constructs of this work.

Review of related literature

Teaching

Teaching: is a process of attending to people's needs, experiences and feelings and making specific interventions to help them learn a particular thing. In much modern usage, the words "teaching" and "teacher" are wrapped up with schooling and schools. One way of approaching the "what is teaching?" is to look at what those called "teachers" do-and-then to draw out key qualities or activities that set them apart from others. The problem is that all sorts of things are bundled together in job descriptions or roles that may have little to do with what we can sensibly call "teaching".

Another way is to head for dictionaries and search for both the historical meaning of the term and how it is used in everyday language. This brings us to definitions like: Impart knowledge to or instruct (someone) as to how to do something, or cause (someone) to learn or understand something by an example and experience. Therefore, the above definitions of teaching could be concluded that we are all teachers in some way at some time but the only thing it may be informal (Smitin,2016). Based on this explanation, this paper sees the need to address the appropriate method and technique to use for teaching the functions of absolute tenses since the teaching, method and the technique are Inseparable. So, the next section does the job.

L2 Learner of English Language

Second Language Learner (SLL) refers to someone who studies additional language to his/her mother tongue (L1) within a classroom situation. In a broader note, L2 learning could involve a mixture of both learning and acquisition in a particular setting for some reasons or goal of learning. The scope of SLA includes informal L2 learning that and groups who are learning a language subsequent to learning their first language. “Formal learning” occurs when a high school student in England living experiences, or when an adult immigrant from Ethiopia brought to the US and “picks up” English in the course of English. A combination of formal and informal learning takes place when a student from the USA takes Chinese language classes in Taipei or Beijing such additional language is called a second language (L2), even though it may actually be the third, fourth, or tenth to be acquired. It is also common that immigrants in Canada learn English as a result of interacting with native playing and attending school with native English-speaking children which takes place in naturalistic contexts, formal L2 learning that takes place in or out any specialized language instruction, or when an adult Guatemalan course in Arabic, or when an attorney in Colombia takes a night class in one as young children, and to the process of learning that language. Also, using Chinese outside of class for social interaction and daily circumstances is an example for “informal learning”. The interaction resulted to language acquisition which is also a target language (TL). This refers to any language that is learned after the first language (Saville-Troike & Barto, 2017). So, in Nigeria the case is not exceptional because English is used as a national language, official language and language of instructions which is added to the L1 of the learners. Therefore, learning the functions of English tenses remains one of the most significance of learning English in the context of ELT.

Tense

There are many definitions of tense and some of which include: Jabbar (2013) who argues that tense is a grammatical category which correlates with distinctions of time. Therefore, tense is considered as one of difficult materials when students learn grammar. It is proved by some researchers who studied tenses. For instance, Swan asserts that tenses are formed either by changing the verb (e.g: cook, cooked, cooked and see, saw, seen) or by inserting auxiliary verb such as (e.g: has been known, is moving). Considering the above claims. This paper agrees with Situmorang, Saragih, & Karisma, (2018) who assert that tense is a verb form or series of verb forms which are used to express a time relation, and tense refers to the time of the situation relating to the situation of the utterance. Therefore, linguistic perspective sees the tense as morphologically marked (bound morphemes such as – ed1, -ed2 (-en), -s, -es) or zero inflectional element for a plural present tense like go, teach, talk and many more. For

instance, go indicates simple present tense for the 3rd person plural as in: Walida and Khairat go to school everyday. On the other hand, Nana goes to school everyday. This indicates that -es is an inflectional element attached to go for 3rd person singular present tense. Therefore, go remains unmarked simple present as a base form while goes is marked simple present and so all past tense markers such -ed are also marked. To cap it all, any bound morpheme that is added to the base form such as come, talk, and many more is morphologically marked. So, it is possible to argue that tense as a linguistic element which is used in our daily communication and so needs reasons for its usages in English. The segment below provides some useful information about the absolute tense which is the focus of this paper.

Absolute Tense

Tense is divided into three different groups, namely; (a) Absolute tense, (b) Relative tense and Combination options. However, this paper is only concerned with the absolute tense which is its main focus. Absolute tenses are: present, past and future and they qualify as deictic category. That is as a grammatical category which locates a situation on a timeline and always judging from the moment of utterance. The most significant part of it is the function performs by the absolute tense which most teachers pay less or no attention to that. Therefore, this paper intends to provide the solutions below.

Timeline

Timeline is simple diagrams which could help learners to notice the relationships between tenses and aspects. However, when it comes to language learning, it is at times perplexed to describe time and events, or states, which take place in real life and help in understanding the concepts that are given as explanation. In demonstrating how we use verb forms and their time reference, Workman (2008) argues that Timeline is line item which places particular events or situations in tenses and structures to refer to or talk about the past, present and future. It could be helpful to time made by a given piece of language. It is used to show how a particular language and drawings which provide a visual representation of different verb forms. This shows when things happen or are happening in the present, past or future. One of the keys to learning a language is learning about time. In English, this reference to time is most commonly described by the verb. In extent to that, Timeline is a diagram which illustrates the reference to the time reference by demonstrating timeline on board (Huy,2016).

Method---PPP

There are different methods for teaching English as L2. One of which is Presentation, Practice and Production. It is a method that this paper prioritises as a result of its high

possibility to achieve the main goal for teaching language which is intake. Intake means input + comprehension (Krashen, 1982). That is what a teacher comes to teach and the learners notice it. The teaching outcome is called intake because learning has taken place and enable learners produce language in a meaningful way. This means that if a language teacher applies it, lesson will be successful and effective. Therefore, this study intends to explore on reasons for teaching and using of absolute tenses in English instead of focusing on form and meaning only.

PPP includes three different stages:

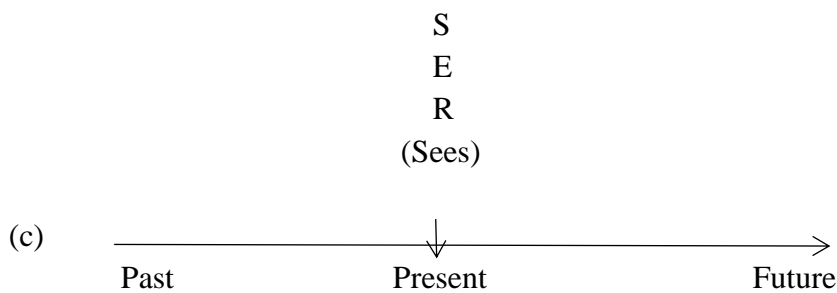
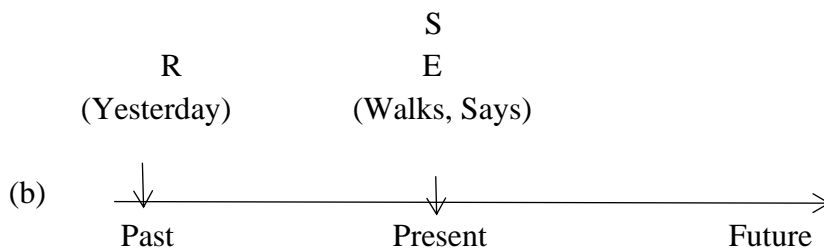
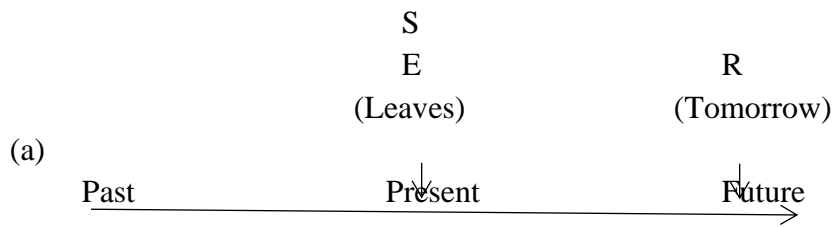
1. The presentation stage is a teacher's activity in which he/she might use a text, audio tape, picture, visual aids or something similar which will demonstrate the topic. At this point in time, the language instructor is expected to use elicitation technique to pull language from the learners by asking them gist question. He should also ensure that he divides them into small groups while they are discussing the question. The language instructor should only go round and monitor their discussion and take note on the learners' errors without intervening. In the end, he should provide feedback for them through: self-correction. If that fails, peer's correction, if that also fails, then the teacher should provide the feedback by himself which is called teacher's correction. Self-correction means the language instructor is to guide the learner concerned to notice the error and correct himself without telling him directly. Peer's correction means the language instructor should ask a learner from any group to provide the correction without referring to the learner who makes the error. He can also drill them on the target language. Drilling means asking the learner who got the right answer to say it aloud while others listen. Then others should repeat after him. This helps in mastering the pronunciation of the inputs.

For instance, a picture could be used to show students what the situation is about. Perhaps, Hauwa'u **goes** to school every day. As discussed above, the language instructor here elicits language from the learners by asking them to discuss the picture on board in small groups. After that, the learners should be drilled on how to pronounce the form of language in focus such as "past simple" (S+P+AdvC+ adjunct) as in Hauwa'u= S + (go+ -es) = Predicator (Verb) + to school= advC + everyday = adjunct). This should be written on the board to describe the grammatical rule which may be extended to include the following:

Tense indicates events but not time. Consider these symbols: **S** for Speech time, **E** for Event time, and **R** for Reference time. (Melvin, 2014; Kortmann, 2020). For instance,

- (a) Buhari leaves UK for Nigeria tomorrow.
- (b) This bloke walks up to me and says stupid yesterday.
- (c) My baby sees the book on the table now.

To show a clear distinction between event (tense) and time, let's use time line as thus:



The above timelines demonstrate that a simple present such as leaves, walks, says, and sees could occur at different time such as past, present and future in English (Borjars & Burrige, 2010; Kortman, 2020).

II. Practice stage include activities such as drills, multiple choice questions, gap-, fill, transformation etc. The learners' activities here could be free or controlled practice. If the practice goes beyond what is taught, is free but if only limit to what is taught, is controlled. Here, a teacher is advised to talk less while the learners should talk more to have more time for practice because classroom could be the only place they have opportunity to use English. (I.e. less TTT 30% and more STT 70%).Therefore, a teacher is expected to direct the activities, provide appropriate feedback to the learners, put errors in correct forms and do modelling. In the end, instruction check question (ICQ) should be provided for them to see their wrongs and wrights. ICQ means ready-made solutions to the questions a teacher asks the learners (Book, 2017).

III. **The production stage**, it is point where the learners reach after the practice stage where they have learnt how to produce language without errors. This stage is also called production exercise. The students here use the new language they have learnt to produce spoken or written texts. Some complex activities at this stage may include: dialogue, presentation, interview, drama, role play etc. and involves some complex productions of language such sentences, to longer expression and automatize what they have learnt similar to their native languages. This quite corresponds to the claim made by Mitchell and Myles, (2004) in their "Theory of Skill Acquisition" that the first idea a learner got about language in class is called *declarative knowledge* such as the tense. The second stage is for the learner to practice like he does in his L1 which is the *procedural knowledge*. Finally, is for the learner to master and automatize the language learnt which is *automatization*. There is no need for teacher's intervention here because learners are not expected to make any error. Nevertheless, if there is any error, it should be addressed after the exercise (Harmer, 2015). However, the above method used for teaching absolute tense in English class is quite useful but the lesson focuses on only forms, meanings and examples. Therefore, the lesson is not fully addressed since the functions of the absolute tenses are not provided for the learners to distinguish when and why each one could be used in English language. It is for this reason that this paper is written to bridge the existing gap in the literature.

Some Relevant Reasons to Teach Absolute Tenses for Their Functions:

In order to improve and add more value to the teaching of absolute tenses in English, the following reasons should be considered for the functions:

(a). We use simple present tense to talk about:

- i. **Facts.** For instance, water boils at 100°.
- ii. **Habits, daily** routines or something that often happens. For instance, she eats bread every day.
- iii. **Schedules.** For instance, the bus leaves tomorrow at 7am.
- iv. **Vivid description.** For instance, he is brilliant.

(a). We use simple past tense to talk about:

- i. **Something that happened in the past.** For instance, I went to school yesterday.
- ii. **Conditional sentence type II.** For instance, if I had a lot of money, I would buy a car.
- iii. **Series of completed actions in the past.** For instance, I got up, had breakfast and went to school.
- iv. **Narration.** For instance, when I was in UK, things were goods.

(b) We use simple future tense to talk about:

- i. **A prediction.** For instance, it will rain tonight.

- ii. **A spontaneous decision at moment of speaking (not plan).** For instance, I think I will go to bed now.
- iii. **A promise.** I will see you tomorrow.
- iv. **A plan.** I'm going to Abuja tomorrow.
- v. **When we see that something is going to happen based on present coincidence.** For instance, the sky is getting darker. It is going to rain (Kortmann, 2020; Bolam, 2020; Dykes, 2007).

Conclusion

In conclusion, based on the above explanations and demonstrations of the contract absolute tenses, PPP method, timeline and other evidence such as exemplary techniques which provide adequate reasons for teaching the absolute tenses with more focus on functions rather than only form and meaning is justified. This has really moved us away from being sticky to form and meaning only. Therefore, the aim of every academic paper is to add value to the existing knowledge. This paper is also not exceptional, as it aims to benefit researchers, lectures, students and all interested learners of functions of the absolute tenses in English.

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