INDONESIAN LEARNERS' DIFFICULTIES IN UNDERSTANDING

THE MEANING OF PRESENT PERFECT FORM IN ENGLISH

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1. Introduction

This concise essay is a summary of a limited research project attempting to investigate Indonesian learners' problems in understanding the English perfect forms. It consists of four parts. Firstly the introduction, which gives an outline of what the essay is about. The second part, a brief literature review, discusses the basic verb phrase structure in English and Indonesian. The third part is a prediction of learners' likely difficulties, and hypotheses based on the ideas drawn from the literature review. Then, the methodology section, the fourth part, discusses how the study is conducted. The fifth part is the result and discussion of the findings, which is finally followed by the conclusion.

2. Literature review

The various languages of the world are structured according to many different patterns at the levels of phonology, morphology, syntax and semantics (Finegan, 1992:200). Indonesian and English share the common basic structure of the basic clause. The two languages' sentences follow the order subject-verb-direct object (Finegan, 1992:214). Despite the similarities, the two languages also have differences in many respects. The second segment in the sentence formula, the verb, provides clear examples of how the two languages resemble and differ from each other.

Verbs can be studied and classified in different ways. Quirk and Greenbaum (1973:26), prior to the discussion of verb forms and verb phrases, distinguish the English verbs into lexical verbs (LV) such as walk, write, play, beautify and auxiliary verbs (AV). The auxiliary verbs are further subdivided into Primary Auxiliary Verbs (PAV) such as do, have, be and Modal

Auxiliary Verbs (MAV) such as <u>can</u>, <u>may</u>, <u>shall</u>, <u>will</u>, <u>could</u>, <u>might</u>, <u>should</u>, <u>would</u>, <u>must</u>, <u>ought to</u>, <u>used to</u>, <u>need</u>, <u>dare</u>. Grammarians have so far studied auxiliary verbs, lexical verbs, and how they can be combined. (Thompson A.J. and Martinet, A.V., 1980:89-184) (Quirk and Greenbaum, 1973:26-58).

Verbs in Indonesian can also be grouped in different ways. Moeliono M. (1988:128-129) describes that Indonesian verb phrases are comprised of main verbs (MV) and verb modifiers (VM). Verb modifiers may be placed before verbs as front verb modifiers (FVM), and after the main verbs as rear verb modifiers (RVM). Examples of front verb modifiers (FVM) are <u>akan</u> (will, shall, would), <u>harus</u> (must, have to, had to), <u>dapat</u> (can, could, to be able to), <u>mau</u> (will, would), <u>akan harus</u> (will have to, would have to), <u>harus mau</u> (must be willing to), <u>akan mau</u> (will be willing to). Examples of rear verb modifiers (RVM) are <u>lagi</u> (again) and <u>kembali</u> (back). In Indonesian there also are also words called aspects (A) such as <u>sudah</u> for perfective aspect and <u>sedang</u> for progressive aspect (Moeliono,1988:129).

Indonesian and English verb phrases have relatively similar constructions. An English verb phrase may consist of a main verb, or of one or more auxiliary verbs with a main verb (Leech and Svartvik, 1975:303-304). An Indonesian verb phrase may consist of a main verb plus another word modifying the main verb (Moeliono,1988:128). The difference perhaps lies in terminology. A lexical verb after a subject can be regarded as a verb phrase in English (Leech and Svartvik, 1989:303), while in Indonesian it cannot be so. Moeliono (1988:127) defines a verb phrase as a combination of two words or more, one of which must be a main verb, and the combination must not form a clause.

Of all the various meanings behind the forms of verb phrases, perhaps it is the verb phrase of the Primary Auxiliary Verb **have** plus a **Lexical Verb** in the past participle form called the present perfect tense which provides most complex and diverse meanings. Leech (1987:36) writes that it is too vague to tell exactly the when and when not to use the present perfect.

Michaelis (1994:111-157) discusses the ambiguous uses of the present perfect. Quirk, et al. (1972:91), for instance, state that 'the present perfect indicates a period of time stretching backwards into some earlier time. It is the past with 'current relevance'.

McCoard (1978:11) claims that 'the English perfect has frequently been placed in the category of aspect, partly because of the persistent connection between the perfect and meanings of **completion** or **result**. He further asserts (p.11) that ' these meanings of completion and result are not actually intrinsic to the perfect; rather they come from an interaction with other elements of the linguistic and general pragmatic concepts. Concerning the function of the present perfect, McCoard (p.31) states that 'the defining function of the perfect in English is to express the pastness of the event(s) embodied in the lexical verb, together with a certain applicability, pertinence, or relevance of said past event(s) to the context of coding -- the **now** of the speaker or writer'. Leech (1989:382) provides further information concerning the main uses of the present perfect. It is explained that the present perfect is used with <u>for</u> and <u>since</u> to talk about something which began in the past and has not changed. It is also used with <u>ever</u> or <u>never</u> to talk about general experience, i.e. what have you done in your life up to now. With <u>just</u>, it is used to talk about recent events. Events whose results are still noticeable can also be expressed in the present perfect, especially the present perfect progressive.

Certain sentences in the perfect forms carry specific meanings (Leech,1989:381). <u>I have studied English since I started secondary school</u> implies the meaning that I began to study English in the past and at the moment I am still studying. In the sentence <u>I have visited Sydney but I have never been to Perth</u> indicates my experience of not having never been to Perth despite my aving been to Sydney. A more recent experience is expressed in the present perfect with <u>just</u> as in <u>I've just had a delicious meal</u> . In the present perfect, there is a relationship between past and present. In fact, it is known that the ways of indicating past is by the past tense, the perfect aspect and also the pluperfect . At its most general, the perfect aspect is used for a past happening which

is seen in relation to a later event or time (Leech, 1987:35).

Comparing the present perfect in English with that of the Indonesian language may be able to reveal meaning differences. It is perhaps the comparison of strong perfective markedness in English with a lesser one in Indonesian. It is also the comparison of seemingly intricate and complicated meanings in English with the relatively less complicated ones in Indonesia. It is the comparison of two languages which may not share a common understanding that the present perfect, as distinct from the Simple Past Tense, is often described as referring to 'past with present relevance', or 'past involving the present'.

The study of the present perfect will not seem to be very effective without first addressing the differences between stative (state) and dynamic (event) verbs . English verbs are commonly categorized into state and event verbs (Leech, 1987), while in Indonesian there are three verb categories (Moeliono,1988:77) i.e. <u>kata kerja proses</u> (Process Verb), <u>kata kerja perbuatan</u> (Action Verb), <u>kata kerja keadaan</u> (Situation Verb). The verbs <u>to run</u>, <u>to take</u> are event verbs in English (action verb in Indonesian). <u>To study</u>, <u>to live</u> <u>are</u> stative verbs (process verb in Indonesian), and <u>to like</u>, <u>to love</u> which are verbs of the senses are classified as <u>Situation Verbs</u> in Indonesian.

Leech (1987:36-40) claims that the perfect ' may involve a time period lasting into the present and have results persisting at the present time'. The various forms of perfect in English may mean the following :

a. State-up-to-the-present. With 'state verbs' present involvement means that the state extends over a period lasting up to the present moment.

b. Indefinite Past (IP) .With 'event verbs', the present perfect may refer to some indefinite happening in the past.

c. Habit-in-period-leading-up-to-the-present (HUP). The habitual or iterative use of the Present Perfect with 'event verbs' is illustrated by the following sentences " I <u>have</u>

always <u>walked</u> to work" with the Indonesian equivalent " Saya -   <u>selalu</u> <u>berjalan</u> untuk kerja".

d. Resultative Past (RP). The Present Perfect is also used in reference to a past event to imply that the result of that event is still operative at the present time. This result can particularly be seen with the verbs of movement and transitional event verbs.

McCoard (1987:31) presents an example of the difference between " <u>he's gone to bed"</u> and "<u>he went to bed</u>." It is said that the former indicates that he is still in bed at the time of utterance, whereas the latter does not support such understanding. In Indonesian, the two sentences do not have different verb phrase forms, i.e " <u>Dia sudah pergi tidur"</u>.   In the examples below, (1) has equivalent meaning with both (2) and (3).

(1) He <u>has gone</u> to bed.
(2) He -   <u>went</u> to bed.
(3)   Dia <u>sudah pergi</u> tidur.

The resultative use of the Present Perfect (4) is shown in contrast to the Simple Past (6) in the examples below:

(4) Peter <u>has   broken</u>   the expensive glass.
(5) Peter <u>sudah memecahkan</u> gelas mahal itu.
(6) Peter   <u>broke</u>   the expensive glass.
(7) Peter   <u>memecahkan</u> gelas mahal itu.

In English, the Present Perfect is used when the past which, in its indefinite past tense, does not name a specific point of time (8). The simple past tense is used when there is a definite point of orientation in the past (11).

(8) I   <u>have   seen</u> him. He came   to   borrow a book.
(9) Saya <u>sudah   melihat</u> dia. Dia datang untuk meminjam - buku.
(10) Saya   -   <u>melihat</u> dia. Dia datang untuk meminjam - buku.
(11) I   <u>met   her</u>   on Wednesday.
(12) Saya   <u>bertemu</u> dengannya hari Rabu.
(13) Saya   <u>sudah bertemu</u> dengannya hari Rabu.
*(14) I   <u>have seen</u>   him   on Wednesday.

In the examples above, the Indonesian sentences (9), (10), (11), (13) are the equivalent of

both English present perfect and simple past tense. The present perfect (14) is, however, incorrect and incompatible with the simple past tense (11).

3. Indonesian Learners' likely difficulties

There have been studies on the role of first language to second language acquisition (Odlin,1989:15-16). It is " a popular belief that second language is strongly influenced by the learner's first language (Ellis,1985:19). It may be possible and understandable that many learners carry first language rules in their effort to learn the present perfect, which may partly contribute to learners' difficulties. Learners difficulties may likely be caused by the following factors: a) The Indonesian language expresses the English perfect with and without the aspect   sudah; b) In certain present perfect meaning, i.e. resultative past, the use of <u>sudah</u> is compulsory. In other meanings, it is not obligatory; c) the definite adverbial of time such as   <u>on Wednesday</u>, <u>yesterday</u>, <u>last year</u> are <u>never</u> used with the present prefect in English. In Indonesian, those definite adverbials of time can be used comfortably in the <u>sudah</u> + <u>verb</u> construction, which is equivalent to the present   perfect.

Considering the complex systems of the English perfect, Indonesian learners mostly will have problems understanding and using the present perfect. Three hypotheses will be put forward: a) Learners may find almost relatively equal difficulties to use and interpret the four meanings of the Present Perfect; b)   Learners will be mostly tempted to replace the Present Perfect with the Simple Past and the Simple Present Tense; c)   Learners will find more difficulties when a certain present perfect carries certain meaning without the presence of distinct adverbials.

4. Methodology

The purpose of the study was to investigate Indonesian learners' problems in understanding and using the present perfect. To achieve that purpose, Indonesian learners were

requested to do completion tests. Twelve of them, who have TOEFL scores of 500-530, were selected as subjects. The test consisted of two parts. For Part A (**Appendix 1**) learners were required to fill in the blank spaces with the correct verb forms. The items had been designed in such a way that they cover the four meanings of the present perfect discussed in the literature review. For part B **(Appendix 2**), learners were requested to translate Indonesian sentences into English. Some words were given to help and guide the learner's thinking of form usage in English.

The completed test of Part A was grouped in according to the meaning background using certain codes. For ease in reading, the codes were rewritten in ordinary tables. They were tables 1 to 10. Tentative interpretation and exploration on learners' problems in understanding using the present perfect would be based on the results of both parts of the completion test.

5. Result and discussion

Tables 1-10 illustrate the result of the completion test. Tables 3,5,7 show learners give more incorrect answers than correct ones. Table 1 indicates that learners give more correct answers than wrong ones in the present perfect meaning " State-up-to-the-Present". Tables 2,4,6,8 illustrate what inappropriate forms learners have used in place of the present perfect. Table 9 illustrates the result for the Completion test part B, where learners were required to translate Indonesian sentences into English. Table 10 shows learners' correct answers based on individual items of the completion test Part A. The discussion which follows the illustration of results focuses on interpreting why learners seem to find more problems with the present perfect with certain meanings.

5.1. Meaning: State-up-to-the-Present

Table 1 Subjects' Correct and wrong answers

Subjects' answers	Numbers	Percentage
Correct	28	58.3%
Wrong	20	41.7 %

Total	48	100%

As can be seen from table 1, learners give 20 wrong answers out of 48. Table 2 below shows learners' wrong answers consist of various other forms, mainly simple present, simple past and present continuous. Learners also complete the test using verb phrases which are grammatically unacceptable, such as <u>he gone</u>, <u>radio station broadcasting</u>, <u>my father gone</u>, <u>she has been a major in social work</u>, <u>she is major in social work</u>, <u>the mechanics have been serviced.</u>

Table 2 Inappropriate forms in subjects' wrong answers

Subjects' forms	Numbers	Percentage
Simple Past	6	30
Simple Present	7	35
Present Continuous	5	25
Past Perfect	1	5
Ungrammatical	1	5
Total	20	100

5.2. Meaning: Indefinite Past

Table 3 Percentage of subjects' correct and wrong answers

Subjects' Answers	Numbers	Percentage (%)
Correct	19	39.6
Wrong	29	60.4%
Total	48	100

Table 3 shows that learners give 29 wrong answers in the present perfect meaning " Indefinite Past", 19 of which, as table 4 shows, are in the simple past. This seems to indicate that learners do not quite understand that the two forms, i.e. the present perfect and the simple past, express different meanings.

Table 4 Percentage of inappropriate forms in subjects' wrong answers

Subjects' forms	Numbers	Percentage (%)
Simple Past	19	65.50
Simple Present	4	13.80
Present Continuous	2	6.90
Past Continuous	1	3.45
Ungrammatical	1	3.45

No answer	2	6.90
Total	29	100

5.3. Meaning: Habit-in-Period-Leading-Up-To-The-Present

Table 5 Percentage of subjects' correct and wrong answers

Subjects' Answers	Numbers	Percentage (%)
Correct	16	33.46
Incorrect	32	66.7%
Total	48	100

Table 6 Percentage of inappropriate forms in subjects' wrong answers

Subjects' forms	Numbers	Percentage (%)
Simple Past	8	25.0
Simple Present	12	37.50
Present Continuous	4	12.50
Past Continuous	1	3.125
Ungrammatical	6	18.750
No answer	1	3.125
Total	32	100

Table 5 shows that learners only give 16 correct answers, while the incorrect ones total 32. As shown in table 6, out of 32 wrong answers, 12 are in the simple present, and 8 in the simple past. It is a phenomenon which needs to be explored. There must be reasons as to why learners associate the present perfect meaning Habit-in-period-up-to-the-present with the simple present and simple past.

5.4. Meaning: Resultative Past

Table 7 Percentage of subjects' correct and wrong answers

Subjects' answers	No	%
Correct	8	16.7
Incorrect	40	83.3[3]
Total	48	100 [3]

Table 7 shows that learners give 40 wrong answers, with only 8 answers correct. As

compared with tables 3 and 5 , learners make many mistakes in the present perfect meaning resultative past. The present perfect meaning " Resultative Past" seems to be the most difficult one to understand. Table 8 shows that out of the 40 incorrect answers, 16 are in the simple past and 15 in the simple present.

Table 8 Percentage of inappropriate forms in

subjects' wrong answers

Subjects' forms	Numbers	Peercentage (%)
Simple Past	16	40.0
Simple Present	15	37.5
Present Continuous	1	2.5
Past Perfect	2	5.0
Past Perfect	2	5.0
Ungrammatical	5	12.0
No answer	1	2.5
Total	40	100

Table 9 shows below shows that learners find most difficulty in translating Indonesian sentences having resultative past meaning into English. In item no. 3, for example, there is only 1 correct answer out of 12. Learners seem to have less difficulty translating a sentence with State-up-to-the-Present meaning (10 correct answers out of 12).

Table 9. Result of Translation Test

Item No.	Intended Meaning	Correct Answers	%	Wrong answers	%
01	State up to the present	10	83.3	2	16.7
02	Habit in period leading up to the present	4	33.3	8	33.7
03	Resultative Past	1	8.3	11	91.7
04	Resultative Past	6	50.0	6	50.0
05	Indefinite Past	4	33.3	8	66.7
06	Indefinite Past	3	25.0	9	75.0

07	Resultative Past	2	16.7	10	83.3
08	Resultative Past	3	25.0	9	75.0
09	Resultative Past	6	50.0	6	50.0
10	Indefinite Past	6	50.0	6	50.0
	Total	45	100	75	100

Learners have to complete blank spaces with the right verb forms in the completion test part A (Appendix 1), and their performance on individual items can be seen in table 10 below. When completed properly, nos. 1, 5, 9, 13 have the meaning of state-up-to-the-present; Numbers. 2,6,10,14 express the meaning of indefinite past; nos. 3,7,11,15 have habit-in-period-leading-up-to-the-present; and nos. 4,8,12,16 carry the meaning of resultative past. Table 10 seems to indicate that learners likely find more difficulties in certain items. It can be tentatively interpreted that Indonesian learners find the present perfect with resultative past (8 correct answers out of 48) the most difficult to understand. The present perfect with state-up-to-the-present causes least difficulties (28 correct answers out of 48). The present perfect expressing indefinite past meaning (19 correct answers out of 48) and habit-in-period-leading-up-to-the-present (16 correct answers out of 48) seems to cause moderate difficulties to learners.

Table 10. Learners' correct answers on individual item

Item No.	Correct Answers	Meaning	Total Correct answers out of 48 and %
01	9	State-up-to-the-Present	28 / 58.34%
05	8	Ibid.	
09	3	Ibid.	
13	8	Ibid.	
02	8	Indefinite Past	
06	2	Indefinite Past	19 / 39.58%
10	6	Indefinite Past	
14	3	Indefinite Past	
03	3	Habit-in-Period-leading-up-to the-Present	
07	2	Ibid.	16 / 33.33%

11	7	Ibid.	
15	4	Ibid.	
04	1	Resultative Past.	
08	2	Ibid.	8 / 16.66 %
12	4	Ibid.	
16	1	Ibid.	

Table 9 and 10 seem to support this interpretation. This means the finding likely contradicts the first hypothesis, which predicts learners may have equal difficulties in understanding and using the four meanings of the present perfect. Tables 2, 4, 6, 8 show that learners use different tenses in place of the present perfect. Learners use simple past 49 times, simple present 38 times, and present continuous tense 12 times. It is difficult to analyse why learners use the Present Continuous which actually is not directly related to the present perfect. The fact learners use the present continuous twelve times does not support the second hypothesis, either.

Tables 9 and 10 provide information that the present perfect with resultative past meaning is the most difficult of all. In both tables, only one learner out of twelve gives the right answer, i.e. item no. 3 in table 9, and no. 4 in Table 10. Table 9 is the result of Completion test or Part B (Appendix 2), and Table 10 is the individual result of Completion Test (Appendix 1). As can be seen in the test, items 3 and 4 do not have clear time signals or adverbials which may guide learners to choosing the perfect form. This finding supports the third hypothesis which claims that learners will find more difficultiy when a certain present perfect carries certain meaning without the presence of adverbials.

In general, the findings seem to support what Felix has found (1980:107). He writes that ' our data on L2 acquisition of syntactic structures in natural environment suggest that interference does not constitute a major study in this area..' The findings also seem to justify the study of Whitman and Jackson (1972) who obtained no support for the contrastive analyses ' so carefully

worked out by linguists'. The findings may also conclude that contrastive analyses between the present perfect Indonesian and English should not not necessarily be the most reliable means of predicting learners' difficulties. However, the study may benefit teachers of English to at least understand the areas of difficulties their learners may face. Moreover, in this particular case, Lado's ideas may still be relevant that the teacher who has made a comparison of the foreign language with the native language of the students will know better what the real problems are and can better teach them (Lado,1957). Other aspects may need to be taken into consideration as many of the errors might not be directly linked to learners' first language.

6. Conclusion

From the results and discussion, the conclusion may be tentatively drawn that learners experience difficulties. The difficulties may be ranked in order, i.e. not so difficult (present perfect expressing state-up-to-the-present), difficult (present perfect expressing Indefinite Past and Habit-in-period-leading-to-the-present), and very difficult (present perfect expressing resultative past).

The study of Indonesian learners' problems in understanding and using the present perfect in English offers some interesting perspective. The result of the completion test indicates learners' difficulties seem to vary in accordance with **what meaning** a certain perfect form carries. The result also seems to indicate learners' preference in using other forms to express meanings which can only be correctly expressed in the present perfect forms. Those forms are the simple past and simple present. The results also seem to indicate that learners of seemingly equal knowledge do not necessarily have equal difficulties in a certain grammar item, i.e. the present perfect.

This study is, however, very limited in its scope, size, and data. The interpretation of the result consequently cannot be more reliably conducted. The study will be more reliable if learners are asked to explain as to why they have decided to use other forms instead of the present perfect.

If interviews can be held, a clearer picture concerning first language influence on learners decisions in choosing the wrong forms may be able to be detected. This limited study may possibly be used as a stepping stone for further study. Future studies may consider enlarging the subjects, improving the completion test with more items of other forms other than present perfect, asking subjects to provide reasons for making certain form choices, and making use of more helpful statistics. Findings of the study covering wider scope , size and data might be much more useful and reliable.

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Appendix 1
Your last TOEFL score:
Your last IELTS score:

PART A.
Using the verb in brackets, complete each of the blank spaces below with the most suitable verb form.

1. I ....(teach) English in this university since 1975.
2. I ....(be) to New Zealand twice.
3. I ....always (walk) to school since I was twelve years old.
4. Dedi is rich. He ....(buy) a new car again.

    Look, the car is parked there.
5. We ....(live) in Melbourne for two years.

    But next year we are moving to New Zealand.
6. We...............................(play) squash before.

7. *Since we bought this washing machine, the mechanics ......*
    ....(service) it almost once a month.

8. *What a nice camera she has. Her brother ....just (give)*
    it to her as a birthday present.

9. *I ....(know) his father since I was young.*

10. *This is the most difficult exam I.................. ever (experience).*

11. *The government radio station ....(broadcast)*
    news about politics since I was a student.

12. *After my father ....(go) I clean his room.*

13. *He ....(work) in this bank since he left university.*

14. *He ....just (tell) me he (get) a new job.*

15. *She ....(major) in Social Work since her return from overseas.*

16. *I feel fresh now. I ....(have) a good rest.*

Appendix 2

PART B.

Translate the sentences below into English by completing the sentences.

1. Sejak tahun 1980 dia telah belajar hukum.
     Since...

2. Saya mencintainya sejak dia mahasiswa.
    I...her.......................

3. Dia merasa senang sekali ketika tahu dia lulus ujian.
    He feels...

4. Kita terlambat. Kereta baru saja berangkat.
    We are..

5. Dicky pemain badminton yang baik. Dia menjadi juara
    badminton di universitas dua kali.
    Dicky is...

6. Dia telah mengunjungi kami dua kali sejak dia

16

diangkat menjadi direktur bank itu.

....*since*

he was promoted......................................

7. Dia memusatkan perhatiannya untuk menulis tesis. Dia
   selalu sibuk dan tidak mau mengerjakan yang lain.

   ....thesis. He is ....

8. Dina betul-betul pandai. Dia mendapat nilai A untuk tata- bahasa. Lihat ini hasilnya.

   Dina is.....................................She...............................Look....................

9. David belum makan pagi, maka dia lapar. Saya makan pagi   jam 7.

   David..........................., so he is hungry...

10. Saya beritahu dia berkali-kali tetapi dia tidak juga   mengerti.

    ..but he still ....