

**FURTHER NOTES FOR A CONTRASTIVE AND DIDACTIC
APPROACH TO THE USE OF THE PRESENT PERFECT TENSE VS.
THE PAST TENSE**

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***Abstract:** The Present Perfect Tense is a notable instance of the many quirks, “pitfalls” and inherent intricacies that can make the acquisition of English grammar quite a challenge, even with advanced students. Its dissimilarity from its possible counterparts in most European languages (including Romanian) is patent. The present contribution continues the author’s preoccupation with such “False Friends” that teaching is called upon to overcome (at least, to an acceptable degree). Since the Present Perfect Tense closely incorporates tense and aspect information, while also being highly context-, and attitude-dependent, it requires conscious communicative adjustment on the part of the non-native speaker, including the students of EFL. The grammatical category of Aspect often emerges as a linguistic “trap” for foreign learners of English, since, in Romanian, it is rendered unsystematically, mainly through specialized words, phrases, or derivational morphemes, being, in most cases, rather lexicalized (and comparatively syntax-dependent); in English **aspect** is a grammatical category mainly – and essentially – subordinated to the category of tense, and is usually taught as such. In this presentation, very much as in the previous one dealing with the Present Perfect and Past Tense, we considered that the most serious grammatical “trap” with respect to the use and definition of the two tenses under consideration is laid by the notion of perfectivity. The contribution presents the main tenses involved in the broader picture of the English tenses and verbal structures related, in a way or other, to the past – viz. the Past Tense Simple, the Past Tense Progressive, the Present Perfect Simple Tense, and the Present Perfect Progressive Tense –, as well as the main differences (in meaning, grammatical collocation and communicative implications) between the Present Perfect Tense and the Past Tense. The author’s remarks could hopefully contribute to facilitate teacher handling of the tense system of English. The Present Perfect Tense can be taught, we hope, in a more suitable manner if adequate activities are used communicatively in the EFL classes.*

***Key words:** Present Perfect, Past Tense, teaching, pitfalls, communicative*

I. Teaching English grammar can make the teacher or educator come face to face with countless challenges, intricacies, cases of imprecision, oscillation, approximation or ambiguity, and quirks (some of which can be said to verge on the absurd). Among those “pitfalls” and “puzzles”, the Present Perfect Tense stands distinct, being a highly representative element within the grammatical structure of English language, and, at the same time, flatly dissimilar to most other European languages – including Romanian. Therefore, it has all the constitutive elements of a genuine “grammatical False Friend” – and is all the more deceitful as it is, to all

appearances, convergent with such structures as Romanian *perfect compus*, or French *passé composé*. On the other hand, the Present Perfect Tense intimately fuses, in its form and structural make-up, tense and aspect information – being in fact an expression of the English *Perfective* (a notion difficult to – fully – understand and handle by non-native speakers of English). Furthermore, the Present Perfect Tense is heavily dependent on both context, and speaker attitude.

II. The Past¹ Tense Simple. The simplest, grammar book definition runs as follows: The Past Tense Simple is the verbal tense form implying past actions and states (placed at a certain temporal point in the past, or within the limits defined by a certain past period), either terminated or not, which are not in progress (that is to say, unlike the progressive / continuous form); sometimes, frequency or repetition are involved. As one can see, tense and aspect data are interrelated in a close (and rather confusing – at least, for a foreigner) manner.

The Past Tense Simple is used in its essential, temporal, sense:

(1) To express an action or state wholly completed at some moment or during some period in the past; the action or state described by the Past Tense Simple is completely separated from the Present, and has no (obvious or important) connection with it; based on its specific meaning, the Past Tense Simple is used to narrate past actions or states (i.e. the Narrative or Historic Past), e.g. *This kind of head-gear always made an awful impression on the children in Cranford; and now two or three left off their play, and gathered in wondering silence round Miss Pole, Miss Matty, and myself.* (E.C Gaskell, *Cranford*).

As a rule, the time when the action or state took place is marked by: (A) Adverbs of time, or adjectives (*yesterday, three/a few years ago, a week/three weeks ago, last week/summer/July/year, then, when...*), or by any adverbs or adverbial phrases which limit time in the past (*in 1887, as soon as, at the time, at that time, just now, the day before, the other day, recently, this day, last year, etc.*) – e.g. *I met him yesterday. They discussed the matter three days ago. Jake recently² took up guitar lessons. Mary was extremely happy this day last year. They didn't talk to each other for several weeks at that time. Sam started working on that fresco as soon as he recovered from the accident. Sue rang you up just now.*

One can receive more information about the time in the past that forms the specific time reference, by asking questions beginning with: *When?, What time?, How long ago?* – e.g. { *When/What/How long ago* } *did you see him?*

(B) By a verb in the past tense, e.g. *They watched him as he disappeared into the forest.*

(C) By other indicators of the past, which are not adverbials of time, or temporal constructions: *where, there, that.* – cf. the verbs *to say, to tell, to get; to*

¹ Also called *Preterit(e)*; the term comes from Latin (*tempus*) *praeteritum* “past (tense)”; it is the neuter past participle form of the Latin verb *praeterire* “to go by” < *praeter* “beyond” (the comparative form of *prae* “before”. Nowadays, the term *Preterite* is considered obsolete by most grammarians.

² The adverb *recently* can also be used with the Present Perfect – see the Present Perfect Simple.

*buy, to pay, to cost, to lose, to think.*¹ – e.g. *What did you say? I thought you were leaving. How much did you pay for that blouse? It didn't cost me a thing. I noticed there were many people.*

(D) By context, or only the (logically deducible, or obvious) intention of the speaker, e.g. *Was she at home? (That night, when you told me). Penny came to see us every day. (Back then). What did you say? (I haven't heard you). Shakespeare wrote many beautiful poems.* (The idea is implied that Shakespeare is dead, and consequently is no longer writing).

Sometimes, the time of the action / state expressed becomes definite as a result of a question and an answer in the Present Perfect; in this case, the Past Tense has an *anaphoric* function – referring to a previous event in the communication, e.g. *Q: Where has he been? A: He has been to the cinema. Q: What film did he see? A: He saw 'David Copperfield'.*

The progressive / continuous opposition distinguishes the Past Tense Simple from Past Tense Continuous; the first Past Tense form is used:

1. To express a past habit, or a repeated action in the past, e.g. *He stood there for hours.* Such alternative manners of expressing the same grammatical meaning as the structures built with the auxiliaries *used to* and *would* can be used, e.g. *He used to stand there... / He would stand there....* However, when past states that have changed are implied, *used to*, and not *would* will be employed. More often than not, preference for either of the above alternatives can indicate change of register – *would* structures are often considered more colloquial than *used to* patterns. Compare: *The market used to be on the outskirts of the town. (Now it is no longer there).* and: *He used to drink a lot when he was a student. (He is no longer in the habit of drinking.)*

On the other hand, the simple form of the Past Tense is the only possible alternative when the opposite of the Romanian *imperfect* is meant – i.e. *used to* or *would* are not to be used when such exact mentions are made as how many times something happened, how long ago something occurred, or that something occurred at a particular time, e.g. *Sean visited Paris three times during the 1990s. Dora went on holiday to the seaside last autumn.*

3. To indicate past ability² – with verbs used in their *stative* sense,³ e.g. *The little girl swam like a fish.*

(2) When the Past Tense Simple is not used in its fundamental – that is, temporal – sense, it is meant to replace other tenses:

¹ See the Present Perfect Simple, occurrences of the Present Perfect.

² As a rule, one uses *to be able to* when talking about a specific achievement (particularly if it is difficult and requires some effort) rather than a general ability: *She was able to swim 30 miles per day.*

³ The term *stative* is the opposite of *dynamic*. They are both used in the classification of verbs, but can also be applied to other word classes / parts of speech, e.g. adjectives. “A stative adjective such as *tall* cannot be used with the progressive aspect, or with the imperative: **He's being tall. *Be tall!*” (Greenbaum & Quirk, 1990, apud *The Oxford Dictionary of English Grammar*, 372).

a) The Present Tense (in Indirect Speech), e.g. “*We live in a big house*”, *the girl said. The girl said they live in a big house.*

However, the Past Tense in the reporting clause can be followed by either the Present Tense or the Past Tense in the Direct Clause, e.g. *She argued that Carl is/was the best in the class. He said that is living/lives/lived/ in that house.* A present instead of a past tense in the Direct Object Clause shows that the situation being reported still exists, or is still relevant when one reports it.

On the contrary, if one intends to indicate that they are not sure that what they are reporting is necessarily true, or that a situation may no longer exist now, a Past Tense verb is preferred rather than a Present Tense one, e.g. *Sally told me that she has two houses.* (It might suggest that this is the case). Vs. *Sally told me that she had two houses.* (It might suggest that this is perhaps not true, or that she once had two houses, but no longer has them now). So, speaker attitude is heavily implied.

In Direct Speech, the Past Tense is also used to introduce somebody’s words, e.g. “*I’m too busy*”, *he said.*

The Past Tense also replaces the Present Tense in polite requests with verbs like *want, wonder, hope, intend.* (It is to be noted that this is not a Subjunctive form, like the “Hypothetical Past” used in sentences like *If I had more money I would buy her a necklace*), e.g. *I wanted to ask you a question. I wondered/was wondering if you could help me. I hoped you could go over the list one more time.*

b) The Past Perfect – especially in temporal clauses introduced by *when, after, before, as soon as*, e.g. *Dan went out after he finished his homework. Ron saw me before I saw him. Betty finished cooking when her fiancé arrived at home. The plane took off after the passengers fastened their seatbelts.* This use of the Past Tense is specific to activity verbs, and expresses consecutive past actions.

The Past Perfect, however, stresses that the action in the temporal clause took place only after the action in the main clause was accomplished / terminated, e.g. *He went out after he had finished his homework.* So, (1) *He finished his homework.* (2) *He went out.* It follows that (2) only happened after (1).

c) Future-in-the-Past in adverbial clauses of time, if the verb in the main clause is in the past, e.g. *He told me he would lend me the book when he came. We were told to wait there until the bus came.*

A special sub-category includes what we may call “false” (i.e. essentially non-temporal) Past tense forms:

d) Future (or Future fictional¹), or true events in the future, e.g. *In 2105 an interplanetary vehicle made a journey with several species of animals on board.* (We can look at future events from an even further point in the future). This use is, naturally, a matter of mere (literary) convention.

¹ See Mihai Mircea Zdrengea, *ibid.*, p. 33.

e) A Present Conditional in a Conditional Clause, e.g. *My friend would help me if he were here. Suppose I was / were you.*¹ In this case, the Past Tense is in fact the Past Subjunctive, as it indicates supposition, and not a tense; it is therefore a by-product of downright diachronic evolution (with the loss of the specific markers, and the subsequent – illogical – confusion of the Subjunctive form for the Past Tense form).

Assuming the form of a “false” Past Tense, the Past Subjunctive – sometimes called *Hypothetical Past* – can appear after *wish, would rather/sooner, had better*², *it’s (high/about) time, as if/though, if only* to suggest desirability, non-fulfillment, or criticism, e.g. *I wish you were here. It’s (about) time you grew up. Sarah is speaking as if she was / were a doctor (But in fact she is not.) I’d rather you did something else for money.* This (Subjunctive) form is retained in relative clauses as well, e.g. *if I were you, I wouldn’t play with children I disliked.*

III. The Simple Past can be translated into Romanian by:

(1) “Perfectul compus” or “Perfectul simplu”, e.g. *I saw him two days ago.*
↔ *L-am văzut acum doi ani.*

He looked at me, then he went on with his work. ↔ *Se uită la mine, apoi își continuă lucrul.*

(2) “Imperfectul”, e.g. *Whenever I passed by their house, the little boy stared at me.* ↔ *Ori de câte ori treceam pe lângă casa lor, băiețașul se holba la mine.*

(3) “Prezentul” (in Reported Speech), e.g. *He told her he has three cars.*
↔ *I-a spus că are trei mașini.*

(4) “Viitorul”, e.g. *He told his daughter he would buy her a pony when he returned home.* ↔ *Îi spuse fiicei sale că-i va cumpăra un ponei când se va întoarce acasă.*

(5) “Conjunctivul prezent”, e.g. *I told her I had felt lonely before I met her.*
↔ *I-am spus că m-am simțit singur înainte să / până să o întâlnesc.*

(6) “Condiționalul prezent” and “Condiționalul trecut” (or their stylistic, more colloquial equivalents), e.g. *She’s speaking as if she was / were a teacher.* ↔ *Vorbește ca și când / de parcă ar fi profesoară.*

He looks as if he had been there. ↔ *Arată de parcă ar fi fost acolo.*

He was yelling as if he was / were insane. ↔ *Zbiera de parcă ar fi fost / era nebun.*

IV. **The Simple Present Perfect.** The most general grammar book definition (the Present Perfect – simple aspect – is the *perfective* verbal tense form implying actions and states that fall within the time-sphere of the present) can be telling for the name itself, **Present Perfect**, a label which can sound rather paradoxical for speakers of languages such as Romanian, French, Italian, etc., where the literal counterparts, e.g. Rom. *am pierdut*, Fr. *j’ai perdu*, It. *ho perso*,

¹ For the verb *to be* the form *were* (irrespective of the person of the verb) is used especially in written English.

² With different subjects.

belong to the past. Moreover, such often added specifications to the effect that “the action has taken place in the past” are, we think, useless since, on the one hand, it goes without saying that “perfective” verbal forms denote actions and states “that have already happened”,¹ and, on the other hand, it increases the foreign students’ confusion as to the time-scope of this rather ticklish tense of the English language.

The Present Perfect Simple is formed of the auxiliary verb *to have* (*have/has*) and the past participle (the third form of the verb).

The Perfect Tenses (Present Perfect and Past Perfect) of some intransitive verbs (*to become, to come, to do = to finish, to get, to go, to grow, to meet, to melt, to set, to sit, to rest, to return, to rise, etc.*) can sometimes have an alternative form, where the auxiliary *to have* is replaced by the verb *to be*. This phenomenon exists in Romanian, too. The older perfect forms realized with the auxiliary *to be* can help render subtler nuances of language, e.g. *They have gone*. (The stress lies on the action itself) vs. *They are gone*. (The stress lies on the result of the action – They are no longer here, therefore you cannot speak to them).

As to its usage, it should be noted that all occurrences of the perfect marker [*have* + past participle], somehow suggest the idea that the time of the event (or most of it) is prior to the time of reference. But, whereas the Past Tense presents the action without any present reference, the Present Perfect links the past action with the present. Generally, it can be safely said that, when the Present Perfect is used, the speaker is concerned with the action *in spe*, its importance or its connection with the present; actually, one of the main sources of error for Romanian learners is the fact that the Present Perfect has a clear “present-colouring”, as well as present translation (in contexts like *We have been friends for 5 years.*).

Accordingly, most traditional grammarians generally recognize three main uses of the Present Perfect Tense: the so-called *continuative* perfect (e.g. *We’ve known each other for years*), the *resultative* perfect (e.g. *I’ve bought a new car, John has just gone out*), and the perfect of *experience* (e.g. *When I have asked a London policeman the way, I have invariably received a polite answer*).²

V. (a) The **Simple Present Perfect** is used:

(1) To express past actions or states when time is not considered important by the speaker. In this case, no adverbial modifier is required, e.g. *I have seen this museum. Have you had lunch?*

Sometimes, the result of the action in the Present Perfect Simple is obvious in the present. (Resultative Present Perfect), e.g. *I have washed the dishes*. (Result: The dishes are clean) *I have broken my right arm*. (Result: I can’t write now).

¹ See the dictionary definition of the term *perfective*: “Grammar. denoting an aspect of verbs in some languages, including English, used to express that the action or event described by the verb is or was completed” (COLL).

² Cf. Cobb, Timothy, Gardiner, Richard, *Today’s English Grammar*, Editura Prietenii Cărții, București, 1994, pp. 59 and 61-62.

This meaning is clearest with transitional event verbs denoting the switch from one state to another. The final (and present state) implied by the present perfect is indicated in brackets, e.g. *The train has left* (= the train is not here now). *I've got a bicycle for my birthday.* (= I now have a bicycle.)

In other examples, the resultative inference is still there, even if it is not quite so obvious from the verb's meaning, e.g. *He's broken his leg* (= He is still wearing a cast.) *He's cut his chin with the razor* (= the cut is still visible).¹

(2) To refer to indefinite (experiential) past, in combination with adverbs of frequency (*often, sometimes, rarely, never, ever, always, seldom, once, twice, several times*), or adverbs / adverbial phrases like *before, whenever, so far, up to the present, until/till now*, e.g. *I have often seen him carrying a large bag.*

My dog has never eaten inside. I have phoned her twice.

My mother has never liked chocolate.

Whenever I've asked him he has given me good advice.

It's the most intriguing book I have ever read.

In some of these sentences the Present Perfect (the Perfect of Experience) illustrates the occurrence of the events in the life of individuals up to the present moment, e.g. *My dog has **never** eaten inside.* (*never* = at no point up to the present in its life) *It's the most intriguing book I have **ever** read.* (*ever* = at any point up to now in my life).

Although synonyms, in comparison with *so far, until now* suggests a change, a new situation. Compare: *So far, he hasn't been to London,* and *He hasn't been to London until now.* (= He is in London now.)

The indefinite past can also be expressed with adverbials denoting an incomplete/unfinished period of time: *today, this (week/month/morning etc.), all day/night/year, etc.*, e.g. *I haven't heard from him today. They have studied a lot this week. I've been busy all day.*

(3) The Present Perfect is also used to express duration-up-to-the-present when a past action started in the past, continues in the present and is likely to extend into the future, as well. Durative adverbials preceded by *for* mark the duration of the period, whereas definite adverbs marked by: *since* indicate the beginning of the period of time. In either case, the period is still unfinished at the present moment. (= the Continuative Present Perfect), e.g. *I have known him since September. He was lived here for two years.*

As they express duration, *since* and *for* are particularly used in the Progressive / Continuous Perfect Tense. Nevertheless, apart from the verbs that are not used in the continuous aspect (*to know, to see, to be, etc.*) there are some stative verbs (*to stay, to live, etc.*), or dynamic verbs (*to work, to study, etc.*), which can be used either in the Simple or the Progressive / Continuous Present Perfect.

¹ Mircea Mihai Zdreghea, *ibid.* page 348.

With states, the difference in meaning between the Simple and Continuous perfect is almost negligible; if existent, it is brought by the “limited duration” meaning of the progressive marker. Let us compare the two sentences below:

I have been living here... and *They have lived here...*

The first suggests a smaller time-scale [...] and so far a few days would certainly go with the first, and for thirty years with the second.¹

When the Present Perfect tense is used to express completed activities in the recent/ immediate past, the verb is accompanied by adverbs like: *just*, *lately*, *already*, *of late*, *during the last week*, *the last few days*, *these (ten) minutes*, *yet*, e.g. *She has just turned off the TV. They haven't seen each other the last few days.*

She has called twice these ten minutes. Have they received the gift yet?

They have written a lot of letters lately. Father has recently resigned.

The women have already raised enough money.

Students should not confuse this use of *just* with the use of the adverb meaning *barely* or *nearly*. When used with these meanings, it can occur with different tenses, e.g. *Mike just wanted to help us*. On the other hand, *just now* (meaning “adineauri”) is used with the Past Tense, e.g. *He rang you up just now*.²

Notes on the use of adverbials: Most grammarians note that the British tend to use the Past Tense after *recently* and *lately*. *Lately* is used with the Present Perfect particularly in questions and negative statements, e.g. *Until recently they were living in Edinburgh*.³

More recently his name was linked with that of a local councilor.⁴

*Have you been to the movies lately?*⁵

I haven't seen him lately.⁶

Already and *yet* can both appear in interrogative sentences – with one difference, though: *yet* indicates that the question is supposed to find out whether the action is finished or not, whereas *already* shows that the speaker is surprised that the action is over, e.g. *Have you painted the fence yet?* vs. *Have you already painted the fence?* (I am surprised, it should have taken you much longer.) *Already* can also occur in affirmative statements, e.g. *He has already cooked dinner*.

In negative statements, *yet* has the meaning of Romanian (*nu*) *încă*, e.g. *Grandma has not boiled the tea yet.* / *Grandma has not yet boiled the tea.* *Still* can also replace *yet* in negative sentences, stressing the idea of lack or failure of accomplishment, e.g. *I still haven't bought the car*.

(4) To open a conversation where specific information can be asked for with the Simple Past Tense, e.g. *Q: Have you been there? A: Yes, I have. Q: What was it like? A: Great.* This use is frequent in newspapers and broadcasts to

¹ Taina Duțescu-Colibanu, *ibid*, page 179.

² In fact, *just now* can also mean “at this moment”, apart from “a very short time ago” (COLL).

³ *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary*, London, Fifth edition, page 792.

⁴ *Idem 1*

⁵ *Idem 2*

⁶ *Idem 3*

introduce an action that will be described in The Past Tense. The time in the second sentence is often indicated, e.g. *Police in Appleby have concluded a major undercover operation [...] This was sparked off by a shooting incident in the centre city last month [...]*.

(5) A syntactic – i.e. conventional, non-temporal – use of the Present Perfect is needed in English to express a future action, in an adverbial clause of time, prior to another one expressed by a future tense; the sequential relationship thus established is in fact that between a present (cf. *I'll call you when / the moment I find anything*) and a anterior-to-the-present form. The Present Perfect is usually accompanied by *after*, *when* (= *after*), *as soon as*, *till/until*, *by the time* (*that*), *before*, etc., e.g. *He will talk to you after he has returned from the trip. She will call you up the moment she has come back home. Clean this mess up until she has come.*

(6) To replace *will* in Conditional Clauses, e.g. *I'll pay you a visit if you have made my favorite cake. They will not be allowed to see the film unless they have done their homework. If you haven't understood the lesson, read it again!*

In conditional clauses, tenses related to the present (i.e. the Present and the Present Perfect) express real situations.¹

V. (b.) The **translation** of the Simple Present Perfect into Romanian:

The Simple Present Perfect is translated into Romanian by:

(1) "Perfectul compus", e.g. *I have seen him before.* Rom. *L-am mai văzut.*

(2) "Prezentul", e.g. *I have known him for all my life.* Rom. *Îl cunosc de o viață.*

VI. **Remarks on the occurrence of the Present Perfect:** The Present Perfect is common in news, academic prose, and writing. As is but natural, the occurrence of the Present Perfect in these registers is largely varied, as some recent handbooks and dictionaries indicate, based on telling statistical data (e.g. *Longman of Spoken and Written English*, London 1999, page 464 – where the variation in the verb phrase is indicated for such frequent verbs as *to be*, *to have*, *to get*, *to go*, *to do*, *to make*, *to see*, *to come*, *to say*, *to take*, *to become*, *to give*, *to show*, *to think*, *to call*, *to put*, *to lose*, *to win*). Table 6.1 lists the verbs that occur in the present perfect aspect over 40 times per million words in at least one register; occurrences per million words. As expected, the verb *to be* is the most widely used Present Perfect form in all registers, except conversation. The verb *has/have got* in BrE conversation is the single most common present perfect verb in any one register, occurring well over 2,000 times per million words; its occurrence in academic writing is very rare. In news and academic prose, several other verbs occur with the Present Perfect frequently.

The situation of the verbs occurring more than 25% of the time with the Present Perfect in these two registers is the following: News reportage: *agree*,

¹ See The Past Tense Simple.

appoint, campaign, circulate, criticize, draft, experience, pledge, prompt, vow, witness. Academic prose: *criticize, document, implicate, master, report.*

On the other hand, there are many verbs that rarely ever occur with the Present Perfect less than 2% of the time: *accommodate, afford, aim, await, base, believe, bet, boil, compete, comprise, connect, consist, constitute, contain, correspond, cast, denote, depend, differ, distinguish, ensure, entitle, excuse, glance, illustrate, induce, inhibit, kiss, lean, let, matter, mind, need, nod, protect, quit, reckon, reflect, regulate, relate, remember, represent, require, resemble, scream, smell, smile, stare, suppose, thank, want, wave.*¹ The perfect aspect combination *have/has been* is frequent and serves a variety of functions. Apart from its copular use, it can be used as an alternative of the verb *to go*.

Some grammarians² consider that the verb *to go* has two participles: *gone* and *been*.

Have/has gone has a resultative use, meaning “reaching a place and staying there”, e.g. *He’s gone to London. (He’s in London now)*

Have/has been is an indefinite past, implying movement to a destination followed by return, e.g. *He’s been to London. (He visited London, but he came back.)*

Additionally, *have/has been* functions as the auxiliary part of a passive verb, or (less commonly) of a verb in the progressive aspect, e.g. *He has been spotted in the street. He has been thinking of quitting his present job.*

In perfect tenses, the verb *to be* is followed by the preposition *to*.³

The Present Perfect forms of *have* and *get* are used in different ways in AmE and BrE.

Have/has got and *have/has had* both mark possession in a general sense. *Have/has got*, which is extremely common in BrE conversation, has a range of meanings roughly equivalent to the simple Present Tense of *have*, e.g. *He has got a horse. Jerry has got many books.*

It is also frequent to elide the perfect aspect marker (*have/has*), while retaining the *-ed* form of the verb (*got*), e.g. *You got more than me. (You have more than me).*

In many cases, the expression has a meaning associated with the perfect aspect *have + got* – showing the current possession of something – rather than the past tense, meaning that something was acquired.

In AmE conversation, the present tense form of *have* is much more frequently used to express possession than *have/ has got*. Moreover, AmE distinguishes in meaning between *have/ has got* (referring to current possession) and *have/ has gotten* (implying that something has been acquired or that a change of state has occurred).

Compare: I have got a chalet in the mountains (= I have).

¹ Longman, *ibid.*

² *An A-Z of English Grammar & Usage*, 1989, Longman, p. 382

³ The verb *to be* is normally followed by *at* or *in*: *He’s at school; He was in that building.*

I have gotten a chalet in the mountains (= I bought).

In BrE, this perfect meaning is expressed by *have/has got*, e.g. *She has got hold of some important papers. She has got an orange scarf.*

In contrast, *have had* focuses on the present relevance of some state that came into being in the past. This use is especially common in conversation and news, e.g. *They've had an unhappy life. I've had enough of you.*

Have/has got(ten), and *got* in AmE and BrE conversation; occurrences per million words – as indicated in the table on page 466 (*Longman Grammar of Spoken and Written English*) In the BrE conversation *have/has got* is more common than either *got* or *have* occurring alone. *Have/has gotten* occurs mainly in AmE conversation. Perfect aspect *got* is much more common in BrE than AmE; in contrast, Simple Present Tense *have/has* (as transitive main verb) is much more common in AmE.

Most of the verbs that are common in the perfect aspect refer to physical or communicative activities, with consequences that can exist over an extended period of time; these verbs therefore imply a resultant state in the present.

In academic prose, verbs in the Present Perfect Tense are used to imply the continuing validity of earlier findings or practices, e.g. *Experiments have shown that... This, as we have seen is... It has become the usual practice to...*

By contrast, the verbs that rarely occur with the Present Perfect are mainly from the mental domain and the field of and existence. These verbs refer to states that typically exist at some past or present time, but do not suggest any ensuing situation, e.g. *He needs it to cut the fence. He wants to have his beard shaved / shaven. She believed she could make it there.*

Some dynamic verbs denoting bodily actions (e.g. *glance, kiss, nod, scream, smile*) also rarely occur in the Present Perfect Tense, e.g. *She nodded thoughtfully. He glanced at his shoes.* These verbs typically involve short-term events without long-term results.

VII. We should conclude by reiterating the idea that the inherent difficulties and challenges of the grammatical opposition Present Perfect Tense vs. Past Tense (including the variegated shades of meaning involved, the intricately interwoven tense and aspect implications, and the many contextual, stylistic, contrastive and practical aspects) can be successfully overcome in EFL teaching if appropriate didactic activities are used communicatively.

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