

English Present Perfect in Relation to Japanese and Its Inherent Problems in Teaching and Learning

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1. INTRODUCTION

English has two chief ways to refer to past time by means of the verb, the Past Tense and the Present Perfect (Leech 1971). Though the English Present Perfect (EPP) and the Past Tense (PT) share this function in common, they are well contrasted by their decisive difference in the speaker's perspective, whether he speaks from his present perspective or his past one, which causes the difference in what is actually communicated by him.

- (1) a. *The bus has arrived at the station.*
b. *The bus arrived at the station.*

If the speaker is more conscious of the present situation about the bus, he will use (1a) which can communicate to the hearer that the bus is now at the station "so you can get on the bus still now," for example. On the other hand, (1b) only states the past fact that "the bus arrived at the station at some time in the past," without any reference to the present situation of the bus. The purpose of (1b) is

just to state the past happening as a mere fact with no reference to the speaker's present time. Native speakers of English differentiate these two grammatical forms clearly and, I would say, 'instinctively' when they use them.

On the other hand, Japanese can refer to past time by ending a sentence in '-*ta*' (adding a particle '*ta*' to its end) in contrast with a sentence ending in '-(r)*u*' which usually indicates present or future time. Therefore Japanese has at least the means to deal with English PT on the grammar level although this is not always true in case of subordinate clauses, which will be discussed later.

Unlike PT, there is no Japanese counterpart for EPP as far as grammatical forms are concerned. Japanese does not have any grammatical mode that enables the speaker to refer to past time from his present perspective. Then how is this EPP dealt with in school teaching and learning? Is the difference of EPP from English PT in the way of referring to past time taught effectively? To understand this difference is indispensable to the use of EPP to a full extent.

In current English classes in schools, EPP is taught mainly through Japanese Standardized Translation Patterns (STPs) devised on the basis of the senses (meanings) which EPP conveys as shown in Table 1, and 2.

Table 1 Four senses of EPP¹ and their Japanese labels

1. the universal sense	—————	'keizoku' (continuation)
2. the existential sense	—————	'keiken' (experience)
3. the stative sense	—————	'kekka' (result)

4. the hot news sense ————— ‘kanryou’ (completion)
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(The stative sense and the hot news sense are sometimes grouped together as ‘kanryou’.)

Table 2 Four senses and their STPs

Four Senses	Translation Patterns
1. ‘keizoku’ (continuation)	————— (zutto) ~ (shi) teiru
2. ‘keiken’ (experience)	————— ~ (shi) takotogaaru
3. ‘kekka’ (result)	————— [] ————— [] ~ (shi) teshimat-ta
4. ‘kanryou’ (completion)	————— [] ————— [] ~ (shi) tatokoroda

Teaching and learning how to apply these translation patterns to actual EPP sentences usually form main parts of English classes at school, especially at junior high school where EPP is introduced to students for the first time as one of English grammatical categories. Students are usually encouraged to find the most proper sense from among these four to apply its STP to each EPP sentence in their translation work. These patterns can be of help sometimes in teaching and learning, but we should also admit their limitations in use, and that heavy reliance on these patterns in English classes is very likely to keep students away from the real understanding of EPP.

I had 100 first-year college students majoring in English Literature or Liberal Arts write an answer as to the difference between EPP and PT sentences including the pair of sentences of (1). I wanted to know how well students understood what EPP was after

having studied English for at least six years at school. The reason I used these pairs of EPP and PT sentences was that the intrinsic and fundamental nature (the essence) of EPP would be more clearly questioned when compared with PT. The figure in [] shows the number of students out of 100 who answered correctly.

[Question] Explain the difference between the two sentences, a and b, of (A), (B), (C), (D), and (E).

(A) a. Mr.White has lived in London for ten years.

[86] b. Mr.White lived in London for ten years.

(B) a. Mary has injured her foot.

[44] b. Mary injured her foot.

(C) a. His sister has studied English.

[0] b. His sister studied English. (Petersen 1988)

Many students interpreted (C a) as 'keizoku' (continuation) though it is of 'keiken' (experience) sense without any adverbials of time duration. This pair is discussed in the second part.

(D) a. Mary has been an invalid all her life.

[36] b. Mary was an invalid all her life.

(E) a. The bus has arrived at the station.

[21] b. The bus arrived at the station.

The students generally tried to distinguish between EPP (a) and PT (b) sentences through translation applying STPs, but this did not work effectively only to find difficulty of their application or to find the STPs insufficient for differentiation in meaning between the two types of the sentences of each pair except for (A). The students seemed to be embarrassed to find that both of the Japanese translations of each pair of English sentences were very likely to be the same in meaning. Due to the lack of Japanese counterpart of EPP, the word-to-word translation of EPP sentence and that of PT sentence result in the same translation, especially in the case of 'kakka' (result) sense such as (B) and (E). It is quite natural that many students cannot distinguish between these two types of English because almost all of them relied on translations only. Understanding what EPP is (its essence and function) is indispensable to getting correct answers.

Except for (A), the rate of correct answers is low on the whole and it can be presumed that many students do not understand EPP in a real sense, though they seem to know well about the Japanese labels of its senses and their STPs.

In this paper, taking these results into account, I will discuss some aspects of EPP in relation to Japanese in the first part, and the inherent problems about the STPs for school teaching and learning in the second part.

2. ESSENCE OF EPP: PERFECT PRESENT

Understanding what EPP is should be placed first before making use of the STPs. Understanding the fundamental nature (essence) of

EPP makes it really easy to find the difference between EPP and PT sentences. Then there is no need to rely on these STPs so much.

The essence of EPP is that the speaker's attention is completely directed to the present time of his speech even though he is talking about a past event. This essence can be worded as what I like to call '*Perfect Present*', which is accidentally made by just changing the word order of English *Present Perfect* (EPP). EPP is used or selected by the speaker to refer to something of the past time through his '*perfect present*' perspective, but not his past perspective attributed to past tense. Jespersen refers to this as the following:

- (2) a. *Have you finished?*
 b. *Did you finish?*

The question "*Did you finish?*" refers to some definite portion of the past, while "*Have you finished?*" is a question about *the present status.*" (emphasis added) (Jespersen 1933)

Sentence (2a) is practically asking, "Are you through (with the work) *now?*", while (2b) is asking, "Is it a fact that you finished (the work) at sometime in the past?"

In other words, the speaker of (2a) is asking this question to know about the hearer's *present status or situation* relating to a certain work he is supposed to finish, while (2b) is uttered for the speaker to know (or confirm) the simple fact that the hearer finished (the work) at some time in the past.

- (3) a. *Mary has injured her foot.*
 (Implication: Mary's foot is still bad *now*, i.e. has not yet healed.)
 b. *Mary injured her foot.*
- (4) a. *Mary-wa ashi-ni kega-o shite mada naottei-nai.*
 Mary foot injured and yet has healed-not
 (Mary injured her foot and it has not yet healed.)
 b. *Mary-wa ashi-ni kega-o shi-ta.*
 injured
 (Mary injured her foot.)
- (5) *Mary-wa ashi-ni kega-o shiteshimat-ta.*
 (STP-'kekka' (result))
- (6) *Mary-wa ashi-ni kega-o shiteiru.*
 is injured

Even though (3a) and (3b) refer to the same topic, Mary's injury to her foot, the attention of (3a) is directed to the present time, Mary's present status, which is offered as its implication. Unlike (3a), sentence (3b) states only the past fact of Mary's injury to her foot and no more than that with no reference to Mary's present condition.

On the other hand, having no grammatical form corresponding to EPP, Japanese needs some kind of device to communicate this implication of (3a). Japanese sentences, (4a), (5), and (6), are all devised for

this purpose. (4a) has an extra straight explanation (*mada naottei-nai.*) added about Mary's present condition. (5) is the STP of 'kekka' (result), which uses one of Japanese aspects, *-teshimatta*, to imply the speaker's present time, which is Mary's present condition, through the nuance of his present feeling of regret for the past happening, Mary's injury in this case, and (6) is the direct description about Mary's present status with a sentence ending *-ru* that indicates present time.

The following pair of sentences verifies the essence of EPP ('perfect present') grammatically in a visible way in relation to English PT.

(7) a. *He has resolved that he will smoke no more.*

b. *He resolved that he would smoke no more.*

(emphasis added)

(Jespersen 1933)

With the contrast between *will* and *would*, (7a) and (7b) demonstrate explicitly the difference between EPP and PT of English, which is the difference between the speaker's 'perfect present' perspective of EPP and his past one of PT.

3. THE FUNCTION OF EPP

3. 1. Connection between the Past and the Present

The function of EPP, according to Jespersen (1933), is to "connect a past occurrence with the present time, either as continued up to the present moment or as having results or consequences bearing

on the present moment.”

EPP works to “connect a past occurrence with the present time”, but considering its essence discussed so far, its function may also be worded as the following.

The function is for the speaker to draw a past occurrence (event) up to the present time to which his strong attention is directed. The following illustrates this function of EPP in a more concrete and explicit way.

- (8) During the Reagan and Bush administrations, an enormous amount of time and money was spent trying to control drugs with tough prison sentences for dealers and users, and para-military operations against growers in third-world nations. Generally speaking, *the policy has not worked*. The biggest result is that our prisons are now filled with otherwise talented and promising, mostly Hispanic and African-American young men from poor neighborhoods. (emphasis added)

(Schodt F.L. “Drugs”, *Student Times*, May 7, 1993)

Past tense in the first part changes into present tense just after the EPP sentence, *the policy has not worked*, where *the policy* that belongs to the past time is drawn up to the writer’s present time by his present perspective.

3. 2. Two Ways the Past Event Is Connected to the Present Time by Means of EPP

There are two ways in which a past event or state is connected with or related to the present. They are A-type and B-type below.

[A-type] : A past event or state that started at a certain time in the past has continued up to the present time and is still continuing now with the possibility of its continuation into the future.

- (9) a. *Mr. White has lived in London for ten years.*
(Implication: Mr. White is living in London *now*.)
b. *Mr. White lived in London for ten years.*

[B-type] : The result of a past event or state is still persisting at the present time.

- (10) a. *Someone has opened the window.*
(Implication: The window is open *now*.)
b. *Someone opened the window.*

In both A- and B-types, when the speaker's attention is directed to his present time, the EPP sentence, (9a) or (10a), is to be selected since it is a grammatical form that allows him to speak in terms of his present perspective about the past event or state. Accordingly, the selected sentence, (9a) or (10a), should be understood to be talking about the present situation or condition relating to the past event or state, whereas PT refers to the past event or state as a simple fact.

On the other hand, how does Japanese deal with the difference between EPP and PT of A- and B-type?

- (11) a. *White-san-wa London-ni juunenkan sundeiru.*
Mr.White London-in for ten years has lived.

(Mr.White has lived in London for ten years.)

- b. *White-san-wa London-ni juunenkan sundeita.*
lived

(Mr.White lived in London for ten years.)

As for A-type, the action or the state that started in the past time is still continuing and effective at the speaker's present time, which means that the present situation of the action or the state is included in what the EPP sentence expresses, and therefore the Japanese translation of an EPP sentence of this type always ends in *-ru* which indicates present time. On the other hand, that of an English PT sentence ends in *-ta*. These different endings in Japanese are always required. EPP sentences of this type are relatively easy to understand and distinguish from those of English PT in Japanese.

- (12) a. *Dareka-ga mado-o ake-ta. Soshite ima sono mado-wa aiteiru.*
someone window opened and now the window is open

(Someone opened the window, and the window is open now.)

- b. *Dareka-ga mado-o ake-ta.*

(Someone opened the window.)

Unlike (11) of A-type, Japanese cannot distinguish EPP and English PT by different endings. Both of the EPP and PT sentences of (10) result in the same Japanese translation (*Dareka-ga mado-o ake-ta*) unless the explanation (*Soshite ima sono mado-wa aiteiru*) is added

about the implication (And the window is open now). This means EPP and PT sentences of B-type are difficult to be distinguished only with their direct word-to-word translations. If you want to communicate exactly what the EPP sentence of (11a) means in Japanese, you have to add this extra explanation about its implication concerning the window.

Among the four senses of EPP shown in Table 1, only the sense, 'keizoku' (continuation) belongs to A-type, and other three senses to B-type. According to examining these two types, we can presume that dealing with EPP sentences of A-type is not so difficult in Japanese when compared with those of B-type. This explains the reason why so many students (86 out of 100) could give correct answers to (A) of [Question]. (D) is also of A-type, but only 36 students answered correctly.

- (13) (D) a. *Mary has been an invalid all her life.*
 b. *Mary was an invalid all her life.*

The difference between the two sentences is that *Mary* of (13a) is still alive now but *Mary* of (13b) is dead. The problem here is of vocabulary. The frequent Japanese *shougai* which is the direct translation of English *all her life* is usually used in a sentence that indicates past time and accordingly obtaining a proper translation of EPP sentence, (13a), must have been a trouble for students who relied on translations too much.

4. GRAMMATICAL TERMS: PRESENT PERFECT VS GENZAI KANRYO

The grammatical term *Genzai Kanryou* is the Japanese term for *Present Perfect* of English.

Japanese *genzai* is the translation for English *present* and *kanryou* is for *perfect*. In Japanese, *kanryou* generally means that something has been finished or completed, whereas the English *perfect* indicates only the time span between a certain point of past time and the speaker's present time inclusive.

According to the *Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English* (1987), *perfect* as a grammatical term is defined as the following:

“the term of a verb that shows *a period of time up to and including the present*, and in English is usually formed with *have* and a past participle” (emphasis added)

This definition has nothing to do with completion or an end of something that the Japanese term, *kanryou*, indicates. Besides, when you remember the essence of EPP, ‘perfect present’ and that EPP of A-type is used to express the continuation of a past event or state up to the present moment, along with the possibility of its continuation into the future as below, it is evident that this Japanese grammatical term *kanryou* can be very confusing. (Wakabayashi 1990)

(14) *Mr. White has lived in London for ten years.*

(Mr. White started living in London ten years ago and he is still living now in London and he may also continue to live there in

the future.)

5. ASPECT: JAPANESE PERFECTIVE VS ENGLISH PERFECT

It is said that Japanese is a language which centers on aspect rather than tense (Ando 1986)², and it has Perfective (kanryou) and Imperfective (hi (=non)-kanryou) aspects. Andersen (1988) defined them as follows with the definition based on Chung and Timberlake (1985), Dahl (1985), Comrie (1976).

Perfective aspect treats a situation or event as a self-contained whole. Imperfective aspect makes explicit reference to the internal temporal structure of the situation, viewing a situation from within.

Perfective aspect is used to express that something was completed or something ended. Accordingly the “something” in this case is captured (or referred to) as a whole from its outside by the speaker. The Japanese sentence of Perfective aspect takes the ending form of *-ta*. On the other hand, Imperfective aspect is used to express that something is still of the speaker’s present (or future) time with his involvement in it. Accordingly the “something” in this case is not completed and captured from its within by the speaker. The Japanese sentence of Imperfective aspect takes the ending form of *-(r)u*. English PT is handled with Japanese Perfective aspect because what happened in past time is captured as a whole from its outside (from his speech time) by the speaker and therefore the Japanese translations of English PT sentences usually have this

ending form of *-ta*, though this is not always the case when they are in subordinate clauses as follows.

- (15) a. *Mary studied before she played tennis yesterday.*
 b. *Mary-wa kinou tenisu-o suru maeni benkyoushita.*
 Mary yesterday tennis play before studied

(Mary studied before she played tennis yesterday.)

In Japanese what happens before the action or state represented by the main verb is regarded as imperfective and its verb form *-(r)u* is used. This linguistic phenomenon is considered to be partly the reason for the view that Japanese is a language of aspects rather than tense.

As we have examined, Japanese Perfective (*kanryou*) aspect corresponds to English PT but never to EPP and this *Kanryou* aspect of Japanese type called *Perfective* to be distinguished from English *Perfect* does not have any function of English Perfect that connects past time and present time with the speaker's perfect present perspective (Kunihiro 1980).

6. INHERENT PROBLEMS ABOUT THE STPS

I will discuss some problematic aspects concerning the STPs. The STPs are sometimes helpful to interpret EPP sentences, but on the other hand, there are many cases where they cannot be applied or they are useless, and besides they sometimes turn out to be a cause of misinterpretation without real understanding of the fundamental nature of EPP.

Though the senses of EPP and their STPs are focused in English classes so much, ordinary native speakers are not aware of these senses when speaking, and they do not even know there are different senses in EPP. The reason native speakers use it is only because their attention is directed to their present time and they want to talk about past events from their present perspective. This fundamental nature (the essence) should be more emphasized in teaching EPP.

The first case is an example that shows the limitation of the STPs. This shows that the STPs cannot be always applicable.

(16) a. *Someone has broken her doll.*

(Her doll is *now* broken.)

b. *Dareka-ga kanojo-no ningyoo-o kowashita. Soshite*
 someone her doll broke and
sore-wa ima-mo kowareteiru.
 it now-still is broken

(Someone broke her doll. And it is still broken now.)

Sentence (16a) is of B-type, therefore when you want to communicate that her doll is still broken now, you have to add *Soshite sore-wa ima-mo kowareteiru* to explain the present condition of her doll as in (16b).

If the STP is applied, it should appear as the following:

(17) *Dareka-ga kanojo-no ningoo-o kowashi-teshimat-ta.*

Japanese phrase, *-teshimat-ta* is used as the STP to translate an

Sentence (18b) sounds strange or unnatural since *kaifukushi-teshimat-ta* shows that the speaker feels regretful for Mary's recovery and therefore in a normal situation, you cannot use this STP. So if you delete this nuance from (18b), you only get the Perfective sentence, (18c), which is also the translation for English PT sentence, 'Mary regained her health'. This means that translations of this kind cannot make clear the difference between EPP and PT in English. If you want to communicate exactly what (18a) means without fail in Japanese, (18d) should be selected or (18e) in this case. The problem here is that unless you know what EPP is (its essence and its function) you cannot decode from (18a) its implication as its main theme, about Mary's present condition, and add *ima-wa genkida* (she is well now.) or make (18e) in Japanese. It goes without saying that in productive works such as speaking and writing, this fundamental knowledge about EPP will be of crucial importance for successful communication.

The STPs for B-type sentences cannot always be operative as the above case shows and the difficulty to distinguish between EPP and PT of English only by using Japanese translations tends to be the case unlike the STPs for A-type sentences, which can be helpful with little problem as discussed in the first part of this paper.

The next is a problem about the case of misinterpretation caused by relying too much on these translation patterns.

- (19) a. *His sister has studied English.*
 b. *His sister studied English.* (emphasis added)
 (Petersen 1988)

who *benkyooshi-ta* (studied) sounds better at English than that of (20a) who *benkyooshi-takotogaaru* (has studied). The result is completely opposite to what the English pair of sentences means. In this case, the STP, *-takotogaaru* is misleading and not proper. This Japanese phrase can not give the impression that the result of a past event is still influential at the speaker's present time as EPP does. On the contrary, it is rather very likely to give an opposite impression that nothing influential is left now except for the fact of a past event. This STP cannot express exactly what EPP sentences of 'keiken' (experience) tries to communicate, and that is the reason such an opposite result is produced.

Before we make use of the STPs, we need to understand well what EPP is, otherwise this kind of misinterpretation can be very possible.

The next case is the one where the STP is not effective at all but a more appropriate expression can replace it.

(21) A: *Has Peter come to the office?*

B: *Yes, he is now meeting his guest.*

From the context of this conversation, The EPP (has come) of A's utterance can be interpreted to be of the sense of 'kekka' (result) because A is actually asking if Peter is now at the office after the result of his having come. And the speaker A does not feel regretful for Peter's coming, but rather expects his having come, therefore the STP is not applicable to this case. And the translation without this nuance of regretfulness as the following (26) is usually used.

- (22) *Peter-san-wa kaisha-ni kimashi-ta-ka.*
 Peter office-to came-interrogative

(Did Peter come to the office?)

Sentence (22) may not have any problems in this case though it is also a translation of English PT sentence as seen before. But in this context, the following (23) can replace (22) and it sounds more suitable than (22).

- (23) *Peter-san-wa kaisha-ni ki-teimasu-ka.*
 has come-interrogative

(Is Peter at the office now after he came to the office?)

Ki-teiru, which is the informal style of *ki-teimasu* in (23) above, is composed of *kuru* (come) and a Japanese aspect, *-teiru*⁴. It means ‘*kita* (came) and be there now as a result’, and this type of translation adding *-teiru* to a verb can be used for some EPP sentences of ‘*kekka*’ (result) though it is not always the case as (24) shows depending on the types of verbs.

- (24) a. *He has written a letter.*
 b. *Kare-wa tegami-o kai-teiru.*
 a letter is writing

(He is writing a letter.)

I have discussed some problematic cases regarding the STPs of Japanese. Among EPP sentences of B-type, there are many cases

where these patterns cannot work well or cannot work at all. But once we know what EPP is, its essence and its function, we do not need to rely too much on these patterns. I propose that these intrinsic and fundamental nature of EPP be emphasized more in teaching so that students can cope with EPP well using their knowledge about its senses and their STPs effectively and properly.

9. CONCLUSION

EPP works to connect a past occurrence with the present time in one sentence with the speaker's present perspective and it is a category where Japanese does not have a corresponding grammatical form. How then Japanese can deal with this category, how it is being taught at school, and how well students understand it, are the focuses of my investigation.

In English classes at school, teaching and learning those STPs form a main and important part in coping with EPP. They try to differentiate between EPP and TP by using the STPs. But as I have discussed, EPP of B-type is very often difficult to be dealt with only by making use of these patterns and there are some cases where they do not work at all. Here I shall propose that more attention be paid to the more basic matter, the essence (the speaker's '*perfect present*' perspective to a past event) based on the function, rather than devised wordings such as the STPs. Students otherwise will not be able to understand the significance or the role of EPP. Instead of trying to have students get used to using these patterns, the teacher should explain the essence of EPP to students in a more explicit manner, for instance, such as contrasting EPP sentences with the ones of English

PT. I claim that this approach can help students understand what EPP is, its significance, and the role it plays.

Teachers should take into account the difference between English and Japanese in relation to the perfect aspect, and use this kind of contrastive analysis between them for effective and efficient teaching in English classes at school.

Notes

1. There are some views about the senses (or meanings) of EPP such as the one held by traditional grammarians, which approves of two senses Jespersen (1931) calls the inclusive present and the retrospective present, and the one which approves of only one sense, the existential sense as a basic one, suggested by Inoue (1987). Among these I took up the one proposed by McCawley (1971) and shared by Comrie (1976), since this view is widely adopted in Japanese school teaching.
2. This is a very controversial matter. Some linguists admit that Japanese has its tense, but Sadao Ando and some other Japanese linguists argue that the contrast between *-ta* and *-(r)u* is the one between 'kanryou' (completion) and 'hi-kanryou' (non-completion) and that there is no tense in Japanese. But apart from this, Japanese translations end in *-ta* for English sentences of the past tense as far as they are in main clauses, though this is not always the case when they are in subordinate clauses.
3. "...'state' use [the universal sense] of the Present Perfect is generally accompanied by an adverbial of duration: the absence of an adverbial (e.g. We have live in London) usually indicates not a state at all, but an event in the indefinite past [the existential sense]." (G.N.Leech, 1971)
4. There are a group of verbs called 'kekka doushi' (resultative verb) in Japanese. The 'kekka doushi', by adding the aspect, *-teiru*, refers to the condition (state) after the action the verb represents happens. See the following pair of sentences:

- a. *Mado-ga aku.* (The window opens.)
window open

- b. *Mado-ga ai-teiru.* (The window is open.—The window opened, and it is open now as a result.)

The 'kekka doushi' (a resultative verb) with *-teiru* functions as a stative verb phrase, and it places emphasis on the condition after the action the verb represents, and not on the action itself. There are surely some cases of EPP sentences where this resultative condition is put into focus depending on situations or contexts, but in many cases, the actions are also given as much weight as the conditions resulting from them in EPP.

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