การวิเคราะห์เชิงเปรียบเทียบฐานข้อมูลภาษา
ในด้านการใช้ Present Perfect ของผู้เรียนชาวไทย
ที่เรียนภาษาอังกฤษเป็นภาษาต่างชาติกับเจ้าของภาษา

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บทคัดย่อ

ปัจจุบันกาลสมบูรณ์ (present perfect) ในภาษาอังกฤษได้รับความสนใจจากนักวิจัยมาอย่างยาวนาน แต่การใช้กาล (tense) ดังกล่าวยังไม่มีความชัดเจนมากนักโดยเฉพาะอย่างยิ่งในประเทศไทย ซึ่งการสอนภาษาอังกฤษในประเทศไทยจะสอนเป็นภาษาต่างชาติ (EFL) งานวิจัยนี้มีจุดประสงค์ที่จะศึกษารูปแบบการใช้ประโยคปัจจุบันกาลสมบูรณ์ในกลุ่มผู้เรียนไทยที่เรียนภาษาอังกฤษเป็นภาษาต่างชาติ (Thai EFL learner) โดยงานวิจัยเชิงฐานข้อมูล (corpus-based study) เปรียบเทียบความเหมือนและความต่างในเรื่องการใช้ประโยคปัจจุบันกาลสมบูรณ์ในภาษาอังกฤษ ระหว่างผู้เรียนไทยที่เรียนภาษาอังกฤษเป็นภาษาต่างชาติและเจ้าของภาษา ซึ่งงานวิจัยได้ศึกษาเปรียบเทียบรูปแบบของคำกริยาวิเศษณ์ (adverb) ที่เกิดคู่กับประโยคโดยศึกษาคำในภาษาอังกฤษสี่คำ ได้แก่ *just, already, never* และ *ever* ข้อมูลที่ใช้ในการศึกษาได้รวบรวมจากคลังข้อมูลภาษาของผู้เรียนไทย (Thai Learner English Corpus) และฐานข้อมูล British National Corpus (BNC) ซึ่งทำหน้าที่เป็นคลังข้อมูลภาษาของเจ้าของภาษา โดยมีโปรแกรม Antconc เวอร์ชั่น 3.4.3 ประมวลข้อมูล ผลการศึกษาที่ได้บ่งชี้ว่าการใช้คำ *just, already, never* และ *ever* ในประโยคแสดงให้เห็นถึงรูปแบบการใช้คำดังกล่าวในประโยคปัจจุบันกาลสมบูรณ์ ในหมู่ผู้เรียนไทยค่อนข้างจำกัดมากเมื่อ

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เทียบกับผู้เรียนต่างชาติ และการขาดหายไปของบริบทในประโยคทำให้ความเชื่อมโยง
จากอดีตไปสู่ปัจจุบันไม่มีความชัดเจน การศึกษายังพบว่า เจ้าของภาษาใช้รูปแบบ
ของประโยคหลากหลายกว่า ซึ่งแสดงให้เห็นถึงความเชื่อมโยงจากอดีตไปสู่อนาคต
อย่างชัดเจน ถ้าบรรทัดฐานเจ้าของภาษายังเป็นสิ่งจำเป็นอยู่ สิ่งที่ค้นพบจากงานวิจัย
นี้สามารถนำไปสู่การพัฒนาสื่อการเรียนการสอนในเรื่องของปัจจุบันกาลสมบูรณ์

คำสำคัญ:　ปัจจุบันกาลสมบูรณ์ในภาษาอังกฤษ; คำกริยาวิเศษณ์บอกเวลา;
　　　　　ผู้เรียนภาษาอังกฤษเป็นภาษาต่างชาติ; งานวิจัยเชิงฐานข้อมูล

A Comparative Corpus Analysis of the Use of
the Present Perfect by Thai EFL Learners
and by Native Speakers

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Abstract

Present Perfect (PP) in English has drawn attention from researchers for decades. The use of the tense remains uncertain especially in a country like Thailand where English is taught as a foreign language. The present study makes an effort to investigate the use of present perfect among Thai EFL learners. This corpus-based study compares and contrasts how Thai EFL learners and native speakers of English construct present perfect in their writings in terms of co-occurrence patterns of indefinite time adverbials ('just,' 'already,' 'never,' and 'ever'). The data were gathered from the Thai Learner English Corpus (TLEC) and the British National Corpus (BNC) representing native speaker variation. Antconc (version 3.4.3) was used to generate and provide the data for this study. The results revealed that the uses of 'just,' 'already,' 'never,' and 'ever' with the present perfect by Thai EFL learners were very limited compared with native speakers' texts and with the absence of context in their production, connection between past and present was rarely realized. On the other hand, native speakers were found to use more diverse

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patterns and the data showed the sense of strong connections between past and present. As far as the native-speaker norms are concerned, the findings of this study can lead to development materials for teaching the present perfect.

Keywords: English present perfect; time adverbials; EFL learners; learner corpus

1. Introduction

If EFL learners do not understand the concepts of tense and aspect, they will not be able to reach high level (Halliday, 1994). Grammatical aspects of English have been receiving attention from both classroom teachers and researchers. One of the tense aspects of English that most scholars have given importance to is the English present perfect (Binnick, 1991; Comrie, 1976; Dahl, 1985). Learners of English as a foreign language (EFL) encounter ambiguity in the use of present perfect (PP) when they perform writing tasks, e.g. for past-time reference, there can be two choices for learners: the present perfect (*I have done my homework*) and simple past test (*I did my homework*).

In Thailand, English language teaching and learning can be influenced by different varieties of English such as British English (BrE) and American English (AmE). The usages of present perfect taught in Thailand are limited to course books students and teachers consult with and common usages of the tense. One of the ways to find out what Thai learners have missed is to compare and contrast the similarities and the differences with the use of present perfect by native speakers of English through language corpora which allows the researcher to explore the texts that are actually produced by a particular group of people. In this way, the present study tries to shed light on the ambiguity of present perfect prevailing among Thai EFL learners.

This study makes an attempt to investigate the use of present perfect among Thai EFL learners in terms of co-occurrence patterns of time markers *'just,' 'already,' 'never,' and 'ever'* which are the most frequently used adverbs co-occurring with present perfect tense in the Thai Learner English Corpus (TLEC). The data was collected from Thai Learner English Corpus (TLEC)

covering essays written by undergraduate level students in Thailand, and texts from British National Corpus (BNC) were then used to make comparisons.

2. English Present Perfect

There have been so many attempts to explain and define present perfect (PP) in English. It is a complex construction comprising the present-tense auxiliary *have* followed by a past participle (e.g. *the plane has taken off)*. The auxiliary is there as a sentential operator *(have)* which identifies a context-free past situation (Michaelis, 1994). However, the structure of the tense is not what scholars are mainly concerned about. The use of PP has been a subject which has interested researchers with a wide range of theoretical perspectives. Linguists normally accept that it is utilized to link a past to a present situation (Yao & Collins, 2012). According to McCoard (1978) and Binnick (1991), the theories of perfect are categorized into four sections: the indefinite past, the 'extended now', the 'embedded past', and the 'current relevance theories'. The relationship between the past and present falls into 'current relevance' theory, where present perfect is viewed as the continuing relevance of a situation that occurred before the moment of given speech (Comrie, 1976; McCawley, 1971, 1981). Iatridou*,* Anagnostopoulous, and Izvorsky (2003) and Rothstein (2008) indicate that linguists have tried to differentiate the use of present perfect from other forms by characterizing it in terms of its signature temporal range. It underlines a situation extending from an exact time in the past to the moment of speech is produced. One single form of present perfect has several related meanings. McCawley (1971) points out that there are three major meanings distinguished:

(1) (a) We've been sitting in traffic for an hour. (universal/
             continuative)
     (b) We've had this conversation before. (existential/
             experiential)
     (c) The persons responsible have been shot. (resultative)
             (Michaelis, 1994, p. 113)

The continuative perfect (1a) marks a state which obtains throughout the interval from an exact past time to the upper boundary, which is speech time. The experiential perfect (1b) expresses the occurrence of situations within a present inclusive time span. The resultative perfect (1c) concerns the result of a past situation which is obtained in speech time.

According to Rastall (1999, p. 79), the writers of the standard reference grammars have stressed that in English.

(2) (a) the present perfect predominately connotes a present
             state (Quirk, Greenbaum, Leech, & Svartik, 1985, p.
             190);
     (b) it covers past time 'with current relevance' to the moment
             of speech (Quirk et al., 1985, p. 190);
     (c) it is often accompanied by 'indefinite time adverbs'
             (Swan, 1980, pp. 494-495), e.g. *recently, often, just,
             already.*
     (d) and it is believed not to be matched with 'adverb of
             finished time', e.g. *last week, yesterday, in 1960* (Swan,
             1980, p. 495)

The present perfect is always related to the term 'current relevance', (2b). When the moment of producing speech expands to a specific point of time in the past, PP can represent the length of an event.

(3)   I have lived here for 10 years.

(4)   She has been busy since last week.

It can be used to describe ongoing action from the past to present state. As one can see, the present perfect connects and relates the past to the present directly (Quirk et al., 1985). Along with the well known term 'current relevance' in (2b), present perfect in English can be collocated with common 'indefinite adverbials' (e.g. *recently, yet, just, never, ever).* These adverbials seem to be very helpful in EFL materials where other tense aspects are taught, because it allows learners to distinguish between present perfect and past simple which involves 'finished time' adverbials (e.g. *last week, yesterday, five days ago, this morning).*

(5)   I have just paid the bills. (PP)

(6)   I paid the bills yesterday. (PS)

One of the differences is the connection between the past and the present. The speaker of *PP* is expected to share the outcome of the conversation and its consequences (Rastall, 1999, p. 80). At the same time, the use of temporal adverbials *yesterday* from *PS* breaks the present from the past. In other words, the consequence in the present time is not emphasized. According to Quirk et al. (1985) and Swan (1980), the PP sentence that employs temporal adverbials is considered ungrammatical.

(7) *I have paid the bills yesterday.

Nevertheless, the distinction of the two tense aspects is not clear-cut. Lately, no one can deny the fact that the combination between present perfect form and 'finished time' adverbials is acceptable. The evidence from British National Corpus (BNC) reveals that such a combination is actually existent.

(8)   …in October 1987, it has enjoyed a bumper run in 1989. (BNC, ACC 421)

(9)   We've been out in it yesterday. (BNC, KBE 3003)

(10)   ……three people have phone yesterday, we had two phone calls yesterday…… (BNC, KCW 1441)

(11)   Well we've had their director on the phone, phone yesterday and more or less demanded his twenty thousand back (BNC, KB9 3305)

Although the co-occurrence between present perfect structure and 'finished time' adverbials is not found often, it is evident that even native speakers confidently put them together when past simple tense is expected. They seem to be errors to some naked eyes due to the past simple expectation, but they are not. One thing we can see from (11) is that the situation happened in the past, but the nature of current relevance is found there. Looking too closely at the structure of sentence can make it difficult to identify current relevance. Rastall (1999, p. 81) states: 'the focus of communicational attention is on the current relevance of the statement and not on the adverbial'. According to (11), the user did not really focus on the adverbials *yesterday*. The attention was drawn to what will happen and be effective at the moment of producing speech which is *demanded his twenty thousand back*.

As far as regional variation is concerned, the English present perfect can be used and understood differently. One of the classic comparisons is the difference between British English (BrE) and American English (AmE). As mentioned in many studies in linguistics, these two varieties of English have their own unique features. Based on evidence from language corpora, previous studies have shown that the use of present perfect is found more in BrE

compared with AmE. While British people say "*Have you had lunch?*" American people might prefer *"Did you have lunch?"* (Hundt & Smith, 2009). Both sentences have exactly the same meaning and the intentions of both speakers are identical. British speakers are still strongly opposed to the American practice of placing PS in a very recent action (Foster, 1968, p. 10). In a country like Thailand, it is common to witness both styles (AmE and BrE) in speaking and writing.

3. Present Perfect Acquisition of Thai EFL learners

Tawilapakul (2001) points out that a standardized English proficiency of Thai learners does not exist. Although Thai educators have concerned themselves with and pay attention to English language education, the proficiency level of EFL learners is found to be much lower than that of native speakers. There have been many attempts to find out about this linguistic phenomenon. It has been revealed that tense is the most difficult area for Thai students to acquire (Petchtae, 2011). The great difference between Thai and English leads to the difficulty in English tense acquisition. According to Arakkitsakul (2008), the most confusing tense for Thai EFL learners is present perfect. Thai learners simply use present simple and past simple to cover the use of present perfect, because of the lack of this aspect in their mother tongue (L1). What makes present perfect difficult for Thai students to acquire is that time relation is not the only player, the result of action need also be considered (Petchtae, 2011). In Thai, time adverbials are employed to express the shift of time in present and past events. On the contrary, in English, time is expressed by using verb inflections such as *was/were* and *is/am/are* (Rungsriyakul, 1993). Previous studies suggest that Thai learners have a good understanding of the time markers which are commonly used in present perfect

(e.g. *since, for, already, yet, ever*), even though there is no tense marker in Thai. Students can simply memorize those common time adverbs used with present perfect.

However, based on previous studies, the use of present perfect among Thai learners of English is limited to what the text books generally describe. Thai students seem to be very strict with the form rather than the function which is sometimes difficult to notice especially by non-native speakers. The time adverbials that commonly co-occur with the form, *has/have + past participle verb,* make them believe that those adverbs can only be used with present perfect. For instance, a time adverbial such as *already* can be found with more than one tense. The form of a language does not convey the message, but the function does.

4.　Methodology

Data for the present study were collected from the Thai Learner English Corpus (TLEC), which covers texts written by intermediate, advanced, and professional Thai learners of English. Learners at the intermediate level were first year undergraduate students from different faculties. Learners at the advanced level were second year students in the faculty of Arts, Chulalongkorn University, whose major was English. Professional TLEC is writings of Thai journalists in two English newspapers, *The Nation* and *The Bangkok Post*. The present study aimed to investigate the use of present perfect among Thai EFL learners, so the data analyzed were gathered from the corpus of learners of intermediate level, as opposed to the other two whose proficiency levels did not represent the majority of Thai EFL learners. Data from British National Corpus (BNC) were also collected to make a comparison. Since a large number of

concordance lines were detected when searching for particular time markers, only 300 lines were taken for this study.

5. Data Generation Procedure

This study focused on the co-occurrence patterns of indefinite time adverbials: *just, already, never, and ever.* The data collection process involved seeking for the time markers in the learner corpus. Since Thai learners of English do not seem to produce a large number of present perfect tenses in their writing, in order to gather as much data as possible, the maximum output of tokens was considered.

TABLE 1

Frequency of the indefinite time adverbials that co-occurred with present perfect in the TLEC

Indefinite Time Adverbials		Token	Present Perfect	%
1	*just*	81	5	6.17
2	*already*	23	5	21.74
3	*never*	107	15	14.02
4	*ever*	31	15	48.39

Based on the data in Table 1, the target adverbials were not found to be used by Thai students often. Even though the four time markers seem to be quite common with present perfect, they were used in other tense aspects as well.

6. Data Analysis

The present study aims to explore the gap between present perfect constructed by Thai EFL learners and native speakers of English. The analysis was carried out by looking into micro level of the sentences which represent each time adverbial (*just*, *already*, *never*, and *ever*). The concordance lines extracted from TLEC (Thai EFL learners) and BNC (native speakers of English) were used to make comparisons based on the target time adverbials. The head-to-head comparison gave the opportunity to identify distinctive aspects of present perfect produced by both groups. To explain the phenomenon, the analysis was continued with qualitative manner.

6.1 *Just* as a Time Marker

The data indicates that only five tokens of the time markers *just* were found in present perfect structures. This showed that Thai learners used *just* to report an action that had just occurred before the moment of producing speech, but the exact time was not reported.

(12)   I have *just* got back from Hua-Hin with my friends.

(13)   We've *just* talked about meaningful relationships.

In terms of structure, it was noticed that the time marker *just* was located in between auxiliary *have* and part participle. This pattern was quite common when placing time adverbials in present perfect. On the other hand, the data collected from British National Corpus (BNC) confirmed that as a time marker in present perfect, it was only found to be placed in that position. It is worth mentioning this because some adverbs could be in more than one place. However, it was unclear that the present perfect constructed by Thai learners covers past time with 'current relevance' to the moment of producing speech.

The link between past and present was not found there. On the other hand, native speakers provide reader with a strong expression of 'current relevance' in their writings.

> (14)   Is it the same thing as what I have *just* called' the country'? (BNC, FP8 77)
>
> (15)   If, as I understand it from what you have *just* said, you're relying on Jenny. (BNC, KM4 31)
>
> (16)   We have *just* experienced the most amazing value for money holiday available today. (BNC, CAA 98)

The strong sense of 'current relevance' could be easily seen in (14)-(16). The sub-clause of present perfect in (14) and (15) describe the past events which is somehow connected to and affected by the moment of given speech. Such a connection was not found in Thai learners' writings.

6.2   *Already* as a Time marker

With only 23 tokens in total, *already* was not one of the most frequent indefinite time adverbials used among Thai learners of English. Like the time marker *just, already* was used to construct present perfect sentences only five times.

> (17)   From what I *already* have mentioned, sports have many benefits.
>
> (18)   Eighteen years has passed *already*. Many of my best friends did that to me.
>
> (19)   I've *already* found my best friend "Neay".

The learners used *already* differently. The position of the time adverbial could be before the auxiliary *have,* after past participle, and in between auxiliary

and past participle. It is possible that L1 interference plays a vital role even in the use of English time markers. The Thai time marker *láew* 'already' is placed after the verb.

(20) /S + V/ + Time markers *already*

/ *chăn*   *àapnáam* /   *láew*

I   take a shower   already

'I have taken a shower already'

Although native speakers used *already* not only with present perfect but also with other tenses such as present simple and past simple, the only pattern found was   auxiliary *have* + *already* + past participle. When searching for the word *already,* an output of 300 tokens was targeted covering all sections including speaking.

(21)   When you have confirmed your booking and paid your deposit, within 2-3 weeks we will forward a Holiday Details form to you or your travel agent, verifying the confirmed holiday contract you have *already* made with us. (BNC, AMW 282)

(22)   Well, we've *already* had TV exposure and it's created a lot of confidence here. (BNC, CH3 119)

(23)   And Francis has no doubts that the sky is the limit for the Sierra Leone-born kid, who has *already* gained England youth recognition. (BNC, CH7 224)

Beside the pattern, the result informed us that native speakers contribute more contexts in their speech when constructing present perfect sentences. In this way, the 'current relevance' linking past and present can be detected. (22) showed past event *"we've already had TV exposure"* which was related to a present state "*it's created a lot of confidence here.*" in some way.

6.3   *Never* as a Time Marker

As displayed in Table 1, *never* was frequently used by Thai EFL learners. There was no doubt that this time marker could occur with other tenses beside present perfect. No matter where it appears, *never* still keeps its meaning. In present perfect, the use of *never* is slightly different from other uses. The data showed that with *never,* the students seemed to be more selective, as follows:

(24)   Nowadays we are in the university, but I've *never* forgotten my real best friend, Aye.

(25)   She has *never* told me that how good she is.

(26)   She has *never* forgotten my birthday, because she still send me presents every year.

(24) - (26) give readers a clear view of the connection between past and present state. With extra context, it can be assumed that 'current relevance' is there. Such a relation sometimes can only be noticed by adding more contexts to the speech. The way native speakers used never with present perfect structure was similar to other time markers. The focuses were still one prevailing past and present state. Some examples are as follows:

(27)   In each basket we compared like with like -- so there were no cheap and nasty products with brand names you've *never* heard before. (BNC, CH 104)

(28)   I admit that there must be some degree of doubt, because I've never seen this injury anywhere else in isolation. (BNC, CH1 130)

6.4 *Ever* **as a Time marker**

Fifteen tokens of *ever* were detected in the TLEC. In this section, the data could be divided into two groups: affirmative statements and questions. Unlike the other time adverbials discussed earlier in this study, the learners seemed to be confident in making question statements using the time marker *ever*.

a)   Affirmative statements

(29)   This is the hardest thing I have *ever* done.

(30)   It was the best and awesome trip I have *ever* had.

(31)   It was the most fabulous show I have *ever* seen.

(32)   This is the worst attempt to derail a train that I've *ever* seen. (BNC, CH2 99)

(33)   I've only *ever* known one way to play the game, and that is to pass the ball on the floor. (BNC, CH3 112)

(34)   I do think this record is unlike any record that I've *ever* done before. (BNC, C9J 6)

In the affirmative statements, the present perfect tense was used to modify a superlative degree phrase in the main clause of the sentence. *Ever* was used to report a first extreme experience of the writer's. Since no other way of writing has been found, the use of *ever* was limited to only such a pattern. Among the four indefinite time adverbials focused on in this study, *ever* was the only time marker found to be used to construct a question statement. On the contrary, native speakers produce diverse patterns with *ever* with present perfect.

b)   Question statements

(35) Have you *ever* known that when we grow up, we will know and
        feel what love is?

(36) Have you *ever* watched 'Heroes'?

(37) Have you *ever* seen 300 scored in a Test? (BNC, EB3, 492)

(38) I sometimes wonder if I have *ever* suffered so. (BNC, ENU 12)

(39) I don't know if you've *ever* felt that (BNC, CK5 320)

Similarly, a large number instances of *ever* used in present perfect sentences were devoted to emphasizing first extreme experiences with superlative degree. *Ever* can co-occur with *any* to describe and emphasize the first experience.

In question statements, both direct and indirect ways were found. The common pattern *have you ever* was still one of the most frequent question patterns available. Indirect question beginning with *I wonder* and I *don't know* were also seen quite often.

7. Conclusion

The present study has shed light on the difference of co-occurrence patterns of indefinite time adverbials with present perfect tense that are actually produced by Thai EFL learners with intermediate proficiency level and by native speakers. With the data from language corpora, authentic usages were demonstrated. The data from the Thai Learner English Corpus (TLEC) indicated that the uses of *just, already, never*, and *ever* with the present perfect tense were very limited compared with the data gained from the British National Corpus (BNC). Unsurprisingly, native speakers were found to use more diverse patterns. The naturally-occurring linguistic data provide immense

benefits to research where awareness of actual production is concerned. It should be understood that the main focus of this study was to compare the actual use of the learners and native speakers, and this study voices no claims concerning grammatical correctness.

Based on the actual students' production, the results of the present study indicated that present perfect acquisition of Thai EFL learners was still affected immensely by traditional materials focusing on a prescriptive approach. Due to the minimal amount of research supporting corpus-based material used in classroom, this study is not in a position to say that a descriptive approach is better, but if real world use is a concern, there should be a place for corpus materials in the classroom. It is advisable that teachers of English should help students naturalize their English skills by supplying them with supplements comprising corpus-based examples.

8. Limitation and Suggestion

At the time of conducting the research, one of the most reliable learner corpora was the TLEC, which divided learners into three levels (intermediate, advance, and professional). Although the texts were collected from the intermediate section, they may not represent Thai EFL population. The corpus was complied with texts written by students from Chulalongkorn University. In this respect, the data collection was very limited. Thus, it is difficult to claim that the results shown in this study can be generalized to all intermediate level Thai EFL learners. For the future research, one may consider compiling a learner corpus of texts composed by students from different universities. In this way, there will be an opportunity for researchers to explore other varieties of present perfect and other linguistic features.

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