

Simplifying Teaching English Grammar Forms

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Abstract

This article will discuss the simplifying of the teaching grammar forms, presented step by step for Indonesian students who use English as the foreign language. Mastering the forms of English tenses is discussed at the beginning since it will lead to the mastery of other English grammar points. After that, the functions and meanings should also be highlighted since grammar will be useless without its functions and meanings.

Key words:

English tenses, grammar forms, Indonesian students.

1. Introduction

English is considered as the foreign language in Indonesia. It is taught in schools in Indonesia, starting from elementary school to University. One of the English abilities taught is grammar. Grammar itself is defined as "a system that puts words together into meaningful units" (Morenberg, 2002). It means that studying and teaching grammar must be meaningful, it cannot be separated between teaching the grammatical forms and discussing about the grammatical functions which later the meanings can be conveyed. In other words, without teaching its functions and meanings, teaching grammar will be useless (Thornbury, 2000).

While learning those grammar forms, functions, and meanings, the learners may find that learning grammar is too heavy; one of many reasons is due to the fact that there are too many complicated materials which may result in the anxiety in learning grammar (VanPatten & Glass, 1999). Willis (2003) argues that the learners whose mother tongue is not English may find that mastering the English grammar is not only difficult but also time consuming; therefore, the teacher has to generalize the grammar forms, which are also important in

grammar, and pays attention more to the functions and meanings in order that the students can use them in the real use.

This article will discuss the easy ways on how to teach the forms of English grammar forms, presented in easy step by step. First, mastering the English tenses forms by using four steps will be discussed, followed by mastering other grammatical forms based on those English tenses. It is hoped that the by simplifying the teaching of grammar forms, the teacher can save the time for discussing more grammar functions and meanings.

2. Mastering English Tenses Pattern

Hancock (2005) says that English verb forms may cause some problems to the non-native students. This could also happen while teaching the Indonesian students since English is not Indonesian's first language. Moreover, the verb forms are different from English to Indonesian. That is why first of all, it will be discussed the mastery of English tenses. English tenses deal with verbs, meaning that changing of the tenses only change the verbs, the subject and the object of the sentences are not changed. See the examples below:

Table 1. English Tenses Pattern

Subject	Verb	Object	Time markers
Andy	Studies Studied will study is studying has been studying	English	every day yesterday tomorrow now for two hours



Changed, depend on the tenses, indicated by the time markers

Since the only change is the verb only, it is suggested that while teaching the English tenses forms, only the changes of verbs are highlighted. Below are four steps in teaching the twelve English tenses based on the above discussion.

Step 1:

Name the tenses. Make the students understand to read the name of English tenses in table:

Figure 1. Step One and Two

	Simple	Continuous	Perfect	Perfect Continuous
Present				
Past				
Future				

Present simple

Past Perfect

Future Perfect Continuous

Step 2:

Let the students know that all Future Tenses are using "will".

	Simple	Continuous	Perfect	Perfect continuous
Present				
Past				
Future	will	Will	will	will

Step 3:

After using "will" in the Future Tenses, explain that all Future Tenses have the same form as the present tenses. In this step, simplify the forms of the verbs.

Present into V1, past into V2, and past participle into V3.

Figure 2. Step Three

	Simple	Continuous	Perfect	Perfect continuous
Present	V1	Be + Ving	Have + V3	Have been + Ving
Past				
Future	Will + V1	Will + Be + Ving	Will + Have + V3	Will + Have been + Ving

Step 4:

Finally, all Past Tenses are basically just a backshift of present form of the present tenses. See the table below.

Figure 3. Step Four

	Simple	Continuous	Perfect	Perfect continuous
Present	V1	Be + Ving	Have + V3	Have been + Ving
Past	V2	Was /were+ Ving	Had + V3	Had been + Ving
Future	Will + V1	Will + Be + Ving	Will + Have + V3	Will + Have been + Ving

After mastering the forms of the English tenses, the uses of the tenses must also be introduced. The uses can be introduced by using table as can be seen below.

PRESENT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Fact - Habit - Long term - Opinion - Timetable - Non-continuous verbs - Time clauses (future) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - on-going activities - Short term - Describing changes - Fixed plan (future) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Experiences - Result - Checking 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Recent activities - Duration
PAST	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Completed action in the past - Duration in the past - Habit in the past Focus: Time in the past 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Event in the recent past - Event at a specific time in the past - Description of the scene - Interrupted action in the past 		
FUTURE	WILL: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Sudden decision - Prediction with no evidence - Intentions - Offer 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Exact time in the future 		

- Promises			
- Threat			
- Voluntary action			
- Request			
BE GOING TO			
- Decided Plan			
- Prediction with evidence			

Table 2 The Functions of English Tenses.

(Source: Murphy, 2012 & Werner & Spaventa, 2007)

Practicing and explaining the forms and functions of all of those tenses surely needs contexts, so that the meanings can also be clear. As a result, more practices of the uses are highly recommended. The mastery of the forms, functions, and meanings of English tenses will lead to the mastery of other grammatical points.

3. Mastering Other English Grammatical Points Based on Tenses.

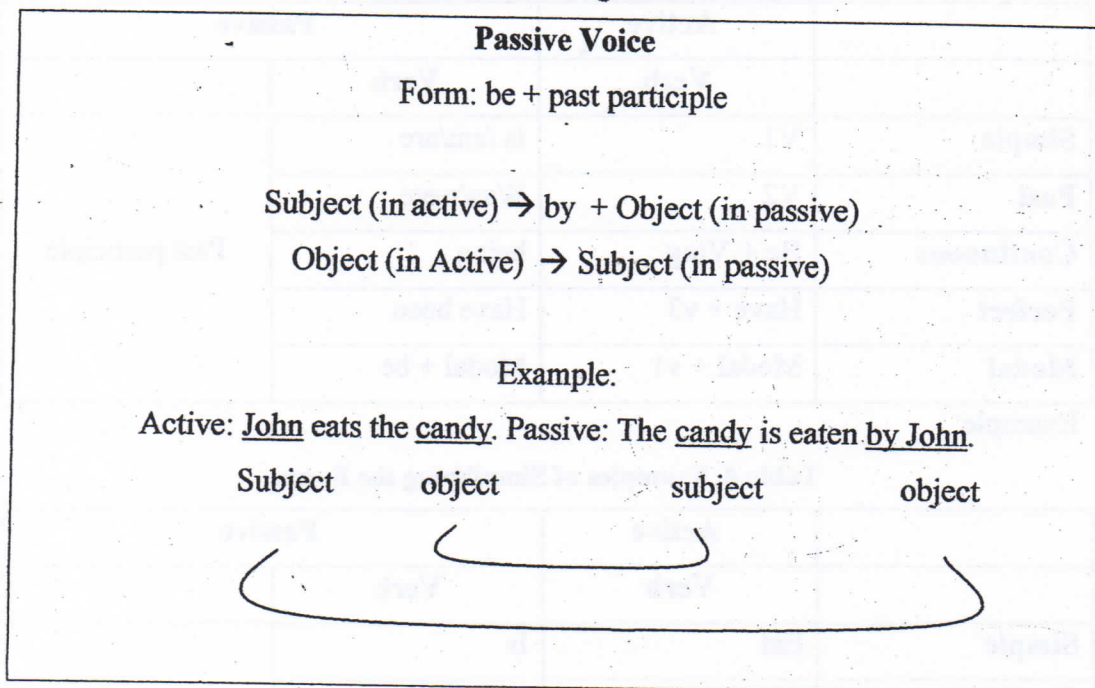
It is expected that the mastery of the forms of English tenses will lead to the easy mastery of other grammatical forms, such as converting from active into passive voice, converting from direct into indirect speech, and both active and passive causative verbs. Below is an example of mastery of converting active sentence into passive voice presented step by step.

Step 1:

Highlight that the verbs in all passive voice are always “be + past participle” (Wardhaugh, 2003). After that, explain that the subject is converted into the object in the passive voice, as the object now becomes the doer which position is at the

beginning of the sentence. The following whiteboard consolidation or slide presentation can be applied in explain this step.

Figure 5. Introducing Passive Voice

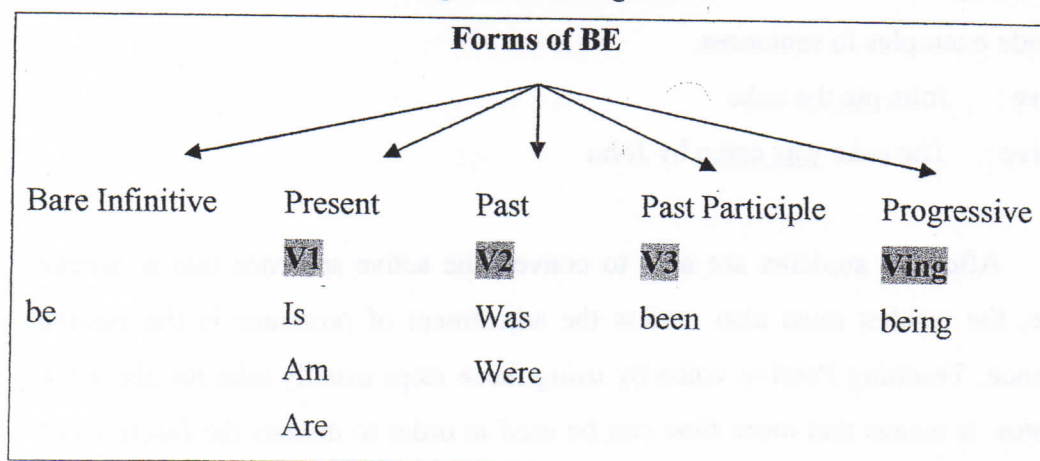


Step 2:

Make code in order to simplify the next step. Present is verb 1 (V1), Past is Verb 2 (V2), Past participle is Verb 3 (V3), and progressive is Verb-ing (V-ing).

Step 3:

Figure 6. Making Codes



Step 4:

Simplify the forms into five as follows. Refer to step 3 above.

Table 3. Simplifying the Forms

	Active	Passive	
	Verb	Verb	
Simple	V1	Is /am/are	Past participle
Past	V2	Was/were	
Continuous	Be + Ving	being	
Perfect	Have + v3	Have been	
Modal	Modal + v1	Modal + be	

Example:

Table 4. Examples of Simplifying the Forms

	Active	Passive	
	Verb	Verb	
Simple	Eat	Is	Eaten
Continuous	Ate	Was	
Perfect	Is eating	Is being	
Perfect	Have eaten	Have been eaten	
Continuous			
Modal	Will eat	Will be	

Step 5:

Provide examples in sentences.

Active : John ate the cake

Passive : The cake was eaten by John

After the students are able to convert the active sentence into a passive voice, the teacher must also review the adjustment of pronouns in the passive sentence. Teaching Passive voice by using those steps usually take for about ten minutes. It means that more time can be used in order to discuss the functions of passive voice itself, together with the practice.

There are some other forms of grammatical points which the mastery will be easier if the students have already mastered the English tenses forms. The other example is about converting direct into indirect speech, which is related to the English Tenses. The indirect speech has different form from the direct speech. The indirect speech is usually introduced by the person who says something, the verb, and the conjunction. (Yule, 1998) The verb itself is backshift, as can be seen in the four steps below.

Step 1:

Table 5. Direct and Indirect Forms of Present, Past, Past Perfect

Direct → Indirect		
Present	→	Past
Past	→	Past Perfect
Past Perfect	→	Past Perfect

Step 2:

Provide more specific forms based on the above table. First if the Present tense, after that the past tenses.

Table 6. Direct and Indirect Form of Present, Present Continuous, Present Perfect, Present Perfect Continuous

Direct → Indirect		
Present Simple	→	Past Simple
Present Continuous	→	Past Continuous
Present Perfect	→	Past Perfect
Present Perfect Continuous	→	Past Perfect Continuous

Table 7. Direct and Indirect Form of Past, Past Continuous, Past Perfect, Past Perfect Continuous

Direct → Indirect		
Past Simple	→	Past Perfect
Past Continuous	→	Past Perfect Continuous
Past Perfect	→	Past Perfect

Past Perfect Continuous	→	Past Perfect Continuous
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Note that all future tenses which use “will” is easier to be converted. “will” is converted into “would” in indirect speech.

Step 3:

Provide examples in tables.

Table 8. Examples One

Direct → Indirect		
eat	→	ate
Is eating	→	Was eating
Has /have eaten	→	had eaten
Has / have eaten	→	Has / have been eaten

Table 9. Examples Two

Direct → Indirect		
ate	→	Had eaten
Was eating	→	Had been eating
Had eaten	→	Had eaten
Had been eating	→	Had been eating

Step 4:

After the adjustments of verbs are presented in tables, provide examples of converting the direct into indirect speech in context in sentences.

Direct : John ate the cake.

Indirect : She said that John had eaten the cake.

Similar to teaching the Passive Voice, the introduction the changes of verbs in direct and indirect speech usually takes less than ten minutes. In a base of one hundred minute meeting, the rest ninety minutes should be used to explain why and when should people use indirect speech as well as the practice of converting direct speech into indirect speech in context. It must be noted that teaching direct and indirect speech must be preceded by teaching noun clause, with the intention that the students know how to change the form of questions in

the direct speech into a noun clause which is always in form of subject and verb in the indirect speech. It is also important, after the students know well how to convert the tense in indirect speech, the change of personal pronouns, demonstratives, place and time adverbials, as well as the word order are also highlighted.

There are many other grammatical points which can be taught by using the English tenses forms as the base, besides converting the active sentences into passive voice and direct into indirect speech, such as teaching the causative verbs and conditional if.

4. Conclusion

The way the teacher delivers the lesson will determine how successful a lesson is. The more effective the teacher delivers it, the more successful the lesson is. Since there are a lot of grammar forms which are based on English tenses, teaching English grammar effectively should be started by introducing the forms of the tenses. The introduction itself should be simplified by using points by points as discussed earlier. Since many grammar forms deal with verbs, it is suggested that the subject and object(s) of the tenses should not be presented in the form of the tenses. The purpose of simplifying those patterns is that the students spend more time in practicing the functions and meanings of those particular grammar forms, not in the forms themselves.

A grammar textbook should ideally also focus on the uses of each grammatical points presented, especially in the practices available in the textbooks. If possible, the grammar textbooks also provide some discussion or role plays about the uses of the grammatical points in the real use. It can be provided after the presentation and the practices.

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