

Lecture 8: Time Present and Past

An essential function of language is sequencing events – organising data chronologically. This often poses a problem for learners because "**time**" can be expressed in different ways in different languages. For instance, the English expression "**She has been working**" may not correspond to any literal, word-for-word translation in another language.

The tenses are often accompanied by characteristic **time markers** – that is to say, adverbs and other expressions which give supplementary information confirming the choice of tense.

KEY POINTS – ORGANISING TIME: THE PRESENT & THE PAST

→ There are four present tenses and four past tenses.

PRESENT TIME

1. Present simple

Example

The newspaper **says** ...
He likes Ann. She **drinks** coffee.
She **lives** in Turin.
He **leaves** for work at 7 o'clock.
Water **freezes** at 0°C.

Meaning

The "general" present.
Opinions and habits.
The "status quo".
Habitual actions.
Scientific facts.

TYPICAL TIME MARKERS

(N.B. – Time markers may be implicit)

every day • usually • often • sometimes

2. Present continuous

Example

Look! It **is raining**.
Mary **is trying** to finish her work.
At the moment, he **is working**
in London.

Meaning

On-going present time.
Actions happening now.
Temporary actions in the present.

TIME MARKERS

now • at the moment • currently • at present • temporarily

3. Present perfect simple

Example

*She **has already finished** her work.
He **has broken** his leg.*

Meaning

It is important **now** / a surprise.
The **result** is important – he can't walk **now**.

Example

*I **have just** finished.
I **have never been** to Miami.
He **has worked** in Madrid **since** 1999.
I **have seen** him twice **this week**.*

Meaning

The finishing is part of the **present**.
In my life – **up to now**.
From then **till now** – it is not history.
The time span is the present – **this** week – not **last** week.

TIME MARKERS

- just ^{G. Notes 13} • recently • already • not yet
- ever • never ^{G. Notes 14} • so far • up to now
- since 1999 • for 3 years
- this week • this month

4. Present perfect continuous

Example

*He **has been living** in Paris for several months.
They **have been studying** the question **for years**.
She **has been working** in Bordeaux.*

Meaning

An **on-going** situation – not yet completed.
Non-stop – up to the present.
Temporary present – up to now.

TIME MARKERS

for 10 years • for a long time • since 1999

PAST TIME

1. Past simple

Example

*I **went** to the cinema last week.
In 1865, Pasteur **discovered** the theory of microbes.
I **saw** her briefly a couple of hours ago.
When I **was** a child ...*

Meaning

Past, **finished** actions.
Dates – "**History**".
Past action considered as **no longer important**.
Memories.

TIME MARKERS

yesterday • two days ago • last week •
in 1970 • in the 18th century • during the war

2. Past continuous

Example

She **was trying** to finish a letter.
While he **was eating** the meal,
the TV imploded.
At the time, he **was living** in
London.

Meaning

Past **duration**.
Two past actions – one **interrupted** by
another.
Temporary past.

TIME MARKERS

while • when

3. Past perfect simple

Example

As soon as he **had finished** his
meal, he went out.

Meaning

The **first** of two past events.

TIME MARKERS

after • as soon as • when

4. Past perfect continuous

Example

They **had been living** in Cairo for about
ten years when the war broke out.
He **had been working** on the
problem for years.

Meaning

The first of two actions – past action
with duration.
Stress on the **action**.

TIME MARKERS

when • after • for a long time • during this period