

A Case Study on the Acquisition of the Present Perfect: Interlanguage of an Adult ESL Learner

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This paper examines the acquisition process of the present perfect by an adult ESL learner. The participant is a Chadian ESL learner whose native tongues are Ngambay and French. He was enrolled in a language training program at a Midwestern university at the time of data collection. The researcher collected data from the participant's essays and tests. The results of the study demonstrate that: (1) there is a dramatic increase in the frequency of the present perfect and the percentage of its appropriate uses during and after the period of instruction, (2) the present perfect emerges after the stable use of the present and past tenses, (3) overgeneralization and undergeneralization of the present perfect are caused by misconception of the present perfect as a mixture of the past and the present, and (4) there is a developmental sequence in the acquisition of the present perfect: the feature of *experience* is acquired more easily and faster than other features of the present perfect.

Keywords: [second language acquisition/present perfect/interlanguage/제 2언어 습득/현재완료/중간언어]

1. Introduction

From his experiences as an ESL/EFL teacher, the researcher

realized that a number of ESL/EFL learners have difficulties understanding the present perfect. Korean EFL students, for instance, are taught the present perfect in their second year in middle school, before which they learn the present tense, present progressive, and past tense. They understand and use these tenses with ease when they speak English, but they hardly use the present perfect. In another case, Tamada (1997) states that the present perfect seems to "the most difficult grammar" for Japanese students, which is "one of the main reasons" that they do "not like English grammar" (p. 2).

According to Moy (1982), ESL learners make three major mistakes with the present perfect: (1) forming it improperly, (2) using it with the improper adverbials, and (3) avoiding it. He claims that the avoidance of the use of the present perfect, among the three mistakes, is the most difficult problem to solve. From the analysis of a random sample of 100 compositions for UCLA ESL Placement Exam, he found that only 28 out of 100 examinees used the present perfect, and only 22 out of those 28 used it appropriately. He further argues that present perfect usage is closely related to higher proficiency of English.

If so, what is the best way for ESL/EFL learners to study the present perfect? What are the barriers in its acquisition? How does their native tongue influence its acquisition? Many researchers in applied linguistics have made efforts to answer these questions for several decades. For example, Bardovi-Harlig (1997) found the sequence for the acquisition of the present perfect by examining of her participants' linguistic contexts. She collected a total of 1751 texts from the participants' journal entries, compositions, placement exams, and interviews, 90% of which were written texts and only 10% of which were oral texts. In her study, all uses of and attempts at present perfect and non-uses of the present perfect were analyzed into appropriate uses, overgeneralizations, and undergeneralizations. The findings

of her study demonstrate that: (1) learners acquire the present and past tense before they acquire the present perfect, and (2) the appropriate uses of the present perfect depend on the learners' understanding of form and of the meaning association of the present perfect.

This paper investigates the acquisition process of the present perfect by an adult ESL learner who enrolled in a language training course at a Midwestern university during the time of data collection. The findings of this study are expected to answer the questions as follows: (1) in what contexts, does the participant use the present perfect? (2) Is there a developmental sequence in terms of the features of the present perfect? (3) What barriers does he have in the acquisition of the present perfect? And (4) how can the present perfect be taught effectively?

2. Literature Review

2.1 Description of the Present Perfect

"When we talk about a period of time that continues from the past until now we use the present perfect", says Murphy (2004, p. 16). He also states, "When we use the present perfect, there is a connection with now" (p. 14). Rastall (1999) argues that "the writers of the standard reference grammars" have emphasized that the present perfect "refers to past time with current relevance" (p. 79). Dowty (1979) explains that "the *present* [italics added] perfect serves to locate an event within a period of time that began in the past and extends up to the present moment" (p. 341). From the above general definitions, Bardovi-Harlig (1997) derives the first characteristic of the present perfect: "the meaning of the present perfect (and current relevance) is composed of its

past and present components" (p. 379).

Another characteristic of the present perfect is that it indicates actions which took place at indefinite moments in the past while the past tense is used for actions happened at definite past times (Davis, 1977; Moy, 1982). Even though the present perfect in this case does not seem to extend its meaning into the present, it is assumed that the speaker has a feeling of a past-to-present time period (Moy, 1982). The present perfect for actions at indefinite times is often accompanied by indefinite adverbial expressions such as *so far*, *up to now*, *lately*, *recently*, *already*, and *yet* (Moy, 1982; Rastall, 1999; Swan, 1980), which are considered as indicators of the present, or current relevance for the actions (Bardovi-Harlig, 1994, 1997; DeCarrico, 1986; Sheen, 1984).

One reason that ESL/EFL learners avoid the present perfect is that it relates past-time to the present in some cases, and it indicates indefinite past times in other cases. Another reason for this avoidance is that the learners do not fully understand that the present perfect for the indefinite past has a connection with the present and allows "the current relevance interpretation of past actions" (Moy, 1982, p. 5). Moy (1977) argues that native speakers use the present perfect without indefinite adverbial expressions when a given discourse context is related to the present tense. Therefore, for ESL/EFL learners to use the present perfect with precision, an understanding of a discourse context is a prerequisite.

2.2. Four Hypotheses for the Study

This research has been conducted on the basis of four hypotheses. The first one is that instruction affects the learners' acquisition of the present perfect. It is assumed that not only the frequency of the present perfect but also the percentage of the appropriate uses will increase during and after the period of

instruction. Bardovi-Harlig (1997) states that instruction "increases the participants' production of the present perfect" (p. 391). Some participants in her study showed a dramatic increase in the frequency of the present perfect after instruction. They also showed an increase in the number of appropriate uses of the present perfect.

The second hypothesis derives from Pienemann (1989). He claims that the acquisition of the specific feature of a target language such as the present perfect occurs only when the learner is ready to acquire. He also explains that the structure acquired at each stage is a prerequisite for moving on to a next stage. Bardovi-Harlig (1997), in her discussion of the timing of the emergence of the present perfect, reports that "productive use of the present perfect" emerge after "a stable rate of appropriate use" of the simple past (p. 411). On the basis of the results of the two studies, the researcher believes that the acquisition of the simple past will be a prerequisite for the acquisition of the present perfect.

The third hypothesis is based on Bardovi-Harlig (1997). According to her, most overgeneralizations of the present perfect occur in the environment of the simple past. It is because ESL/EFL learners do not understand that the present perfect is associated with present time. In the case of undergeneralizations, on the other hand, the present tense was mostly used in the present perfect environments. She reports that the past tense and the pluperfect are also used at 20% for each in the present perfect environments. She further argues that "both overgeneralizations and undergeneralizations result from an imperfect form-meaning association vis-a-vis the target association" (p. 409). In this study, the researcher investigates the relationship between the present perfect and other tenses through an analysis of overgeneralization and undergeneralization.

The fourth hypothesis for the present study comes from Tamada

(1997)'s research. He found that Japanese EFL teachers tended to teach that there are four types of feature in the present perfect such as *perfect*, *experience*, *unfinished past*, and *the result*. This way of teaching brings some advantages: (1) it helps learners memorize the rule with ease, and (2) it helps teachers instruct learners by simplifying the rule of the present perfect: they "explain learners that the meaning of the present perfect is decided by the adverb such as *just*, *already*, *yet*, *never*, *ever*, *since*, and *for*" (p. 5). However, simultaneously it is a barrier to a complete understanding of the present perfect because students only memorize the form and four types of feature with some past-to-present adverbials without focusing on context. The researcher assumes that the acquisition of *experience* will precede that of other features of the present perfect, because it is the closest concept to the simple past.

To sum up, the four hypotheses which guide this research are as follows:

- (1) Instruction will affect learners' acquisition of the present perfect.
- (2) The acquisition of the simple past will be a prerequisite for the acquisition of the present perfect.
- (3) An imperfect understanding of association of the present perfect with the past and the present will lead to overgeneralizations and undergeneralizations.
- (4) The feature of *experience* will be easily acquired compared with other features of the present perfect.

3. Methodology

3.1 The Participant

Lawadji's¹⁾ participation in this study was voluntary. The researcher visited several IEP (Intensive English Program) classes to recruit volunteers for this study in January, 2002, and he was the only student to contact the researcher. Lawadji was 27 years old at the time of data collection. He was born and raised in Chad, one of the former French colonies located in Central Africa. His native tongue is Ngambay used in the southwest of Chad and also spoken in Cameroon and Nigeria. The total speaker population of Ngambay reaches 750,000 or more. He said that he could speak French as fluently as Ngambay because he was taught in French from elementary school to university.²⁾ Since Chad was one of the former French colonies, French is one of its two official languages. Another official language is Arabic: about half of Chadians are Muslim. Lawadji can communicate with speakers of Arabic, but he cannot read or write the language. He mentioned that he spoke the Chadian variety of Arabic, not standard Arabic.

Lawadji received his bachelor's degree in computer science from the University of N'Djamena which is the only university in Chad. After graduation, he worked for French Speaking Countries University Agency (FSCUA) for eight months. Then, he was selected as a Fulbright fellowship student and started his academic life at a Midwestern university. He was the only Chadian student at the university.

Lawadji started to learn English when he entered secondary school in 1986. For his seven years of secondary school, he was mainly taught grammar, vocabulary, and reading comprehension. He usually had three to four classes of English per week for the seven years. Speaking and listening to English were marginalized at school. Lawadji learned English at the American Culture Center in his college days. He used to watch a movie and talk about it with other students and an American instructor at the Center

1) The name of the participant is a pseudonym.

2) He considered French to be his native tongue. He has used more French than Ngambay since elementary school.

every week. He listened to BBC Radio and Voice of America for one hour everyday to improve his listening ability. In addition, he read Newsweek for one and a half hours everyday to enhance his reading skills and build up his vocabulary. He had a number of opportunities to talk with native speakers of English at his work place. To sum up, Lawadji has continued to study English for about ten years more than his formal English education of seven years.

On January 4, 2002, he came to the United States to pursue his master's degree in computer science, but he enrolled himself in the Intensive English Program because of his lack of English proficiency. Just before he came to the United States, he took a paper-based TOEFL test and scored 517. He thought this was not good enough to study in a master's program. On the basis of his placement test results, Lawadji was first assigned in a class of Level Five which is for intermediate to upper intermediate students among a total of seven levels. He scored 207 (paper-based 540) on computer-based TOEFL one month later, and he was at Level Six two months later.

He was preparing the GRE Test by memorizing words and reading novels for his admission to computer science. Lawadji's ultimate goal was to receive a doctoral degree from a US university, and he wanted to start his career in the United States. He used to say that he would go back to his home country because Chad needs intelligence. He was highly motivated to learn English, and his motivation was definitely instrumental in his rapid improvement. Lawadji seemed to make every effort to improve his English. He said that he was glad to have a roommate from Ghana in which English is an official language. He always talked with his roommate in English.

Lawadji was a very active outdoor person as well as being proactive in the classroom. He enjoyed meeting friends outside classroom and talking with them in English. He also read a lot of

novels in English. He usually spent most of his evening reading novels, listening to the radio, and watching television to improve his English.

3.2 Instruments

Data was collected in two ways, a total of eight times, during the spring semester of 2002: (1) written texts: essays and (2) tests: providing-verb-form tests and verb-form-correction tests.

Providing-Verb-Form Test means that the student must change the verb in parenthesis or on the left of the sentence into the appropriate form. For example:

He was ill, so he (lie) in bed all day. (lie → lied)
He (be) ill in bed since last Sunday. (be → has been)
study He _____ English for seven years. (has studied)
finish I _____ it when you come home. (finished)

Verb Correction Test means that the student must find and correct the incorrect verb form in a sentence. For example:

I have finished it yesterday. (have finished → finished)
As soon as they have seen a policeman come, they ran away.
(have seen → saw)

The total number of Providing-Verb-Form Tests is 100 and that of Verb Correction Tests is 50. After taking these two types of tests, Lawadji was asked to write an open topic essay for thirty minutes in front of the researcher. The researcher was strict about the thirty minute time limit. When Lawadji wanted to write an essay at home, he was given one week to do it. The data collecting times and methods are summarized in Table 1:

TABLE 1
Data Collecting Times and Methods

Times	T1 (Jan. 14, 2002)	T2 (Jan. 18, 2002)	T3 (Feb. 15, 2002)	T4 (Mar. 1, 2002)
Data Collecting Methods	Essay writing (30 min.)	Essay writing (30 min.)	Essay writing (30 min.)	Essay writing (30 min.)
	No test	No test	Providing-Verb -Form Test (15Q.)	Providing-Verb -Form Test (25Q.)
			Correction Test (10Q.)	Correction Test (10Q.)
Times	T5 (Mar. 8, 2002)	T6 (Mar.18, 2002)	T7 (Apr. 1, 2002)	T8 (Apr. 15, 2002)
Data Collecting Methods	Essay writing (30 min.)	Essay writing (30 min.)	Essay writing (30 min.)	Essay writing (30 min.)
	Providing-Verb -Form Test (10Q.)	Providing-Verb -Form Test (10Q.)	Providing-Verb -Form Test (20Q.)	Providing-Verb -Form Test (20Q.)
	Correction Test (5Q.)	Correction Test (4Q.)	Correction Test (10Q.)	Correction Test (11Q.)

3.3 Limitation

This research is a case study with one adult ESL learner, and the findings are based on the analysis of the participant's written texts and test results; therefore, the findings might not be applicable in general since they only reflect one individual's acquisition process of the present perfect.

4. Results

4.1 Distribution of Tense and Aspect

The participant did not use any present perfect verb forms in his first essay on January 14 (Table 2). It was in his fifth on March

8 that the number of uses of the present perfect increased unexpectedly (Table 3). In his fifth essay, he used a total of 101 verb forms of which seventeen (17%) were in the present perfect. Further, he used it appropriately five out of the seventeen times (29%). The reason for the rapid increase in his use of the present perfect in his writing was because he had begun learning the present perfect from his IEP teacher. That is, the instruction allowed him to begin using the present perfect more often and with more confidence. The frequency of the present perfect, however, decreased gradually after that time. In the long run, he used only one present perfect sentence in his last essay on April 15 (Table 4). In our last meeting, he said that he had not yet internalized the present perfect because his native tongues do not have the same tense nor use the same aspect as the present perfect in English. Hence, it was stated that his native tongues are a reason for his avoidance of the use of the present perfect.³⁾

TABLE 2
Distribution of Tense and Aspect from First Essay on Jan. 14

	Past	Present	Present Perfect	Pluperfect	Total
Appropriate uses	29 (76%)	15 (71%)	0	0	44 (75%)
Inappropriate uses	9 (24%)	6 (29%)	0	0	15 (25%)
Total	38	21	0	0	59 (100%)

³⁾ As mentioned above, his native tongues are Ngambay and French: Ngambay does not have the present perfect. French has the aspect like the present perfect in English, but it does not always work like English.

TABLE 3
Distribution of Tense and Aspect from Fifth Essay on Mar. 8

	Past	Present	Present Perfect	Pluperfect	Total
Appropriate uses	46 (84%)	18 (78%)	5 (29%)	2 (33%)	71 (70%)
Inappropriate uses	9 (16%)	5 (22%)	12 (71%)	4 (67%)	30 (30%)
Total	55	23	17	6	101(100%)

TABLE 4
Distribution of Tense and Aspect from Last Essay on Apr. 15

	Past	Present	Present Perfect	Pluperfect	Total
Appropriate uses	26 (87%)	13 (87%)	1 (100%)	10 (71%)	50 (83%)
Inappropriate uses	4 (13%)	2 (13%)	0 (0%)	4 (29%)	10 (17%)
Total	30	15	1	14	60 (100%)

Likewise, the results from tests demonstrate the participant's sudden increase in the percentage of his appropriate uses of the present perfect (Table 5, 6, and 7). The tables show that he was not introduced to the concept of the present perfect until March 1. However, one week later, he seemed to understand the present perfect to some degree. Additionally, after that his percentage of appropriate uses of the present perfect increased little by little. In our fifth meeting on March 8, the participant said that he had learned the present perfect the previous day in his IEP class; therefore, it is also seen that instruction has an immediate influence on the frequency of use of the present perfect in general as well as an increase over time of its appropriate use.

One more point that requires further consideration is that the percentage of the appropriate uses of the past and present tense increased in proportion to the increase of the percentage of the appropriate uses of the present perfect. This can be explained by the fact that the exact understanding of both of these two basic

TABLE 5
Distribution of Tense and Aspect from Providing-Verb-Form Tests

Time	T3	T4	T5	T6	T7	T8	Total
Type	(Feb. 15)	(Mar. 1)	(Mar. 8)	(Mar. 18)	(Apr. 1)	(Apr. 15)	
Past	5 (3) 60%	8 (5) 63%	2 (2) 100%	2 (2) 100%	4 (4) 100%	5 (5) 100%	26 (21) 81%
Present Perfect	5 (2) 40%	10 (3) 30%	8 (5) 63%	8 (5) 63%	10 (8) 80%	11 (10) 91%	52 (33) 63%
Present	3 (3) 100%	3 (3) 100%			2 (2) 100%	2 (2) 100%	10 (10) 100%
Perfect Prog.	1 (0) 0%	2 (0) 0%			2 (1) 50%		5 (1) 20%
Pluperfect	1 (0) 0%	2 (0) 0%			2 (1) 50%	2 (1) 50%	7 (2) 29%
Total	15 (8) 53%	25 (11) 44%	10 (7) 70%	10 (7) 70%	20 (16) 80%	20 (18) 90%	100 (67) 67%

Note. numeral = number of tense and aspect
(numeral) = number of appropriate uses of tense and aspect
% = percentage of appropriate uses of tense and aspect

TABLE 6
Distribution of Tense and Aspect from Correction Tests

Time	T3	T4	T5	T6	T7	T8	Total
Type	(Feb. 15)	(Mar. 1)	(Mar. 8)	(Mar. 18)	(Apr. 1)	(Apr. 15)	
Past	2 (1) 50%	3 (2) 67%	2 (2) 100%	2 (2) 100%	2 (2) 100%	2 (2) 100%	13 (11) 85%
Present Perfect	5 (2) 40%	5 (2) 40%	3 (2) 67%	2 (2) 100%	5 (4) 80%	5 (4) 80%	25 (16) 64%
Present	2 (1) 50%	1 (0) 0%			1 (1) 100%	2 (2) 100%	6 (4) 67%
Perfect Prog.						2 (1) 50%	2 (1) 50%
Pluperfect	1 (0) 0%	1 (1) 100%			2 (2) 100%		4 (3) 75%
Total	10 (4) 40%	10 (5) 50%	5 (4) 80%	4 (4) 100%	10 (9) 90%	11 (9) 82%	50 (35) 70%

Note. numeral = number of tense and aspect
(numeral) = number of appropriate uses of tense and aspect
% = percentage of appropriate uses of tense and aspect

TABLE 7
Distribution of Tense and Aspect from All Tests

Time	T3	T4	T5	T6	T7	T8	Total
Type	(Feb. 15)	(Mar. 1)	(Mar. 8)	(Mar. 18)	(Apr. 1)	(Apr. 15)	
Past	7 (4) 57%	11 (7) 64%	4 (4) 100%	4 (4) 100%	6 (6) 100%	7 (7) 100%	39 (32) 82%
Present Perfect	10 (4) 40%	15 (5) 33%	11 (7) 64%	10 (7) 70%	15 (12) 80%	16 (14) 88%	77 (49) 64%
Present	5 (4) 80%	4 (3) 75%			3 (3) 100%	4 (4) 100%	16 (14) 88%
Perfect Prog.	1 (0) 0%	2 (0) 0%			2 (1) 50%	2 (1) 50%	7 (2) 29%
Pluperfect	2 (0) 0%	3 (1) 33%			4 (3) 75%	2 (1) 50%	11 (5) 45%
Total	25 (11) 44%	35 (16) 46%	15 (11) 73%	14 (11) 79%	30 (25) 83%	31 (27) 87%	150(101) 67%

Note. numeral = number of tense and aspect
(numeral) = number of appropriate uses of tense and aspect
% = percentage of appropriate uses of tense and aspect

tenses plays a crucial role in understanding the present perfect. In other words, the acquisition of the past and present tenses is a prerequisite for the understanding of the present perfect.

4.2 Distribution of the Present Perfect in Inappropriate Uses

Overgeneralization is defined as the overuse of the present perfect (Bardovi-Harlig, 1997). That is, it indicates cases of the participant's use of the present perfect in environments not requiring its use. Undergeneralization is the participant's non-use or almost non-use of the present perfect in environments requiring it (Bardovi-Harlig, 1997). The researcher decided to identify overgeneralization and undergeneralization uses only from the participant's written texts, not from Providing-Verb-Form Tests and Verb Correction Tests because he wanted to analyze the natural emergence of the present perfect in the participant's mindset. Tests do not provide a natural situation for the use of the present perfect. It was difficult for the researcher to determine

whether a sentence required the present perfect or not. He regarded sentences which included *have/has* as an auxiliary verb regardless of subject agreement. Also, he considered ill-formed verbs such as *has eat* and *have went* as obligatory cases.

TABLE 8
Distribution of Present Perfect in Inappropriate Uses from Essays

Overgeneralizations			Undergeneralizations		
in the environment of:	N	%	in the environment of:	N	%
Simple Past	12	60	Simple Past	4	100
Pluperfect	5	25	Pluperfect	0	0
Present	1	5	Present	0	0
Ambiguous	2	10			
Total	20	100	Total	4	100

TABLE 9
Examples of Overgeneralizations and Undergeneralizations

Overgeneralization	Undergeneralization
(a) The day before it <u>has rained</u> seriously.	(a) I <u>was</u> totally <u>traumatized</u> for the last of my life since that date.
(b) They raped many women and young girls. Delaou, our neighbor's daughter of 15 <u>has been raped</u> . Some years later, she died of AIDS.	(b) What is different from the language I <u>was using</u> so far?

As you see in Table 8, the three-fifths of overgeneralizations occurred in the environment of the simple past—60%, or 12 out of the 20 overgeneralizations. On the other hand, he showed only 4 undergeneralizations, all of which were expressed as simple past. Bardovi-Harlig (1997) says that learners' overgeneralization and undergeneralization uses of the present perfect reflect that they do not completely connect the present perfect with past and present

time. Therefore, when the participant makes either of these errors, it is believed that the participant probably does not understand that the present perfect refers to past time with current relevance.

4.3 Distribution of Features of the Present Perfect

According to Leech and Svartvik (1994), the present perfect has four features:

- a) past event with results in the present time (Perfect) accompanied by *just*, *already*, and *yet*, e.g. *The bus has just arrived.*
- b) indefinite event(s) in a period leading up to the present time (Experience) accompanied by *ever*, *never*, *before*, *once*, *twice*, and *often*, e.g. *Have you ever been to Canada?*
- c) habit in a period leading up to the present time (Unfinished Past) accompanied by *for*, *since*, and *lately*, e.g. *He has studied at Cornell University since he was eighteen.*
- d) a state leading up to the present time (Result), e.g. *Someone has broken the window.*

The researcher analyzed the participant's test results in accordance with the four features of the present perfect to examine the hypothesis that there is a developmental sequence in the acquisition of the present perfect. Table 10, 11, and 12 indicate that the participant understands *experience* better than the other features of the present perfect. It is because the participant considers the concept of *experience* as a past event in the present time. That is to say, it has the closest feature to the past tense when compared to the others. On the other hand, the most difficult feature to be acquired would be the concept of *perfect* because it refers to a past event with current relevance.

TABLE 10
Distribution of Features of Present Perfect from Providing-Verb-Form Tests

Type	Time (Feb. 15)	T3 (Mar. 1)	T4 (Mar. 8)	T5 (Mar. 18)	T6 (Apr. 1)	T7 (Apr. 15)	T8 (Apr. 15)	Total
Perfect	1 (0) 0%	3 (0) 0%	2 (1) 50%	2 (0) 0%	3 (1) 33%	3 (2) 67%	14 (4) 29%	
Experi- ence	2 (2) 100%	3 (2) 67%	2 (2) 100%	2 (2) 100%	3 (3) 100%	4 (4) 100%	16 (15) 94%	
Unfinished Past	2 (0) 0%	2 (1) 50%	3 (2) 67%	3 (3) 100%	3 (3) 100%	3 (3) 100%	16 (12) 75%	
Result		2 (0) 0%	1 (0) 0%	1 (0) 0%	1 (1) 100%	1 (1) 100%	6 (2) 33%	
Total	5 (2) 40%	10 (3) 30%	8 (5) 63%	8 (5) 63%	10 (8) 80%	11 (10) 91%	52 (33) 63%	

Note. numeral = number of feature of present perfect
(numeral) = number of appropriate uses of feature of present perfect
% = percentage of appropriate uses of feature of present perfect

TABLE 11
Distribution of Features of Present Perfect from Correction Tests

Type	Time (Feb. 15)	T3 (Mar. 1)	T4 (Mar. 8)	T5 (Mar. 18)	T6 (Apr. 1)	T7 (Apr. 15)	T8 (Apr. 15)	Total
Perfect	2 (1) 50%	2 (0) 0%			2 (1) 50%	1 (1) 100%	7 (3) 43%	
Experi- ence	2 (1) 50%	2 (2) 100%	1 (1) 100%	1 (1) 100%		1 (1) 100%	7 (6) 86%	
Unfinished Past	1 (0) 0%			1 (1) 100%	2 (2) 100%	1 (1) 100%	5 (4) 80%	
Result		1 (0) 0%	2 (1) 50%		1 (1) 100%	2 (1) 50%	6 (3) 50%	
Total	5 (2) 40%	5 (2) 40%	3 (2) 67%	2 (2) 100%	5 (4) 80%	5 (4) 80%	25 (16) 64%	

Note. numeral = number of feature of present perfect
(numeral) = number of appropriate uses of feature of present perfect
% = percentage of appropriate uses of feature of present perfect

5. Discussion

The first hypothesis for this study is about 'the influence of

TABLE 12
Distribution of Features of Present Perfect from All Tests

Time	T3	T4	T5	T6	T7	T8	Total
Type	(Feb. 15)	(Mar. 1)	(Mar. 8)	(Mar. 18)	(Apr. 1)	(Apr. 15)	
Perfect	3 (1) 33%	5 (0) 0%	2 (1) 50%	2 (0) 0%	5 (2) 40%	4 (3) 75%	21 (7) 33%
Experi- ence	4 (3) 75%	5 (4) 80%	3 (3) 100%	3 (3) 100%	3 (3) 100%	5 (5) 100%	23 (21) 91%
Unfinished Past	3 (0) 0%	2 (1) 50%	3 (2) 67%	4 (4) 100%	5 (5) 100%	4 (4) 100%	21 (16) 76%
Result		3 (0) 0%	3 (1) 33%	1 (0) 0%	2 (2) 100%	3 (2) 66%	12 (5) 42%
Total	10 (4) 40%	15 (5) 33%	11 (7) 64%	10 (7) 70%	15 (12) 80%	16 (14) 88%	77 (49) 64%

Note. numeral = number of feature of present perfect
(numeral) = number of appropriate uses of feature of present perfect
% = percentage of appropriate uses of feature of present perfect

instruction.' The researcher believes that instruction plays a crucial role in the acquisition of the present perfect. In the case of the participant, he showed the emergence and improvement of the present perfect during and after the period of instruction. However, with the passage of time, the frequency of his use of the present perfect decreased. Non-existence of the present perfect in his native tongues seemed to spawn his avoidance of using the present perfect.

The second hypothesis is that the past and present tense are the prerequisites to the correct use of the present perfect because the present perfect has two semantic features, *anteriority* and *current relevance*. The findings of this study show that the participant began to use the present perfect after a stable ability to use the past and present tenses developed. Correspondingly, the accuracy of the use of the present perfect also assists in the appropriate uses of the past and present tense.

The third hypothesis is about overgeneralizations and undergeneralizations. Bardovi-Harlig's (1997) findings show that most overgeneralization uses of the present perfect occur in the

environment of the simple past. As for undergeneralization, the present tense was mostly used in the present perfect environment. In contrast, the findings of this study indicate that both overgeneralization and undergeneralization uses were mostly found in the environment of the simple past. At any rate, the results of both studies show that an imperfect understanding of the present perfect as a mixture of the past and the present brings overgeneralization and undergeneralization uses of the present perfect.

The last hypothesis is that there is a developmental sequence in the acquisition of the present perfect. The findings of this study demonstrate that the feature of *experience* is acquired more easily than other features of the present perfect because *experience* is the closest concept to the past. The feature of *perfect* would be the last to be acquired because of its sense of current relevance.

In this study, the researcher has explored the acquisition process of the present perfect. The period of three months with the participant decided him to speculate on an effective way to teach the present perfect. Despite its instruction, the participant did not reach complete understanding of the present perfect. Tamada (1997) mentions that the present perfect has been taught without discourse contexts in Japan; this has happened in other contexts such as Korea. In Korea, students have been forced to memorize the uses and features of the present perfect with some adverbials. Therefore, for the success of the instruction of the present perfect, it is a prerequisite to offer a discourse context, which includes "an event within a period of time that began in the past and extends up to the present moment" (Dowty, 1979, p. 341).

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A Case Study on the Acquisition of the Present Perfect: 21
Interlanguage of an Adult ESL Learner

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