

## A Study of Native English Speakers' Usage of the English Present Tense and Their Metalinguistic Knowledge on Locations in Time and Aspects

การศึกษาการใช้รูปปัจจุบันกาลในภาษาอังกฤษและความรู้ภาษาศาสตร์  
ของเจ้าของภาษาที่สัมพันธ์กับเรื่องเวลาและการณ์ลักษณะ

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Received: 25 September 2023

Revised: 29 November 2023

Accepted: 9 December 2023

### Abstract

This study aims to analyze the usage of the English Present Tense among native English speakers and their metalinguistic knowledge governing the selection of the tense forms. There were 3 research instruments employed in the study: 1) a background questionnaire; 2) a gap-filling test of the English Present Tense; and 3) an open-ended metalinguistic elicitation questionnaire. There were 10 well-educated native English speakers with a bachelor's degree or higher, participating in the study. Their nationalities are British, American, and Australian. The results of the study revealed that the participants mostly used the Present Simple in accordance with the expected theories, followed by the Present Progressive, the Present Perfect, and the Present Perfect Progressive, respectively. The participants' metalinguistic knowledge demonstrated diverse perceptions of the situations presented in the test instrument. The study provides evidence for the existence of L1 metalinguistic knowledge and offers a deeper understanding of how each tense form expressed the locations in time and aspects, influencing the language users' perceptions of the situations. Furthermore, the study proposes a novel approach to teaching English tenses, suggesting that English teachers should emphasize factors that impact the selection of tense forms beyond grammatical markers like temporal adverbials and conjunctions. These factors include aspectual perceptions, text genres, and situational contexts.

**Keywords:** Native English Speakers, English Present Tense, Metalinguistic Knowledge

## บทคัดย่อ

งานวิจัยนี้มุ่งศึกษาการใช้ปัจจุบันกาลในภาษาอังกฤษและความรู้ไวยากรณ์ที่มีอิทธิพลต่อการใช้รูปกาลของเจ้าของภาษา โดยใช้เครื่องมือวิจัย 3 ชนิด คือ แบบสอบถามข้อมูลส่วนตัวของผู้เข้าร่วมวิจัย แบบทดสอบการใช้ปัจจุบันกาลในภาษาอังกฤษ และแบบสอบถามความรู้ไวยากรณ์ ผู้เข้าร่วมวิจัยเป็นผู้ที่พูดภาษาอังกฤษเป็นภาษาแม่จำนวน 10 คน ซึ่งมีการศึกษาระดับปริญญาตรีหรือสูงกว่าในสาขาต่าง ๆ และมีเชื้อชาติอังกฤษ อเมริกัน และออสเตรเลีย ผลการศึกษาพบว่าเจ้าของภาษาใช้ปัจจุบันกาลปกติ (the Present Simple) ได้ตรงตามทฤษฎีที่สุด ตามด้วยปัจจุบันกาลต่อเนื่อง (the Present Progressive) ปัจจุบันกาลสมบูรณ์ (the Present Perfect) และปัจจุบันกาลสมบูรณ์ต่อเนื่อง (the Present Perfect Progressive) ตามลำดับ ความรู้ไวยากรณ์ของผู้เข้าร่วมวิจัยแสดงมุมมองที่หลากหลายต่อเหตุการณ์ในแบบทดสอบ งานวิจัยนี้ได้พิสูจน์ว่าความรู้ไวยากรณ์ในภาษาแม่มีอยู่จริง และยังช่วยทำให้เกิดความเข้าใจเกี่ยวกับการเลือกใช้รูปกาลแสดงจุดบอเวลา และการณลักษณะจากมุมมองต่อเหตุการณ์ของเจ้าของภาษาได้อย่างลึกซึ้งยิ่งขึ้น ผู้วิจัยได้นำเสนอแนวทางใหม่ในการสอนกาลในภาษาอังกฤษ โดยเสนอว่าผู้สอนควรเน้นย้ำองค์ประกอบที่มีอิทธิพลต่อการใช้รูปกาลเช่น มุมมองต่อเหตุการณ์ผ่านการณลักษณะ วัจนลีลาของบทความ และบริบท ซึ่งเป็นองค์ประกอบที่นอกเหนือจากการเน้นรูปภาษาบ่งชี้ทางไวยากรณ์ เช่น คำวิเศษณ์บอเวลา และคำสันธาน

**คำสำคัญ:** เจ้าของภาษาอังกฤษ, ปัจจุบันกาลในภาษาอังกฤษ, ความรู้ไวยากรณ์

## Introduction

The present study mainly addresses native English speakers' usage of the English Present Tense, and their metalinguistic knowledge – their explanation on each tense form they employed. The notion of tense involves locations in time and aspects (Comrie, 1976, 1985; Klein & Li, 2009; Quirk et al., 1985; Smith, 1991; Yule, 1998). Smith (1991) compared aspects to camera lenses bringing objects into focus, and language users possess individual aspectual perceptions of situations. Simply put, a situation can be perceived differently by individuals. The locations in time and aspects expressed by the English Present Tense are quite complex. The location in time in the English Present Tense is not always identical to the present utterance time. This can be seen in the Stative Present and the Habitual Present, where the timespans include the past, the present, and the future. Furthermore, the Present Progressive can be used to describe a one-time situation, a habit, and a near-future situation (Quirk et al., 1985; Smith, 1991). Also, the Present “Perfect of Result” (as addressed by Comrie, 1976, p. 56) and the Past Simple are sometimes interchangeable depending on perceptions of language users. The Present Perfect of Result implies current results while the Past Simple does not have that implication. For instance, some language users may say: “I just came back” rather than: “I’ve just come back” (Quirk et al., 1985, p. 194). Additionally, the Present “Perfect of Persistent Situation” (as addressed by Comrie, 1976,

p. 60) and the Present Perfect Progressive seem to be switched back-and-forth by language users. Both forms denote a situation commencing in the past and persisting into the present. The Present Perfect Progressive combines the Perfect Aspect with progressiveness, expressing emotive effects (Bégin, 2003; Quirk et al., 1985). Consequently, language users may say: “I’ve been waiting for you for 2 hours” rather than: “I’ve waited for you for 2 hours” to express more emotional tones.

As discussed earlier, how language users perceive a situation is subject to their individual viewpoints and attitudes towards it. Therefore, the researchers are interested in investigating the extent to which native English speakers’ usage of the English Present Tense aligns with the theories proposed by scholars (e.g., Comrie, 1976, 1985; Klein & Li, 2009; Quirk et al., 1985; Smith, 1991; Yule, 1998). Furthermore, exploring the native English speakers’ reasons behind their choices of tense forms may provide more insights into their various perceptions of situations. As a result, the participants were asked to engage in the metalinguistic knowledge task. In this study, metalinguistic knowledge refers to conscious language knowledge that can be expressed or verbally explained by language users (Gombert, 1992). Contrary to the need for accuracy or alignment with the theories, previous studies (e.g., Isarankura, 2008; McManus, 2019; Worathumrong, 2015) suggest that metalinguistic knowledge performed by language users does not necessarily conform to what is expected by the theories. Instead, metalinguistic knowledge studies aim to enhance language learning and teaching, exploring aspects such as how awareness of the first language (L1) influences second language (L2) learning, and how language learners comprehend language theories.

The native English speakers participating in this study are of diverse nationalities: British, American, and Australian. It is important to note that the study acknowledges the cultural diversity among the participants, but the primary focus is on their shared proficiency in standard English. The selection was based on their educational levels (bachelor’s degree or higher), and the study does not aim to look into variations within different varieties of English. Rather, the study aims to explore how speakers of standard English cope with the complexity of the English Present Tense.

While numerous studies have explored L1 metalinguistic knowledge (e.g., Falk et al., 2015; Isarankura, 2008; Watson & Newman, 2017; Worathumrong, 2015), the research specifically addressing L1 metalinguistic knowledge in English tenses is limited in number (e.g., Isarankura, 2011; McManus, 2019). Isarankura (2011) studied the conceptualizations of native English speakers and Thai EFL learners regarding locations in time and aspects expressed by the Present Tense and the Past Tense in a reading task. McManus (2019) explored the advantages of L1 awareness of English when learning the French “Imparfait”. No study has explored native English speakers’ reasons for their choices of tense forms. Moreover, the existence of L1 metalinguistic knowledge is still a topic of debate among scholars. Thus, this study is hoped to shed more light on the

study of L1 metalinguistic knowledge, particularly in the context of English tenses. Considering the close relevance of Isarankura's (2011) study to the present research, the results obtained from the present research will be compared and discussed in relation to Isarankura's (2011) findings.

The present study also aims to offer a new perspective on the teaching of the English Present Tense by enabling teachers to introduce their learners to various perceptions of language users, contextual factors, and text genres that influence the various possibilities in the usage of English tenses.

### **Research Questions**

1. How do the native English speakers use the English Present Tense in the present study?
2. What metalinguistic knowledge governs the choices of the native English speakers regarding the English Present Tense?

### **Research Hypotheses**

1. The native English speakers' use of the English Present Tense varies.
2. The metalinguistic knowledge that governs the native English speakers' use of the English Present Tense reveals their various perceptions of the situations presented in the test instrument.

### **Review of Literature**

#### **Understanding Tenses**

This part of the paper provides the background on tenses as related to locations in time and aspects.

Comrie (1976, 1985), Klein & Li (2009), Quirk et al. (1985), and Smith (1991) suggested that tense involves locations in time and aspects. The former refers to when a situation happens (e.g., now, this week). The latter refers to how a situation happens (e.g., progressively, resultatively). Comrie (1985, p. 9) defined tense as a "grammaticalised expression of location in time". By this definition, English has only two tenses: the Present Tense and the Past Tense, for both are morphologically marked, while the Future is lexically marked by modals and it is not, by this definition, a tense (Quirk et al., 1985).

### Locations in Time Expressed by Tenses

Quirk et al. (1985) discussed the locations in time in language in a linear relationship, as shown in Figure 1 below:



Figure 1. The locations in time in language

Figure 1 above broadly indicates the locations in time in language (the past, the present, and the future).

Further, the locations in time expressed by the Stative Present include the past, the present, and the future. The timespan of the Stative Present is represented by the bold line in Figure 2 below:

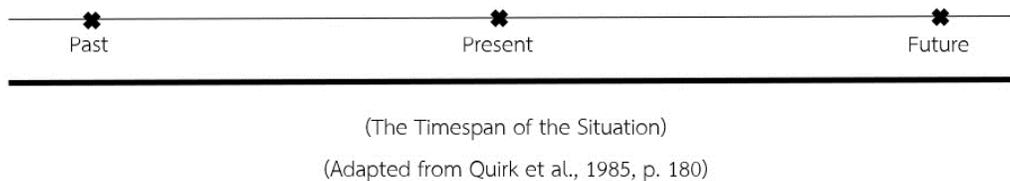
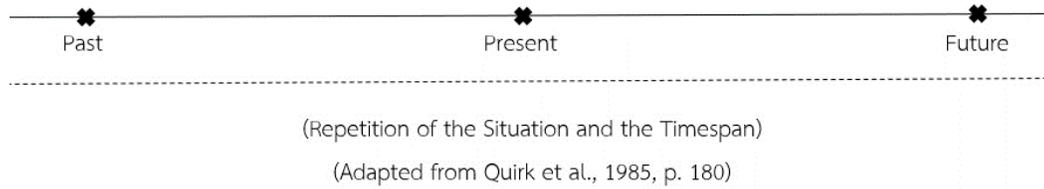


Figure 2. The locations in time and aspect expressed by the Stative Present

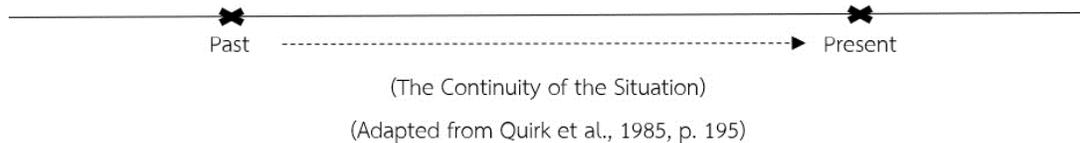
The bold line in Figure 2 above represents a stative situation where there is no dynamicity or changes, as illustrated by the saying: “Honesty *is* the best policy” (Quirk et al., 1985, p. 179).

Similar to the Stative Present, the Habitual Present includes the past, the present, and the future. Yet, the situation involves dynamicity or movements, as illustrated by the sentence: “We go to Brussels *every year*” (Quirk et al., 1985, p. 179). The timespan of the Habitual Present is represented by the dashed line in Figure 3 below:



**Figure 3.** The locations in time and aspect expressed by the Habitual Present

Likewise, the Present Perfect conveys a range of temporal dimensions, encapsulating the initiation of a situation in the past and its ongoing existence into the present moment; for example, in the statement: “The province *has suffered* from disastrous floods *throughout its history*” (Quirk et al., 1985, p. 192). The timeframe of the situation is illustrated in Figure 4 below:



**Figure 4.** The timeframe expressed by the Present Perfect

### Aspects Expressed by Tenses

The notion of aspect refers to the focal point of the situation (Comrie, 1976; Klein & Li, 2009; Quirk et al., 1985; Smith, 1991; Yule, 1998). There are two main categories of aspects: the Grammatical Aspect and the Lexical Aspect.

#### The Grammatical Aspect

The Grammatical Aspect is expressed through grammatical structures of verbs. It includes the Simple Aspect, the Progressive Aspect, the Perfect Aspect, and the Perfect Progressive Aspect (Comrie, 1976; Klein & Li, 2009; Quirk et al., 1985; Smith, 1991; Yule, 1998).

#### *The Simple Aspect*

According to Quirk et al. (1985), the Simple Aspect is quite a broad category covering the Stative Aspect (a state of mind, a state of being or having, and a fact), and the Habitual Aspect (the repetition of a situation or a habit). The verb form of the Present Simple is “V.1 (with the suffix “-s” as a third person singular subject)”. In line with Quirk et al. (1985), Bégin (2003)

suggested that the Simple Aspect does not focus on any particular phases of the situation. Instead, it refers to the situation as a single whole. Examples 1 and 2 illustrate the Simple Aspect:

**Example 1:** The verb “to be” in this example expresses the state of being (the best policy) or the so-called Stative Aspect.

“Honesty *is* the best policy” (Quirk et al., 1985, p. 179).

**Example 2:** The temporal adverbial “every year” in this example expresses the repetition of the situation (going to Brussels) or the so-called Habitual Aspect.

“We go to Brussels *every year*” (Quirk et al., 1985, p. 179).

### *The Progressive Aspect*

The verb form used in the Progressive Aspect is “Be + Present Participle” (Comrie, 1976; Klein & Li, 2009; Quirk et al., 1985; Smith, 1991; Yule, 1998). The Progressive Aspect does not focus on the beginning or the ending of the situation. Rather, it focuses on the middle phase. Comrie (1976), Quirk et al. (1985), and Smith (1991) suggested that the Progressive Aspect expresses the Event Aspect (a one-time situation), the Habitual Aspect (the repetition of a situation or a habit), and the Prospective Aspect (a situation that is happening in the near future). Examples 3 to 5 illustrate this point:

**Example 3:** In this example, “at this moment” serves as the temporal adverbial marking the specific point in time (the present utterance time when Mary is doing something), and expressing the Event Aspect.

“What *is* Mary *doing* at this moment?” (Quirk et al., 1985, p. 199)

**Example 4:** In this example, “whenever I see her” depicts a habit (of working in the garden); and thus, expresses the Habitual Aspect.

“*Whenever I see her, she’s working* in the garden”  
(Quirk et al., 1985, p. 199).

**Example 5:** In this example, the Prospective Aspect or the near-future situation (reaching the top) is implied by the situational context.

“Algernon *is reaching* the top” (Smith, 1991, p. 97).

### ***The Perfect Aspect***

The Perfect Aspect refers to a situation anterior to another. The verb form used in the Perfect Aspect is “Have + Past Participle” (Comrie, 1976; Klein & Li, 2009; Quirk et al., 1985; Smith, 1991; Yule, 1998). Comrie (1976, pp. 56-60) categorized the Perfect Aspect into four types: the “Perfect of Result”, the “Experiential Perfect”, the “Perfect of Persistent Situation”, and the “Perfect of Recent Past”. Each of which is presented in examples 6 to 9 below:

**Example 6:** This example illustrates the Perfect of Result. John arrived sometime in the past but the focal point of the situation is his presence at the present utterance time.

“John *has arrived*” (Comrie, 1976, p. 56).

**Example 7:** This example illustrates the Experiential Perfect. Bill went to America sometime in the past but the speaker focuses on his current traveling experience.

“Bill *has been* to America” (Comrie, 1976, p. 59).

**Example 8:** This example illustrates the Perfect of Persistent Situation. The act of shopping in that place started at an unspecified time in the past and continues to the present. The continuity of the shopping is the focal point of the situation.

“I’ve *shopped* there *for years*” (Comrie, 1976, p. 60).

**Example 9:** This example illustrates the Perfect of Recent Past. The time when the learning started is unspecified but the speaker emphasizes the recency of the situation (Comrie, 1976).

“I *have recently learned* that the match is to be postponed”  
(Comrie, 1976, p. 60).

### *The Perfect Progressive Aspect*

The Perfect Progressive Aspect is formed by the structure “Have been + Present Participle”. It combines the Perfect of Persistent Situation and progressiveness, expressing emotional effects (Bégin, 2003; Quirk et al., 1985). It can express the Event Aspect and the Habitual Aspect, as illustrated in examples 10 and 11:

**Example 10:** In this example, the Perfect Progressive Aspect expresses the series of one action (starting the car). Therefore, it expresses the Event Aspect (Comrie, 1976; Quirk et al., 1985).

“He *has been starting* the car” (Quirk et al., 1985, p. 211).

**Example 11:** In this example, the Perfect Progressive Aspect expresses habituality through the temporal adverbial “for several weeks”.

“I’ve *been working* on the night shift *for several weeks*”  
(Quirk et al., 1985, p. 212).

### **The Lexical Aspect**

The Lexical Aspect is lexically expressed by two main types of verbs: stative verbs and dynamic verbs. Stative verbs express facts (e.g., the verbs “to be”, the verbs “to have”, and so forth), states of being (the verbs “to be”), states of having (the verbs “to have”), states of mind (cognitive verbs: “want”, “prefer”, “know”, “believe” and the like), and locations (e.g., the verb “stand” in: “Bangkok *stands* on the left bank of the Chao Phraya River”). Dynamic verbs express movements through action verbs: “play”, “run”, “nod”, and the like (Comrie, 1976; Klein & Li, 2009; Quirk et al., 1985; Smith, 1991; Yule, 1998).

### *The Lexical Aspect Expressed by Stative Verbs*

Since the Stative Aspect focuses on the entire situation with no changes or dynamicity, the progressive form is theoretically incompatible. The Stative Aspect is usually expressed by verbs in the simple form (Quirk et al., 1985). Examples 12 to 13 below illustrate this point:

**Example 12:** The verb “to be” in this example expresses the fact.

“The Nile *is* the longest river in Africa” (Quirk et al., 1985, p. 179).

**Example 13:** The verb “to have” in this example expresses the state of having.

“Mary *has* blue eyes” (Quirk et al., 1985, p. 200).

Due to the timespan with unspecified endpoints, the Stative Aspect is theoretically compatible with the Perfect of Persistent Situation (Quirk et al., 1985; Yule, 1998) as illustrated by examples 14 and 15 below:

**Example 14:** The verb “know” in this example expresses the state of mind. The speaker of the sentence below emphasizes the continuity of the situation (knowing).

“We *have known* Fred *for many years*” (Yule, 1998, p. 66).

**Example 15:** In this example, the verb “believe” also expresses the state of mind. Similar to Example 14, the speaker emphasizes the continuity of the belief.

“He *has believed* in Allah *all his life*” (Yule, 1998, p. 66).

### *The Lexical Aspect Expressed by Dynamic Verbs*

The Dynamic Aspect can be categorized into the Event Aspect and the Habitual Aspect. The Event Aspect is theoretically compatible with the Progressive, the Perfect, and the Perfect Progressive Aspects (Comrie, 1976; Quirk et al., 1985; Yule, 1998). Examples 16 to 18 below illustrate the theories accordingly:

**Example 16:** In this example, the Present Progressive form expresses the character’s action (doing something) at the present utterance time.

“What *are you doing?*” (Quirk et al., 1985, p. 204)

**Example 17:** The Present Perfect form in this example expresses the Perfect of Result, emphasizing the current result of the action (no more apples left).

“The apples *have all been eaten*” (Quirk et al., 1985, p. 193).

**Example 18:** The Present Perfect Progressive form in this example expresses a one-time situation through the temporal adverbial “for an hour”. The example is an excerpt from “At Last” by Harland (1870) taken from the Corpus of Historical American English (COHA). This example with the verb “protest” exhibits the emotional aspect of the speaker.

“... *“I have been sitting in the summer-house for an hour – reading!”*  
*protested Mabel, ...”*

The Habitual Aspect is theoretically compatible with the Simple Aspect, the Progressive Aspect, the Perfect Aspect, and the Perfect Progressive Aspect, as suggested by Comrie (1976) and Quirk et al. (1985). Examples 19 to 22 below illustrate the theories accordingly:

**Example 19:** In this example, the Simple Aspect is expressed through the Present Simple form of the verb “make” depicting the character’s habit.

“She *makes* her own dresses” (Quirk et al., 1985, p. 179).

**Example 20:** In this example, the Progressive Aspect is expressed through the Progressive form of the verb “type”. The character’s temporary habit of typing his own letter is expressed through “while his secretary is ill”.

“The professor *is typing* his own letters *while his secretary is ill*”  
(Quirk et al., 1985, p. 199).

**Example 21:** In this example, the Perfect Aspect is expressed through the Perfect form of the verb “sing” and the temporal adverbial phrase “ever since he was a boy” expresses the Habitual Aspect or the character’s repeated act of singing in the choir.

“Mr Terry *has sung* in this choir *ever since he was a boy*”  
(Quirk et al., 1985, p. 192).

**Example 22:** In this example, the Perfect Progressive Aspect is expressed through the Perfect Progressive form of the verb “do” and “for seven years” serves as the temporal adverbial phrase expressing the habituality of the action. The example below is an excerpt from “Ordinary People” by Guest (1976) taken from COHA.

*“... They **have been doing it for seven years**. It has been that long since they have had a good legal secretary. ...”*

### Previous Study of Perceptions and Awareness of Tenses by Thai EFL Learners and Native English Speakers

To the researchers’ knowledge, there is only one study by Isarankura (2011) that explored the conceptualizations of temporal locations and aspects among Thai EFL learners and native English speakers concerning English tenses. Her study encompassed the Present and Past Tenses, including the Simple, Progressive, Perfect, and Perfect Progressive Aspects. The findings revealed evident variations in how temporal locations and aspects were perceived and understood by both the Thai participants and the native English speakers. Isarankura’s findings on the native English speakers would be compared with our findings in the conclusion.

### Methodology

#### Participants

This study comprised a randomly selected sample of 10 native English speakers from Britain, the United States, and Australia. All participants were verified as native English speakers, predominantly residing in their home countries. Their usage of standard English was assumed, given their high level of education, with each participant holding at least a bachelor’s degree or higher in various fields of study.

### Research Instruments

The present study employed three research instruments: 1) a background questionnaire, which gathered personal information such as age, education, home countries, and language background from the participants; 2) a gap-filling test of the English Present Tense, in the form of a letter to a friend, providing the participants with the base form of each verb in parentheses,

requiring them to fill in the appropriate Present Tense form; and 3) an open-ended metalinguistic elicitation questionnaire.

The gap-filling test was constructed from the descriptions of tenses as proposed theoretically by Comrie (1976), Quirk et al. (1985), Smith (1991), and Yule (1998). The test and the expected answers were reviewed by two reviewers who are professors of linguistics. One is a native English-speaking professor who is currently working for James Cook University in Singapore. The other is a Thai professor from Chulalongkorn University in Thailand.

### **Data Collection**

To begin, through the researchers' connection, consent letters were sent via email to a group of native English speakers to confirm their willingness to participate in the study and inform them about the protection of their personal information. Subsequently, the research instruments were distributed to those who agreed to partake. Out of the 17 sets of research instruments, only those exhibiting metalinguistic knowledge performance were chosen for analysis. As this study focuses on standard English usage and does not aim to address various English varieties, participants from diverse geographical backgrounds, such as Britain, the United States, and Australia, were welcomed. The study was also opened to participants of all ages and genders. However, to ensure a selection of participants using standard English, only those holding at least a bachelor's degree were included. Consequently, the total number of research instruments eligible for inclusion in the present study was 10 sets.

### **Data Analysis**

Both quantitative and qualitative methods were employed for data analysis. The quantitative method involved checking the native English speakers' answers in the gap-filling test. The answers consistent with the expected answers based on the reviewed theories were presented as percentages. The qualitative method involved analyzing their metalinguistic knowledge. This entailed examining the tense forms chosen by the native English speakers that deviated from the reviewed theories, analyzing, and discussing their metalinguistic knowledge as related to their choices.

## Results and Discussion

### The Native English Speakers' Answers That Were in Line with the Reviewed Theories

Table 1 below presents the native English speakers' answers in the gap-filling test that were consistent with the expected answers based on the reviewed theories. The test consisted of 16 items in total. The native English speakers' scores are presented in descending order (out of 16), with their codes (NS1-NS10) listed in the first column. The subsequent columns display the numbers of the test items that aligned with the theories of the Present Tense, encompassing four distinct forms: the Present Simple (PS), the Present Progressive (PR), the Present Perfect (PF), and the Present Perfect Progressive (PF PR). The second-to-last column shows the overall items of the Present Tense test (PT). The number of test item for each tense form is provided in parentheses.

NS Code	PS (4)	%	PR (4)	%	PF (6)	%	PF PR (2)	%	PT (16)	%
NS1	4	100	4	100	5	83	2	100	15	94
NS2	4	100	3	75	5	83	2	100	14	88
NS3	4	100	4	100	3	50	2	100	13	81
NS4	4	100	3	75	5	83	1	50	13	81
NS7	4	100	3	75	5	83	1	50	13	81
NS8	4	100	4	100	5	83	0	0	13	81
NS6	3	75	3	75	5	83	1	50	12	75
NS9	3	75	4	100	3	50	1	50	11	69
NS5	4	100	3	75	3	50	0	0	10	63
NS10	4	100	0	0	2	33	0	0	6	38
<b>MEAN</b>	<b>3.8</b>	<b>95</b>	<b>3.1</b>	<b>78</b>	<b>4.1</b>	<b>68</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>75</b>
<b>STDEV</b>	<b>0.42</b>		<b>1.2</b>		<b>1.2</b>		<b>0.82</b>		<b>2.54</b>	

**Table 1.** The native English speakers' answers that were in line with the reviewed theories

As shown in Table 1, it is interesting to note that none of the native English speakers achieved the total score of 16. The highest total score recorded was 15, while the lowest score obtained was 6. Among the native English speakers' answers, the choices of the Present Simple aligned most closely with the theories (95%). This was followed by the Present Progressive (78%), the Present Perfect (68%), and the Present Perfect Progressive (50%), respectively. The standard deviation of the Present Simple was the lowest (0.42), while that of the Present Progressive and

the Present Perfect was the highest (1.2). This suggested that the native English speakers' choices of the Present Simple was generally consistent with one another (STDEV: 0.42). In contrast, more variations were found in the choices of the Present Progressive (STDEV: 1.2) and the Present Perfect (STDEV: 1.2). This may be because most of the native English speakers perceived the same locations in time expressed by the Present Simple, while they had different aspectual perceptions for the expected Present Progressive and the expected Present Perfect. Interestingly, it was observed that the native English speakers in this study preferred not to use the Present Perfect Progressive, with three of them not using it at all. This study aims to find out what tense form (s) they preferred to use instead of the expected Present Perfect Progressive. Furthermore, the metalinguistic knowledge that governed their choice (s) will be investigated.

### **The Metalinguistic Knowledge of the Native English Speakers**

This section presents the native English speakers' answers in the gap-filling test that deviated from what was expected based on the theories, and the metalinguistic knowledge that governed their choices of tense forms. The answers that deviated from the expected Present Simple are presented first, followed by those that deviated from the expected Present Progressive, the expected Present Perfect, and the expected Present Perfect Progressive, respectively.

#### ***The Metalinguistic Knowledge of the Expected Present Simple***

Table 2 below displays the answer of the native English speakers that differed from the expected Present Simple, along with their metalinguistic knowledge (MLK). The metalinguistic knowledge of the native English speakers is verbatim and presented within quotation marks. The original versions of the language form, including spellings, grammar, punctuation, capitalization, and word choices are retained.

The native English speakers' codes (NS6 and NS9) are presented in the first column. The following column indicates their nationalities (Australian and British). The test item number (3) is presented in the next column. The subsequent column presents the theoretical answer along with its context. Then, the theoretical reason according to the scholar (Quirk et al., 1985) is provided in the next column. Finally, the last two columns display the native English speakers' answer (NS Answer) and their metalinguistic knowledge (NS MLK), respectively.

NS Code	NS NAT	Test Item	Theoretical Answer	Theoretical Reason	NS Answer	NS MLK
NS6	AUS	3	... I have been very busy with my studies this semester. Physics is (be) a very hard subject. ...	The verb “to be” here denotes a <b>fact or a state</b> . The endpoints of the situation are not specified (Quirk et al., 1985).	“... Physics <b>has been</b> (be) a very hard subject. ...”	<i>“To describe a current experience that has been ongoing in the past”</i>
NS9	BRI					<i>“present perfect to stay in keeping with NO.1.”</i>

**Table 2.** The native English speakers’ answer that deviated from the expected Present Simple and their metalinguistic knowledge

Only two native English speakers’ answer deviated from the expected use of the Present Simple. The theoretical answer for Test Item 3 is “is”, which according to Quirk et al. (1985), is used to express states and facts in a theoretical sense. In Test Item 3, the test writer considered the difficulty of physics a general fact. However, NS6 and NS9 used the Present Perfect (“has been”). As can be seen from their metalinguistic knowledge, they referred to the context of the previous sentence: “... I have been very busy with my studies this semester. ...”. NS6 also perceived physics as a particular subject only in the semester. Consequently, the difficulty of physics was perceived only during the semester. NS9 utilized the context of the previously mentioned situation (Test Item 1), which was expressed by the Present Perfect. Their metalinguistic knowledge matched well with their usage.

### *The Metalinguistic Knowledge of the Expected Present Progressive*

The answers of the native English speakers that deviated from the expected use of the Present Progressive are presented in Table 3 below. The selection of examples was based on differences in their perceptions of the situations, as revealed by their metalinguistic knowledge. Deviations with the same metalinguistic knowledge will not be presented here.

NS Code	NS NAT	Test Item	Theoretical Answer	Theoretical Reason	NS Answer	NS MLK
NS10	AUS	5	... At the moment, I <b>am taking</b> (take) a two-month private course with Mr. Greg. ...	The temporal adverbial “ <b>at the moment</b> ” signifies an ongoing situation at the time of utterance (Quirk et al., 1985).	“... At the moment, I <b>take</b> (take) a two-month private course with Mr. Greg. ...”	“ <i>all present tense the passage is about what is happening “now” -at the present time</i> ”
NS6	AUS	8	... I also have to conduct research for my final project at my college. During this week, I <b>am collecting</b> (collect) data for this research. ...	The temporal adverbial “ <b>during this week</b> ” signifies an ongoing situation at the time of utterance (Quirk et al., 1985).	“... During this week, I <b>will collect</b> (collect) data for this research. ...”	“ <i>Future tense to describe something that will happen</i> ”
NS7	AME				“... During this week, I <b>collected</b> (collect) data for this research. ...”	“ <i>I used past tense because the writer was describing what they had already done during the week that had just finished.</i> ”
NS10	AUS				“... During this week, I <b>collect</b> (collect) data for this research. ...”	“ <i>all present tense -the passage is about what is happening “now” - at the present time</i> ”

**Table 3.** The native English speakers’ answers that deviated from the expected Present Progressive and their Metalinguistic Knowledge

In Test Item 5, the expected theoretical answer is “am taking” with the inclusion of the temporal adverbial “at the moment”, indicating the progressiveness of the situation (Quirk et al., 1985). Based on the contexts, the act of taking the course happens during the two-month period due to the temporal adverbial in conjunction with the length of the course (two months). However, among the native English speakers, only NS10 used the Present Simple (“take”) instead

of the Present Progressive. This native English speaker’s metalinguistic knowledge solely revealed the location of the present time.

In Test Item 8, the expected theoretical answer is “am collecting” with the inclusion of the temporal adverbial “during this week”, expressing both progressiveness and habituality, as suggested by Quirk et al. (1985). Therefore, the act of collecting data for research is happening during this week. However, in contrast to Test Item 5, a significant number of native English speakers deviated from using the Present Progressive when responding to Test Item 8. The deviations observed in this test item revealed a range of temporal locations in the native English speakers’ perceptions, including the present, the past, the future. This variability in answers may be attributed to the wide timespan implied by the temporal adverbial “during this week”. Another point worth noting is NS6 and NS10, the native speakers of the same nationality (Australian), perceived the situation differently. NS6 perceived the act of collecting data as happening in the future while NS10 perceived it as happening in the present.

#### *The Metalinguistic Knowledge of the Expected Present Perfect*

The answers of the native English speakers that deviated from the expected Present Perfect are presented in Table 4 below. In Test Item 9, all native English speakers provided an answer contrary to what theories predicted, exhibiting unanimous agreement in the perception of the situation. Conversely, in Test Item 10, the majority of the participants provided an answer and metalinguistic knowledge in line with what was expected based on the theories, except for NS10 who provided a different answer. Consequently, the participants’ answers and metalinguistic knowledge in Test Item 9 and Test Item 10 are presented. Due to the unanimous answer among the native English speakers in Test Item 9, their metalinguistic knowledge was summarized in the researchers’ own words, without being placed in quotations.

NS Code	NS NAT	Test Item	Theoretical Answer	Theoretical Reason	NS Answer	NS MLK
NS1- NS10	BRI, AME, AUS	9	... Guess what? My sister <b>has just given</b> (just give) birth to her first child! It’s a boy and he’s so cute!	The Perfect of Result is implied by the temporal adverbial “ <b>just</b> ” (Comrie, 1976; Quirk et al., 1985).	“... My sister <b>just gave</b> (give) birth ...”	<i>The situation happened and completed in the past.</i>
...						

NS10	AUS	10	... It's a boy and he's so cute! She named him Jacky. I am so excited to be an aunt. I <b>have fallen</b> (fall) in love with him already. ...	The Perfect of Result is implied by the temporal adverbial " <b>already</b> " (Comrie, 1976; Quirk et al., 1985).	"... I <b>fell</b> (fall) in love with him already. ..."	" <i>all past tense – the passage is about past events</i> "
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**Table 4.** The native English speakers' answers that deviated from the expected Present Perfect and their Metalinguistic Knowledge

In Test Item 9, the Perfect of Result is indicated by the temporal adverbial "just" referring to the current occurrence of the situation and its current result (Comrie, 1976; Quirk et al., 1985). The test writer focused on the current birth of the baby even though the situation of giving birth happened in the past. However, all 10 native English speakers chose the Past Simple form ("just gave"). Their metalinguistic knowledge revealed that all of them perceived the situation as completed, without an implication of the current result.

In Test Item 10, the Perfect of Result is indicated by the temporal adverbial "already", referring to the recent occurrence of the situation and its current result (Comrie, 1976; Quirk et al., 1985). The feeling of love started in the past but is still vivid in the narrator's mind. Unlike in Test Item 9, only one native English speaker (NS10) deviated from the expected answer based on the theories. This native English speaker used the Past Simple form ("fell"). Once again, her metalinguistic knowledge only revealed the location in time in the past. While NS10 is not the only Australian participant in this study, every other native English speaker, including the Australians, offered an answer different from NS10. It is worth noting that while both Test Item 9 and Test Item 10 assessed the Perfect of Result, deviations in answers were more significant in Test Item 9. This may be interpreted as giving birth being an action with a physically observable result, while falling in love is a feeling whose result is mentally perceived.

#### *The Metalinguistic Knowledge of the Expected Present Perfect Progressive*

The native English speakers' answers that deviated from the expected use of the Present Perfect Progressive are shown in Table 5 below. Only, the metalinguistic knowledge that revealed the native English speakers' different perceptions of the situations are illustrated.

NS Code	NS NAT	Test Item	Theoretical Answer	Theoretical Reason	NS Answer	NS MLK
NS5	AUS	12	... She has breast cancer and is in the final stage. She <b>has been suffering</b> (suffer) from this disease for over a year and is going to die fairly soon. ...	The Perfect of Persistent Situation is implied by “ <b>for over a year</b> ” (Comrie, 1976; Quirk et al., 1985). The context in the following sentences implies the continuation of her suffering.	“... She <b>suffered</b> (suffer) from this disease for over a year ...”	“ <i>past + completed</i> ”
NS4		13	... She has breast cancer and is in the final stage. She has been suffering from this disease for over a year and is going to die fairly soon. Her husband quit his job to take care of her. Throughout this difficult time, he <b>has been looking after</b> (look after) her. ...	The Perfect of Persistent Situation and Progressiveness is implied by “ <b>throughout this difficult time</b> ” (Comrie, 1976; Quirk et al., 1985).	“... Throughout this difficult time, he <b>has looked after</b> (look after) her. ...”	“ <i>past tense, because she is talking about his actions up until now</i> ”
NS5			Her husband quit his job to take care of her. Throughout this difficult time, he <b>has been looking after</b> (look after) her. ...		“... Throughout this difficult time, he <b>looked *afte</b> (look after) her. ...” (The participant made a spelling error).	“ <i>past + completed</i> ”

**Table 5.** The native English speakers’ answers that deviated from the expected Present Perfect Progressive and their metalinguistic knowledge

In Test Item 12, the temporal adverbial “for over a year” marks the timeframe from the past to the present (Comrie, 1976; Quirk et al., 1985). The progressiveness of the situation is implied by the surrounding contexts. Based on the contexts, the character has been suffering

from cancer for over a year and is likely to continue suffering. Additionally, the message that she is in the final stage and is going to die soon suggests that she is still alive and suffering. However, NS5 perceived the suffering as completed. During the interview with this native English speaker, it was revealed that she referred to the previously mentioned context of the character being in the final stage, implying the end of the suffering.

Test Item 12 and Test Item 13 refer to situations happening simultaneously. Therefore, the similar tense form (Present Perfect Progressive) should be theoretically used to express the same timeframe and aspect. The test writer aimed to maintain coherence between Test Item 12 and Test Item 13 by incorporating the temporal adverbial phrase “throughout this difficult time” in Test Item 13. This was to depict the character’s battle with cancer and her husband’s caregiving as concurrent situations. Once more, different perceptions of the similar situation between the native English speakers of the same nationality were detected. NS5 (Australian) perceived the suffering and the caregiving as completed. So, the Past Simple form was used in both test items (“suffered” and “looked after”). Whereas NS4 (Australian) perceived the caregiving as continuing until now. Moreover, the use of the Present Perfect Simple (“has looked after”), rather than the Present Perfect Progressive by NS4 suggested that this native English speaker’s perception of the caregiving was shorter than what was expected by the contexts.

Notably, the native English speakers did not always use technical terms in line with the theories. As seen in NS4’s answer and metalinguistic knowledge in Test Item 13, although this native English speaker chose the Present Perfect (“has looked after”), the tense form was referred to as “past tense”. Since most native English speakers in this study do not hold degrees in English, linguistics, or language studies, it was not expected that they would use technical terms correctly. However, their explanations correlated with their choices of tense forms.

## Conclusion

The study verified the presence of metalinguistic knowledge in the first language (L1), demonstrating that speakers of L1 have the ability to articulate their understanding of their mother tongue. The results supported the hypotheses that the native English speakers’ usage of the English Present Tense varied and their metalinguistic knowledge revealed different perceptions of the situations provided in the test. The deviations in their answers should not necessarily be considered errors. As Smith (1991) suggested, the usage of tense forms by language users is influenced by their aspectual perceptions, particularly when dealing with tense forms that have multiple temporal and aspectual locations (e.g., the Progressive, the Perfect, and the Perfect Progressive).

The results of the present study showed that the native English speakers' perceptions of the situations and their usage of tense forms were influenced by the specification of temporal location expressed by the temporal adverbial. For instance, in Test Item 5, the temporal adverbial "at the moment" indicates a specific location in the present time. Consequently, most native English speakers perceived the same location in time and aspect (the present moment and the Progressive Aspect). On the other hand, the temporal adverbial "during this week" in Test Item 8 indicates a broader timeframe, leading the native English speakers to perceive different locations in time (the present time, the past time, and the future time).

Likewise, the participants commonly opted for the Past Simple tense rather than the Present Perfect of Result, particularly when describing situations with physically observable outcomes, such as the act of giving birth in Test Item 9. Conversely, the majority of participants employed the Present Perfect to narrate situations where the results are mentally perceived, exemplified by the experience of falling in love in Test Item 10.

The Present Perfect Progressive further revealed variations in the native English speakers' perceptions of the situations. As the timespan of the Present Perfect Progressive includes the past, the present, and possibly the future, the participants appeared to focus on different phases of the situations. As shown in Test Item 12 and Test Item 13, the participants used the Present Perfect Simple and the Past Simple with their metalinguistic knowledge matching their choices of tense forms. Although the Present Perfect Progressive was rarely used in the present study, it does not imply that this tense form is not extensively employed. The Present Perfect Progressive is significantly expressing the emotional effects (Bégin, 2003; Quirk et al., 1985), making it more prevalent in literary works. The following example is an excerpt from "Lucy Arlyn" by Trowbridge (1866), taken from COHA. It illustrates the use of the Present Perfect Progressive very clearly.

*"... She put up her arms, drew his head to her bosom, and burst into sobs of anguish. "Don't cry, don't cry, Lucy! What is the matter? I am here."  
"I **have been waiting** so long, so long!"  
She wept, from a heart wrung with misery. ..."*

However, in the context of the study, which involved a casual genre (a letter to a friend), the native English speakers may have perceived the situations straightforwardly without employing language artifice or shades of meaning.

Conversely, it was observed from the study that most native English speakers perceived the same locations in time and aspect expressed through the Present Simple. This may be because the locations in time and aspect expressed through the Present Simple are conclusive (Bégin, 2003). In other words, the Present Simple focuses on the entire situation. As Smith (1991) suggested, aspects function like camera lenses, and the focal point of the Present Simple can be compared to capturing a panoramic view, where the photographer does not solely focus on a particular part of the scenery.

Another noteworthy point is the detection of idiosyncratic usage of the simple tense forms in the study. As illustrated in the examples, one native English speaker (NS10) consistently used the simple tense forms (the Present Simple, and the Past Simple) regardless of the timeframes and aspects implied by the temporal adverbials. Additionally, this native English speaker's metalinguistic knowledge revealed a holistic perception of the situations presented in the test. She relied on the surrounding contexts to determine her choices of tense forms. This usage can be considered authentic in terms of English tenses, apart from the existing theories. However, further studies with larger sample groups are needed to investigate this phenomenon.

Remarkably, the study noted that native English speakers of the same nationality often employed different tense forms when recounting situations within identical provided contexts (e.g., Test Item 5, Test Item 8, Test Item 10). This observation suggests that geographical variation does not necessarily correspond to the uniformity of tense usage. Instead, this finding substantiates the notion that language users make individualized aspectual choices when narrating situations.

Significantly, the study unveiled that the metalinguistic knowledge of the native English speakers was predominantly oriented towards pragmatics. Essentially, they relied on the surrounding and situational contexts within the test to determine the tense forms they used, exemplified by NS9's explanation in Test Item 3: "present perfect to stay in keeping with NO.1." and NS10 in Test Item 5: "all present tense the passage is about what is happening "now" -at the present time". In this study, the participants infrequently employed sentence elements, such as temporal adverbials or conjunctions, to inform their tense choices. Consequently, syntactically-oriented explanations (e.g., "SV agreement", "Present because of the word 'now'") were rare in the dataset.

From a pedagogical standpoint, English teachers should heighten their learners' awareness of diverse perspectives and text genres that influence the selection of tense forms by language users. It would be captivating to expose learners to passages from various genres, illustrating how tenses are strategically employed. In the context of English language teaching in Thailand, there appears to be a significant emphasis on grammatical markers, particularly temporal adverbials,

when instructing on English tenses. To cultivate native-like proficiency, learners should be attuned to pragmatically-oriented factors such as surrounding and situational contexts. Moreover, learners should recognize the emotive aspects of texts to effectively utilize English tenses. Additionally, English teachers are encouraged to provide alternative options when teaching English tenses to ensure that learners gain a nuanced understanding of various situational perceptions.

To wrap up, the results derived from this current study appeared to substantiate Isarankura's (2011) findings. While Isarankura identified evident within-group variations in locations in time and aspects among native English speakers, the present study unveiled substantial divergences in the participants' perceptions of temporal locations and aspects.

However, this is a small-scale study. The results should not be indiscriminately applied to all native English speakers. To broaden the scope of research, future studies should consider a larger sample size to explore a more comprehensive range of tense usages among native English speakers. Additionally, the participants in this study were selected based on English being their mother tongue and possessing high educational levels. Hence, further research is encouraged to investigate other aspects such as ages, genders, and geographical backgrounds of the users as well.

### Acknowledgments

The researchers extend our gratitude to all participants for their attentive responses to the research instruments. Special thanks are owed to Associate Professor Dr. Heather Winskel for generously dedicating her time to review the test instrument and offering invaluable comments during its design phase. Additionally, our heartfelt appreciation goes to all the reviewers for their constructive advice, significantly enhancing the quality of this research paper.

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## APPENDIX A

### TEST INSTRUMENT

Read the following passage and fill in the blanks with the appropriate forms of the verbs in parentheses.

Dear Lily,

I know it (1) \_\_\_\_\_ (be) a long time since you last heard from me. I (2) \_\_\_\_\_ (be) very busy with my studies this semester. Physics (3) \_\_\_\_\_ (be) a very hard subject. I (4) \_\_\_\_\_ (think) I am very poor at doing calculations. At the moment, I (5) \_\_\_\_\_ (take) a two-month private course with Mr. Greg. He (6) \_\_\_\_\_ (work) as a permanent lecturer at Oxford University. Apart from teaching, he (7) \_\_\_\_\_ (conduct) research. I also have to conduct research for my final project at my college. During this week, I (8) \_\_\_\_\_ (collect) data for this research.

Guess what? My sister (9) \_\_\_\_\_ (just give) birth to her first child! It's a boy and he's so cute! She named him Jacky. I am so excited to be an aunt. I (10) \_\_\_\_\_ (fall) in love with him already. He always puts a big, big smile on my face. I (11) \_\_\_\_\_ (smile) and writing at the same time. There is not only good news, though. Do you remember Sally? She has breast cancer and is in the final stage. She (12) \_\_\_\_\_ (suffer) from this disease for over a year and is going to die fairly soon. Her husband quit his job to take care of her. Throughout this difficult time, he (13) \_\_\_\_\_ (look after) her. Both of them are very good friends of mine. It is so sad. Now, I (14) \_\_\_\_\_ (cry). Oh, by the way, I am thinking about quitting my job at the Blue Café. I (15) \_\_\_\_\_ (work) there for 3 years. It is a nice workplace, though. My boss (16) \_\_\_\_\_ (take) good care of me since my first day. I just think it is now time for a change. So, how are you doing? Hope life is treating you kindly.

Love,  
Tasha

## APPENDIX B

### TEST INSTRUMENT WITH EXPECTED ANSWERS

Dear Lily,

I know it (1) **has been** (be) a long time since you last heard from me. I (2) **have been** (be) very busy with my studies this semester. Physics (3) **is** (be) a very hard subject. I (4) **think** (think) I am very poor at doing calculations. At the moment, I (5) **am taking** (take) a two-month private course with Mr. Greg. He (6) **works** (work) as a permanent lecturer at Oxford University. Apart from teaching, he (7) **conducts** (conduct) research. I also have to conduct research for my final project at my college. During this week, I (8) **am collecting** (collect) data for this research.

Guess what? My sister (9) **has just given** (just give) birth to her first child! It's a boy and he's so cute! She named him Jacky. I am so excited to be an aunt. I (10) **have fallen** (fall) in love with him already. He always puts a big, big smile on my face. I (11) **am smiling** (smile) and writing at the same time. There is not only good news, though. Do you remember Sally? She has breast cancer and is in the final stage. She (12) **has been suffering** (suffer) from this disease for over a year and is going to die fairly soon. Her husband quit his job to take care of her. Throughout this difficult time, he (13) **has been looking after** (look after) her. Both of them are very good friends of mine. It is so sad. Now, I (14) **am crying** (cry). Oh, by the way, I am thinking about quitting my job at the Blue Café. I (15) **have worked** (work) there for 3 years. It is a nice workplace, though. My boss (16) **has taken** (take) good care of me since my first day. I just think it is now time for a change. So, how are you doing? Hope life is treating you kindly.

Love,  
Tasha