

## Better Understanding of the Real Present Tense

Prof. L. Lakshmanan and Ms. N. Karpaha, M.A., M.Phil. with NET

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Past	Pre.	Future
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2.-----X-----~~////////X////////~~-----X--

**Tense** (n): a set of forms taken by a verb to indicate the time.

--- *The Concise Oxford Dictionary*

### Abstract

“The sun rises in the east” is a habitual action which is represented in the present simple tense, but truly speaking it is a timeless tense. “I am writing an article” is a progressive action which is represented in the present continuous tense but truly speaking it is the real present tense. The present simple and The real present / present continuous tense usage with better light-the sequence-state verbs- relational verbs-mental states-with other verbs (sometimes called “per formatives”) habitual actions-limited period; in stories and jokes-in narratives-with phrases-on news –paper- headlines-with time adverbs-and wonder etc...

### Introduction

#### GRAMMAR

“The laws of language are sure and valid, but they are revealed in speech and writing as the laws of nature are revealed in living beings in a delicate harmony of balanced forces and blended qualities. The elements can be recognized but the harmony itself defies ultimate analysis.”  
----- Modern Studies.

“It must be borne in mind, that grammar, which is essentially concerned with generalized facts, is thus basically a study of abstraction”.

“A grammar test is often based on a Knowledge of exceptions to rules and may include such vocabulary items as the forms of abstract nouns and the particular prepositions which should follow certain verbs, adjectives or nouns, which cannot be derived by analogy”

----- The art of teaching English as a language by I-MORRIS

“The attitude to grammatical rules will vary according to the general approach to grammar. A rule may be looked upon as merely a generalized statement of usage or as an authoritative law imposed by linguistic principles’

*Above all beastly lerne and rede good Latyn auctors of chosen poetes and oratours and note wisely how they write and spake, and study always to follows them; desiring none other rules but their example. For isn the beginnings men spake not latin because suche rules were made, but contrari Wyse because men spake suche latyn, upon that followed the rules and were made. That is to say a latin speech was before the rules, not the rules before latyn speche.*

*“We learn to speak by pattern rather than rule”-- paul and “that are learn living languages more by imitation than by rules”:- Storm*

### **Formal and Functional Grammar**

“The formal grammar offers a systematic classification of all the language forms. Its main feature is its employment of highly abstract technical terms with all definition or explanation”.

“The functional grammar may be equally systematic although its approach is essentially didactic. It deals with each facts of language by reference to the concrete example rather than to the abstract principle or rule.

*‘It is true that one really cannot begin to learn the grammar of a language until one knows the language itself’.*

Ref; Starch as quoted by Handschin from an article in school review’ 23; pp 697-703-1915

Being Indians - not having English as my mother tongue, we are a little puzzled and we have a tension to find out the differentiation between the Present simple tense and the present continuous sentence in usage, rather to say that there we find a mental or emotional strain.

To ease such a tension not only to us but also to the beginners in English or careless Indian English speakers, we would like to try to give a better light for clarity in our write-up here in this paper.

For better understanding these two tenses (the Present simple tense and the present continuous sentence) the sequence normally plays the major role, but this is not enough for us to know about the mental status.

At the outset which tense can be taught or learnt first, between these two tenses. There is a wide debate on this issue among the grammarians.

More than 90% of Indian English speakers are not good at the usage of simple present and present progressive sentences because of the bi-lingual problem.

*“Which is preferable the present simple or the present progressive tense for the introduction of the tense for the beginners. It is advised to introduce the present progressive tense for activities in progress and the simple present tense for what is habitual or usual. There can be no rules for tense usage and as pupils leave the beginning stage behind they will meet tense usages which appear to contradict the guidance they have been given”*

---- *The teaching of structural words as sentence patterns* - A. S. Hornby

### **A Better Understanding of the Present Progressive Tense**

Nowadays, the students are very much interested to hear the Telecast / broadcast commentaries on sporting events.

In a football game there is a very rapid sequence of movements by the players. A kick or a pass occupies a fraction of a second. The commentator cannot describe such rapidly executed movements while they are in progress. He does so immediately afterwards and uses the simple present.

*“Ronaldo **passes** the ball to white, who **passes** it to brown shoots. The goal-keeper **makes** a brilliant save.*

While demonstrating a dish the cook uses the progressive tense for those which performed slowly for those which take only a movement or two, the present simple tense is used.

*“I **pour** the milk into bowl, and **place** it on the oven. I **strike** a match or the lighter to light the gas. I **pour** the tea-dust in the boiling water **stir** it well...*

*Now the tea in the bowl is boiling.*

The progressive tense is used only in the last sentence.

A sequence of this kind with the simple present tense would be unsuitable for use. It would cause pupils to form wrong association. They will need to learn about the use of simple present for a series of acts of the kind discussed here.

A much simpler use of the simple present tense for an activity in progress in exclamatory sentences with 'here' as 'there'

Here the hero comes! *Here comes* the bus!

There he goes! Hurry up to catch it!

1. Instead of using the simple present we use the present continuous tense in some contexts.

I usually *go* to college by car. (habitual action) This means, I *am going* to college by bike because my car is out of order.

In this context the progressive tense is used to indicate an activity which is repeated during *a limited and usually stated period of time*.

2. The simple present and the present progressive are used for future events that are parts of a settled programme for future intention 'going to' and an infinitive is common.

(a) Sriram, a child says, he's going to be a pilot when he grows up.

I *leave* for Chennai tomorrow, (my plan)

I *am leaving* for Chennai tomorrow. (certainty)

Though both sentences make a statement about my plan for tomorrow, the second sentence conveys about certainly going more than a plan.

a) Prof. Laxman *retires* next year. (because he reaches his age limit).

(b) Prof. Laxman *is retiring* this year earlier (because of his own decision).

II. With some state verbs, the present continuous Tense is used: (e.g. attract, like, look, love, sound).

*My son comes from abroad this summer to stay with us. All my family members love having him here.*

*Note: The state verbs which we rarely use include the present continuous Tense 'believe, consist of, doubt, own', etc.*

### **Stative: verbs of inert perception and cognition:**

1. (Abhor, adore, astonish, believe, desire, detest, dislike, doubt, feel, forgive, guess, hate, here, imagine, impress, intend, know, like, love, *mean, mind, perceive, please,*

*prefer, presuppose, realize, recall, recognize, regard, remember, satisfy, see, smell, suppose, taste, think, understand, want, wish, etc).*

## 2. Relational verbs

'apply to, (everyone)be, belong to, concern, consists of, contain, cost, depend on, deserve, equal, fit, have, include, involve, lack, matter, need, owe, own, posses, remain, (bachelor), require, resemble, seem, sound, suffice, tend, etc.

B) Some verbs have different meanings when they are used to talk about states and when they describe actions. With their state meanings, the usually take simple rather than continuous forms. With their action meanings, they may take simple or continuous forms, depending on context.

a) *The treatment for controlling recent fever does not **appear** to work. (appear: state=seem)*

b) *The actress Ms. Shetty **is currently appearing** in the serial films. (as the she has grown older. )appear: action=take part)*

c) *Do you think it is a good idea? (Think: state=about an opinion*

d) *I am thinking of going in August/your trouble is you think too much. (think: action=consider).*

*Other verbs like this include, 'anticipate', 'cost', 'expect', 'feel', 'fit', 'have', 'imagine', 'measure', 'weigh'.*

C) With some verbs describing mental states (e.g. find, realize, regret, think, and understand). We can use the present continuous to emphasize that we have recently started to think about something or that we are not sure about something.

*I **regret** that the company will have to be sold.*

*(I have made the decision and I am sorry about it) and  
I **am regretting** my decision to give her the job (=I am increasingly aware  
that it was the wrong decision)*

Some other verbs describing preferences and mental states (e.g. agree, believe, conclude, know, prefer) rarely used with the present continuous.

*I **believe** you now (not I am believing now.)*

d) We use the present simple with verbs which perform the action they describe.

*I admit I can't see as well as I used to.*

*We apologize for not replying earlier.*

Other verbs like this (sometimes called (performatives) include

*'Acknowledge, advise, beg, confess, congratulate declare, deny, forbid, guarantee, name, order, permit, predict, promise, refuse, remind, request, thank, warn'.*

Some verbs used as performatives in affirmative (positive) sentences (*apologize, deny, guarantee, promise, suggest*) and have a similar meaning with either the present simple or the present continuous in negative sentences.

*I don't deny/I'm not denying taking the book but and why said it mind be okay.*

Note that we can use modals with performatives, often to make what we say more tentative or polite.

- *We would advise you to arrive two hours before the flight leaves.*
- *I must beg you to keep this a secret.*

e) We often use the present simple and present continuous in stories and Jokes in in formal spoken English to create the impression that events are happening now. This can make them more direct and exciting and hold people's attention.

*\* She goes up to the man looks straight is to his eyes. He is not wearing his glasses and he doesn't recognize her'*

*\* This man's playing cricket when the ball bounds up to him he hits the ball and drives it beyond the boundary.*

The main events are usually described in sequence using the present simple and longer the back ground events are described using the present continuous.

In narratives and anecdotes, the present simple can be used to highlight an event. Often it is used after past tenses. Tense and with a phrase such as suddenly or all of a sudden.

*\*I was sitting in the park, reading a newspaper, when all of a sudden this dog jumps at me.*

f) We also use the present simple and present continuous in live commentaries for examples on sports events. When the report takes place at the same time as the action.

*The bowler bowls a googly in the cricket; the batsman Dhoni- (the Indian captain) hits a wonderful sixer. He is playing a magnificent cricket in the last over.*

g) We can use the present simple in phrases such as

*\* It says here, I hear. I gather, I see. I understand and they say (someone) says (someone tells me to introduce news that we have heard, read, seen. (e.g.) on television) or been told. We can also use past tenses (e.g. It said here, I heard).*

*\* I gather you are worried about your son's future.*

*\* Professor. L. L is at the conference and I hear he is an excellent speaker.*

*\*Ref. Advanced grammar in use-by Martin Hewing.*

h) The present simple is often used in newspaper headlines to talk about events that have recently happened.

*'THE CYCLONE HITS CHENNAI'*

*'THE PRIME MINISTER VISITS AMERICA'*

*'FIRE BREAKS OUT IN HOTEL TAJ-MUMBAI'*

We can use the present simple to refer to the contents of books, films, newspapers, etc.

*\*Thomson gives the largest European companies in chapter six.*

*\* At the beginning of the book, three men find \$4 million in a crashed plane.*

*In the film, the actor Elizabeth Taylor takes the role of the Egyptian Queen-Cleopatra.*

- i) We can use the present continuous with adverbs such as always constantly, continually or forever to emphasize that something is done so often that it is characteristic of a person, group or thing.
- (a) *I think, I will stay here after all.*
- (b) *You are constantly changing your mind.*
- (c) *My boss is a really kind person; He is always offering to help me whenever i need.*

We often use pattern to indicate disapproval. The past continuous is used in a similar way with these adverbs. (e.g. was your servant always asking you for money, too?)

j) We can use the present (or past) continuous rather than present (or past) simple with the verb “wonder”. If we want to be especially friendly or polite, particularly. If we are unsure about the other persons feeling towards something or how they will react to what we say.

\* *You said that there were only 50 books in the boxes, I'm just wondering/I was just winding, whether you counted them all?( mere polite than, I just wonder?)*

\* The present simple tense is having abstract rules in usage.

The present progressive tense is visualized most of the time when we speak or write with meaningful rules. so, this is rightly called ‘The real present tense’.

### EXCERCISES:

PUT THE VERBS IN BRACKETS INTO THE SIMPLE PRESENT OR PRESENT CONTINUOUS TENSE.

1) a) *What Tom ( think) of the budget?*

*What does Tom think of the budget?*

b) *He (think) it most unfair.*

c) *I (agree) with him.*

*I agree with him.*

2) *What this one (cost)?*

*It (cost) four shillings.*

3) You (hear) the mind?

*It (blow) very strongly tonight.*

4) You (see) my hat anywhere?

*No, i (look)for it but i(not see it)*

5) He never (listen) to what you say. He always(think) about something else.

6) This book is about a man who (desert) his family and (go) to  
*live on a pacific island.*

7) You (understand)what the lecturer is saying?

8) What you (have)for breakfast usually? I usually (eat) a carrot and (drink) a glass of  
*cold water.*

9) When the curtain (rise) we (see) feride hand and Miranda sitting in a cave.  
*They (play chess).*

10)Why you (walk) so fast today? You usually (walk)quite slowly. Be going to  
definitive;(future of present intention).

1. When are you going to get married? (With personal subject).

2. She is going to have a baby. (Future of present cause).it is going to rain.

The present progressive is especially frequent with dynamic transitional verbs like 'arrive, come, go, land, start, shop', etc. which refer to a transition between two states or position?

*The plane is taking off at 7.30.*

*The President of America is coming to India this week. The bus is stopping (it is going to stop-slowing down).*

### Simple present (with the subordinate clauses)

It is introduced by 'if' unless, etc. or temporal introduced by 'as soon as' 'before', 'when', etc.

*'What will you say if I marry my boss?*

*The guest will be given gifts before they leave.*

The use of the simple present in main clauses-normally associated with **present and past events**. It is used for statements about the **calendar**.

Yesterday *was* Sunday, today *is* Monday and tomorrow *is* Tuesday. And to describe **immutable events or fixtures**.

The simple present and the present progressive are often used with **dynamic transitional verbs**: 'arrive, come, leave', etc.. Both having the meaning of '*plan*' or *programmer*.

*The plane {leaves/is leaving} to night from Chennai.*

## Conclusion

'Fundamentally grammar is concerned with the analogous facts of languages as exemplified by the forms of words and the patterns of word groupings.

'The grammatical scheme and the manner of treatment should be determined mainly by the pupil factor (age, education, mother-tongue) and the stage of language training. Initial Experience and reflective study <sup>(5,6)</sup>.

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Prof. L. Lakshmanan  
Annai Dora College of Nursing

Seva Nilayam  
Theni– 625 512.

[laxmanmegalai@gmail.com](mailto:laxmanmegalai@gmail.com)

Ms. N. Karpaha, M.A., M.Phil. with NET

Asst. Professor

Department of English

Holy Cross College

Tiruchirappalli - 620 002.

[n.karpaha@gmail.com](mailto:n.karpaha@gmail.com)

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