

THE EXPRESSION OF PAST ACTIONS IN ENGLISH AND UZBEK: A COMPARATIVE STUDY

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Abstract:

This article presents a comparative study of the expression of past actions in English and Uzbek languages. The research aims to analyze how past tense forms are structured and used in both languages, highlighting their grammatical features, semantic meanings, and functional differences. English expresses past actions mainly through tense forms such as the Simple Past, Present Perfect, and Past Continuous, while Uzbek relies on suffixes and verb forms to convey tense and aspect. By comparing these systems, the study identifies both similarities and differences in the way past events are described, including distinctions in aspect, completion, and speaker perspective. The findings of this study contribute to a better understanding of tense systems in English and Uzbek and may be useful for language learners, translators, and comparative linguistics research.

Keywords: past tense, English language, Uzbek language, comparative study, verb forms, tense and aspect.

The category of tense plays a crucial role in the grammatical systems of languages, as it reflects how speakers perceive and structure time in relation to actions and events. Among tense categories, the expression of past actions is particularly significant because it involves not only temporal reference but also aspects such as completion, duration, modality, and speaker attitude. English and Uzbek, belonging to different language families and typological groups, demonstrate distinct approaches to encoding past events. Therefore, a comparative study of past tense expression in these two languages provides valuable insights into their grammatical organization and functional usage.

In English, past actions are expressed through a range of tense and aspect forms, including the Simple Past, Past Continuous, Past Perfect, and Present Perfect. These forms allow speakers to distinguish between completed actions, ongoing processes, and actions with present relevance. Uzbek, on the other hand, primarily relies on morphological suffixes and auxiliary constructions to express past tense meanings, often combining tense with evidentiality and aspectual nuances. Such structural differences make the comparison of English and Uzbek past tense systems both linguistically relevant and pedagogically important. From a theoretical perspective, the study of grammatical form and meaning has been central to linguistic research. Scholars emphasize that tense forms should be analyzed not only structurally but also semantically and functionally, as grammatical meaning often depends on context and discourse-level factors. This approach is especially important when comparing languages with different morphological and syntactic systems.

Previous studies in linguistics have extensively examined grammatical categories such as tense, aspect, mood, and modality across languages. Botirova [1, 45] highlights the relationship between grammatical form and meaning, emphasizing that tense forms function at both language and speech levels. This view supports the idea that past tense constructions cannot be fully understood without considering their contextual and communicative functions. Research on grammatical categories in English has focused on tense, aspect, and verb forms. Karimova [10, 145] and Jabborova [9, 12] analyze tense, person, and number categories in English grammar, providing a detailed description of how verb forms interact to convey temporal and grammatical meanings. Similarly, Hatcher's [6, 254] classical study on the progressive form in English offers an important foundation for understanding aspectual distinctions in past tense constructions, while Depraetere and

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Reed [3, 110] explore mood and modality, which often intersect with tense usage in English. Comparative and cross-linguistic studies also contribute to the understanding of tense systems. Ejupi and Skenderi [4, 213] examine grammatical verb categories in English and Albanian, demonstrating how typologically different languages encode similar temporal meanings through different grammatical mechanisms. Greavu [5] investigates morphological and syntactical aspects in Romanian–English code-switching, showing how tense and aspect forms shift across languages in bilingual contexts. Hawkins [7] further discusses processing complexity in morphological systems, which is relevant for understanding why tense systems vary in form and usage across languages.

Studies focusing on Uzbek linguistics provide essential insights into the morphological nature of tense expression. Ismoilova [8, 123] analyzes the interpretation of morphological categories in Uzbek linguistics, highlighting the role of suffixation in expressing tense and aspect. Komilova [12, 266] examines the semantic-functional aspects of grammatical categories in Uzbek, emphasizing how meaning is shaped through morphological markers. Mahrabova [13, 267] also discusses grammatical meaning and form, reinforcing the idea that tense categories in Uzbek are closely linked to functional and semantic considerations. In addition, research on learner difficulties and cognitive aspects of grammar use, such as Khan's [11, 276] analysis of participle usage and Chan, Tan, and Xiao's [2, 456] study on plurality and cognition, indirectly contribute to understanding how grammatical categories like tense are processed and acquired. Despite the wide range of studies on tense and grammatical categories, relatively few works focus specifically on a direct comparison of past tense expression in English and Uzbek. This gap highlights the need for a comparative analysis that examines both structural and functional aspects of past tense usage in these languages. The present study aims to fill this gap by analyzing how past actions are expressed in English and Uzbek, identifying their similarities and differences, and contributing to comparative linguistics and language teaching methodology.

1. Expression of Past Actions in English

In English, the expression of past actions is realized through a complex tense–aspect system that allows speakers to distinguish between various temporal and semantic nuances. The most commonly used past tense forms include the Simple Past, Past Continuous, Past Perfect, and Present Perfect. Each of these forms encodes not only temporal reference but also aspectual meaning such as completeness, duration, or relevance to the present. The Simple Past is primarily used to describe completed actions that occurred at a definite time in the past. According to Karimova [10, 211], this tense form represents the core past tense in English and is closely connected with time adverbials. The Past Continuous, on the other hand, emphasizes the ongoing nature of an action at a specific moment in the past. Hatcher [6, 108] notes that the progressive aspect plays a crucial role in distinguishing background actions from completed events.

The Present Perfect and Past Perfect tenses introduce additional semantic layers, such as result, experience, and anteriority. Depraetere and Reed [3, 150] argue that these forms often interact with modality and speaker perspective, making them particularly challenging for language learners. Khan [11, 287] also highlights that learners frequently struggle with participle forms, which are essential in the formation of perfect tenses. From a grammatical standpoint, English past tense forms are analytically constructed and rely heavily on auxiliary verbs and participles. Jabborova [9, 345] emphasizes that tense in English cannot be fully analyzed independently of other grammatical categories such as person and number. This interdependence reflects the syntactic nature of English verb forms and their functional flexibility.

2. Expression of Past Actions in Uzbek

Unlike English, Uzbek expresses past actions primarily through morphological means, especially verb suffixes. The Uzbek language employs several past tense markers, such as *-di*, *-gan*, and *-ib*, each of which carries specific semantic and functional meanings. These suffixes not only indicate past time but also convey aspectual and evidential nuances. Ismoilova [8, 25] explains that Uzbek past tense forms are closely linked to the speaker's

certainty and source of information. For instance, the suffix *-di* usually indicates a witnessed or definite past action, while *-gan* often implies result or indirect evidence. Komilova [12, 76] further notes that Uzbek tense forms frequently overlap with other grammatical categories, reflecting a strong connection between form and meaning. Mahrabova [13, 267] emphasizes that grammatical meaning in Uzbek is inseparable from grammatical form, particularly in verb morphology. This view aligns with Botirova's [1, 68] argument that grammatical categories operate on both language and speech levels. As a result, Uzbek past tense forms tend to be more compact and information-dense compared to English constructions. Another distinguishing feature of Uzbek is the absence of auxiliary verbs in most past tense constructions. Instead, tense, aspect, and sometimes modality are encoded within a single verb form. This morphological efficiency, however, can pose difficulties for learners of Uzbek, especially those whose native languages rely on analytical tense systems.

3. Comparative Analysis of English and Uzbek Past Tense Systems

A comparison of English and Uzbek reveals significant typological differences in the expression of past actions. English relies on a syntactic and analytical system, whereas Uzbek employs a morphological and synthetic system. Hawkins [7, 213] suggests that such differences in morphological complexity affect both language processing and acquisition. While both languages express distinctions such as completion and duration, they do so through different grammatical mechanisms. English uses separate tense and aspect forms, whereas Uzbek integrates these meanings into verb suffixes. Ejupi and Skenderi [4, 245], in their comparative study of English and Albanian, demonstrate that such cross-linguistic differences are common among typologically diverse languages and require functional rather than purely formal analysis.

Greavu's [5, 232] research on code-switching also illustrates how tense forms adapt across languages, supporting the idea that tense expression is sensitive to both grammatical structure and discourse context. Furthermore, cognitive studies by Chan, Tan, and Xiao [2, 478] suggest that grammatical categories influence how speakers conceptualize actions and events, which is relevant when comparing tense systems across languages. Despite their differences, both English and Uzbek share the common goal of accurately representing past events. As Botirova [1, 34] notes, grammatical forms serve communicative purposes, and their effectiveness depends on how well form and meaning are aligned within a language system.

In conclusion, the expression of past actions in English and Uzbek reflects significant typological and grammatical differences between the two languages. English relies on an analytical tense–aspect system with the use of auxiliary verbs and participles, while Uzbek primarily employs morphological suffixes to convey past tense meanings. Despite these structural differences, both languages effectively express temporal relations, aspect, and speaker perspective. The comparative analysis demonstrates that understanding the interaction between grammatical form and meaning is essential for accurate interpretation and language learning. This study contributes to comparative linguistics by highlighting key similarities and differences in past tense expression in English and Uzbek.

Furthermore, the findings suggest that these differences may present specific challenges for learners of both languages, particularly in mastering tense–aspect distinctions and contextual usage. Awareness of such contrasts can help language learners avoid negative transfer and develop greater grammatical accuracy. From a pedagogical perspective, incorporating comparative approaches into language instruction may enhance learners' understanding of tense systems and improve translation skills. Overall, the study underscores the importance of cross-linguistic analysis in deepening our understanding of how languages encode time and meaning, and it provides a foundation for further research in tense, aspect, and modality across typologically diverse languages.

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