RESEARCH REPORT

มโนทัศน์เรื่องกาลและการณ์ลักษณะในภาษาอังกฤษของผู้เรียนไทย

**CONCEPTUALIZATIONS OF TENSE AND ASPECT IN ENGLISH AMONG THAI
LEARNERS**

BY

SOISITHORN ISARANKURA

DHURAKIJ PUNDIT UNIVERSITY

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บทคัดย่อ

งานวิจัยเรื่องนี้มีวัตถุประสงค์เพื่อศึกษาเปรียบเทียบระดับความใกล้เคียงในเชิงมโนทัศน์เรื่องกาลและการณ์ลักษณะในภาษาอังกฤษของผู้เรียนภาษาอังกฤษชาวไทยกับเจ้าของภาษา กลุ่มตัวอย่างประกอบด้วยกลุ่มเจ้าของภาษา 1 กลุ่ม จำนวน 15 คนและกลุ่มผู้เรียนไทย 3 กลุ่มซึ่งจำแนกตามความสามารถทางภาษาอังกฤษเป็นกลุ่มที่มีความสามารถระดับสูง กลาง และต่ำ จำนวนกลุ่มละ 33 คน รวมทั้งสิ้น 99 คน ผู้เข้าร่วมการวิจัยทั้งหมดอ่านบทความที่ใช้เป็นแบบทดสอบและตอบแบบสอบถามโดยการเลือกตัวเลือกที่ให้ความหมายของกาลและการณ์ลักษณะในภาษาอังกฤษซึ่งสอดคล้องกับมโนทัศน์ของตนมากที่สุด ตามบริบทซึ่งอยู่ในบทความที่ได้อ่าน

ผลการวิจัยพบว่า ระดับความใกล้เคียงของมโนทัศน์เรื่องกาลและการณ์ลักษณะในภาษาอังกฤษระหว่างผู้เรียนไทยกับเจ้าของภาษา มีความสัมพันธ์กับความสามารถทางภาษาอังกฤษของผู้เรียน กล่าวคือผู้เรียนที่มีความสามารถทางภาษาระดับสูงมีมโนทัศน์เรื่องกาลและการณ์ลักษณะใกล้เคียงกับเจ้าของภาษามากที่สุด ส่วนผู้เรียนที่มีความสามารถทางภาษาระดับต่ำมีมโนทัศน์แตกต่างจากเจ้าของภาษามากที่สุด กล่าวโดยรวมผู้เรียนไทยมีมโนทัศน์เรื่องการบอกเวลาปัจจุบันด้วยรูปกาล present simple และ progressive ใกล้เคียงกับเจ้าของภาษามากเป็นสองอันดับแรก ตามด้วยรูปกาล past simple ซึ่งแสดงเวลาในอดีต สำหรับกาลใน past perfect progressive นับว่าเข้าใจได้ยากที่สุดในกลุ่มผู้เรียนไทยทุกกลุ่ม ส่วนมโนทัศน์เรื่องการณ์ลักษณะในภาษาอังกฤษนั้นพบว่า มีความแตกต่างกันทั้งในระดับกลุ่มและระหว่างกลุ่มของผู้เรียนไทยมากกว่าการบอกเวลา จึงทำให้อนุมานได้ว่าปัญหาของผู้เรียนไทยในการเรียนรู้รูปกาลในภาษาอังกฤษเกิดจากความเข้าใจการณ์ลักษณะมากกว่าเรื่องเวลาอ้างอิงของเหตุการณ์ ทั้งนี้พบว่าการณ์ลักษณะของรูปกาลที่เข้าใจได้ยากที่สุดคือ past perfect progressive นอกจากนี้ผลของการวิจัยยังชี้ให้เห็นว่าบริบทและความหมายของกริยาเป็นปัจจัยหลักต่อมโนทัศน์เรื่องกาลและการณ์ลักษณะในภาษาอังกฤษ

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Abstract

This study investigated proximity in conceptualizations of tense and aspect in English between native English speakers (NSs) and Thai learners of English at three proficiency levels—high, intermediate, and low—referred to as non-native speakers of English (NNSs). The participants, consisting of 15 NSs and 99 NNSs, were asked to read a text and respond to a questionnaire by choosing the meanings of time references and aspectual properties of eight forms of tense and aspect markers from multiple-choice selections. The results showed an increase in the degree of proximity to NSs' norms as NNSs' proficiency levels increased across groups. The present time reference of the present tense with simple and progressive aspects represented the most accessible deictic time spans for all groups, followed by the past tense with the simple aspect. The past time reference with the perfect progressive aspect appeared to have been the most difficult to conceptualize for NNSs. With regard to conceptualizations of aspectual properties, within-group and across-group variations were greater, suggesting that aspect is more persistently problematic than time reference. Again, aspectual property of the perfect progressive in the past tense was the most difficult to access for NNSs. The results further suggested that discourse context and the semantic meaning of verb play a crucial role in the conceptualizations of tense and aspect.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

This study investigates Thai learners' conceptualizations of two grammatical categories in English: tense and aspect. The term *conceptualization* is used here to refer to the ability to interpret and identify the semantic meaning of the verb form. *Tense-aspect conceptualization*, thus, means the ability to recognize the tense-aspect marking of a verb and its meaning.

Tense is a *grammatical category* of a verb when it is used in a predicate of a sentence. *Tense markers* are added to a verb to represent a time reference of the event being referred to by the verb. In English, there are three (grammatical) tenses: *the present tense, the past tense* and *the future tense*. Each tense is marked by a specific tense marker, as shown in the following table.

Table 1.1: *Tense and Tense Marker in English*

TENSE	TENSE MARKER	
	Singular	*Plural*
Present	-s (except for 'I')	('zero' marker)
Past	-ed (except for irregular verbs)	
Future	will, shall, be going to	

The semantic information represented by a tense marker is the time reference being made by the speaker. Time reference is not an *absolute* time determined by a

clock or a calendar. Rather, it is a *relative* time, relative to the speech time or the time the speaker says the utterance. Therefore, this three-way *tense marking system* can represent more than three time references, especially when combined with the semantic information supplied by another grammatical category, the *aspect*.

Aspect is a grammatical category that adds information about how the speaker views the state of an event. There are 4 grammatical aspects: simple, perfect, progressive, and perfect progressive. Similar to tense, aspect is also marked by a specific marker, as shown below.

Table 1.2: *Aspect and Aspect Marker in English*

ASPECT	ASPECT MARKER
Simple	
Perfect	Have + -en
Progressive	Be + -ing
Perfect Progressive	Have been + -ing

As in the tense marking system, the four-way aspect marking system can represent more than four views of the state of an event, when combined with the semantic information supplied by the grammatical category *tense*. As such, the combination of both tense and aspect results in the complex tense-aspect system that accommodates a set of 12 grammatical markers used to represent the division of three time lines combined with four aspects. (The tense and aspect systems are described in greater detail in Chapter 2.)

Because of the complex interplay of the multiple form-function mappings, usage of the English tense-aspect system has been widely accepted to be one of the most difficult grammatical areas for learners of English as a second or foreign language (ESL/EFL) to fully master (Richards, 1981; Riddle, 1986; Hinkel, 1992). In fact, the tense-aspect system is often introduced very early, and it has occupied a prominent role in ESL/EFL classes. However, despite several years of learning, even advanced learners of English still have substantial difficulty with the tense-aspect system.

Although researchers have attempted to investigate the difficulty in the acquisition of English tense and aspect, the primary causes of learners' difficulty still remain unclear. Research suggests that tense and aspect errors result from learners' lack of understanding of the referential relationships that exist between time reference and aspectual properties in association with their grammatical markers. In acquiring the English tense-aspect system, learners need to learn all the grammatical forms designated for all tense-aspect combinations. They also need to have clear conceptual understanding of the time reference and aspectual property encoded in each form in order to choose the one that best fits a certain situation. This probably explains why ESL/EFL learners struggle so much with understanding and producing the correct form of the verb for a particular situation.

With regard to conceptualization of time, Levinson (1983) maintained that although the domains of time and their references exist in all languages, the divisions of time domains may be conceptualized differently among speakers of different languages. Hinkel (1992) argued that "time attributes," which include "perceptual, conceptual and cultural divisions of time vary greatly among language communities"

(p. 557). Moreover, she contended that the location of an event in time is "subjective and depends on how people perceive and experience temporal contexts in which events occur" (Hinkel, 1997, p. 290). Such differences can present a great deal of problems for EFL/ESL learners. According to Kripke (1991), the relationships between perceptions of time and the time reference are "determined by the conventions of the language" and are often "language specific" (p. 84). In learning a second language, L2 learners often resort to their prior knowledge of L1 and transfer concepts from their L1 to aid comprehension of L2. Thus, if the time reference in an L2 does not fit the learners' conceptualization in their L1, these learners are likely to have difficulty establishing a correspondence between L1 and L2 systems (Donnellan, 1991). In other words, in order to acquire the L2 system, learners need first to develop contextual beliefs shared by native speakers of the L2 speech community and correspondingly conceptualize time reference in ways native speakers do.

Added to the diversity of time conceptualizations, the fact that various language systems employ different linguistic devices to represent these time references also contributes to the complexity in acquiring the English tense-aspect system. English utilizes auxiliaries and/or inflectional morphology to refer to time and aspect, whereas in many other languages, the concept of time and aspect is conveyed by other means (Levinson, 1983). In Thai, for example, time and aspect are realized through lexical items such as nouns and adverbs or implicitly through contextual assumptions. With the differences in both forms and time concepts, speakers of languages without inflectional morphology, such as Thai, may find it even harder to establish the relationships between L1 and L2 grammatical markers and their references to time and aspect.

Because the relationships between forms and their meanings with regard to tense and aspect are not simple or obvious, L2 learners may not acquire the tense-aspect meanings and their morphological forms simultaneously. Although it remains inconclusive whether learners acquire grammatical forms before meanings or vice versa, a few studies have suggested that knowledge of morphological forms seems to precede tense-aspect meanings and functions. For example, in a study conducted by Coppetiers (1987), highly-educated nonnative speakers with near-native proficiency in French had acquired tense-aspect forms, while their perceptions of meanings were not native-like. Coppetiers suggested that the non-native speakers' perceptions of tense-aspect meanings appeared to be strongly affected by their L1. Speakers of languages that lack L2 morphological forms may perceive L2 time and aspect according to their L1 conceptual paradigms, resulting in their interpretations of L2 tense-aspect meanings in ways different from native speakers of languages with morphological forms.

In line with Coppetiers's study, Hinkel (1992) found that non-native English speakers conceptualized time references of English tense-aspect markers differently from the way native speakers (NSs) did, resulting in constraints on their usage of the English tense-aspect system. Hinkel concluded that confusion over tense-aspect markers and their meanings among non-native English speakers may be due to their inability to develop new conceptualizations of how time is referred to in relation to aspectual properties within the given contexts in which certain forms are used.

Given that the Thai language uses a different linguistic device to mark the concepts of time and aspect (i.e., Thai verbs do not inflect for time and aspect in the same way as English verbs do), such grammatical verb forms in English may seem

confusing and inaccessible to Thai speakers, particularly for those with low English proficiency. For learners with relatively high English proficiency who tend to acquire grammatical forms, the concepts of time and aspect may still pose some difficulty for them to fully acquire the whole system. This could be due to the fact that Thai speakers conceptualize time and aspect in English differently from native English speakers.

Based on the above rationale, the goal of this study was to investigate conceptualizations of English tense and aspect among Thai learners with high, intermediate and low English proficiency levels, as opposed to NSs' conceptualizations. In so doing, it is hoped that the results would reveal the proximity in conceptualizations of time reference and aspectual property encoded in the English grammatical tense-aspect markers between Thai learners and native English speakers.

The organization of this research study is as follows. In this chapter, research questions, objectives, hypotheses, scope, limitations, significance of the study and key term definitions are presented. Chapter 2 reviews literature relevant to the study. Chapter 3 introduces research methodology. In Chapter 4, the results of the study are presented. Chapter 5 provides the discussion of the results. Finally, Chapter 6 presents the conclusions and implications of the study.

1.2 Research Questions

The purpose of this study was to examine conceptualizations of time reference and aspectual property encoded in English tense-aspect markers among Thai learners of English at three English proficiency levels in terms of proximity to those of native

English speakers (NSs). In so doing, this study aimed to answer the following questions:

(1) What are the conceptualizations of time reference and aspectual property of English tense and aspect among Thai learners at three English proficiency levels: high, intermediate and low?

(2) What is the degree of proximity to the native English speaker norms in terms of conceptualizations of time reference and aspectual property among the three groups of Thai learners at high, intermediate and low English proficiency levels?

1.3 Objective of the Study

The objective of this study was two-fold:

(1) To investigate conceptualizations of tense and aspect in English by Thai learners at three different proficiency levels: high, intermediate and low, using conceptualizations of native English speakers as a baseline.

(2) To examine the degree of proximity to the native English speaker norms in terms of conceptualizations of time reference and aspectual property among Thai learners at high, intermediate and low English proficiency levels.

1.4 Statement of Hypotheses

To carry out the objectives of this study, the following hypotheses were formulated and tested.

The conceptualizations of tense and aspect in English among Thai learners of English differ at varying degrees from those of native English speakers. Conceptualizations of Thai learners with high English proficiency more closely

approximate the native speaker norms than conceptualizations of learners with lower proficiency levels.

1.5 Scope of the Study

As the present study attempted to identify Thai learners' potential problems in comprehending the English tense-aspect system, the research was undertaken as follows.

(1) The data-gathering process was conducted in a cross-sectional design using Thai learners of English at three proficiency levels: high, intermediate and low. Conceptualizations of time reference and aspectual property of these three sample groups were then compared with those of native English speakers. The research methodology is discussed in Chapter 3.

(2) This study was primarily an exploratory study. It was decided to explore conceptualizations of time and aspect that denote only the factual account of an event, and not non-factual or predictive. This decision was based on the assertion that only the present and past tenses in English express the factual account of a situation (Huddleston, 1984; Quirk et al., 1972); future events are merely predictive and thus are expressed by means of a modal auxiliary: *will* or *shall*. The exclusion of all future forms at this stage was to avoid the interpretations of time and aspectual references based on speculative events, which may be more subjective than those based on factual events. Consequently, the present study investigated conceptualizations of time and aspectual references of the present and past tense-aspect markers only. All the future forms with the future modal auxiliaries were not in the scope of this study. Therefore, with the present and past time lines combined with aspectual markers for

simple, perfect, progressive and perfect progressive, the following tense-aspect forms were investigated in this study:

Present time: (1) Present Simple

(2) Present Perfect

(3) Present Progressive

(4) Present Perfect Progressive

Past time: (5) Past Simple

(6) Past Perfect

(7) Past Progressive

(8) Past Perfect Progressive

1.6 Limitations of the Study

The present study aimed to provide patterns in the comprehension of English tense meanings among Thai learners of English at different proficiency levels in terms of proximity to the native English speaker norms. Nonetheless, it had the following limitations.

(1) The decision that Thai university teachers of English would represent the high-proficiency group was based on the presumption that their language ability was high. However, their actual proficiency was not evaluated as it was not viable to request teachers who were randomly chosen from different universities to take the same English proficiency test that the participants in the intermediate and low proficiency groups took. Despite this limitation, care was taken to assess English proficiency of the students who were recruited to represent the intermediate and low proficiency groups. These groups were evaluated on the basis of their scores from the

DPU-Test of English Proficiency (DPU-TEP) administered at one time, and thus a division between ability levels should be possible.

(2) The sample groups used in the present study were relatively small. Additionally, the intermediate and low English proficiency groups were recruited from a single university. The investigation may limit the generalizability to students in other contexts.

(3) The cross-sectional design of this study could be viewed as reflecting only one phase of learners' language development. This limits one's ability to draw strong inferences about the learner's actual pattern of English tense and aspect comprehension at different developmental stages. However, it is hoped that the findings of the study could present some insights into learners' patterns of English tense-aspect acquisition that can be useful for the teaching of the English tense-aspect system to Thai learners of English.

1.7 Definitions of Key Terms

For the purpose of the study, the key terms are defined as follows.

(1) Conceptualization

Conceptualization is used in this study to refer to the ability to interpret and identify the semantic meaning of the verb form used in a predicate of a sentence. *Conceptualization of tense and aspect*, thus, refers to the ability to interpret time reference and aspectual property encoded in the tense and aspect marking of a verb and to identify its meaning.

(2) Time

Time refers to "actual clock time in our physical world … as measured by clocks, calendars, or other such devices" (Marquez & Bowen [1983] as cited in DeCarrico, 1986, p. 667).

(3) Tense and Time Reference

Tense is a grammatical term referring to the forms that verbs take to represent a *time reference* of the event being referred to: either the present or the past. *Time reference* conveyed by *tense* can be said to be the *conceptual time*, i.e. it is not an absolute time determined by a clock or a calendar. Rather, it is a *relative time*, relative to the time the utterance is said. In English, a verb is inflected to express tense or time reference of an event as happening in the past or at present. Reference to the future time can be made in a number of ways such as by using the modal auxiliary *will*, *shall*, or the semi-auxiliary *be going to*. (Please refer to Table 1.1 on page 1.)

Tense is often used in combination with *aspect* marking to indicate the ways the speaker views the event/situation expressed by the verb at a particular time signified by tense.

(4) Aspect

Aspect is an additional feature of time reference, which is independent of its relation to any reference time. Aspect gives the details about how the speaker views the situation described in terms of *internal temporal properties*, for instance focusing on the completion, continuation, or habitual occurrence of the event/situation.

Although aspect is common to human languages, different linguistic forms are used to represent aspect among various language communities. In English, aspect is encoded in particular grammatical forms such as the progressive, perfect or simple past morphemes. (Please refer to Table 1.2 on page 2.)

With the combination of time and aspect marking, English has 12 forms of verb, which are commonly referred to in grammar textbooks as "tenses":

Present time: Present Simple, Present Perfect, Present Progressive, and Present Perfect Progressive

Past time: Past Simple, Past Perfect, Past Progressive, and Past Perfect Progressive

Future time: Future Simple, Future Perfect, Future Progressive, and Future Perfect Progressive

Yule (1998) argued that the present, past and future tense forms can be differentiated in terms of "remoteness" and the "factual account" of an event. "Remote" situations are referred to by the past tense, whereas the present and future tenses are considered "non-remote". In terms of the factual account of an event, the present and past tenses are regarded as "factual," while the future forms imply "non-factual" situations.

In line with Yule's (1998) argument, some researchers and educators (e.g., Huddleston, 1984; Quirk et al., 1972) characterized English as containing only two tenses: the present and past. Future events are regarded as predictive, and thus they are conveyed by means of a modal auxiliary or semi-auxiliary.

1.8 Significance of the Study

The present study is worth conducting for several reasons.

(1) There has been no study to date that investigates differences in conceptualizations between native English speakers and Thai learners of English with regard to time reference and aspectual property in relation to English tense and aspect. In order for teachers to correct learner errors in tense usage, it is extremely important to understand how Thai learners as opposed to native English speakers conceptualize time and aspect conveyed by the tense and aspect markers.

(2) It has been suggested that EFL learners at different proficiency levels, particularly those whose first languages (L1s) lack morphological tense markers, have different kinds of problems with usage of the English tense-aspect system. Yet, there has been no investigation in any great detail into what kinds of problems these learners might have at different stages of their second language development. This study aimed to identify some problems of learners' difficulty in acquiring the English tense-aspect system that may arise from their diverse conceptualizations of time and aspect.

(3) Many grammar textbooks are written for ESL classrooms with largely speakers whose first languages have inflections of the verb. Thus, the terminology associated with time and aspect conceptualizations and grammatical references used in those published materials should be more easily understood by L1 learners whose first languages have verb tense-aspect inflections than by those whose L1s lack morphological tenses. The results of the study are expected to reveal the extent to which Thai learners who have been exposed to many years of English training

understand such terminology associated with time and aspectual references in the same way as they are understood by native English speakers.

(4) The findings are also expected to shed some light on the acquisition pattern of the English tense-aspect system among Thai learners. Additional sources of information as to which tense forms are more accessible to Thai learners than others could be a valuable tool to determine learner problems at different stages in their L2 development.

The pedagogical implications of this study should accordingly be clear. An additional source of learner problems regarding diverse conceptualizations of time and aspect could be useful for teachers in aiding them to develop more informed methods and design more appropriate materials for teaching English tense and aspect to Thai learners.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

This chapter reviews theories and research studies that are relevant to the present study. It consists of four sections as follows:

(1) Tenses

(2) Time and Time Reference in English

(3) Aspect in English

- Lexical Aspect

- Grammatical Aspect

 (4) Research on L1 and L2 Acquisition of Tense and Aspect

Tense, time and aspect are sometimes referred to in different ways in ESL textbooks. In the following section, these three terms will be discussed.

2.1 Tenses

'Tense' and 'time' are sometimes used interchangeably and many ESL textbooks do not make a clear distinction between the two terms. As such, one may find the terms present tense, past tense and future tense used in some published materials to indicate the time of an event as occurring in the present, the past, and the future, respectively. Comrie (1985, p.5) refers to 'tense' as the "grammaticalised expression of location in time", which he differentiates from 'aspect'. Aspect, on the other hand, involves the grammaticalisation of different ways of viewing the internal temporal constituency of a situation (Comrie, 1976, 1985). Simply put, tense and aspect refer to grammatical forms that verbs take to express two different semantic

meanings. While tense designates verbs which express the location in time of an event, aspect designates verbs to indicate how the speaker views the internal temporal properties of an event (DeCarrico, 1986). For example, in Table 2.1 below *He plays* (*present* simple) and *He played* (*past* simple) show a difference in tense, whereas *He played* (past *simple*) and *He was playing* (past *progressive*) show a distinction in aspect.

Table 2.1: *Tense and Aspect Combination*

	PRESENT	**PAST**
Simple	He plays.	He played.
Progressive	He is playing.	He was playing.

As can be seen, tense and aspect are jointly connected to the verb form. This makes it hard for learners to clearly differentiate one grammatical feature from the other.

In line with Comrie (1985) and DeCarrico (1986), 'tense' in this paper is used to refer to the grammatical forms that the verb undergoes in expressing the *time reference* of an event or situation that the verb describes. (The time concepts will be discussed in more detail in the following section.) English is a language that requires an overt morphological marking of time reference, which is expressed in the set of verbs in terms of auxiliary or inflectional affix in different forms. These morphological forms of a verb, often simply referred to as 'tenses', typically indicate the location of an event in time – either in the past, present, or future. The present and past are expressed by verb inflections and the future by auxiliaries.

The choice of tense is affected by the relationships between three times: event time (Te), reference time (Tr), and time of utterance or speech time (Ts). The relationship between the three times can be classified as "anteriority, simultaneity and posteriority—or simply put—past, present, and future" (Huddleston, 2006, p. 103). For instance, the present tense associates the event time with the reference time, which is more or less simultaneous to the speech time (Te = Tr = Ts); the past tense associates the event time with the reference time, which is anterior to the speech time (Te = Tr < Ts); and the future tense associates the event time with the reference time, which is posterior to the speech time (Te = Tr > Ts). Tense is, therefore, "relational" in that "it locates one time by its relation to another" (Huddleston, 2006, p. 102). Richards (1995) refers to tense as 'deictic' as it is simultaneous with the moment of utterance but points either toward time now or time then.

2.2 Time and Time Reference in English

As discussed in the earlier section, 'time' is one feature that is usually used to refer to tense'. In fact, 'time' should be kept strictly apart from 'tense'. 'Time' merely refers to the actual physical time in the real world "as measured by clocks, calendars, or other such devices (Marquez and Bowen, 1983, as cited in DeCarrico, 1986, p. 667). The units of time, according to Quirk, Greenbaum and Leech (1992), are extra-linguistic; they exist independently of the grammar of any particular language.

Although time is a universal concept common to all languages, the relationship between time and tense is not. This means that while each language community typically makes a distinction between three time locations as in the *past*,

present, and *future*, there is no obligation for the distinction to be carried solely by tense. Some languages demonstrate an explicit relation between time and tense. English, for example, associates time with tense through verbal inflections and auxiliaries. Such a relationship does not exist among many other languages in which time is expressed through several other linguistic means such as adverbs and various time expressions. In discourse-oriented languages such as Thai, time in most cases is conveyed implicitly through contextual assumptions (Chaiyaratana, 1961).

Not only do different languages utilize different means to convey the realities of time, the concept of time itself may be perceived differently among different language communities. Comrie (1985) argues that conceptualization of time differs radically among various cultural groups (p. 3). The boundary of a day, for example, may be divided differently in different cultures (Hinkel, 1992). Days, in Muslim and Jewish cultures, do not begin immediately after midnight as they do in western conventions, but at sunset. On the contrary, the Japanese consider a new day to begin at sunrise (Hinkel, 1992, p. 557). When conceptualizations of time are determined by the conventions of the language and thus differ across language societies, the relationship of meaning between time and its referential use may consequently be different and language specific. In order to understand the meanings of linguistic realizations of time and its reference, the learner of a particular language must share the time conventions and conceptualizations of the members of such a speech community. In the case that the reference does not fit time conceptualizations of L2 learners, they face difficulty establishing a correspondence between time reference of L2 and their L1.

Usage of tense in relation to time reference is largely subjective and context-

sensitive. The choice of tense depends heavily on the time-point the user wants to focus on in a particular context (Gabrielatos, 2003). Speakers of languages without morphological tense markers may find it difficult to conceptualize the time reference from the context. For learners to master the English tense system, they have to understand not only how the three notions of time—i.e. event time, reference time, and speech time—correspond to tense but also how context impacts on determining tenses (ibid).

2.3 Aspect in English

'Aspect' is a separate feature from time and tense. It is independent of its relation to any reference time. The term '*aspect*' is given to verb forms to signify certain ways in which an event is viewed or experienced (Jacob, 1995). An event can be seen as a completed whole, in progress, repeated intermittently, habitual, durative, or continuative to a more recent time (ibid). Although time and aspect are neither equivalent nor subsumed under one another, they complement each other in determining morphological tense-aspect markers.

Like time reference, aspect is common to human languages (Comrie, 1976). However, different languages use different linguistic forms to convey aspectuality (meaning). In English, aspect can be said to encode in the lexical class of the verb phrase and is referred to as 'lexical aspect'. Another type of aspect is expressed in particular grammatical forms, referred to as 'grammatical aspect' or 'viewpoint aspect' (Smith, 1983). According to Gabrielatos (2003) and Jacobs (1995), English has been categorized as containing two grammatical aspects: perfect and progressive. Finite verbs can be marked for one, both or neither of the aspects, but must be marked

for tense. Svalberg and Chuchu (1998) assert that English can be said to have three aspects: simple, progressive and perfect. Given the interests of this paper in examining the participants' viewpoints on situations expressed by the present simple and past simple, it was decided that the two verb forms are also marked for the 'simple' aspect.

Although lexical aspect is not central to the investigation of this study, it will be briefly described in order to add to the understanding of the meanings of aspectuality. Then, grammatical aspect will be discussed in the section that follows.

2.3.1 Lexical Aspect

Lexical aspect is also known as 'semantic' aspect (Comrie, 1976). It indicates the semantic properties inherent in the meaning of the predicate or a particular conception of a situation rather than in an isolated verb (Robison, 1995, p. 346), regardless of any grammatical marking or reference to time (Salaberry, 1999). Compare *sing* and *sing a song*, for example. The verb *sing* in isolation may be conceived as having no definite duration, whereas *sing a song* has a definite endpoint determined by the length of the song. Vendler (1967) classifies lexical aspect into four aspectual classes:

1. *States (STA)* denote stative situations that have no dynamics, and continue without additional effort or energy being applied (e.g., love, hate, want, seem, know, be).

2. *Activities (ACT)* denote events or actions that have duration, but without a specific endpoint (e.g., run, walk, play, sing, sleep, talk, rain).

3. *Achievements (ACH)* denote situations that take place instantaneously, and can be perceived as being reduced to a single point without duration (e.g., reach, arrive, leave, recognize, notice)

4. *Accomplishments (ACC)* are similar to activities in that they denote events or actions that have inherent duration, and, like achievements, they have an inherent endpoint (e.g., make, build, paint).

Among the above four classifications, there are three basic semantic distinctions: stative vs. dynamic, telic vs. atelic, and punctual vs. durative. Stative predicates denote conditions, properties, or relations that exist; dynamic predicates describe actions or events that occur. A telic predicate suggests a situation that is presumed to have an inherent endpoint if the goal is reached; an atelic predicate relates an event that has no well-defined endpoint. Punctual predicates denote events that occur in an instant, with no duration; durative predicates indicate situations perceived as lasting for some duration of time. These semantic properties can be illustrated by three binary features: [± punctual], [± telic], and [± dynamic]. The three aspectual semantic contrasts effect the four classifications of lexical aspect, as displayed in Table 2.2.

Table 2.2: *Semantic Features for Vendler's classification of Aspectual Categories*

	States	Activities	Accomplishments	Achievements
Punctual	–	–	–	+
Telic	–	–	+	+
Dynamic	–	+	+	+

Table 2.2 shows that achievements are punctual whereas all other categories are durative. Achievements and accomplishments are telic (have an inherent endpoint) whereas activities and states do not have a specific endpoint. Stative verbs are non-dynamic, whereas activities, achievements and accomplishments are dynamic.

2.3.2 Grammatical Aspect

As the name implies, the grammatical aspect signifies how an action or event is viewed and is expressed through grammatical markers such as verb inflections or auxiliaries. The grammatical aspect is sometimes called the 'viewpoint aspect' (Smith, 1983). English can be said to have four aspects: simple aspect, perfect aspect, progressive aspect, and perfect progressive aspect (Svalberg and Chuchu, 1998).

(a) Simple Aspect

The simple aspect is also called the 'indefinite aspect'. It depicts an event as a whole, as incomplete (indefinite), as seen unfolding from beginning to end, or as unchanging (Richards, 1995). Finite verbs in the simple aspect allow the speaker to express discrete or habitual actions or states. The present simple is marked by verbs in the base form or with the inflection –*s*; the past simple is marked by the inflection –*ed* (the so-called "2nd form" verbs); and the future is added by *will*, for example,

I live in Milan.

The little girl reads a book every morning.

Two and two makes four.

The train leaves in an hour.

I read "War and Peace" yesterday.

He painted me a picture.

I will go to the bookstore with my best friend.

(b) Perfect Aspect

In terms of morphological form, the perfect aspect is marked by means of the auxiliary *verb* have, followed by the past participle form (the so-called *–en* form) of a lexical verb. The auxiliary verb *have* will be converted to *has*, *had*, or added by the future marker *will* as in the following examples:

Table 2.3: *Perfect Aspect in English*

Present Perfect	*Past Perfect*	*Future Perfect*
I *have eaten* the food. You *have eaten* the food. We *have eaten* the food. Mary *has eaten* the food.	The train *had left* (before I arrived) Jane *had eaten* the food. The goalkeeper *had injured* his leg and couldn't play.	The plane *will have landed* by then.

Semantically, the perfect aspect expresses the time relation of anteriority (Huddleston & Pullum, 2002). In other words, the perfect aspect is used when the speaker refers to the time of an event that may begin before (anterior) and extend up to the reference time, which may or may not be simultaneous with the speech time. With the perfect, the reference time may be specified by the time clause, adverbs, or the context.

The ***present perfect*** is used to express the event that begins before and extends up to the reference time, which is simultaneous with the speech time, as illustrated in the diagram below:

```
        Te         <        Tr = Ts
                    ┌─────────────┐
<───────────────────────────────────────────>
                    │             │
                    ▼             │
               has lived          │
                                  ▼
```
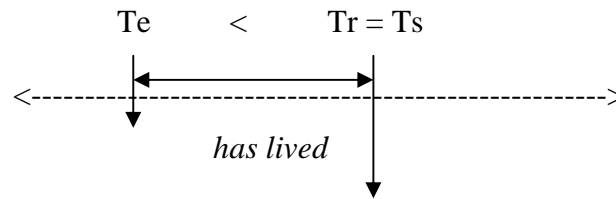
Present perfect: John **has lived** in Paris for two years.

The ***past perfect*** is used to express the event that begins before and extends up to the reference time, which is anterior to the speech time, as shown below:

```
        Te       <      Tr      <      Ts
                 ┌──────────────┐
<─────────────────────────────────────────────>
                 │              │             │
                 ▼              │             │
            had lived           ▼             │
                              met             ▼
```
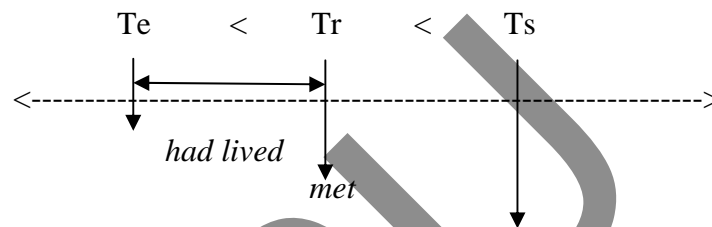
Past perfect: John **had lived** in Paris for two years (when I *met* him).

The event expressed by the ***future perfect*** is anterior to the reference time in the future, as illustrated below:

```
                        Ts             <        Tr
                                    ┌──────────────┐
<─────────────────────────────────────────────────────>
                        │                          │
                        │           will have written│
                        ▼                          ▼
```
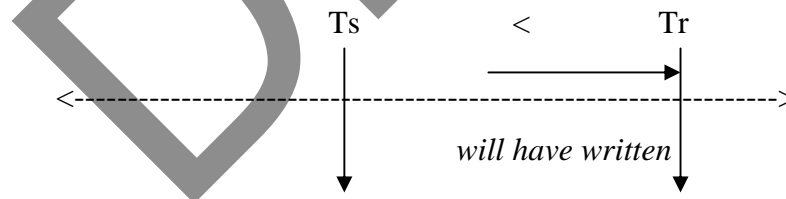
Future perfect: John **will have written** four chapters (by next week).

From the above examples, with the perfect aspect the speaker focuses on the relevancy of anteriority to reference time, either in terms of continuative, experiential, or resultative perfect (Huddleston & Pullum, 2002). Although the beginning of the event time is unspecified, as in the case of future perfect, the speaker indicates his interest in the state of affairs at the reference time as a result or an experience of the anterior event/situation. Quirk et al. (1992, p. 91) describes the perfect as indicating "a period of time stretching backwards into some earlier time." Present perfect

denotes "current relevance" (p. 91); past perfect signals "past-in-the-past" (p. 92).

(c) Progressive Aspect

The progressive aspect is shown in the verb phrases by means of the verb *be* immediately followed by a lexical verb in the present participle form, the so-called –*ing* form. Huddleston and Pullum (2002) describe the category of meaning to involve the following features:

(1) The situation is presented as in progress

(2) The situation is viewed imperfectively

(3) The situation is interpreted as mid-interval

(4) The situation is presented as durative

(5) The situation is presented as dynamic

(6) The situation is presented as having limited duration

Situation in progress

Consider the following examples:

(a) *Paula <u>was cooking</u> dinner when I arrived.*

(b) *They <u>were discussing</u> the matter over lunch.*

(c) *I <u>am writing</u> my term paper at the moment.*

In (a), the clause *when I arrived* indicates that at that point the *cooking* was in progress. In (b), the phrase over lunch is a period allowed for the ongoing discussion throughout that period. Some situations are not strictly continuous but allow for gaps. An example can be seen in (c). One is unlikely to *only write* the term paper at a single sitting—that is, there may be reading interspersed with periods when one is doing

other things (such as taking some rest, or even a nap). But this is of no linguistic significance. The gaps are normally treated as part of the situation. Thus, in (c) it is the situation with gaps included that is presented as ongoing.

Imperfectivity

     (d) *When I arrived, Paula <u>phoned</u> Nicky*.

     (e) *When I arrived, Paula <u>was phoning</u> Nicky*.

In (d), the *phoning* is viewed as a whole; the non-progressive is interpreted 'perfectively', and the clause *when I arrived* indicates the time of the phoning as a whole.   Semantically, the act of arriving and Paula's phoning are said to be simultaneous, but pragmatically we interpret it as the sequence of actions with the phoning immediately following the speaker's arrival. In (e), the progressive gives an imperfective interpretation. The time clause *when I arrived* specifies the time when the phoning was in progress, with the implication that it had started before the speaker's arrival and continued after it. The diagram below illustrates the relationship between the two actions.

arrived

<--------------------------------|---------------------> *was phoning*
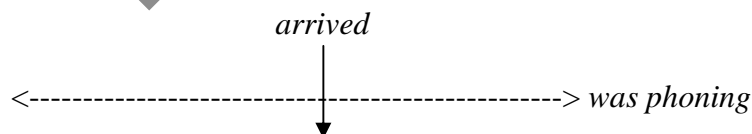
The progressive use of a situation is sometimes presented as a frame or background for a perfective (viewed as whole) situation:

     (f) *I saw a terrible car accident as I <u>was walking</u> along the street*.

     (g) *Michael <u>was mowing</u> the lawn when the police arrived*.

Mid-Interval

Progressive aspectual is normally interpreted as a mid-interval of the whole situation—that is, it specifies a point or period that excludes the beginning and an end. For example,

(h) *Michael is mowing the lawn*.

(i) *Annie was writing a novel*.

In (h), the mowing started in the past and will continue for at least some time into the future; whereas in (i), the writing started before the time specified in the context and presumably continued afterwards, which therefore excludes the punctual terminal phrase. The progressive used in this case implicates *incompleteness* and is of great significance with accomplishment verbs as discussed earlier.

Duration

For a situation to be in progress, it must have duration. In other words, there can be no progress within a punctual situation.   Compare the sentences below:

(j) *The train arrived*.

(k) *The train was arriving*.

The sentence in (j) can be interpreted punctually as an achievement, whereas in (k) the train had not yet arrived, and thus, the effect of the progressive is precisely to change a punctual situation into a durative one, providing a basis for realizing future achievements.

Dynamicity

Expressions that indicate purely static situations do not combine properly with progressive aspect.

(l) *When I left, Jackie <u>had</u> her head buried in a book but David <u>was watching</u>*

   TV.

The *have* clause in (l) has non-progressive aspect because having one's head buried in a book is a state whereas *watching TV* is an activity, and thus can be progressive, though the time clause *when I left* is shared by both. There are, however, several ways in which the progressive can combine with a stative expression to give a dynamic interpretation:

(m) *Peter <u>is being</u> smart*, as opposed to *Peter <u>is</u> smart*.

(n) *Linda <u>is driving</u> to school this week*, as opposed to *Linda <u>drives</u> to school*

   every day.

In (m), the non-progressive *Peter is smart* is stative in that we interpret *smart* as being a quality. By contrast, the progressive *Peter is being smart* is dynamic because we interpret it as describing Peter's present behavior—"Peter is behaving in a smart manner". In (n), *Linda drives to school every day* again suggests a serial state interpretation indicating her regular mode of travel to school whereas the progressive version comes from the feature of temporary state (perhaps she normally goes to school in someone else's car, but this week something happens, so she is driving to school).

Limited Duration

The progressive is often used to denote the situation that is of limited duration or temporary. In *Peter is being smart*, the focus is on current behavior and therefore is likely to be interpreted as indicating a shorter duration than *Peter is smart*, which generally suggests a permanent personal quality (state of affairs vs. dynamicity

resulting in limited duration). By comparison, *The train arrived* and *The train was arriving* suggest the interaction between punctual and extended duration.

(d) Perfect Progressive Aspect

The perfect progressive is marked by the form of *have been* immediately followed by a lexical verb in the present participle form, the so-called –*ing* form. The perfect progressive combines the functions of perfect and progressive aspects and can be more or less what can be predicted from the functions of the individual aspects. While the perfect expresses ***anteriority***, the progressive indicates the period up to the reference time that has ***limited duration***. Following the basic use of the perfect, the perfect progressive can suggest the results of an event/situation at the reference time, but with the emphasis on the temporary duration of such a situation, as implicated in the progressive.

Jacobs (1995) makes a distinction between perfect and perfect progressive aspects in that the latter has applied the completion sense of the individual perfect aspect to the duration sense of the progressive. Thus, instead of being completed, the action/event is rather interrupted at the time the sentence refers to (pp. 209-210).

Consider the sentence below.

(o) Mary ***had been cooking*** dinner when Eric *arrived*.

Compare the sentence (o) above with sentence (p) in the past perfect and sentence (q) in the past progressive below:

(p) Mary ***had cooked*** dinner.

(q) Mary ***was cooking*** dinner.

Sentence (p) with the perfect aspect suggests a finished state of the action, whereas sentence (q) in the progressive indicates the activity being in progress, but not completed, at the reference time. Thus, with combination of both aspects, we can tell that at the time Eric arrived in sentence (o), the duration of the cooking could be over, but we cannot tell from the sentence whether the cooking had been completed. Mary might go back later to finish cooking the dinner. The speaker's attention is not on the resultative state of the activity, but rather on the durative state at the time the sentence refers to.

In summary, the English tense-aspect system thus puts the relations of three time locations—present, past and future—together with the four aspect of simple, perfect, progressive, and perfect progressive. With tense and aspect combinations, English accommodates 12 tense-aspect grammatical forms, as shown in Table 2.4 below.

Table 2.4: *Twelve tense-aspect forms in English*

	Simple **0**	**Perfect** *have + V-en*	**Progressive** *be + V-ing*	**Perfect Progressive** *have + -en be + V-ing*
Present	Present simple *plays*	Present perfect *has/have played*	Present progressive *is/am/are playing*	Present perfect progressive *has/have been playing*
Past	Past simple *played*	Past perfect *had played*	Past progressive *was/were playing*	Past perfect progressive *had been playing*
Future	Future simple *will play*	Future perfect *will have played*	Future progressive *will be playing*	Future perfect progressive *will have been playing*

Note: Adapted from Larsen-Freeman, D., Kuehn, T., & Haccuis, M, 2002, p. 3.

Disagreements over the English tense-aspect system pertain to the question of how many 'tenses' there are. In associating 'tense' with 'time' of an event, Comrie (1976) identifies three tenses in English: *past, present*, and *future*, whereas Jacobs & Rosenbaum (1970), Lester (1976) and Quirk et al. (1992) hold the view that English has two tenses: *past* and *present*. In the assertion that English contains only the present and past tenses, it views these two tenses as expressing the factual account of an event or a situation. The present, on the one hand, expresses proximity, while the past, on the other, expresses remoteness. Futurity is characterized as the non-factual account of a situation. It is regarded as predictive and thus is not a tense, but merely a future time marker. The future time markers are shown by means of other structures such as simple present, present progressive, or modals in the present-past time dichotomy.

In line with the latter argument, the decision was made for the present study to primarily investigate the tenses that express only the factual account of a situation. Hence, eight tense-aspect markers were investigated which express two time locations—the present and past—in relation with aspectual markers for simple, perfect, progressive and perfect progressive.

Present time: Present Simple, Present Perfect, Present Progressive, and Present Perfect Progressive

Past time: Past Simple, Past Perfect, Past Progressive, and Past Perfect Progressive

2.4 Research on L1 and L2 Acquisition of Tense and Aspect

The issue of tense and aspect in English has been extensively investigated in L1 and L2 acquisition research. This section reviews previous studies in L1 and L2 acquisition of English tense and aspect.

2.4.1 L1 Acquisition of Tense and Aspect

In Brown's (1973) work on English L1 acquisition, he found that the first morpheme that emerged in L1 children was the progressive aspect marker *–ing*, but without the existence of the auxiliary *be*. The addition of auxiliary *be* in the correct forms is acquired at a later stage. Children also recognize the semantic distinction between activity and stative verbs very early and learn to apply the rule for the progressive appropriately, and never overgeneralize the *–ing* ending to stative verbs such as *know*. Although children are capable of distinguishing aspect, they do not combine aspect markers with time reference. A child's sense of time reference is initially limited to the here and now. In other words, the child first talks about things that are occurring now. The child starts to talk about the past or present between age 1½ and 3; however, the point of reference is always in the present. Around age 3 to 3½, the child gains a sense of reference other than the present. Brown (1973) further noted that L1 children used past tense morphology with a small group of punctual verbs such as *fell, broke, and dropped* (p. 334).

Bloom, Lifter, & Hafitz (1980) found the correlation between lexical aspect and the emergence of verbal morphology in their longitudinal study of L1 children. In their study, the *–ing* ending almost always occurred with action verbs such as *play* and *run*, and the past tense form occurred with punctual verbs such as *find* and *fall*.

2.4.2 L2 Acquisition of Tense and Aspect

L2 research on tense and aspect markers also reported correlations between lexical aspect and verbal morphology acquisition. Bardovi-Harlig & Reynolds (1995) found that lexical aspect played an important role in the use of past tense although in their early stages learners tended to undergeneralize the meaning of the past. The results from a cloze test showed that both instructed L2 learners and untutored L2 learners of English demonstrated similar sequences in the use of past tense for achievement and accomplishment verbs, which suggested that the teaching of past tense for these two types of verbs was much less necessary than the teaching of past tense with activity and stative verbs.

Robison (1995) also examined the relationship between verb inflections and lexical aspect and found that the L2 acquisition of verbal morphology aligned with the inherent aspectual properties of the verb. That is, learners linked –s with stative verbs, -ing with activity verbs, and the past morpheme with punctual events, and spreading more to all punctual predicates and durative events in higher-level learners. From the English interviews with L2 learners of English, the association of verbal morphology and lexical aspect varied across proficiency levels. Lower-level learners strongly associated –s and the past morpheme with lexical aspect, whereas learners at higher levels shifted from markers of lexical aspect to markers of time reference.

Shirai and Andersen (1995) examined the L2 acquisition of English tense-aspect morphology in three children and found that they initially used past inflections with achievement verbs, and progressive inflections with activity verbs. The result also supports the aspect hypothesis that early development of tense-aspect

morphology is strongly influenced by the inherent aspect of the verbs.

Collins' (2002) study of ESL learners' use of tense-aspect marker in past contexts supported the aspect hypothesis. Her findings suggested that the learners were significantly more successful in using the past tense with telic verbs, struggled most with stative verbs. Learners preferred progressive for activities and present for statives.

Research also investigated the relationships between the meaning and forms with regard to tense and aspect acquisition. In Coppetiers's (1987) study, highly-educated nonnative speakers with near-native proficiency in French had acquired tense-aspect forms, while their perceptions of meanings were not native-like. Coppetiers suggested that the nonnative speakers' perceptions of tense-aspect meanings appeared to be strongly affected by tense and aspect meanings in their L1. Speakers of languages that lack morphological tenses may perceive L2 tense and time according to their L1 conceptual paradigms, resulting in their interpretations of tense and aspect meanings in ways different from native speakers of languages with morphological tense-aspect forms.

In line with Coppetiers's study, Donnellan (1991) found that perceptions of meanings and functions of time reference in the learners' L1 may affect their ability to establish the referential relationships between L1 and L2 time reference and grammatical markers. This makes it difficult, if not impossible, for speakers of languages, particularly those without morphological tenses, to be able to fully acquire conventionalized uses of the English tense-aspect system.

Hinkel (1992) investigated the meanings and implications that time, aspect and English tenses have for nonnative English speakers. She found that NNSs' intuitive conceptualizations of time were not linear and/or deictic in the same way as those of NSs. Thus, NNSs have limited access to the means of interpreting time and its associated verbal morphology. Hinkel concludes that differences between NS and NNS perceptions of tense meanings may be caused by the fact that "NNs and NNSs view time spans and their divisions and measurements differently" (p. 568). In her study, Chinese, Korean, and Japanese learners tended to interpret L2 time references and meanings of English tense and aspect differently from NSs and speakers of Spanish and Arabic, whose L1s have morphological tense systems. Hinkel maintains that confusion over tense markers and their meanings among learners whose L1s lack morphological tenses, could be due to the learners' inability to develop new conceptualizations of how time and aspect are referred to in given contexts in which certain tense-aspect markers are used. Without the teaching of English conceptual notions of time, learners will find it difficult to understand the terminology associated with time, aspect and tense meanings provided in ESL grammar texts.

Based on studies that investigated conceptualizations of time and aspect references in relation to their meanings, the present study was undertaken to investigate the meanings and implications that time, aspect and tense in English have for Thai learners of three English proficiency levels.

CHAPTER III

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This chapter introduces the research design and methodology. It consists of four sections:

(1) Development of Research Instruments

(2) Participants

(3) Data Collection

(4) Data Analysis

3.1 Research Instruments

The present study utilized two main research instruments for data collection: (1) an email for the participants to read; and (2) a questionnaire with multiple-choice selections for time reference and aspectual property. The development of the instruments is described in the following section.

3.1.1 An Email

To investigate conceptualizations of tense and aspect, which requires semantic and pragmatic considerations of time and aspectual references of the context in question, it was decided that the test instrument should be constructed in such a way that language in discourse was provided. Thus, a reading passage was developed as one task for the participants to interpret tense meanings in terms of time reference and aspectual property from given contexts.

a) Construction of the Test

The test construction followed the procedures described below.

(1) A text in the form of an email was initially designed as a reading task. The content of the email was devised so that the potential items would cover the following tense-aspect forms to be investigated:

Present time: (1) Present Simple, (2) Present Perfect, (3) Present Progressive, and (4) Present Perfect Progressive

Past time: (1) Past Simple, (2) Past Perfect, (3) Past Progressive, and (4) Past Perfect Progressive.

Because some tense-aspect combinations (e.g. the past perfect progressive) are used less frequently than others in connected discourse, it was difficult to provide the number of items that was equally distributed across the 8 tense-aspect forms. In the first draft of the email, there were 23 potential items. The distribution of these items was as follows:

Tense-Aspect	No. of items	Tense-Aspect	No. of items
Present Simple	4	Past Simple	5
Present Progressive	4	Past Progressive	2
Present Perfect	3	Past Perfect	2
Present Perfect Progressive	2	Past Perfect Progressive	1

(2) To check language for grammaticality and acceptability, the first draft was initially read by a native English speaking teacher (NEST). Adjustments were made based on comments made by the NEST.

(3) The text was then prepared for a reliability check by deleting all the verb forms in the 23 potential test items. Each item was replaced by a blank, with the base form of the verb given in parentheses.

(4) Three native English speaking teachers (NESTs) were then asked to supply the tense-aspect form for each item and give comments and suggestions (if any).

(5) Upon completion of the first task, the three NESTs were also asked to select time reference and aspectual property for each item. This was done by means of a questionnaire which was developed as another tool to elicit conceptualizations of time and aspect markers in given contexts. This instrument will be discussed in the following section.

(4) Based on the responses and comments obtained from the "Supply-the-Verb Form" test and the time and aspect elicitation questionnaire, disagreements over variations among the 3 NESTs were considered and resolved through discussions. The text was correspondingly modified, whereby it was decided that one more item in the past perfect progressive form should be added to increase the reliability of this tense-aspect marker. Therefore, the number of items distributed across the 8 tense-aspect forms was as follows:

Tense-Aspect	No. of items	Tense-Aspect	No. of items
Present Simple	4	Past Simple	5
Present Progressive	4	Past Progressive	2
Present Perfect	3	Past Perfect	2
Present Perfect Progressive	2	Past Perfect Progressive	2

3.1.2 A Questionnaire for Time Reference and Aspectual Property

To elicit conceptualizations of time reference and aspectual property in the tense-aspect markers provided in the email, a questionnaire was designed for the participants to choose one answer from the multiple-choice selections that best described their conceptualizations of time and aspect for each of the potential items. The terminology used to describe the meaning of time reference and aspectual properties were chosen from intermediate to advanced ESL/EFL grammar texts. The multiple choice selections for time and aspect selections were uniform for all contexts in the reading task.

In checking the reliability of the multiple choice selections, 3 NESTs who were asked to supply the tense-aspect form of the verb given in the email, as described in the previous section, were also asked to choose the time reference and aspectual property from the questionnaire based on their conceptualizations. In so doing, they were encouraged to give comments, add other descriptors as they deemed appropriate and/or write in their own words how they conceptualize time and aspect in a certain context. Based on the participants' responses, comments and suggestions, adjustments were made to the terminology used as descriptors in the questionnaire.

a) **Test-Run of the Instrument**

A test-run of the instrument was carried out with 3 native English speaking teachers, 1 Thai teacher and 2 undergraduate students to test the validity and reliability of the modified version of the instruments prior to actual administration on participants. The aims of the test-run were three-fold. Firstly, it aimed to examine the participants' perceptions of time reference and aspectual property of the tense-aspect

markers in terms of consistencies and variations among the three native English speakers. Secondly, appropriateness of the multiple-choice selections would be evaluated based on comments made by the participants. Thirdly, the administration of the test-run would allow the researcher to approximate the time to complete the task and anticipate whether there would be any potential problems in the actual administration. Based on the responses, comments, suggestions and disagreements over the multiple choice selections obtained from the participants, the final modifications were correspondingly made to the research instruments as follows:

(1) To sound authentic, a few sentences in the email were rewritten. As a result, the final version of the email contained 24 tense-aspect items. (Please refer to the reading task in Appendix A.)

(2) The terminology used for the multiple choice selections in the questionnaire was adjusted (please see Appendix B). The descriptors used in the questionnaire were as follows:

(I) The time reference of the event is:

a. Future

b. Present

c. Past relevant to present

d. Past

e. Before another past event

f. Other (please specify)

(II) The event is viewed as:

a. Started but continuing

b. Completed

c. Duration finished

d. Repeated intermittently

e. State or fact

f. Other (please specify)

Once the terminology for the descriptors was finalized, Thai translation to the questionnaire was prepared for participants in the intermediate and low proficiency

groups so that they would understand the instructions as well as the terminology clearly. (Please refer to Appendix C.)

3.1.3 Background Questionnaire

In addition to the two main instruments described above, a background questionnaire was also used to obtain the participants' contact information (e.g. their names, ages, email addresses and telephone numbers). Other purposes for utilizing this questionnaire were as follows:

(1) For native English speakers, this questionnaire aimed to verify that English was actually their first language. (Please see Appendix D.)

(2) For Thai teachers of English, referred to as Thai learners with high English proficiency, the objective of the questionnaire was to obtain general background information such as educational levels, the amount of exposure to the English language. This questionnaire was prepared in English. (Please refer to Appendix E.)

(3) For Thai undergraduate students, classified as learners with intermediate and low English proficiency levels, the purpose of the questionnaire was to obtain information on the learners' histories of learning English. The questionnaire was prepared in Thai. (See Appendix F.)

3.2 Participants

The participants included 99 Thai learners of English, referred to as non-native speakers of English (NNSs). Fifteen native speakers of English (NSs) participated in the study as NS controls. The recruitment of these participants is described below.

3.2.1 Native English Speakers (NS)

The research instruments were distributed to 20 native English speaking teachers from 3 universities in Bangkok, Thailand. Upon receipt of the test instruments, each NS was asked to individually complete the tasks in his/her own time. Eighteen test papers were returned to the researcher. Based on the information provided in the background questionnaire, 3 participants indicated that, apart from English, they also spoke another language natively. To avoid conceptual transfer from another language into English, the test papers of these 3 participants were excluded from the data analysis. Therefore, only 15 NS participants were selected for the purpose of this study. These participants comprised 7 NESTs from Chulalongkorn University, 3 from Thammasat University and 5 from Dhurakij Pundit University. All the three universities are located in Bangkok, Thailand.

3.2.2 Non-native Speakers of English (NNS)

Ninety-nine non-native speakers of English (NNSs) were classified into 3 English proficiency groups: high, intermediate and low, with 33 in each group, as described below.

3.2.2.1 Non-native Speakers with High English Proficiency (NNS-H)

The high-proficiency group (NNS-H) consisted of 33 Thai teachers of English from Dhurakij Pundit University and Thammasat University in Bangkok, Thailand. In recruiting the participants, 45 sets of the test instruments were distributed to Thai teachers of English in two universities. The participants were asked to individually complete the tasks in their own time. Thirty-three completed papers—24 from

Dhurakij Pundit University and 9 from Thammasat University—were returned to the researcher. The data obtained from these 33 participants were collected for analysis.

3.2.2.2 Non-native Speakers with Intermediate Proficiency (NNS-I) and Low Proficiency (NNS-L)

One hundred and eighty-nine (189) undergraduate students (93 freshmen and 96 seniors) in the English Major program at Dhurakij Pundit University were asked to take the DPU Test of English Proficiency (DPU-TEP). Although it cannot be claimed that the DPU-TEP is a standardized test, the reliability of this instrument has been reported at the Cronbach's alpha of .901. This should serve well for the purpose of this study.

In order to equalize the number of participants with high English proficiency (NNS-H), 33 students with the highest scores and 33 students with the lowest scores were selected to represent the intermediate (NNS-I) English proficiency group and low (NNS-L) English proficiency group, respectively. Out of the total DPU-TEP score of 120 (100%), the scores of the NNS-I ranged from 72 (60%) to 93 (77.5%), whereas the scores of the 33 NNS-L ranged from 33 (27.5%) to 43 (36%).

3.3 Data Collection

The data-gathering process was conducted in two phases.

(1) The first phase was conducted with native English-speaking teachers (the NS group) and Thai teachers of English (the NNS-H group). The test instruments were distributed by the researcher to a representative at each of the three institutions described in 3.2.1 and 3.2.2.1. The instruments were accordingly distributed by the representative to the participants who were asked to fill in the background

questionnaire and complete the tasks individually. The participants completed the tasks in the same manner that the instruments were carried out in the test-run. That is, the participants were asked to read the email and choose one answer from the choices that best described their conceptualizations of time and aspect of each given verb form. In the case that no choice actually described their conceptualizations, the participants were asked to supply an answer in their own words. Upon completion of the tasks, the papers were collected by the representative of each institution and subsequently returned to the researcher.

(2) The second phase of data collection was conducted with the English Major undergraduate students at Dhurakij Pundit University, recruited under the process as described in Section 3.2.2.2. The sixty-six students, classified into the intermediate and low English proficiency (NNS-I and NNS-L) groups, performed the test in two separate classrooms. The students were asked to complete the background questionnaire in Thai. Then, the test tasks were administered to the students in both groups. In order to avoid misunderstanding of the instructions and the terminology used as descriptors for time reference and aspectual property, the students were also given a Thai translation attached to the English version of the time and aspect elicitation questionnaire.

There was no time limit for the participants to complete the tasks. However, based on the test-run of the instrument, the time for the actual test administration was approximated to be 20 to 30 minutes.

3.4 Data Analysis

As native English speakers were classified as NS controls, the NS responses were used as a baseline for data analysis. However, native English speakers exhibited variations in their responses. Thus, in identifying the choice that represented the NS 'acceptable' response, the time reference and aspectual conceptualization for each tense-aspect item chosen by the highest number of NSs were selected as the 'acceptable' time reference and aspectual property against which all those of the NNSs were compared. After the results were tabulated, the data were converted to percentages due to the unequal size of the NS group (N = 15) as opposed to the size of the 3 NNS groups (N = 33). The following descriptive statistics were used:

    (1) frequency distribution

    (2) percentages

    (3) mean values

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

This chapter presents the results of a series of quantitative analyses performed on the participants' conceptualizations of time reference and aspectual property with regard to English tense-aspect markers. Due to the fact that variations existed among the NSs, classified as NS controls, the time reference and aspectual property for each item chosen by the highest number of NSs was identified as an acceptable choice against which all those of NNSs were compared. As the sizes of the four sample groups were not equal, the data were converted into percentage for ease of comparison. (Please refer to Table 4.7 and Table 4.8 on pages 59 and 60 for the distribution of responses in percentage by group.)

In order to present the findings of the study according to its objectives, the mean values (in percentage) of conceptualizations of time reference and aspectual property by the four groups, averaged from the 24 items, will firstly be compared. Then, the mean values of conceptualizations of both features, averaged from the items in each tense-aspect form will be compared across the four groups. Next, the percentage of conceptualizations of time reference further classified by individual items in each tense-aspect form will be reported. Finally, by using similar analyses, the percentage of conceptualizations of aspectual property at the level of individual items will be presented across the groups.

The analyses in this chapter were conducted in order to answer the following research questions:

(1) What are the conceptualizations of time reference and aspectual property of English tense and aspect among Thai learners at three different proficiency levels: high, intermediate and low?

(2) What is the degree of proximity to the native English speaker norms in terms of conceptualizations of time reference and aspectual property among the three groups of Thai learners at high, intermediate and low English proficiency levels?

4.1 CONCEPTUALIZATIONS OF TIME REFERENCE AND ASPECTUAL PROPERTY BY GROUP

4.1.1 Conceptualization of Time Reference by Group

As described in Section 3.1 of Chapter 3, the instrument used in this study was an email consisting of 8 tense-aspect forms in 24 items. (Please see Appendix A.) The participants were asked to choose time reference for each item from six multiple choice selections which were uniform for all 24 contexts. These choices were:

(a) Future   (d) Past

(b) Present   (e) Before another past event

(c) Past relevant to present   (f) Other (please specify).

Table 4.1 below displays the mean values of conceptualizations of time reference averaged from all the 24 items across the four groups of participants. The analysis was conducted by using the values of the NS acceptable choice (i.e. the choice chosen by the highest number of NSs) as a baseline. The NS average value was converted into percentage, against which the percentages of the values of Thai learners in the three proficiency groups were compared.

Table 4.1: *Conceptualizations of Time Reference in Percentage by Group*

Time Reference Across Groups			
	NS	NNS-H	NNS-I	NNS-L
Mean value	85.3	80.6	65.8	46.1

The results in Table 4.1 show that the NNS-H value most closely approximated the NS value. The values of Thai learners in the other two groups decreased in relation to their proficiency levels. The results support the hypothesis that the degree of proximity of conceptualizations of time reference varies according to the learners' English proficiency levels, and that conceptualizations of Thai learners with high English proficiency should more closely approximate the NS norms than those of lower proficiency levels. Figure 4.1 illustrates the same results in the form of graph.

Figure 4.1: *Conceptualizations of Time Reference in Percentage by Group*
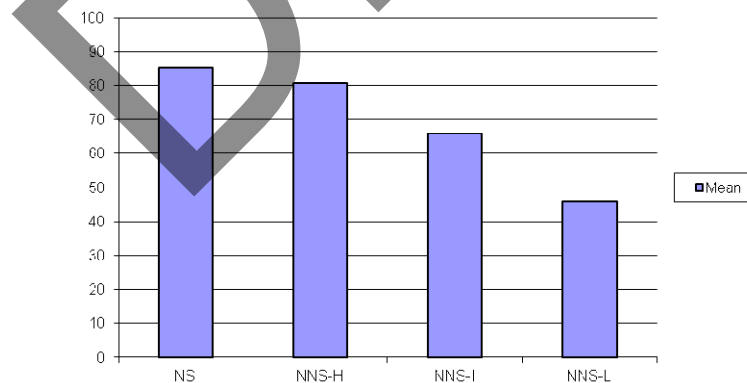
4.1.2 Conceptualization of Aspectual Property by Group

Conceptualizations of aspectual property among the four groups of participants were compiled and analyzed in the same manner as those for time reference. The participants were asked to choose one aspectual property from six

multiple choice selections that best described their conceptualization. The choices were uniform for all 24 contexts, which were as follows:

(a) Started but continuing   (d) Repeated intermittently

(b) Completed   (e) State or fact

(c) Duration finished   (f) Other (please specify).

Table 4.2 below shows the mean values of conceptualizations of aspectual property for all 24 items in percentage across the groups. The analysis for aspectual property was also conducted based on the average values of the NS acceptable choice, as was for time reference. Figure 4.2 also illustrates the same results in a graph format.

Table 4.2: *Conceptualizations of Aspectual Property in Percentage by Group*

Aspectual Property across Groups			
	NS	NNS-H	NNS-I	NNS-L
Mean value	75.8	63.1	57.8	39.7

Figure 4.2: *Conceptualizations of Aspectual Property in Percentage by Group*
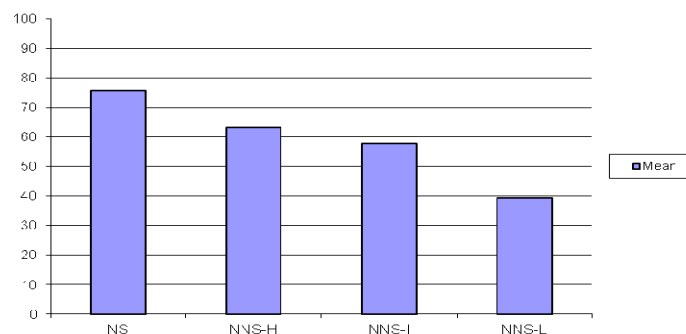
The results of conceptualizations of aspectual property also support the hypothesis that conceptualizations of Thai learners with high English proficiency with

regard to aspectual property should more closely approximate those of NSs than those of lower proficiency levels. However, in comparing the values in Table 4.1 with those in Table 4.2, one can find that the degree of within-group variation was greater with regard to aspectual property than with time reference in all groups, even among the NS controls. Additionally, the gap in the mean values of conceptualizations of time reference between the NS and NNS-H groups (i.e. 85.3% > 80.6% = 4.7%) was relatively narrow compared with a more sizable gap between the NS and NNS-H conceptualizations of aspect (i.e. 75.8% > 63.1% = 12.7%). The greater distance in the NS and NNS-H conceptualizations of aspect suggests that aspect may be more complicated for Thai learners to conceptualize than time reference.

In order to explore which English tense-aspect forms were more problematic to Thai learners than others, the conceptualizations of Thai learners as opposed to those of NSs were investigated in greater depth. The results are presented in the following section.

4.2 CONCEPTUALIZATIONS OF TIME REFERENCE AND ASPECTUAL PROPERTY BY TENSE-ASPECT FORM

4.2.1 Conceptualization of Time Reference by Tense-Aspect Form

Table 4.3 below displays the mean values of conceptualizations of time reference classified by tense-aspect form in percentage across the groups. The mean values (in percentage) of NS acceptable choice for the eight tense-aspect forms are displayed in column 2, and those of Thai learners in the high, intermediate and low groups are shown in columns 3, 4 and 5, respectively. The same results are also illustrated in a line graph in Figure 4.3.

Table 4.3: *Conceptualizations of Time Reference by Tense-Aspect Form*

Time Reference in Percentage				
	NS (N=15)	NNS-H (N=33)	NNS-I (N=33)	NNS-L (N=33)
Pres simple (N=4)	90	65.9	56.1	48.6
Pres progressive (N=4)	100	94.7	81.1	54.4
Pres perfect (N=3)	71.1	79.8	53.5	48.8
Pres pf pg (N=2)	76.7	84.9	69.7	39.1
Past simple (N=5)	94.6	95.8	92.1	68.5
Past progressive (N=2)	60	68.2	42.5	24.3
Past perfect (N=2)	83.3	74.3	60.6	27.6
Past pf pg (N=2)	80	59.1	31.9	12.5

Figure 4.3: *Conceptualizations of Time Reference by Tense-Aspect Form*
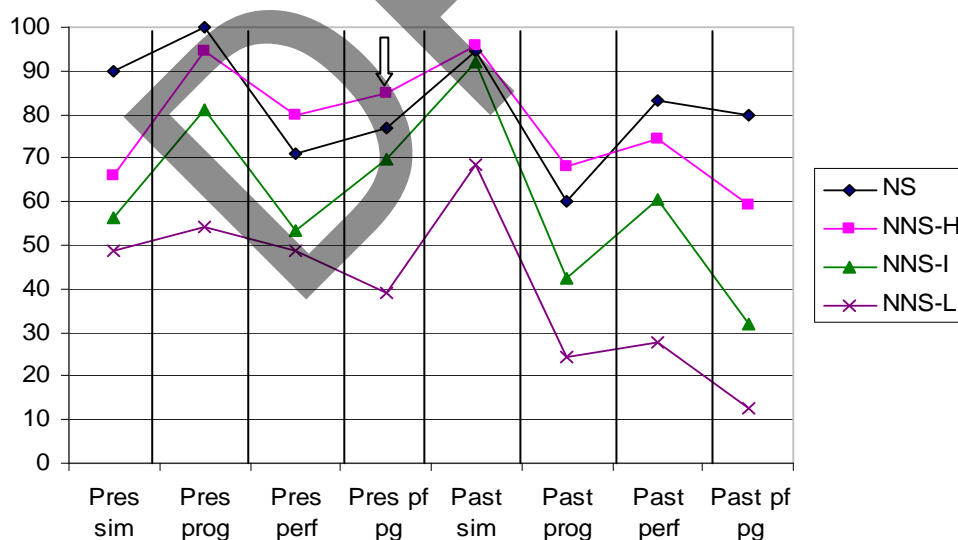
The results shown in Table 4.3 indicate that, even in the NS group, within-group variations in conceptualizations existed across the eight tense-aspect forms. Variations were greater in some forms than others. Of the three nonnative groups, the NNS-H values more closely approximated the NS values than those of the other

two groups in most tense-aspect forms, except for the present perfect progressive. It should also be noted that the NNS-H values for the present perfect, present perfect progressive, past simple and past progressive forms outnumbered the NS values. As the percentage of responses for the items marked by the same form varied, this will be analyzed in greater depth at the level of individual items in the next section.

Figure 4.3 above gives a clearer visual format of the degree of proximity to the native English speaker norms in terms of conceptualizations of time reference classified by forms among the three groups of Thai learners, which also supports the hypothesis that the conceptualizations of Thai learners with high English proficiency more closely approximated the NS norms than those of lower proficiency levels.

4.2.2 Conceptualization of Aspectual Property by Tense-Aspect Form

Table 4.4: *Conceptualizations of Aspectual Property by Tense-Aspect Form*

Aspectual Property in Percentage Across Groups				
	NS (N=15)	NNS-H (N=33)	NNS-I (N=33)	NNS-L (N=33)
Pres simple (N=4)	73.3	78.8	79.6	39.4
Pres progressive (N=4)	68.4	49.3	43.2	37.9
Pres perfect (N=3)	82.2	50.5	40.4	24.3
Pres pf pg (N=2)	86.7	92.4	75.8	42.4
Past simple (N=5)	92	88.5	87.3	58.2
Past progressive (N=2)	50	12.1	24.3	37.9
Past perfect (N=2)	70	54.6	30.3	30.3
Past pf pg (N=2)	66.7	45.5	39.4	28.8

Table 4.4 shows the mean values of conceptualizations of aspectual property classified by tense-aspect form in percentage across the groups. The analysis for

aspectual property was also conducted based on the average values of the NS acceptable choice for all the items in each tense-aspect form, as was for time reference. Figure 4.4 below also illustrates the same results in a different visual format.

Figure 4.4: *Conceptualizations of Aspectual Property by Tense-Aspect Form*
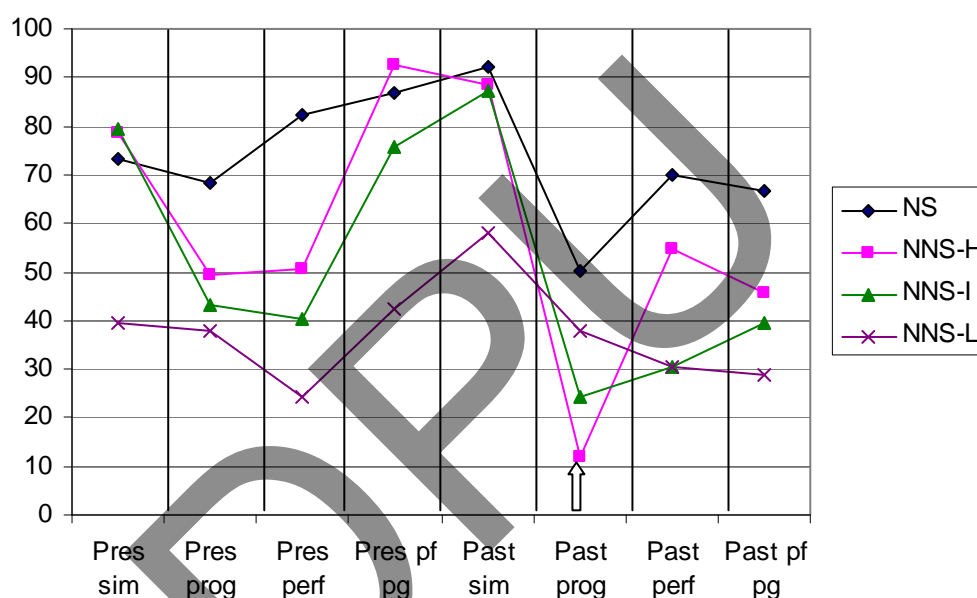
Table 4.4 shows that the NNS-H values most closely approximated the NS values in all tense-aspect forms, except for the past progressive. It should be noted that conceptualizations of aspectual property in the past progressive revealed a reverse pattern. One can observe that the NNS-L value more closely approximated the NS value than those of the high and intermediate groups. The values decreased linearly with increasing proficiency levels. This suggests that the aspect of the past progressive could be problematic to Thai learners. Again, this requires further investigation into the variation in responses across group at the level of individual items, which will be presented in the next section.

Another notable point is that the values of conceptualizations of the high and intermediate groups exceeded that of the NS group in two forms: the present simple and the present perfect progressive. This will be discussed later in Chapter 5.

From the results presented thus far, we have seen the overall picture of the degree of proximity of conceptualizations of Thai learners to those of NSs in terms of each tense-aspect marker. However, as conceptualizations for each individual item varied according to the context in which the verb was used, the data were further analyzed and are presented at the level of individual items in the following section.

4.3 CONCEPTUALIZATIONS OF TIME REFERENCE AND ASPECTUAL PROPERTY BY ITEM

4.3.1 Conceptualization of Time Reference by Item

In this section, conceptualizations of time reference by item were analyzed across the four groups so that within-group and across-group variations can be investigated more closely.

Table 4.5 below displays conceptualizations of time reference by item in percentage. The 24 items were placed into 8 groups according to their tense-aspect markers. The mean values of NS acceptable choices in percentage are shown in the third column. Columns 4, 5, and 6 display percentages of the mean values of responses, which corresponded to the NS acceptable choices, by Thai learners in the high, intermediate and low groups, respectively.

Table 4.5: *Conceptualizations of Time Reference in Percentage by Item*

TENSE	ITEM	NS (N=15)	NNS-H (N=33)	NNS-I (N=33)	NNS-L (N=33)
Pres Simple	**3**	93.3	100	93.9	84.8
	22	93.3	97	97	71.9
	20	100	42.4	21.2	12.5
	24	73.3	24.2	12.1	25
Average Mean		**90**	**65.9**	**56.1**	**48.6**
Pres Prog.	**2**	100	100	87.9	68.8
	8	100	97	97	81.3
	19	100	90.9	75.8	39.4
	23	100	90.9	63.6	28.1
Average Mean		**100**	**94.7**	**81.1**	**54.4**
Pres Perfect	**1**	66.7	78.8	**63.6**	51.5
	9	86.7	87.9	48.5	59.4
	10	60	72.7	**48.5**	35.5
Average Mean		**71.1**	**79.8**	**53.5**	**48.8**
Pres Pf Pg	**4**	66.7	87.9	**78.8**	46.9
	21	86.7	81.8	60.6	31.3
Average Mean		**76.7**	**84.9**	**69.7**	**39.1**
Past Simple	**5**	100	100	93.9	69.7
	11	93.3	87.9	**90.9**	60.6
	12	93.3	100	**90.9**	69.7
	15	93.3	97	**90.9**	75.8
	16	93.3	93.9	93.9	66.7
Average Mean		**94.6**	**95.8**	**92.1**	**68.5**
Past Prog.	**13**	60	69.7	45.5	27.3
	14	60	66.7	39.4	21.2
Average Mean		**60**	**68.2**	**42.5**	**24.3**
Past Perfect	**6**	93.3	81.8	69.7	36.4
	17	73.3	66.7	51.5	18.8
Average Mean		**83.3**	**74.3**	**60.6**	**27.6**
Past Pf Pg	**7**	80	57.5	27.3	6.1
	18	80	60.6	36.4	18.8
Average Mean		**80**	**59.1**	**31.9**	**12.5**
Total Mean		**85.3**	**80.6**	**65.8**	**46.1**

As a whole, the degree of proximity to the NS values among Thai learners for time reference decreased linearly according to the proficiency groups. The NNS-H values most closely approximated the NS values in almost all items, except for items

11, 12, and 15 in the past simple form, items 1 and 10 in the present perfect, and item

4 in the present perfect progressive. This will be discussed later in Chapter 5.

4.3.2 Conceptualization of Aspectual Property by Item

Table 4.6: *Conceptualizations of Aspectual Property in Percentage by Item*

TENSE	ITEM	NS (N=15)	NNS-H (N=33)	NNS-I (N=33)	NNS-L (N=33)
Pres Simple	3	93.3	93.9	87.9	51.5
	22	80	84.8	81.8	39.4
	20	73.3	72.7	75.8	27.3
	24	46.7	63.6	72.7	39.4
Average		73.3	78.8	79.6	39.4
Pres Prog.	2	80	78.8	60.6	63.6
	8	60	30.3	24.2	36.4
	19	66.7	39.4	36.4	21.2
	23	66.7	48.5	51.5	30.3
Average		68.4	49.3	43.2	37.9
Pres Perfect	1	86.7	57.6	42.4	30.3
	9	86.7	42.4	24.2	15.2
	10	73.3	51.5	54.5	27.3
Average		82.2	50.5	40.4	24.3
Pres Pf Pg	4	86.7	93.9	84.8	63.6
	21	86.7	90.9	66.7	21.2
Average		86.7	92.4	75.8	42.4
Past Simple	5	100	97	97	66.7
	11	66.7	81.8	81.8	51.5
	12	100	90.9	90.9	54.5
	15	93.3	87.9	75.8	60.6
	16	100	84.8	90.9	57.6
Average		92	88.5	87.3	58.2
Past Prog.	13	46.7	12.1	21.2	45.5
	14	53.3	12.1	27.3	30.3
Average		50	12.1	24.3	37.9
Past Perfect	6	80	69.7	42.4	39.4
	17	60	39.4	18.2	21.2
Average		70	54.6	30.3	30.3
Past Pf Pg	7	80	48.5	39.4	21.2
	18	53.3	42.4	39.4	36.4
Average		66.7	45.5	39.4	28.8
Total Average		75.8	63.1	57.8	39.7

Table 4.6 above illustrates the percentages of conceptualizations of aspectual property by individual items across the four groups. One can see that in some items, conceptualizations of aspect among the four groups did not follow the typical developmental pattern of non-native speakers. On the one hand, it was found that in items 22, 23, 10, 4, and 16, the NNS-I values more closely approximated the NS values than those of the NNS-H. On the other hand, the NNS-L values in items 24, and 8 more closely approximated the NS value than those of the other two groups. The results suggest that conceptualizing aspect appears to be more problematic than conceptualizing time references. Moreover, one may observe that in items 13 and 14 of the past progressive, the values in the NNS-L group were closest to those of the NS group and the NNS-H values were most distant from the NSs' norms. In other words, the values deteriorated as proficiency developed. This suggests that aspect of the past progressive form was complicated. Investigation in greater depth will be reported and discussed in the following chapter.

4.4 Summary

This chapter presented the results of the quantitative analyses of the participants' conceptualizations of time reference and aspectual property in order to examine the proximity of Thai learners' conceptualizations to those of NSs' norms.

The series of analyses showed that there were high consistencies in Thai learners' developmental pattern of conceptualizing time reference and aspectual property in the English tense-aspect system. Overall, the degree of proximity to the NSs' norms among Thai learners linearly increased according to the proficiency groups. However, with regard to conceptualizations of aspectual property, one can

find a substantial degree of within-group variations, even in the NS group. There was a sizable gap in conceptualizations of aspect between the NNS-H and NS groups, suggesting that aspect is more problematic for Thai learners than time reference.

In examining conceptualizations of the participants at the level of tense-aspect form, the NNS-H values for time reference most closely approximated the NS values in all tense forms, except for the present perfect progressive. With regard to aspect, the past progressive revealed a reverse pattern: the proximity to NS norms decreased as Thai learners' English proficiency developed across group, suggesting that the aspect of this form is difficult for Thai learners to conceptualize.

In exploring conceptualizations by items, it was found that items in the past simple, present perfect, and present perfect progressive revealed some inconsistency from the typical developmental pattern of conceptualization of time reference among Thai learners. Inconsistency also existed in Thai learners' conceptualizations of aspectual property. In addition, a slight deterioration in the developmental pattern was also found in Thai learners' conceptualizations of aspect of the past progressive form. The analyses of conceptualization by item across the proficiency groups will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter 5.

Table 4.7: *Conceptualizations of Time Reference in Percentage by Item across Group*

TENSE	ITEM	NS (N=15)							NNS-H (N=33)							NNS-I (N=33)							NNS-L (N=33)						
		a	b	c	d	e	f	Total	a	b	c	d	e	f	Total	a	b	c	d	e	f	Total	a	b	c	d	e	f	Total
Pres Simple	3		93.3	6.7				100		100					100		93.9	6.1				100	3	84.8	6.1	3		3	100
	22		93.3				6.7	100	3	97					100	3	97					100	18.8	71.9	6.3	3.1			100
	20	100						100	42.4	48.5	9.1				100	21.2	75.8	3				100	12.5	71.9	12.5	3.1			100
	24	73.3	20				6.7	100	24.2	75.8					100	12.1	87.9					100	25	68.8	3.1		3.1		100
Pres Prog.	2		100					100		100					100		87.9	6.1			6.1	100	9.4	68.8	12.5	3.1	3.1	3.1	100
	8		100					100		97				3	100		97				3	100	6.3	81.3	6.3		3.1	3.1	100
	19	100						100	90.9	9.1					100	75.8	21.2				3	100	39.4	51.5	6.1			3	100
	23	100						100	90.9	6.1				3	100	63.6	27.3				9.1	100	28.1	56.3	3.1		9.4	3.1	100
Pres Perfect	1		26.7	66.7	6.7			100	9.1	78.8	12.1				100		12.1	63.6	15.2	6.1	3	100	18.2	9.1	51.5	18.2	3		100
	9			86.7	13.3			100	6.1	87.9	6.1				100		15.2	48.5	24.2	9.1	3	100		6.3	59.4	34.4			100
	10			60	40			100	12.1	72.7	15.2				100		15.2	48.5	30.3	3	3	100		9.7	35.5	38.7	9.7	6.5	100
Pres Pf Prog.	4		26.7	66.7			6.7	100	9.1	87.9				3	100		18.2	78.8	3			100	15.6	21.9	46.9	9.4	6.3		100
	21		6.7	86.7	6.7			100	12.1	81.8		3		3	100		18.2	60.6	6.1	12.1	3	100	21.9	15.6	31.3	25	6.3		100
Past Simple	5				100			100				100			100				93.9	6.1		100	3		9.1	69.7	18.2		100
	11			93.3	6.7			100		3	9.1	87.9			100			3	90.9	6.1		100	6.1	21.2	9.1	60.6	3		100
	12			6.7	93.3			100				100			100			6.1	90.9	3		100	3	9.1	15.2	69.7		3	100
	15			6.7	93.3			100				97		3	100		3	3	90.9	3		100	6.1		15.2	75.8	3		100
	16			6.7	93.3			100				93.9	6.1		100		3		93.9	3		100	3	6.1	15.2	66.7	9.1		100
Past Prog	13			60	33.3	6.7		100			69.7	27.3	3		100			12.1	45.5	36.4	6.1	100	6.1	24.2	27.3	27.3	12.1	3	100
	14			60	33.3	6.7		100			66.7	30.3	3		100	3	3	18.2	39.4	30.3	6.1	100	9.1	12.1	39.4	21.2	15.2	3	100
Past Perfect	6				6.7	93.3		100			6.1	12.1	81.8		100		3	3	21.2	69.7	3	100	3	3	36.4	18.2	36.4	3	100
	17			13.3	13.3	73.3		100			12.1	18.2	66.7	3	100		9.1	18.2	21.2	51.5		100	6.3	3.1	21.9	40.6	18.8	9.4	100
Past Pf Prog.	7			6.7	13.3	80		100			15.2	27.3	57.5		100			39.4	21.2	27.3	12.1	100	24.2	3	51.5	15.2	6.1		100
	18				20	80		100	3		12.1	21.2	60.6	3	100		3	39.4	18.2	36.4	3	100	21.9	12.5	34.4	12.5	18.8		100

Table 4.8: *Conceptualizations of Aspectual Property in Percentage by Item across Group*

TENSE	ITEM	NS (N=15)							NNS-H (N=33)							NNS-I (N=33)							NNS-L (N=33)						
		a	b	c	d	e	f	Total	a	b	c	d	e	f	Total	a	b	c	d	e	f	Total	a	b	c	d	e	f	Total
Pres Simple	3				6.7	93.3		100	6.1				93.9		100	6.1	6.1			87.9		100	18.2	9.1	3	12.1	51.5	3	97
	22	13.3				80	6.7	100	6.1				84.8	6.1	97	9.1	6.1			81.8	3	100	27.3	15.2	3	12.1	39.4	3	100
	20					73.3	26.7	100	3			3	72.7	18	97	3		6.1	6.1	75.8	9.1	100	33.3	15.2	15.2	3	27.3		93.9
	24	46.7				46.7	6.7	100	18.2	3			63.6	15	100	12.1			3	72.7	12.1	100	33.3	18.2		6.1	39.4	3	100
Pres Prog.	2	80				13.3	6.7	100	78.8			15.2	3	3	100	60.6			3	33.3	3	100	63.6	6.1	6.1	9.1	12.1	3	100
	8	60				40		100	30.3		3	9.1	48.5	6.1	97	24.2	3		15.2	54.5	3	100	36.4	6.1	15.2	12.1	24.2	3	97
	19					66.7	33.3	100	3			3	39.4	52	97	12.1		3	3	36.4	45.5	100	39.4	6.1	6.1	9.1	21.2	15	97
	23		6.7			66.7	26.7	100	6.1			3	48.5	42	100	12.1				51.5	36.4	100	36.4	6.1	3	21.2	30.3	3	100
Pres Perfect	1		86.7	13.3				100	9.1	57.6	30.3			3	100	21.2	42.4	21.2		12.1		97	27.3	30.3	30.3		9.1		97
	9		13.3		86.7			100	30.3	12.1	15.2	42.4			100	33.3	18.2	18.2	24.2	3	3	100	21.2	6.1	54.5	15.2	3		100
	10		73.3	26.7				100	6.1	51.5	39.4			3	100	15.2	54.5	24.2		3	3	100	24.2	27.3	30.3	9.1	9.1		100
Pres Pf Prog.	4	86.7			13.3			100	93.9				6.1		100	84.8		6.1	6.1	3		100	63.6	3	15.2	6.1	6.1		93.9
	21	86.7	6.7		6.7			100	90.9				6.1		97	66.7	9.1	12.1	9.1		3	100	21.2	3	51.5	15.2	6.1		97
Past Simple	5		100					100		97			3		100		97	3				100		66.7	18.2	9.1	3		97
	11		66.7	33.3				100		81.8	18.2				100		81.8	9.1	6.1	3		100	12.1	51.5	18.2	6.1	9.1		97
	12		100					100		90.9	9.1				100	3	90.9	3		3		100	9.1	54.5	18.2	9.1	3	3	97
	15		93.3				6.7	100		87.9	6.1			6.1	100	3	75.8	9.1	6.1	6.1		100	9.1	60.6	9.1	6.1	12.1		97
	16		100					100		84.8	9.1		6.1		100		90.9	6.1				97	18.2	57.6	6.1	3	12.1		97
Past Prog	13	46.7	6.7	26.7		6.7	13.3	100	12.1	9.1	33.3	24.2	3	18	100	21.2	21.2	30.3	15.2	6.1	6.1	100	45.5	15.2	12.1	12.1	6.1	6.1	97
	14	53.3	6.7	26.7			13.3	100	12.1	12.1	30.3	24.2	3	18	100	27.3	21.2	24.2	15.2	6.1	6.1	100	30.3	9.1	24.2	21.2	6.1	6.1	97
Past Perfect	6		80	13.3			6.7	100		69.7	27.3		3		100		42.4	45.5	6.1	3	3	100	15.2	39.4	27.3	12.1	3	3	100
	17		60	33.3		6.7		100	3	39.4	48.5		6.1	3	100	9.1	18.2	54.5	12.1	3		97	24.2	21.2	39.4	6.1	6.1	3	100
Past Pf Prog.	7			80	13.3		6.7	100	9.1	21.2	48.5	21.2			100	12.1	18.2	39.4	21.2	3	3	97	30.3	6.1	21.2	36.4	3		97
	18		6.7	53.3	33.3		6.7	100	15.2	15.2	42.4	24.2	3		100	30.3	12.1	39.4	18.2			100	42.4	9.1	36.4	6.1	6.1		100

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

In the previous chapter, the results of the participants' conceptualizations of time reference and aspectual property with regard to English tense-aspect markers were presented by means of a series of quantitative analyses. The results indicated that inconsistencies existed in conceptualizations of both features even among the native English speakers. The present chapter, thus, aims for a more in-depth examination of the participants' responses at the level of individual items in each tense-aspect form across the groups. The qualitative discussion of results presented in this chapter is to further respond in greater depth to the following research questions that were quantitatively analyzed and presented in the previous chapter.

(1) What are the conceptualizations of time reference and aspectual property of English tense and aspect among Thai learners at three different proficiency levels: high, intermediate and low?

(2) What is the degree of proximity to the native English speaker norms in terms of conceptualizations of time reference and aspectual property among the three groups of Thai learners at high, intermediate and low English proficiency levels?

The organization of the present chapter is as follows: first, conceptualizations of time reference by each group of participants will be presented and discussed qualitatively based on the quantitative analyses provided in the previous chapter. Then, conceptualizations of aspectual property will be closely examined and discussed.

5.1 CONCEPTUALIZATION OF TIME REFERENCE

In order to use native English speakers' conceptualizations as a baseline to investigate Thai learners' interpretations of time reference, the responses of native English speakers will be presented and discussed first. The conceptualizations of NSs will then be compared and contrasted with those of Thai learners in the high, intermediate, and low proficiency groups, respectively, in the section that follows.

5.1.1 Native English Speaker (NS) Group

Table 5.1: *Time Reference in Percentage by the NS Group*

TENSE	ITEM	NS (N=15)						
		a	b	c	d	e	f	Total
Pres Simple	3		93.3	6.7				100
	22		93.3				6.7	100
	20	100						100
	24	73.3	20				6.7	100
Pres Prog.	2		100					100
	8		100					100
	19	100						100
	23	100						100
Pres Perfect	1		26.7	66.7	6.7			100
	9			86.7	13.3			100
	10			60	40			100
Pres Pf Pg	4		26.7	66.7			6.7	100
	21		6.7	86.7	6.7			100
Past Simple	5				100			100
	11				93.3	6.7		100
	12			6.7	93.3			100
	15			6.7	93.3			100
	16			6.7	93.3			100
Past Prog.	13				60	33.3	6.7	100
	14				60	33.3	6.7	100
Past Perfect	6				6.7	93.3		100
	17			13.3	13.3	73.3		100
Past Pf Pg	7			6.7	13.3	80		100
	18				20	80		100

Table 5.1 above displays the NSs' responses on time reference of the 24 items in percentage. The NS group consisted of 15 participants. Six multiple choice selections for time reference, which were uniform for all 24 contexts, were as follow:

(a) Future	(d) Past
(b) Present	(e) Before another past event
(c) Past relevant to present	(f) Other (please specify).

The NSs' responses identified as acceptable choices were those chosen by the highest number of NSs, which were shown in the shaded columns.

As Table 5.1 illustrates, consistency of NSs for time reference was found in all the 4 items marked by the present progressive form. All NSs perceived two contexts of the present progressive (items 2 and 8) to mark the present and the other two contexts (items 19 and 23) to mark the future (i.e. future realization of a present plan/intention). (Please refer to the reading text in Appendix A).

Likewise, the present simple was generally perceived to mark the present and the future in a similar manner. However, one can observe that variations existed in three test items. In items 3 and 22 in which the present simple marks the present time, the NS values were almost unanimous (93.3%). For the future time interpretation, consistency was found in one context (item 20), in which the present simple was used to describe a future event that will take place according to a fixed plan or scheduled timetable. In the other context (i.e. item 24), the NSs' responses varied quite remarkably. While 73.3% of NSs chose the future, 20% selected the present. Gabrielatos (2003) argues that the choice of tense in relation to time reference and grammatical aspect is largely subjective and context-sensitive, depending on the time-

point the speaker/hearer is focusing on in association with the context. In item 24: *Hope you* (24) *enjoy the rest of your stay*…, the focus of NSs on the time-point could have varied as a result of the existence of the word *hope*. In this case, 73.3% of NSs perceived *hope* as conveying the future, thus *enjoy* also had its realization in the future. NSs who perceived *enjoy* as marking the present, by contrast, viewed the situation itself as coinciding with the speech time. Semantically, the present tense used with an emotive verb such as *enjoy* conveys a situation that is understood as a state of affairs. It thus has a meaning that cuts across three times: from the past when the situation started to the moment of speaking and with the possibility to extend further into the future. In fact, the present time itself is not easy to define in terms of its beginning and end points, and that is why the present simple form is not used to make predication specifically to the present time reference only (Aje , 2010).

For the present perfect, the majority of NSs (i.e. 86.7% in item 9, 66.7% in item 1 and 60% in item 10) perceived this form to mark the past with a present relevance. It can be seen, however, that the NS values varied most considerably in item 10, followed by item 1. Again, such variations could be due to NSs' diverse attention to the event time-points in relation to speech time. In item 10, although 60% of NSs perceived the present perfect to mark the past with present relevancy, 40% of NSs viewed the context: *Uncle Tom* (10) *has finished building a shed*… to mark the past. The explanation could be that the latter group focused their attention only to the actual event that was completed before speech time, and not the consequence of it to the present speech moment. The fact that the focus of the time-point was in the past could be due to the semantic meaning of the verb *finish*, which conveys a completed action. In contrast to item 10, the present perfect in item 1: *I* (1) *have just gotten back*

from Florida was viewed by 26.7% of NSs as conveying the present. In this case, the addition of the adverb *just* could have drawn the NS attention to a more recent time-point close to speech time. The focus was, therefore, placed on the result or the present condition of a past situation at speech time rather than the situation itself.

The NS values for time reference of the present perfect progressive in item 4 and item 21 approximated those in item 1 and item 9 of the present perfect form. In item 21, the majority of NSs (86.7%) perceived the time reference of the perfect progressive to describe a past situation with current relevance. In item 4: *Bobby* (4) *has been working very hard*…, there was a higher degree of variation in the NS group. The fact that 26.7% of NSs perceived the present perfect progressive in this item to mark the present could result from their attention to the present time-point conveyed in the preceding sentences (i.e. *Things here are pretty much the same*). Consequently, the time-point in item 4 was regarded as the result or condition at present of a durative action.

Of the four past tense forms, time reference of the past simple was largely agreed by NSs to mark the past (i.e. 100% in 1 item and 93.3% in the other 4 items). The past perfect and past perfect progressive forms were perceived as depicting events that happened before another past situation. Of these two forms, one can observe that there were only a few NSs who viewed time reference of these forms holistically as just *past*.

The NS values for the past progressive varied at a higher degree than the past perfect and past perfect progressive. In items 13 and 14 of the past progressive: *Bobby and I* (13) *were watching TV, and Susan* (14) *was preparing supper*…, about

two-thirds (60%) of NSs viewed time reference of the two items to depict the *past*, while one-third (33.3%) perceived them as marking the past before another past event. This again may be explained in terms of the participants' attention to diverse time-points. The larger group perceived both durative events as a whole which started and ended in the past, while the smaller group probably focused on the time-point that each event had occurred as a background before a more recent past event (a foreground) interrupted it (i.e. *when Alex unexpectedly* (15) <u>*arrived*</u>).

5.1.2 Non-native Speakers with High English Proficiency (NNS-H)

Table 5.2: *Time Reference in Percentage by the NNS-H Group*

TENSE	ITEM	NNS-H (N=33)						
		a	b	c	d	e	f	Total
Pres Simple	3		100					100
	22	3	97					100
	20	42.4	48.5	9.1				100
	24	24.2	75.8					100
Pres Prog.	2		100					100
	8		97				3	100
	19	90.9	9.1					100
	23	90.9	6.1				3	100
Pres Perfect	1		9.1	78.8	12.1			100
	9		6.1	87.9	6.1			100
	10		12.1	72.7	15.2			100
Pres Pf Pg	4		9.1	87.9			3	100
	21		12.1	81.8		3	3	100
Past Simple	5				100			100
	11		3	9.1	87.9			100
	12				100			100
	15				97		3	100
	16				93.9	6.1		100
Past Prog.	13				69.7	27.3	3	100
	14				66.7	30.3	3	100
Past Perfect	6			6.1	12.1	81.8		100
	17			12.1	18.2	66.7	3	100
Past Pf Pg	7			15.2	27.3	57.5		100
	18	3		12.1	21.2	60.6	3	100

As described in Section 3.2.2.1 in Chapter 3 of this report, the participants in the NNS-H group were Thai teachers of English at the tertiary level from two universities in Bangkok. This group consisted of 33 participants. Table 5.2 above illustrates the choices for time reference among the NNS-H participants in percentage. Choices that yielded the highest percentage for each item were displayed in boldface. Choices that were consistent with those selected by the highest number of NSs were marked in shaded columns.

Table 5.2 shows that the pattern of choices for time reference in the NNS-H group followed approximately the same pattern as that of the NSs shown in Table 5.1. Of the four present tense forms, the NNS-H group values in the present progressive were most approximated those of the NS values. Unanimity in the NNS-H group was found in 1 item marked by the present progressive. In the remaining 3 items, the NNS-H values were over 90%.

The pattern of the NNS-H group's choices for time reference of the present perfect was similar to that of the NS group. The majority of participants in the NNS-H group perceived time reference of the present perfect form in items 1, 9 and 10 as depicting a past situation with current relevance, similarly to the majority of NSs. However, it should be noted that, for each of the 3 items, the NNS-H value over this choice was higher than the NS value. This could be hypothesized that ESL/EFL learners of English adhere to grammar rules described in textbooks more so than NSs. Due to the fact that the present perfect is typically described in grammar textbooks as depicting a past situation which is somehow relevant to the present time, such an explanation has become the conscious metalinguistic awareness among the NNS-H group participants. This hypothesis could be applicable to explaining choices for time

reference of the present perfect progressive among the NNS-H participants in a similar manner as those for time reference of the present perfect form.

For time reference of the present simple form, items 20 and 24 display a substantial degree of within-group variation as well as distance from the NS norms. If one may recall, the majority of the NSs perceived time reference of these two items to mark the future. In item 20: *The plane (20) leaves very early...(tomorrow)*, in particular, the NSs agreed unanimously that the present simple in this context depicted the future (i.e. by means of a realization of a present schedule or timetable beyond the speech time). The NNS-H group, in contrast, displayed a remarkable within-group variation; while only 42.4% of the NNS-H participants chose this option, 48.5% perceived time reference of this context to refer to present. As this study did not explicitly investigate the reasons why participants chose options the way they did, it is not possible for the researcher to make assumptions as to how the participants conceptualized time reference which each tense-aspect form represents by investigating their choices alone. However, the analyses of responses on aspectual properties, which will be presented in the next section, may provide grounds for us to understand how the participants viewed the state or characteristic of the event in its given context.

Another notable point in the perception of time reference between the NS and NNS-H participants in the present simple form was the reverse pattern that existed in item 24: *Hope you* (24) *enjoy the rest of your stay*. While 73.3% of NSs viewed the present simple form of *enjoy* as marking the future and 20% as depicting the present, 24.2% and 75.8% of the NNS-H participants considered the form to indicate the future and the present respectively. According to the results, one may assume that

the NS and the NNS-H participants perceived time differently when *enjoy* was used as subordination to the predicate *hope*. The majority of NSs probably viewed an event expressed as a *hope* to portray a favorable expectation for the future, whereas the NNS-H participants possibly regarded the feeling of *hope* to exist at the present speech time, and not its realization in the future.

Of the four past forms, the NNS-H conceptualizations of the past simple most closely approximated those of NSs. The NNS-H values displayed a relatively low degree of within-group variation and distance from the NS norms.

For time reference of the past progressive, within-group variations among the participants in the NNS-H group were in ways similar to those in the NS group. That is, for the two contexts in the past progressive, approximately two-thirds of both groups chose the *past*, and one-third viewed the form to convey the *past before another past event*.

With regard to the past perfect and past perfect progressive forms, the results revealed that the highest number of participants in the NNS-H group chose the same option as the majority of the NSs. However, the NNS-H values showed a higher degree of within group variations than those of NSs. Additionally, the NNS-H values for time reference of the past perfect progressive form displayed a substantial distance from the NS norms. This suggests that this form may be more difficult for Thai learners of English to acquire than others.

5.1.3 Non-native Speakers with Intermediate English Proficiency (NNS-I)

The NNS-I group consisted of 33 undergraduate students in the English Major program at Dhurakij Pundit University, classified into the intermediate English

proficiency group as described in Section 3.2.2.2 of Chapter 3.

Table 5.3 below demonstrates the percentages of temporal references chosen by the NNS-I group. Choices selected by the highest number of NNS-I participants were marked in boldface, whereas choices that were consistent with the acceptable choices selected by NSs were displayed in shading.

Table 5.3: *Time Reference in Percentage by the NNS-I Group*

TENSE	ITEM	NNS-I (N=33)						
		a	b	c	d	e	f	Total
Pres Simple	3		93.9	6.1				100
	22	3	97					100
	20	21.2	75.8	3				100
	24	12.1	87.9					100
Pres Prog.	2		87.9	6.1			6.1	100
	8		97				3	100
	19	75.8	21.2				3	100
	23	63.6	27.3				9.1	100
Pres Perfect	1		12.1	63.6	15.2	6.1	3	100
	9		15.2	48.5	24.2	9.1	3	100
	10		15.2	48.5	30.3	3	3	100
Pres Pf Pg	4		18.2	78.8	3			100
	21		18.2	60.6	6.1	12.1	3	100
Past Simple	5				93.9	6.1		100
	11			3	90.9	6.1		100
	12			6.1	90.9	3		100
	15		3	3	90.9	3		100
	16		3		93.9	3		100
Past Prog.	13			12.1	45.5	36.4	6.1	100
	14	3	3	18.2	39.4	30.3	6.1	100
Past Perfect	6		3	3	21.2	69.7	3	100
	17		9.1	18.2	21.2	51.5		100
Past Pf Pg	7			39.4	21.2	27.3	12.1	100
	18		3	39.4	18.2	36.4	3	100

Of the four present forms shown in Table 5.3, one can observe the high degree of consistency in the NNS-I time conceptualizations of the present simple and the

present progressive that marked the *present* (i.e. items 3 and 22 for the present simple and items 2 and 8 for the present progressive). This indicates that, when used to indicate the *present* time reference, these two forms were most accessible to the NNS-I participants. The *future* time reference of the present progressive form (i.e. items 19 and 23) displayed fairly high percentages. This is probably because of the existence of the explicit future time markers: *tomorrow* and *very soon*, as shown below:

> *By the way, I* (19) *am going to Denver with Jackie **tomorrow***.

> *The shop* (23) *is opening **very soon***.

For items 20 and 24 in the present simple form, only 21.2% and 12.1% of the NNS-I responses were consistent with the NS norms in perceiving time reference as marking the future. The fact that the majority of the NNS-I participants viewed the two contexts to depict the present could be because the verb form was in the present simple. This suggests that the intermediate-proficiency students probably considered time reference through the form of the verb rather than contextual meaning.

With regard to time reference of the present perfect form, the results demonstrate considerable within-group variations among the NNS-I participants. The majority of the NNS-I participants perceived time reference of the present perfect as *the past with present relevance*. The rest viewed the events as happening in *the past*, *the present* and *before another past* respectively. It should be noted that quite a high percentage of NNS-I participants associated the present perfect in items 9 and 10 with past time (i.e. at 24.2% and 30.3% respectively). This could be due to the participants' misinterpretation of the existing time expression *during the past few weeks* in item 9. The word *past* may have been mistaken as the past time indicator.

This explanation, however, does not seem to be accountable for the participants' choice of *past time reference* in item 10, as there was no explicit time marker provided. A plausible reason could then be due to the participants' interpretation of the semantic meaning of the verb *finish* as conveying an event that was completed in the past. If one may recall, conceptualization of the present perfect form was quite complicated, even among NSs. As this form expresses relevancy of two time points, perception of time reference may vary, depending on which time-point the individual focuses on in association with the given context.

When comparing the NNS-I values for time reference of the present perfect progressive with those of the present perfect, one can see that the former more closely approximated the latter. The majority of NNS-I participants considered the present perfect progressive to mark *the past with present relevance*, while some participants viewed this form to mark the *present* and very few participants perceived the event to happen in the *past*. As there was the time phrase *since last month* attached to the sentence for item 21, this probably explained why two participants chose *past* and four chose *before another past*. Again, these participants could mistakenly relate the word *last* in *since last month* to the *past* time.

Of the four past forms, time conceptualization of the past simple in the NNS-I group most closely approximated the NS norms. The majority of NNS-I participants (over 90%) selected the option chosen by the highest number of the NSs for each of the five items in the past simple form. This suggests that the association between the time reference of the past simple and its morphological form is relatively straightforward for the intermediate proficiency group, which in turn implies that this tense-aspect form could be relatively easy for Thai learners to acquire.

On average, time reference of the past perfect yielded the second highest percentage among the four past tense forms by the NNS-I group, followed by time reference of the past progressive. In terms of distance from the NS values, the NNS-I choices for time reference of the past perfect progressive were least consistent with the NS norms. Only 27.3% and 36.4% of the NNS-I participants chose the option agreed by most NSs for items 7 and 18, which was *before another past event*. Instead, the highest number of NNS-I participants considered the past perfect progressive in both items to mark the *past with present relevance*. This could be due to the NNSs' confusion over the interpretation of time reference of the perfect progressive aspect used in combination of the present tense as opposed to the past tense.

We have seen so far that, in terms of time reference, the past tense forms, which express remoteness, were more problematic than the present forms. When aspect is concerned, the progressive aspect appears to exacerbate the complexity of time conceptualization. The analyses of responses by the low-proficiency group in the following section will support this assumption.

5.1.4 Non-native Speakers with Low English Proficiency (NNS-L)

The participants in the NNS-L group consisted of 33 undergraduate students in the English Major program at Dhurakij Pundit University, classified as low English proficiency group as described in Section 3.2.2.2 of Chapter 3. Table 5.4 below demonstrates the percentages of time references chosen by the NNS-L group. Choices selected by the highest number of participants were marked in boldface, and choices that were consistent with the acceptable choices selected by NSs were displayed in shaded columns.

Table 5.4: *Time Reference in Percentage by the NNS-L Group*

TENSE	ITEM	NNS-L (N=33)						
		a	b	c	d	e	f	Total
Pres Simple	3	3	84.8	6.1	3		3	100
	22	18.8	71.9	6.3	3.1			100
	20	12.5	71.9	12.5	3.1			100
	24	25	68.8	3.1		3.1		100
Pres Prog.	2	9.4	68.8	12.5	3.1	3.1	3.1	100
	8	6.3	81.3	6.3		3.1	3.1	100
	19	39.4	51.5	6.1			3	100
	23	28.1	56.3	3.1		9.4	3.1	100
Pres Perfect	1	18.2	9.1	51.5	18.2	3		100
	9		6.3	59.4	34.4			100
	10		9.7	35.5	38.7	9.7	6.5	100
Pres Pf Pg	4	15.6	21.9	46.9	9.4	6.3		100
	21	21.9	15.6	31.3	25	6.3		100
Past Simple	5	3		9.1	69.7	18.2		100
	11	6.1	21.2	9.1	60.6	3		100
	12	3	9.1	15.2	69.7		3	100
	15	6.1		15.2	75.8	3		100
	16	3	6.1	15.2	66.7	9.1		100
Past Prog.	13	6.1	24.2	27.3	27.3	12.1	3	100
	14	9.1	12.1	39.4	21.2	15.2	3	100
Past Perfect	6	3	3	36.4	18.2	36.4	3	100
	17	6.3	3.1	21.9	40.6	18.8	9.4	100
Past Pf Pg	7	24.2	3	51.5	15.2	6.1		100
	18	21.9	12.5	34.4	12.5	18.8		100

As a whole, the NNS-L participants displayed greater within-group variations in their selections of time reference than participants in the other three groups. Of all the NNS-L conceptualizations of tense, the values for the present simple form that marks the present time most closely approximated the NS values. The values for time reference of the present progressive that depicts the present time also yielded a fairly high degree of proximity to the NS values. However, the NNS-L values for time reference of these two present tense forms that mark the future time deviated

considerably from the NS norms. One may assume that low-proficiency participants possibly associated the tense form with its most common usage and typical time reference—i.e. present tense represents present time. Moreover, low-proficiency learners still lacked a clear understanding of the context in which the form is used, and thus, they did not consider the context as seriously as the other two NNS groups.

Of the four present tenses, time reference of the present perfect progressive form seemed to be the most difficult for the NNS-L participants to interpret. The percentages of the choices that were consistent with the NS values were relatively low (i.e. 46.9% for item 4 and 31.1% for item 21). In item 4: *Bobby* (4) *has been working very hard*…, the NNS-L participants variably marked this verb form for the *present time* at 21.9%, the *future time* at 15.6%, and for *past* and *before another past* at 9.4% and 6.3% respectively. Conversely, in item 21: *Jackie and I* (21) *have been decorating our new shop since last month*, 25% of the NNS-L participants associated the present perfect progressive with *past time*, while 15.6% and 21.9% of participants marked the context for the *present* and *future*, respectively. As mentioned earlier, there was a possibility that the association of item 21 with the past time could result from the participants' misunderstanding of the time phrase *since last month*. The NNS-L participants were likely to consider *last* as referring to the *past* time, and not the *duration from the past to present*.

With regard to time reference of the present perfect form, the NNS-L highest values for items 9 and 1 (i.e. 59.4% and 51.5%) were consistent with those of NSs. Like the intermediate group, the NNS-L diverse choices from the norms in item 9 were assumed to be affected by the learners' misinterpretation of the time phrase *during the past few weeks* to indicate the *past*, instead of present-and-past relevancy.

For item 1, greater variations existed. It was found that some learners viewed this context to depict the future, while no participants in other groups did.

For the present perfect form in item 10, only 35.5% of the NNS-L participants agreed with the option chosen by the highest number of NSs. It was noted that a higher percentage (i.e. 38.7%) viewed the context: *Uncle Tom* (10) <u>*has finished*</u> *building a shed* to depict the *past*. This again could support the hypothesis that the inherent semantic meaning of the verb plays a role in the participants' decision of time reference. The NNS-L participants were likely to view the verb *finish* in item 10 as a completed *past* action rather than considering its present result.

Selections for time reference of the past tense forms reflected greater variations among the NNS-L participants than those for the present tense forms. Only the past time reference of the past simple yielded the highest values, with percentages ranging from 60.6% to 75.8%. For other past tense forms, the degrees of within-group variations in the choices of time reference were greater, particularly those with the past perfect progressive marker.

In terms of distance from the NS values, time reference of the past perfect progressive form demonstrated the greatest distance from the NS norms. Only 6.1% and 18.8% of the NNS-L participants chose the same option chosen by the majority of NSs for item 7 and item 18, respectively. Similar to the intermediate group, the highest number of participants in the NNS-L group also considered the past perfect progressive to mark *the past with present relevance* instead of a situation happening *before another past event*. This again might result from the students' confusion over the interpretation of the present perfect progressive and the past perfect progressive.

5.2 CONCEPTUALIZATION OF ASPECTUAL PROPERTY

The participants' conceptualizations of aspectual property for each of the 24 items in the email were collected in the same manner as those for time reference. The participants chose one aspectual property from six multiple choice selections that best described their conceptualization. The choices were uniform for all 24 contexts, which were as follows:

(a) Started but continuing   (d) Repeated intermittently

(b) Completed   (e) State or fact

(c) Duration finished   (f) Other (please specify).

In this section, the conceptualizations of NSs will be presented and discussed first. Then, the results of NSs will be compared and contrasted with those of Thai learners in the high, intermediate, and low proficiency groups, respectively

5.2.1 Native English Speaker (NS) Group

Although tense and aspect are two separate features, conceptualization of aspect is usually related to time perception in a given context. Therefore, the NSs' responses to aspectual property (in percentage) for each of the 24 items are displayed in conjunction with the responses to time reference in Table 5.5. The highest number chosen by the NSs for each item which was identified as an acceptable choice is shown in boldface.

Table 5.5: *Time and Aspect in Percentage by the NS Group*

TENSE	ITEM	TIME							ASPECT						
		a	b	c	d	e	f	Total	a	b	c	d	e	f	Total
Pres Simp	3		93.3	6.7				100				6.7	93.3		100
	22		93.3				6.7	100	13.3				80	6.7	100
	20	100						100					73.3	26.7	100
	24	73.3	20				6.7	100	46.7				46.7	6.7	100
Pres Prog	2		100					100	80				13.3	6.7	100
	8		100					100	60				40		100
	19	100						100					66.7	33.3	100
	23	100						100		6.7			66.7	26.7	100
Pres Perf	1		26.7	66.7	6.7			100		86.7	13.3				100
	9			86.7	13.3			100		13.3		86.7			100
	10			60	40			100		73.3	26.7				100
Pres Pf Pg	4		26.7	66.7			6.7	100	86.7			13.3			100
	21		6.7	86.7	6.7			100	86.7	6.7		6.7			100
Past Simp	5				100			100	100						100
	11				93.3	6.7		100	66.7	33.3					100
	12			6.7	93.3			100	100						100
	15			6.7	93.3			100		93.3				6.7	100
	16			6.7	93.3			100		100					100
Past Prog	13				60	33.3	6.7	100	46.7	6.7	26.7		6.7	13.3	100
	14				60	33.3	6.7	100	53.3	6.7	26.7			13.3	100
Past Perf	6				6.7	93.3		100		80	13.3			6.7	100
	17			13.3	13.3	73.3		100		60	33.3		6.7		100
Past Pf Pg	7			6.7	13.3	80		100			80	13.3		6.7	100
	18				20	80		100		6.7	53.3	33.3		6.7	100

As Table 5.5 illustrates, the majority of NSs viewed the present simple as expressing some kind of *state or fact*. As most verbs in the present simple are stative verbs, they are often thought of as depicting a whole situation which remains constant from one moment to the next without changing (Richards, 1981). As a result, a stative situation normally extends toward the future. That is why the future time reference can also be conveyed by the present simple form. When describing aspectual property of the present simple that marks the *future*, the results showed that

inconsistencies existed among NSs. For example, in item 24: *Hope you* (24) <u>*enjoy the rest of your stay*</u>…, 46.7% of NSs chose to describe *enjoy* as *state or fact*, while the same percentage of NSs viewed the action as *started but continuing*. In item 20: *The plane* (20) <u>*leaves very early in the morning*</u>, 73.3% of NSs considered the situation as a *state or fact*, whereas some NSs chose to describe in their own words that *leaves* conveyed "*future indicative*," "*schedule,*" "*timetable*," and "*not yet started.*"

The present progressive form that marks the *present* was largely viewed by NSs in accordance with its typical usage as presenting a durative event that *started but is continuing* to the speech time. However, when used with a *stative* verb as in item 8: *Aunt Mary* (8) <u>*isn't feeling very well*</u>, 40% of NSs variably regarded this context as expressing a *state or fact*.

The present progressive that is used to express the future (i.e. as a realization of the present plan/intention) was viewed by the majority of NSs as a *state or fact*. However, one may observe that about one-third of the NSs chose to explain how they viewed this situation in their own words. From examining the descriptions for items 19 and 23, it was found that the NSs offered their viewpoints in a similar manner. Their explanations indicated the relationships that existed between their conceptualization of time and how they viewed the characteristic of the event. The NS descriptions included statements such as: "*future intention*," "*future plan*," "*fixed arrangement*," "*present decision but not yet started*."

Aspectual property of the present perfect form in items 1 and 10 was viewed by the majority of the NS group as *completed*, while the time reference was marked as *past* relevant to the *present* speech time. The present perfect form in item 9, however,

was viewed by the highest number of NSs as *repeated intermittently*. This may be due to the fact that the time expression *many times* was added to the verb phrase. This allows the context: *She* (9) <u>*has visited*</u> *the doctor many times during the past few weeks* to be considered as a punctual situation that repeated intermittently for a certain period of time.

With the progressive aspect added to the present perfect, the present perfect progressive form in items 4 and 21 was generally viewed by the majority of NSs (86.7%) as *started but continuing*.

The NS conceptualizations of aspectual property for the past simple were more consistent than those for other tense-aspect forms. Consistency was found in 3 items, whereby all NSs described events in the simple past as *completed* before speech time. A substantial degree of inconsistency among NSs was found in item 11: *He* (11) <u>*spent almost a month building it*</u>. While two-thirds of NSs viewed the event as *completed*, one-third (33.3%) chose to describe the event as *duration finished*. This viewpoint could be affected by the inherent semantic property of the verb *spend*, which implies a situation perceived as lasting for some duration of time before it is complete. In this instance, the focus of attention may be placed on the *duration* that *ended* or on the *endpoint* of the event (i.e. the *completion* of the event). In contrast to *spend*, punctual verbs such as *pass (a test), come, arrive* and *tell* (in items 5, 12, 15, and 16) denote events that occur in an instant with no duration; thus, the situations marked by the present simple were perceived as *completed*.

For the past progressive, the results revealed a high degree of inconsistency among NSs both in terms of time reference and aspectual property. For time

reference, NSs focused their attention on two different time-points: (1) *past* and (2) *before another past* event. The choice of *past* for time reference indicated that NSs viewed the event as a whole, which *started* and *ended* in the past. The latter choice of time reference reflects a common characteristic of the progressive aspect as expressing a *durative* event being in progress at a particular point of time; either in the past, at present or in the future. The past progressive, thus, depicts an event starting before the point of time in the past specified in the sentence but still being in progress at such time. An event expressed by the past progressive can therefore be viewed as occurring before another past event.

As time reference of the past perfect was generally conceptualized by NSs as happening *before another past event*, the aspect of this tense-aspect form was viewed by the majority of NSs as *completed*. However, one may observe remarkable variations in the NS responses on item 17: *Alex told us he* (17) <u>*hadn't written*</u> *because* …. In this context, one-third of NSs (33.3%) viewed the verb *write* in the past perfect form as denoting *duration finished*. These NSs possibly focused on the duration of the event (which already ended) rather than the endpoint of the situation alone.

Time reference of the past perfect progressive was generally viewed by NSs in the same manner as the past perfect (i.e. *before another past event*). With the addition of the progressive aspect which indicates duration, aspectual property of the past perfect progressive was viewed by the majority of NSs as depicting the *duration* of a past situation that had *finished* before another past event. Variations among NSs in item 18: *…he* (18) <u>*had been studying*</u> *hard…*showed that the past perfect progressive was variably viewed by 33.3% of NSs as expressing *repetitiveness*. This may be because these NSs did not consider the verb *study* to happen continuously, but rather

repeated intermittently before another past event.

From the analysis of NS conceptualizations of aspectual property, we have seen that lexical aspect or the semantic meaning of the verb and the context in which it is used play a crucial role in determining grammatical aspect.   This suggests that lexical aspect should be incorporated into the design of teaching verb tense-aspect to EFL/ESL learners.

5.2.2 Non-native Speakers with High English Proficiency (NNS-H)

Table 5.6: *Time and Aspect in Percentage by the NNS-H Group*

TENSE	ITEM	TIME							ASPECT						
		a	b	c	d	e	f	Total	a	b	c	d	e	f	Total
Pres Simp	3		100					100	6.1				93.9		100
	22	3	97					100	6.1				84.8	6.1	97
	20	42.4	48.5	9.1				100	3			3	72.7	18.2	97
	24	24.2	75.8					100	18.2	3			63.6	15.2	100
Pres Prog	2		100					100	78.8			15.2	3	3	100
	8		97				3	100	30.3		3	9.1	48.5	6.1	97
	19	90.9	9.1					100	3			3	39.4	51.5	97
	23	90.9	6.1				3	100	6.1			3	48.5	42.4	100
Pres Perf	1		9.1	78.8	12.1			100	9.1	57.6	30.3			3	100
	9		6.1	87.9	6.1			100	30.3	12.1	15.2	42.4			100
	10		12.1	72.7	15.2			100	6.1	51.5	39.4			3	100
Pres Pf Pg	4		9.1	87.9			3	100	93.9			6.1			100
	21		12.1	81.8		3	3	100	90.9			6.1			97
Past Simp	5				100			100		97			3		100
	11		3	9.1	87.9			100		81.8	18.2				100
	12				100			100		90.9	9.1				100
	15				97		3	100		87.9	6.1			6.1	100
	16				93.9	6.1		100		84.8	9.1		6.1		100
Past Prog	13				69.7	27.3	3	100	12.1	9.1	33.3	24.2	3	18.2	100
	14				66.7	30.3	3	100	12.1	12.1	30.3	24.2	3	18.2	100
Past Perf	6			6.1	12.1	81.8		100		69.7	27.3		3		100
	17			12.1	18.2	66.7	3	100	3	39.4	48.5		6.1	3	100
Past Pf Pg	7			15.2	27.3	57.5		100	9.1	21.2	48.5	21.2			100
	18	3		12.1	21.2	60.6	3	100	15.2	15.2	42.4	24.2	3		100

As displayed in Table 5.6 above, one can observe that inconsistencies between the NNS-H and NS conceptualizations were greater with regard to aspectual property than time reference.

Of the present tense forms, the NNS-H values for aspectual properties of the present perfect progressive yielded lowest within-group variations and most closely approximated the NS values, followed by the present simple form.

The NNS-H aspectual conceptualizations of the present perfect yielded considerable within-group variations and greater distance from those of NSs. This could be due to a number of factors. Firstly, the present perfect deals with two time points: the past and the present. The conceptualizations of aspect may vary depending on the individuals' focuses on diverse time points. Secondly, the lexical meaning of the verb also plays an important role. A punctual predicate may be viewed differently from a durative predicate. Thirdly, the context in which the verb is used determines how the situation is viewed. For example, the existence of the time phrase *many times* causes a punctual predicate (i.e. *visit*) to be viewed as an event *repeated intermittently*.

The analysis for the NNS-H participants' viewpoints on the present progressive was quite complicated. At first glance it appears that the NNS-H aspectual conceptualizations of the present progressive that marks the future (items 19 and 23) displayed a substantial degree of within-group variations. As a matter of fact, this phenomenon also existed in the NS group. One may observe that a high percentage of participants in both groups decided to offer their viewpoints *in their own words*. The explanations provided by the participants in the NS and NNS-H

groups revealed a common viewpoint, i.e. that the present progressive in items 19 and 23 expressed a future realization of a present plan/intention. As this explanation implies the time span that extends from present to future, the event that involves the present plan for future occurrence may be viewed as a state of affairs. This probably explains why other participants in the NS and NNS-H groups viewed items 19 and 23 as *state or fact*.

Generally speaking, aspectual property of the present progressive that indicates the present time should be easier to conceptualize. A typical usage of the present progressive normally describes a situation that started and has continued up to the moment of speaking. This usage basically applies to activity verbs. Thus, when the present progressive is used with a stative or emotive verb like *feel* (in item 8), one may have to decide whether the predication is viewed according to the common usage of the progressive, or it is viewed according to the verb type as a *state of affairs*. For this item, the results revealed that 48.5% of the NNS-H participants chose *state*, while 30.3% chose *started but continuing*.

We have seen so far that defining events associated with the present time is not always straightforward. The concept of the present time itself is abstract; it does not merely refer to the moment of speaking but rather has a meaning that cuts across three times: from the past to the moment of speaking and with the possibility of extending further into the future. The present simple, in particular, does not simply make a specific predication to the present time. On the one hand, the present simple conveys a situation that is understood as habitual, state of affairs or fact, and on the other, as temporary or in progress. This has led us to observe that the tense-aspect form which involves more than one time point is difficult to define and it may not be

possible to summarize its characteristic in just one simple description.

Of the four past forms, the NNS-H values of the past simple revealed the least within-group variation and most closely approximated the NS values. This is probably because the past simple involves only one time point; i.e. the endpoint of a situation in the past. It is relatively straightforward and therefore most easily conceptualized by non-native speakers of English.

The NNS-H values for the past perfect support the assertion that lexical aspect plays a role in determining grammatical aspect. One may observe a considerable variation among the NNS-H participants in items 6 and 17. The distinction between a punctual verb *fail* (a test) in item 6 and a verb with some duration *write* in item 17 seemed to illustrate the diverse focus of attention to time-point: the former toward the completion of the punctual verb *fail*, and the latter toward the endpoint of the durative event *write*.

For the past perfect progressive, the NNS-H values in items 7 and 18 yielded a higher degree of within-group variations and greater distance from the NS norms. The results showed that the highest number of the NNS-H participants focused their attention to the *finishing* point of a *durative* past event for item 7 and item 18 (i.e. 48.5% and 42.4%, respectively). Other participants viewed the past perfect progressive as a past event that had happened repeatedly, and an event that had completed in the past. If one compares the NNS-H values with those of the NS group, one will find that the NS conceptualizations for the verb phrases *had been taking* in item 7 and *had been studying* in item 18 varied quite considerably. The majority of NSs (80%) considered *had been taking a three-week driving course* to depict a

durative event being finished, whereas 13.3% viewed the event being intermittently repeated in the past. The verb phrase *had been studying*, on the other hand, was viewed as *duration finished* at only 53.3%, and as a *repeated past* event at 33.3%.

Aspect of the past progressive provides the most within-group and across-group variations among the NNS-H participants. This could be attributable to a number of reasons. First, the progressive aspect indicated duration from one time to another. As discussed earlier, an event that can be viewed to happen from more than one time perspective often allows individuals' diverse focuses to the time-point. Second, viewing a past event which expresses 'remoteness' in terms of time is normally more complicated than perceiving time and aspect of a present situation, which conveys nearness or 'proximity' in time (Gabrielatos, 2003). Third, usage of the past progressive is complex in that it depicts a durative past event that was interrupted by a more recent past action or situation specified in the sentence. Thus, it is context-sensitive and subjective, allowing varied temporal viewpoints among individuals. The results of this study suggest that the highest number of NSs perceived the past progressive as a continuation of a past action, whereas the highest number of the NNS-H group focused on the point at which a durative event finished or was interrupted. One may observe, further, that the degree of consistency within both groups was relatively low, compared to other tense-aspect forms.

In summary, the NNS-H conceptualizations of aspect marking between the NS and the NNS-H groups demonstrate greater distance than conceptualizations of time. This probably implies that speakers of Thai, even those with high English proficiency, do not conceptualize time reference with clear progressive and perfect aspects in the way native English speakers do (Tawilapakul, 2007). In other words, native English

speakers normally consider the events in the progressive and perfect aspects more analytically, while Thai speakers view the events in a more holistic manner (ibid).

In addition, the distance in conceptualization between the NS and NNS-H groups was even greater with regard to the aspects for past tense markers, which express 'remoteness' (Gabrielatos, 2003). This has led one to assume that proximity (expressed by present tenses) and remoteness (expressed by past tenses) could be one factor that affects the level of difficulty in L2 learners' conceptualizations of aspect.

5.2.3 Non-native Speakers with Intermediate English Proficiency (NNS-I)

Table 5.7: *Time and Aspect in Percentage by the NNS-I Group*

TENSE	ITEM	TIME							ASPECT						
		a	b	c	d	e	f	Total	a	b	c	d	e	f	Total
Pres Simp	3		93.9	6.1				100	6.1	6.1			87.9		100
	22	3	97					100	9.1	6.1			81.8	3	100
	20	21.2	75.8	3				100	3		6.1	6.1	75.8	9.1	100
	24	12.1	87.9					100	12.1			3	72.7	12.1	100
Pres Prog	2		87.9	6.1			6.1	100	60.6			3	33.3	3	100
	8		97				3	100	24.2	3		15.2	54.5	3	100
	19	75.8	21.2				3	100	12.1		3	3	36.4	45.5	100
	23	63.6	27.3				9.1	100	12.1				51.5	36.4	100
Pres Perf	1		12.1	63.6	15.2	6.1	3	100	21.2	42.4	21.2		12.1		97
	9		15.2	48.5	24.2	9.1	3	100	33.3	18.2	18.2	24.2	3	3	100
	10		15.2	48.5	30.3	3	3	100	15.2	54.5	24.2		3	3	100
Pres Pf Pg	4		18.2	78.8	3			100	84.8		6.1	6.1	3		100
	21		18.2	60.6	6.1	12.1	3	100	66.7	9.1	12.1	9.1		3	100
Past Simp	5				93.9	6.1		100		97	3				100
	11			3	90.9	6.1		100		81.8	9.1	6.1	3		100
	12			6.1	90.9	3		100	3	90.9	3		3		100
	15		3	3	90.9	3		100	3	75.8	9.1	6.1	6.1		100
	16		3		93.9	3		100		90.9	6.1				97
Past Prog	13			12.1	45.5	36.4	6.1	100	21.2	21.2	30.3	15.2	6.1	6.1	100
	14	3	3	18.2	39.4	30.3	6.1	100	27.3	21.2	24.2	15.2	6.1	6.1	100
Past Perf	6		3	3	21.2	69.7	3	100		42.4	45.5	6.1	3	3	100
	17		9.1	18.2	21.2	51.5		100	9.1	18.2	54.5	12.1	3		97
Past Pf Pg	7			39.4	21.2	27.3	12.1	100	12.1	18.2	39.4	21.2	3	3	97
	18		3	39.4	18.2	36.4	3	100	30.3	12.1	39.4	18.2			100

Table 5.7 above indicates that the responses in the intermediate-proficiency group followed approximately the same pattern as those in the high-proficiency group although greater within-group variations existed in the NNS-I group.

With regard to aspectual properties of an event, the results suggest that the past simple was the most easily conceptualized by the NNS-I group, followed by the present simple. The NNS-I values for the aspect of the past progressive demonstrated a high degree of variations. This is consistent with the results found in the NS and NNS-H groups, whereby the highest values for the aspectual conceptualizations of the past progressive in the two items were averaged at the lowest percentages among all tense-aspect forms. Furthermore, the highest number of participants in the high- and intermediate-proficiency groups did not choose the aspectual description that the highest number of the NS group did. Surprisingly, though, in terms of distance from the NS norms, the NNS-H values displayed greater distance from those of NSs than did the NNS-I values.

5.2.4 Non-native Speakers with Low English Proficiency (NNS-L)

As demonstrated in Table 5.8 below, conceptualizations of aspectual properties among the NNS-L participants displayed considerable variations. Similar to the intermediate-proficiency group, the past simple appeared to be the most easily conceptualized for the low-proficiency learners. In terms of distance from the NS values, the NNS-L conceptualizations of the present perfect were averaged at the lowest percentage. This was followed by aspectual conceptualizations of the past perfect progressive and the past perfect, respectively. While the conceptualization of

the past progressive was problematic, especially for the NNS-H participants, the NNS-L values appeared to approximate most closely to the NS norms.

Table 5.8: *Time and Aspect in Percentage by the NNS-L Group*

TENSE	ITEM	TIME							ASPECT						
		a	b	c	d	e	f	Total	a	b	c	d	e	f	Total
Pres Simp	3	3	84.8	6.1	3		3	100	18.2	9.1	3	12.1	51.5	3	97
	22	18.8	71.9	6.3	3.1			100	27.3	15.2	3	12.1	39.4	3	100
	20	12.5	71.9	12.5	3.1			100	33.3	15.2	15.2	3	27.3		94
	24	25	68.8	3.1		3.1		100	33.3	18.2		6.1	39.4	3	100
Pres Prog	2	9.4	68.8	12.5	3.1	3.1	3.1	100	63.6	6.1	6.1	9.1	12.1	3	100
	8	6.3	81.3	6.3		3.1	3.1	100	36.4	6.1	15.2	12.1	24.2	3	97
	19	39.4	51.5	6.1			3	100	39.4	6.1	6.1	9.1	21.2	15.2	97
	23	28.1	56.3	3.1		9.4	3.1	100	36.4	6.1	3	21.2	30.3	3	100
Pres Perf	1	18.2	9.1	51.5	18.2	3		100	27.3	30.3	30.3		9.1		97
	9		6.3	59.4	34.4			100	21.2	6.1	54.5	15.2	3		100
	10		9.7	35.5	38.7	9.7	6.5	100	24.2	27.3	30.3	9.1	9.1		100
Pres Pf Pg	4	15.6	21.9	46.9	9.4	6.3		100	63.6	3	15.2	6.1	6.1		94
	21	21.9	15.6	31.3	25	6.3		100	21.2	3	51.5	15.2	6.1		97
Past Simp	5	3		9.1	69.7	18.2		100		66.7	18.2	9.1	3		97
	11	6.1	21.2	9.1	60.6	3		100	12.1	51.5	18.2	6.1	9.1		97
	12	3	9.1	15.2	69.7		3	100	9.1	54.5	18.2	9.1	3	3	97
	15	6.1		15.2	75.8	3		100	9.1	60.6	9.1	6.1	12.1		97
	16	3	6.1	15.2	66.7	9.1		100	18.2	57.6	6.1	3	12.1		97
Past Prog	13	6.1	24.2	27.3	27.3	12.1	3	100	45.5	15.2	12.1	12.1	6.1	6.1	97
	14	9.1	12.1	39.4	21.2	15.2	3	100	30.3	9.1	24.2	21.2	6.1	6.1	97
Past Perf	6	3	3	36.4	18.2	36.4	3	100	15.2	39.4	27.3	12.1	3	3	100
	17	6.3	3.1	21.9	40.6	18.8	9.4	100	24.2	21.2	39.4	6.1	6.1	3	100
Past Pf Pg	7	24.2	3	51.5	15.2	6.1		100	30.3	6.1	21.2	36.4	3		97
	18	21.9	12.5	34.4	12.5	18.8		100	42.4	9.1	36.4	6.1	6.1		100

5.3 SUMMARY

Based on the analysis of the results, there was consistency in the development of non-native speakers' conceptualizations of tense and aspect in English. Conceptualizations of time and aspect among high-proficiency learners most closely approximated those of NSs, while low-proficiency learners showed the highest degree

of variation and distance from NSs' norms. In terms of time, the past perfect progressive shows a substantial degree of variation among the four groups, which suggests that time reference of this form seems to be most difficult for nonnative speakers to learn, especially for those at low English proficiency levels. The results also shows that substantial within-group and across-group variations existed in a linear manner in the conceptualizations of time reference of the present simple that expresses the future.

Conceptualizations of aspectual property also show consistency in the developmental patterns of non-native speakers. However, there was a slight deterioration in the development of the past progressive. One can observe that the highest values in NNS-L group approximated those in the NS group. The values deteriorated as proficiency developed. The NNS-H values were most distant from NSs' norms.

The results in terms of time reference have suggested that speakers of Thai and English may conceptualize the time domains differently. However, at this stage there are still insufficient grounds for justifying this simple assumption. But if one explores the proximity in conceptualizations of English aspects between native English speakers and Thai learners, one can see that the distance was greater, especially when the viewpoint aspect of a past event is concerned. The distance in conceptualization of verb forms that carry progressive and perfect aspects indicates that these two aspects are not perceived by Thai speakers in a clear manner. Thai speakers may view events more holistically than native English speakers do. This may be due to the fact that Thai and English have different linguistic systems to convey time and aspect. The fact that Thai does not have inflectional pattern of time

and aspect may impede Thai learners of English from comprehending and producing some tense-aspect forms in which syntactic patterns as well as semantic and pragmatic interpretations are required. As suggested by Tawilapakul, 2007, such typological difference between the two languages may have some cognitive implications in the conceptualization of tense and aspect in English by Thai learners.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The purpose of this study was, first, to investigate conceptualizations of tense and aspect in English among Thai learners of English at three proficiency levels; and second, to explore the degree of proximity to the native English speaker norms in terms of conceptualizations of time reference and aspectual property among Thai learners at high, intermediate and low English proficiency levels. This study was motivated particularly by the following reasons:

(1) It is generally known that tense and aspect marking of a verb and its meaning is a challenging feature of English for non-native learners to master. Many advanced L2 learners still have difficulty with comprehending and using English tense and aspect properly. Previous research has found that non-native learners of English, particularly those whose L1 lacks morphological and inflectional tense-aspect markers, tend to conceptualize time and aspectual references in English differently from native English speakers. If this is the case, one may assume that grammaticalization of the time reference and aspectual property of English tense and aspect may not be readily available for semantic and pragmatic interpretations by Thai learners of English.

(2) Tense-aspect errors are one of the common errors found among EFL learners and are what teachers of English find the most difficult grammatical element to remedy. In order for teachers to understand where learners' inappropriate usage of tense and aspect originates, it is important to understand to what extent Thai learners of English comprehend tense meanings in terms of time reference and aspectual property when

used in discourse contexts. It is equally important to understand whether their conceptualizations of time reference and aspectual property are consistent with those of native English speakers. Such consistencies and variations in conceptualizations of time and aspect between native English speakers and Thai learners of English are hoped to shed light on problems that Thai learners have in comprehending English tense and aspect, which in turn reflects their difficulty in effective usage of tense and aspect in English.

In this study, a reading text in the form of an email containing 24 items of 8 tense-aspect forms was used to investigate conceptualizations of time reference and aspectual property between native English speakers and Thai learners of English. To respond to those items, a questionnaire with descriptors for time reference and aspectual property was provided so that participants would choose an option that best described their conceptualization for each of the 24 items in the email. The multiple-choice options for time and aspect descriptors were uniform for all 24 contexts.

As the instrument required some metalinguistic knowledge regarding time concepts and descriptors for aspectual properties, native English speakers chosen for this study were all teachers of English in Thai universities. Thai learners of English were classified into 3 proficiency levels: high, intermediate, and low. The high-proficiency group consisted of Thai English language teachers recruited from two universities in Thailand, whereas the intermediate and low groups were undergraduate English major students, who were EFL learners in a Thai university.

In the following three sections in this concluding chapter, the main findings of the study will be presented, followed by the implications drawn from the study. The last section will offer some recommendations for further research.

6.1 The Main Findings of the Study

The data presented in this study revealed how native English speakers (NS) and Thai learners of English (NNS) conceptualized tense and aspect in English. The results also yielded within-group and across-group consistencies and variations in their conceptualizations of time and aspectual references. The findings allow one to see the proximity to the native English speaker norms in terms of conceptualizations of time reference and aspectual property for the present and past tense-aspect markers among Thai learners at high, intermediate and low English proficiency levels.

The analyses of the conceptualizations of time reference showed that only in the present progressive with the present time span were the NSs' conceptualizations of time reference unanimous. Otherwise, NSs demonstrated varying degrees of inconsistency in their choices of time reference. The data revealed that tense-aspect markers associating with one time point (i.e. past, present, or future) showed less within-group variations than those relating to more than one time points (i.e. past with present relevance or before another past event). Thus, the present progressive with present or future time reference and the past simple with past time reference showed the highest degree of consistency among NSs. Conceptualizations of the present simple seemed to be more complex. Unlike the past tense, which specifically makes predication to the past time, the present tense does not straightforwardly make a specific predication to the present time (Aje, 2010). According to Aje, the present

tense conveys a situation that is understood as habitual, state of affairs, or fact, and it semantically has a meaning that cuts across three times: the past, the present, and the future. This allows individuals to make judgment on the basis of their subjective perspectives of time and discourse convention. The tense-aspect forms that denote more than one time such as those with the perfect aspect, which indicate a period of time stretching backward into some earlier time, may allow for subjective perspectives of the referenced time, especially when the lexical verb type is involved.

In terms of time conceptualization among Thai learners of English, the responses of the NNS groups showed a linear increase in the degree of proximity to NSs' norms as the learners' proficiency levels increased across the groups. In other words, time conceptualization of Thai speakers with high proficiency level most approximated the NS norms. The values decreased linearly in relation to proficiency levels. The data show that the present simple and the present progressive denoting the present represented the most accessible time reference for all NNS groups, followed by the past simple. The future time reference of the present simple, in contrast, showed a high degree of variation and distance from NSs' norms for all groups of Thai learners. Time reference of the past perfect progressive appeared to have been conceived of as more difficult for Thai learners to acquire than time reference of the other tense-aspect forms.

The analyses of the conceptualizations of aspect showed that greater within-group variations existed even among NSs. Across-group variations were also greater with regard to aspectual property than time reference. However, the data revealed consistency in Thai learners' development in their conceptualization of aspect. The lower the proficiency of the Thai learners, the more distant their values were from

those of NSs. Again, aspectual property of the past perfect progressive appeared to be the most difficult to conceptualize for Thai speakers of English. As discussed in the summary part of the previous chapter, the distance in conceptualization of English verb forms that carry progressive and perfect aspects may result from the fact that these two aspects are not perceived by Thai speakers in a clear manner. From a cognitive perspective, Thai speakers may view events differently from native English speakers as a result of different linguistic systems between the two languages. Thai speakers may view events more holistically than native English speakers do. Such typological difference may have some cognitive impacts on the conceptualization of tense and aspect in English and thus impede Thai learners of English from comprehending and producing some tense-aspect forms in which syntactic patterns as well as semantic and pragmatic interpretations are required. In addition, the remoteness of the past time reference may also exacerbate the learners' difficulty in conceptualizing time and aspect. This possibly results from the lack of inflectional forms to convey the past as opposed to the present in the Thai language. If this is the case, it could explain why conceptualizations of a past event with perfect and progressive aspects among Thai learners of English even at the advanced level were most distant from those of NSs.

It should be noted, further, that the aspect of the past progressive was also problematic to Thai learners. The results showed slight deterioration in the learners' developmental pattern. The values deteriorated as the learners' proficiency increased across groups. In other words, the more proficient the learners became, the more distant from the NS norms were the learners' conceptualizations. This finding suggests that aspect is more persistently problematic than time reference. Despite a

dozen or more years of studying English, aspect is still hard to conceptualize and nonnative speakers do not acquire all the aspectual features of English.

The results further suggest that lexical aspect (i.e. the inherent semantic meaning of the verb) and the context in which the verb is used play a crucial role in determining grammatical aspect. We have seen so far that conceptualizations of time reference and grammatical aspect are largely subjective and context-sensitive. Tense is syntactic, while the inherent meaning of verb is semantic, and the interpretations of time and aspectual references in discourse context are pragmatic (Aje , 2010). All these elements are closely intertwined in a complex way, and that is why the challenge of learning with many problematic elements of language requires a clear understanding of both meaning and use of a linguistic form.

6.2 Implications of the Study

From the data presented in this study, the following pedagogic implications can therefore be offered.

Firstly, the findings suggest that non-native learners of English, even at high English proficiency level, experience some challenges when they have to interpret tense meanings in their full functional range. In the English tense-aspect system, a number of factors are in play: (1) time reference and its marker, (2) grammatical aspect, (3) verb meaning or lexical aspect, and (4) context. The tense meanings will become specific when time and grammatical aspect that mark verbs interact with context and lexical aspect. The English tense-aspect system are usually introduced in ESL grammar textbooks by presenting rules, explaining forms in association with time reference and tense meanings. As English tenses and aspects have a variety of

functions, one may assume that all these functions are beyond the terminology and explanations that published materials could possibly provide. The implication is that learners should look at the different functions in a variety of contexts rather than memorizing the more general rule that each tense-aspect form refers to. To have a good understanding of the English tense-aspect system, learners must first be aware of the meanings of time reference and aspectual property in relation to their linguistic forms. Then, they should be encouraged to associate those functions and forms within the context of language use. Generally, learners often know what the correct form is for a given verb, but it is the association of functions and forms in language use that continues to present difficulties. Thus, there is a need for exposure to time and aspect marking in a variety of contexts and for ample opportunities to make choices regarding which forms best convey intended meanings.

Secondly, as lexical aspect is an important factor which motivates choices about the most appropriate tense-aspect form, it should be useful to associate lexico-semantic classes of verbs and time-aspect references with which the verb forms are most suitable in the teaching of the English tense-aspect system.

Thirdly, the data showed that for Thai learners of English, the past simple, the present simple and present progressive with present meanings represented more accessible time and aspectual references than the other tense-aspect forms. This implies that conceptualizations of time and aspect of those forms are considered relatively easy among Thai learners regardless of proficiency levels. It is therefore reasonable that the teaching of the English tense-aspect system should begin with the most easily accessible forms. On the other end, the data further showed that Thai learners of English had difficulty relating time and aspectual references of the past

perfect progressive. This suggests that this tense-aspect marker was conceived of as the most difficult one to access. Thus, teachers need to provide learners with opportunities to see the different possible uses of this form and explain relationships between time and aspectual references within given contexts.

6.3 Recommendations for Further Research

Analyses of non-native learners' comprehension of time reference and aspectual property have, to some extent, shown common developmental patterns in the domain of English tense-aspect markers. However, further research can be conducted in order to qualitatively examine the decision making process of learners as they work on a task that requires them to make choices between tense-aspect markers in given contexts. This can help teachers understand how learners associate between forms and meanings.

Moreover, research into the process in which learners supply and manipulate contexts for the production of forms as well as the reasons for which learners decide to use such forms may further help address the difficulty that learners have in matching the forms with the meanings they would like to express.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

TEST INSTRUMENT

Please read the email below and complete the attached questionnaire.

Dear Linda,

Sorry for my late reply to your email; I (1) <u>have just gotten</u> back from Florida.

Nice to know you (2) <u>are enjoying</u> yourself in Thailand. Things here (3) <u>are</u> pretty much the same. Bobby (4) <u>has been working</u> very hard on his new project. Susan (5) <u>passed</u> her driving test last Friday after she (6) <u>had failed</u> the first one. She (7) <u>had been taking</u> a three-week driving course at a school nearby. Aunt Mary (8) <u>isn't feeling</u> very well. She (9) <u>has visited</u> the doctor many times during the past few weeks. Uncle Tom (10) <u>has finished</u> building a shed in the garden. He (11) <u>spent</u> almost a month building it. His son Alex (12) <u>came</u> home from Texas last night. Bobby and I (13) <u>were watching</u> TV, and Susan (14) <u>was preparing</u> supper when he unexpectedly (15) <u>arrived</u>. Alex (16) <u>told</u> us he (17) <u>hadn't written</u> because he (18) <u>had been studying</u> hard for his exams for weeks.

By the way, I (19) <u>am going</u> to Denver with Jackie tomorrow. The plane (20) <u>leaves</u> very early in the morning. Jackie and I (21) <u>have been decorating</u> our new shop since last month. We (22) <u>need</u> some more pictures and nice curtains. The shop (23) <u>is opening</u> very soon.

Hope you (24) <u>enjoy</u> the rest of your stay in Thailand. Write soon.

Love,
Paula

APPENDIX B

QUESTIONNAIRE

From the multiple choices below, interpret: (I.) <u>the time reference of the event</u>; and (II.) <u>how the event is viewed to take place</u> for each underlined verb form in the email you have read.   Mark (X) on the letter of your choice in the left column for (I.) and right column for (II.). If you choose (f.), please write your answer in the space provided.

(I.) <u>The time reference of the event is</u>:	(II.) <u>The event is viewed as</u>:
a. future	a. started but continuing
b. present	b. completed
c. past relevant to present	c. duration finished
d. past	d. repeated intermittently
e. before another past event	e. state or fact
f. other (please specify)	f. other (please specify)

Item	(I.) The time of the action is:	(II.) The action is viewed as:
1.	(a) (b) (c) (d) (e) (f)_____	(a) (b) (c) (d) (e) (f)_____
2.	(a) (b) (c) (d) (e) (f)_____	(a) (b) (c) (d) (e) (f)_____
3.	(a) (b) (c) (d) (e) (f)_____	(a) (b) (c) (d) (e) (f)_____
4.	(a) (b) (c) (d) (e) (f)_____	(a) (b) (c) (d) (e) (f)_____
5.	(a) (b) (c) (d) (e) (f)_____	(a) (b) (c) (d) (e) (f)_____
6.	(a) (b) (c) (d) (e) (f)_____	(a) (b) (c) (d) (e) (f)_____
7.	(a) (b) (c) (d) (e) (f)_____	(a) (b) (c) (d) (e) (f)_____
8.	(a) (b) (c) (d) (e) (f)_____	(a) (b) (c) (d) (e) (f)_____
9.	(a) (b) (c) (d) (e) (f)_____	(a) (b) (c) (d) (e) (f)_____
10.	(a) (b) (c) (d) (e) (f)_____	(a) (b) (c) (d) (e) (f)_____
11.	(a) (b) (c) (d) (e) (f)_____	(a) (b) (c) (d) (e) (f)_____
12.	(a) (b) (c) (d) (e) (f)_____	(a) (b) (c) (d) (e) (f)_____
13.	(a) (b) (c) (d) (e) (f)_____	(a) (b) (c) (d) (e) (f)_____
14.	(a) (b) (c) (d) (e) (f)_____	(a) (b) (c) (d) (e) (f)_____
15.	(a) (b) (c) (d) (e) (f)_____	(a) (b) (c) (d) (e) (f)_____
16.	(a) (b) (c) (d) (e) (f)_____	(a) (b) (c) (d) (e) (f)_____
17.	(a) (b) (c) (d) (e) (f)_____	(a) (b) (c) (d) (e) (f)_____
18.	(a) (b) (c) (d) (e) (f)_____	(a) (b) (c) (d) (e) (f)_____
19.	(a) (b) (c) (d) (e) (f)_____	(a) (b) (c) (d) (e) (f)_____
20.	(a) (b) (c) (d) (e) (f)_____	(a) (b) (c) (d) (e) (f)_____
21.	(a) (b) (c) (d) (e) (f)_____	(a) (b) (c) (d) (e) (f)_____
22.	(a) (b) (c) (d) (e) (f)_____	(a) (b) (c) (d) (e) (f)_____
23.	(a) (b) (c) (d) (e) (f)_____	(a) (b) (c) (d) (e) (f)_____
24.	(a) (b) (c) (d) (e) (f)_____	(a) (b) (c) (d) (e) (f)_____

APPENDIX C

QUESTIONNAIRE TRANSLATION

คำแปลแบบทดสอบ

จากอีเมล์ที่ท่านอ่าน จงใช้ตัวเลือกด้านล่างในการพิจารณากริยา (verb form) ที่ขีดเส้นใต้ไว้แต่ละชุดว่า :

(I.) การกระทำ/เหตุการณ์ เกิดใน**เวลา**ใด (II.) การกระทำ/เหตุการณ์ เกิดใน**ลักษณะ**ใด

และจงกาเครื่องหมาย (X) ลงบนตัวอักษรตามคำตอบที่ท่านเลือก หากท่านเลือกข้อ (f) กรุณาระบุคำตอบของท่านลงในช่องว่าง

(I.) **เวลา**ของการกระทำ/เหตุการณ์ (II.) **ลักษณะ**การดำเนินของการกระทำ/เหตุการณ์

   (a) อนาคต   (a) เกิดแล้วแต่ยังดำเนินอยู่

   (b) ปัจจุบัน   (b) เสร็จสิ้นลงแล้ว

   (c) อดีตที่เชื่อมโยงปัจจุบัน   (c) ช่วงเวลาที่เหตุการณ์ดำเนินสิ้นสุดลงแล้ว

   (d) อดีต   (d) กระทำซ้ำเป็นพักๆ

   (e) ก่อนอีกเหตุการณ์หนึ่งในอดีต   (e) เป็นสภาพการณ์หรือความเป็นจริง

   (f) อื่นๆ (โปรดระบุ)   (f) อื่นๆ (โปรดระบุ)

APPENDIX D

BACKGROUND QUESTIONNAIRE
For Native Speakers of English

Please complete the questionnaire below.

1. Name_____

2. Gender　　　[ ] Male　　　[ ] Female

3. Native country_____

4. Native language_____

5. Language(s) you speak at home_____

6. Education　　[ ] Bachelor's degree　[ ] Master's degree　[ ] Doctorate

7. Field of study_____

8. Occupation_____

9. Telephone number_____

10. Email address_____

Thank you for your kind participation in this study.

APPENDIX E

BACKGROUND QUESTIONNAIRE

For Non-native Speakers of English

Please complete the questionnaire below.

1. Name_____

2. Gender   [   ] Male   [   ] Female

3. Telephone number_____

4. Email address_____

5. Education   [   ] Bachelor's degree   [   ] Master's degree   [   ] Doctorate

6. Field of study_____

7. Have you been in any English speaking country for studying/training?

    [   ] Yes. [   ] No.

   If yes, what country/countries?_____

   What level of education?_____

   For how long?_____

Thank you for your kind participation in this study.

APPENDIX F

BACKGROUND QUESTIONNAIRE
For Non-native Speakers of English
(in Thai)

แบบสอบถามข้อมูลผู้เข้าร่วมงานวิจัย

<u>กรุณาตอบคำถามต่อไปนี้</u>

ชื่อ นาย/นางสาว...นามสกุล...

อายุ.........................ปี รหัสนักศึกษา...

หมายเลขโทรศัพท์... Email..

<u>ประวัติการเรียนและการใช้ภาษาอังกฤษ</u>

1. ท่านจบมัธยมปลายจาก..

2. ท่านเริ่มเรียนภาษาอังกฤษตั้งแต่เรียนอยู่ชั้น...

3. ท่านเคยไปต่างประเทศที่สื่อสารกันด้วยภาษาอังกฤษหรือไม่ (เคย)..................... (ไม่เคย)...................

    ถ้าเคย โปรดระบุประเทศ

    <u>ครั้งที่ 1</u>: ประเทศ... เป็นเวลา.....................................

    วัตถุประสงค์..

    <u>ครั้งที่ 2</u>: ประเทศ... เป็นเวลา.....................................

    วัตถุประสงค์..

    <u>ครั้งที่ 3</u>: ประเทศ... เป็นเวลา.....................................

    วัตถุประสงค์..

ขอขอบคุณอย่างสูงที่ให้ความร่วมมือในงานวิจัยครั้งนี้