

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)						Total
		a	b	c	d	e	f	
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) arrived*).

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)						Total
		a	b	c	d	e	f	
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)						Total
		a	b	c	d	e	f	
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)						Total
		a	b	c	d	e	f	
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) has finished 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) enjoy the rest of your stay...*, 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) leaves very early in the morning*, 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) isn't feeling very well*, 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) has visited 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) spent almost a month building it*. 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) hadn't written 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) had been studying 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.

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