

## **CHAPTER II**

### **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*

	<b>PRESENT</b>	<b>PAST</b>
<i>Simple</i>	He plays.	He played.
<i>Progressive</i>	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 ( $T_e$ ), reference time ( $T_r$ ), and time of utterance or speech time ( $T_s$ ). 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 ( $T_e = T_r = T_s$ ); the past tense associates the event time with the reference time, which is anterior to the speech time ( $T_e = T_r < T_s$ ); and the future tense associates the event time with the reference time, which is posterior to the speech time ( $T_e = T_r > T_s$ ). 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:  $[\pm \text{punctual}]$ ,  $[\pm \text{telic}]$ , and  $[\pm \text{dynamic}]$ . 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
<i>Punctual</i>	–	–	–	+
<i>Telic</i>	–	–	+	+
<i>Dynamic</i>	–	+	+	+

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 “2<sup>nd</sup> 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

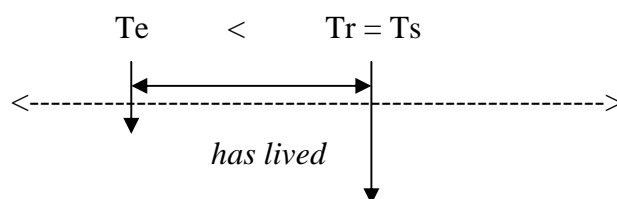
In terms of morphological form, the perfect aspect is marked by means of the auxiliary *verb* *have*, followed by the past participle form (the so-called *–en* form) of a lexical verb. The auxiliary verb *have* will be converted to *has*, *had*, or added by the future marker *will* as in the following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

Table 2.3: *Perfect Aspect in English*

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

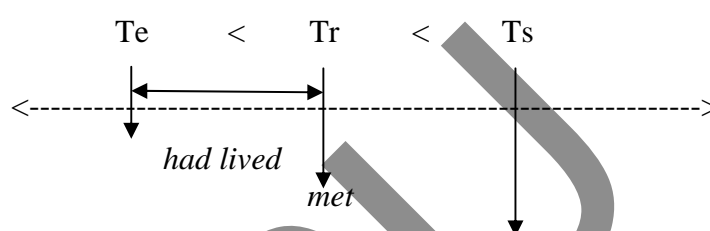
Semantically, the perfect aspect expresses the time relation of anteriority (Huddleston & Pullum, 2002). In other words, the perfect aspect is used when the speaker refers to the time of an event that may begin before (anterior) and extend up to the reference time, which may or may not be simultaneous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



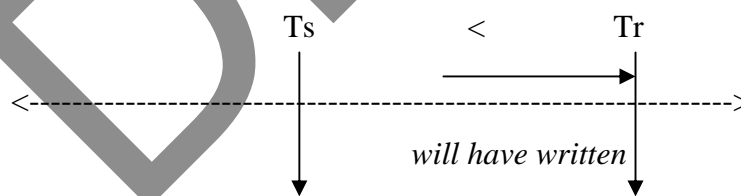
Present perfect: John **has lived** in Paris for two years.

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:



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:



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 was cooking dinner when I arrived.*
- (b) *They were discussing the matter over lunch.*
- (c) *I am writing 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

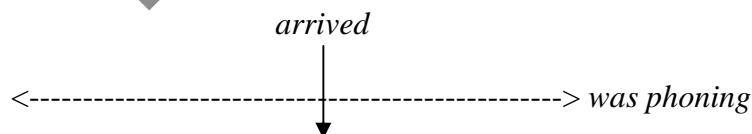
other things (such as taking some rest, or even a nap). But this is of no linguistic significance. The gaps are normally treated as part of the situation. Thus, in (c) it is the situation with gaps included that is presented as ongoing.

### ***Imperfectivity***

(d) *When I arrived, Paula phoned Nicky.*

(e) *When I arrived, Paula was phoning 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.



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 was walking along the street.*

(g) *Michael was mowing 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 had her head buried in a book but David was watching 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 is being smart*, as opposed to *Peter is smart*.  
 (n) *Linda is driving to school this week*, as opposed to *Linda drives 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*

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

*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.