

USING TIMELINES AND CONCEPT QUESTIONS IN TEACHING PRESENT TENSES - A THEORETICAL RESEARCH

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ABSTRACT

The aims of the study are to investigate the theoretical background of timelines and concept questions, its uses and functions in teaching present tenses. The results suggest that the practical roles of these methods benefit both teachers and students. For students, the methods help them feel more interested and useful in studying grammar, especially in learning grammar tenses. For teachers, these are good solutions to enhance students' interest and participation in the classroom.

Keywords: Concept Questions, Grammar, Tense, Timelines.

LITERATURE REVIEW

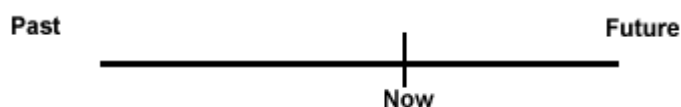
Timelines

Definitions

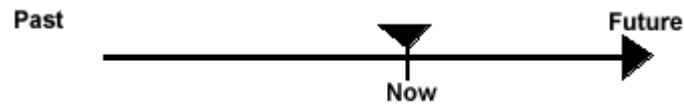
Timelines are simple diagrams that can help some learners to see the relationships between verb forms and their time reference. According to Workman (2008, p.4), Timelines are lines and drawings that provide a visual representation of different verb forms, showing when things happen or are happening in the present, past or future. Rees, the lecturer in London Metropolitan University stated that Timelines are diagrams that illustrate the reference to time made by a given piece of language. They are used to show how a particular language item (often a verb in a particular tense and aspect) places particular events or situations in time and in relation to other events. One of the keys to learning a language is learning how that language refers to, and describes, time and events, or states, that occur in the realm of time. In English, this reference to time is most commonly described by the verb, in its various tenses and aspects. Unfortunately, when learning a language, it is at times difficult to understand the concepts that are given as explanation. When demonstrating how we use tenses and structures to refer to or talk about the past, present and future, it can be helpful to illustrate these time references by drawing timelines.

How Do You Draw Them

The basic drawing is a horizontal and a vertical line. The horizontal line represents time while the vertical line represent now, the present moment. Everything to the left of this vertical line represents the Past, while everything to the right represents the Future.



To emphasise the direction of time, the line may be capped with an arrowhead. I also like to represent now with a triangle, as below.



Symbols

The following is a summary of the common symbols used on timelines

A single event or action	X
A repeated action or habit	X X X X X
A permanent state or situation	_____
A temporary state, situation or repeated/continuous action	~~~~~
Exact time of event is unknown	????
A point in time	↓ _____
A period in time	_____

There are certain conventions for representing actions on timelines.

- A cross is used to show a single, complete action:

Example 1: I get up at seven o'clock every day

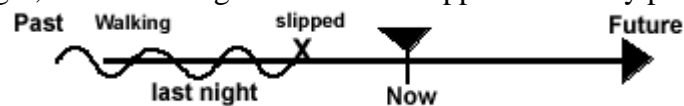


Example 2: He will be thirty on Friday



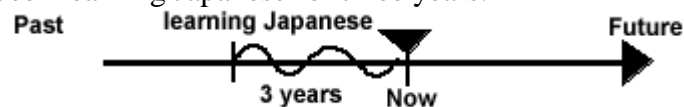
- A wavy line is used to show a continuous action

Example 3: Last night, I was walking home when I slipped on the icy path



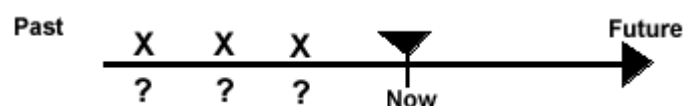
- A straight line is used to show a duration of an action

Example 4: I have been learning Japanese for three years.



- A curved line with question mark is used to show an action that does not have a specific point in time:

Example 5: I have been to New Zealand, Iceland and Taiwan.



The Need So Fusing Timelines In Teachin Ggrammar Tenses

The visual channel is being used to convey understanding of abstract concepts. This can be more memorable than just explanations, and is particularly effective with visual learners. The concepts which underline time reference in a language are often difficult to explain using controlled language and are often linguistically difficult to understand. Timelines are used to explain language in the more universal form of pictures, diagrams and symbols. Most people will follow the direction indicated by an arrow.

Timelines are used to:

- Simplify linguistic explanation
- Reinforce the understanding of a concept
- Illustrate the differences between verb forms and other language items
- Help students with a visual learning style
- Provide a reference point for students
- Encourage awareness of how language refers to time in different ways

Concept Questions

Definitions

According to Workman (2008, p.8), concept questions are questions that are designed to check learners have understood the meaning of a piece of grammar, an item of vocabulary or a functional expression. The word “concept” is used to signify the essential meaning of a piece of language. When a teacher introduces a new piece of language (lexis or grammar), they may present it first in context and then define or explain how and why it is used. Now, explaining or defining something to a person who shares the same mother tongue as you can often be tricky. Imagine doing it to a speaker of a different language. So what concept questions do is they enable the teacher, and perhaps the student, to confirm that understanding has taken place. Concept questions (also referred to as concept check questions) are questions designed to check learners’ understanding of a language item. This is one of the methods of checking concept, they are designed to highlight the meaning of the new item, whether vocabulary or structures and they are particularly useful when you are trying to elicit target language, they help pointing students in the right direction. They are also used to focus attention on the new language item once you have elicited it.

To formulate effective questions, we need to keep in mind several key points:

- Concept questions need to cover every aspect of the meaning of the language item.
- The questions shouldn’t use the target language.
- Concept questions should check the understanding of the language item, not of the situation.
- The questions shouldn’t use language which is overly complicated or long-winded, or more complicated than the target language.
- Concept questions should, where possible, require a simple yes or no, or a choice between two possibilities.

Rules For Design And Use Of Concept Questions

- Breakdown the concept of the item into a series of statements of meaning. A dictionary might be helpful if the vocabulary is challenging.
- Make sure the statements of meaning are expressed in simple language.
- Turn the statement into questions.
- The questions should be concise and simple.
- The language you use must be simpler than the language you are checking.
- The questions should not normally use the language you are checking.
- Sort the questions into a logical order.
- Write down the correct answers you expect the learners to give.
- The answers should be short and simple.
- If they answer incorrectly, state the correct answer and provide clarification.

Some Examples

These examples show how concept questions could be used to help differentiate between the main functions of the present simple and present continuous.

Example 1: Look! They're painting the wall

Checking Questions

Is it happening now? *Yes*

Can you see it? *Yes*

Is the painting finished? *No*

Are they painting now? *Yes*

Is this the past, present or future? *Present*

Example 2: She's a shop assistant. She works in a shop

Checking Questions

Has she got a job? *Yes*

Is she working now? *Don't know*

Does she work there every day? *Yes*

Is this the past, present or future? *Present, but also past and probably future.*

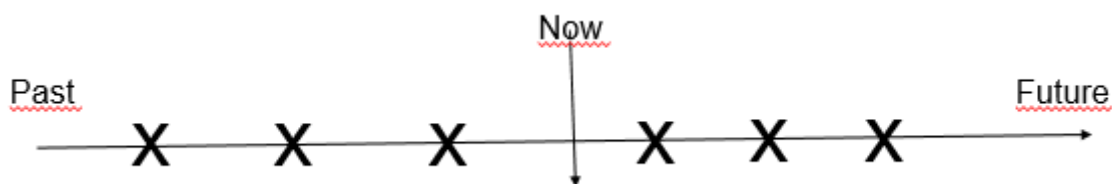
Using Timelines And Concept Questions In Teaching Present Tenses

The Present Simple

Present Simple is used to talk about routine or habit, so crosses are used to show the repeated actions or habit

Example: I get up at 7 o'clock every day

Using Timelines



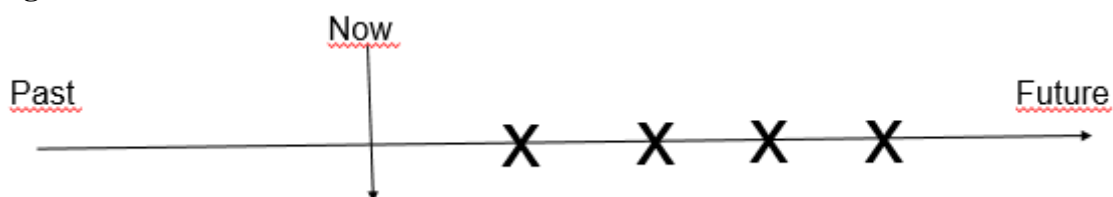
Using Concept Questions

- Is this something I do every day? *Yes*
- Is it a routine or habit? *Yes*
- What time do I get up? *At 7 o'clock*
- How often do I get up? *Everyday*

Present Simple is used to talk about future events on a time table or programme of events. This use is sometimes called the time table future.

Example: The train leaves at 7.00 on Monday.

Using Timeline



Using concept questions

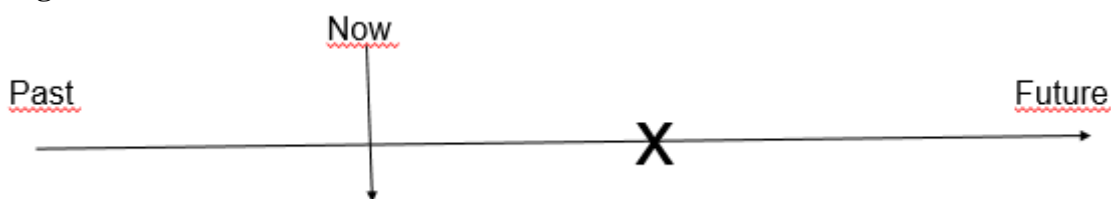
- Is it on the timetable? *Yes*
- Does this happen at the same time every Monday? *Yes*
- What time does the train leave? *At 7.00 on Monday*

The Present Continuous

The Present Continuous is used to talk about definite future arrangements. This use is sometimes called the "diary future". The time reference is given or understood.

Example: I'm meeting Jane at 3.30 on Friday.

Using Timelines



Using concept questions

- Are we talking about the present or the future? *Future*
- Is it a definite arrangement? *Yes*
- Who am I meeting? *Jane*
- What time I meet Jane? *At 3.30 on Friday*

Going to is used to express an intention or plan. The decision was made before the moment of speaking. It is not a definite arrangement.

Example: I'm going to buy a new house
Using Timeline



Using Concept Questions

- Am I talking about the future? *Yes*
- Is this a plan/ intention? *Yes*
- Did I decide now or in the past? *In the past*
- What am I going to buy? *A new house*

The Present Perfect

The Present Perfect is used to talk about the duration of an action that started in the past and continues up to and include the present. It is often use with adverb: for or since.

Example: She has lived in Australia for 2 years
Using Timeline:



Using Concept Questions

- Do we know when the action start? *Yes*
- Does the action continue up to and include the present? *Yes*
- Does she still live here? *Yes*
- How long does she live? *2 years*

The Present Perfect is used to talk about the present result of an action completed at an unspecified time in the past.

Example: You have cut your hair?
Using Timeline:



Using Concept Questions

- Did something happen in the past? *Yes*
- Do we know when this happened? *No*

- Is there a result in the present? *Yes*
- What did you cut? *The hair*

The Present Perfect Continuous

The Present Perfect Continuous is used to talk about the duration of an activity that started in the past and continues up to and includes the present. It is often used with *for* and *since*.

Example: He has been drinking since 9 o'clock

Using Timeline



Using Concept Questions

- Do we know when the activity started? *Yes*
- Does the activity continue up to and include the present? *Yes*
- Is the action still continuing? *Yes*
- What time did he start drinking? *9 o'clock*

CONCLUSION

Teaching grammar tenses has played an important role in teaching English and this requires much efforts and methods to convey the knowledge and information to students. Using time lines and concept questions can increase students' interest and participation in learning grammar which used to be seen as boring and difficult. Timelines can illustrate meaning in a much simpler way than using metalanguage to describe tenses (e.g. we use this tense to talk about something that began in the past and continues up to the present) while using concept checking questions can reinforce meaning and create more interest in the classroom. Especially, they may appeal to more visual learners and can be applied in teaching other skills of English.

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