

THE PAST SIMPLE TENSE IN ENGLISH GRAMMAR: A COMPARATIVE ANALYTICAL STUDY

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Abstract: *This article presents a comparative and analytical study of the Past Simple tense in English grammar based on the perspectives of leading pedagogical grammarians, including Raymond Murphy, Betty Schrampfer Azar, Michael Swan, as well as Oxford and Cambridge grammar traditions. The paper examines how the Past Simple tense is conceptualized in terms of form, meaning, and use, with particular attention to time reference, completed past actions, irregular verb forms, and pedagogical presentation. By analyzing these approaches sequentially, the study identifies both shared principles and methodological differences in the explanation and teaching of the Past Simple tense. The findings emphasize the importance of integrating grammatical accuracy with semantic, contextual, and communicative interpretation in teaching and learning the Past Simple tense. The article concludes with generalizations relevant to grammar instruction and applied linguistics research.*

Keywords: *Past Simple tense, simple past, English grammar, time reference, completed actions, pedagogical grammar, Murphy, Azar, Swan, Oxford, Cambridge.*

Annotatsiya: *Ushbu maqola ingliz tili grammatikasidagi Past Simple zamonini yetakchi pedagogik grammatika olimlari — Raymond Murphy, Betty Schrampfer Azar, Michael Swan hamda Oxford va Cambridge grammatika an'analari qarashlari asosida qiyosiy va tahliliy tarzda o'rganadi. Maqolada Past Simple zamonining shakli, ma'nosi va qo'llanilishi, xususan aniq o'tgan zamoniy vaqtga ishora, tugallangan harakatlar, noto'g'ri fe'l shakllari hamda pedagogik taqdim etish usullari tahlil qilinadi. Ushbu yondashuvlarni ketma-ket tahlil qilish orqali Past Simple zamonini tushuntirish va o'qitishdagi umumiy tamoyillar hamda metodologik farqlar aniqlanadi. Tadqiqot natijalari Past Simple zamonini o'qitishda grammatik aniqlikni semantik, kontekstual va kommunikativ talqin bilan uyg'unlashtirish zarurligini ko'rsatadi. Maqola grammatika o'qitish va amaliy tilshunoslik tadqiqotlari uchun dolzarb bo'lgan umumiy xulosalar bilan yakunlanadi.*

Kalit so‘zlar: *Past Simple* zamoni, oddiy o‘tgan zamon, ingliz tili grammatikasi, vaqtga ishora, tugallangan harakatlar, pedagogik grammatika, Murphy, Azar, Swan, Oxford, Cambridge.

Аннотация: В статье представлено сравнительно-аналитическое исследование времени *Past Simple* в английской грамматике на основе взглядов ведущих специалистов по педагогической грамматике, включая Реймонда Мёрфи, Бетти Шрампфер Азар, Майкла Свона, а также грамматические традиции Oxford и Cambridge. В работе рассматриваются форма, значение и употребление времени *Past Simple*, с особым вниманием к указанию на конкретное прошедшее время, завершённые действия, неправильные формы глаголов и педагогическую подачу материала. Последовательный анализ данных подходов позволяет выявить общие принципы и методологические различия в объяснении и обучении времени *Past Simple*. Полученные результаты подчеркивают важность сочетания грамматической точности с семантической, контекстуальной и коммуникативной интерпретацией при обучении и изучении времени *Past Simple*. Статья завершается обобщениями, имеющими значение для преподавания грамматики и исследований в области прикладной лингвистики.

Ключевые слова: Время *Past Simple*, простое прошедшее время, грамматика английского языка, временная отнесённость, завершённые действия, педагогическая грамматика, Murphy, Azar, Swan, Oxford, Cambridge.

The Past Simple tense occupies a central position in English grammar and is typically one of the first past-time forms introduced to language learners. It is primarily used to describe completed actions and events that occurred at a definite time in the past. Despite its apparent simplicity, learners often face persistent difficulties related to irregular verb forms, time reference, adverbial usage, and distinctions between the Past Simple and other past or perfect forms. For this reason, the Past Simple tense has been widely discussed in pedagogical grammar. This article aims to provide a comparative and analytical examination of how major grammar authorities conceptualize and present the Past Simple tense, highlighting both shared principles and methodological differences.

Murphy’s Time-Reference and Rule-Based Approach

In *English Grammar in Use*, presents the Past Simple tense as a form closely linked to definite past time. His explanation emphasizes that the tense is used when the speaker has a clear idea of when an action happened, whether the time is stated explicitly (yesterday, last year, in 2010) or understood from context.

Murphy highlights the structural simplicity of the tense, focusing on the -ed ending for regular verbs and providing lists of common irregular forms. He also contrasts the Past Simple with the Present Perfect, stressing that the former refers to finished past time, while the latter connects past events to the present. Murphy's approach is practical and learner-oriented, designed to prevent common errors and support communicative clarity.

Azar's Meaning-Focused and Instructional Framework

In *Fundamentals of English Grammar*, Azar adopts a meaning-centered pedagogical approach to the Past Simple tense. She defines it as a tense used to express actions and situations that began and ended in the past. Azar pays particular attention to timelines and contextual cues that help learners understand the temporal boundaries of past events.

Azar systematically integrates form, meaning, and use, explaining affirmative, negative, and interrogative structures in parallel. She also emphasizes the importance of signal words such as *ago*, *last*, and *yesterday*. Her instructional style relies heavily on charts, guided practice, and controlled exercises, making the Past Simple accessible to learners at early stages while maintaining grammatical accuracy.

Swan's Analytical and Usage-Oriented Perspective

In *Practical English Usage*, Swan offers a more analytical and descriptive treatment of the Past Simple tense. Swan focuses on usage problems and typical learner errors, such as unnecessary use of the Present Perfect or incorrect verb forms.

Swan explains that the Past Simple is primarily a tense of narration and storytelling, frequently used in spoken anecdotes and written narratives. He also highlights pragmatic factors, noting that native speakers often prefer the Past Simple when the time reference is clear from context, even if it is not explicitly stated. Swan's discussion is particularly valuable for advanced learners and teachers who seek deeper insight into the functional and discourse-based use of the tense.

Oxford and Cambridge Grammar Traditions

The Oxford and Cambridge grammar traditions approach the Past Simple tense from a functional and communicative perspective. Grammar materials often introduce the tense through everyday situations, personal experiences, and narrative texts, encouraging learners to associate form with real-life meaning.

Similarly, materials emphasize corpus-based examples and authentic usage. Particular attention is given to irregular verb frequency, spoken versus written usage, and contrastive analysis with other past forms. Both traditions stress that mastery of the Past Simple requires not only formal knowledge but also contextual awareness.

Comparative Analysis of Approaches

A comparative analysis reveals strong agreement among the scholars regarding the core meaning of the Past Simple tense as a marker of completed past events. All approaches emphasize its association with definite past time and narrative function. However, differences emerge in pedagogical emphasis. Murphy prioritizes clarity and rule application, Azar focuses on instructional structure and learner cognition, Swan highlights pragmatic and discourse considerations, while Oxford and Cambridge emphasize communicative competence and authentic input.

These differences reflect broader trends in applied linguistics, ranging from form-focused instruction to usage-based and communicative approaches. Together, they provide a comprehensive framework for understanding and teaching the Past Simple tense.

Pedagogical Implications

The analysis suggests that effective teaching of the Past Simple tense requires an integrated methodology. Learners benefit from explicit explanation of form and time reference, systematic practice with regular and irregular verbs, and exposure to authentic narratives. Teachers should also address contrasts with other past-related forms, particularly the Present Perfect, to reduce confusion. A balanced approach combining grammatical rules, semantic interpretation, and communicative practice is therefore essential.

General Conclusions

In conclusion, the Past Simple tense represents a foundational element of English grammar that extends beyond basic form to include semantic, pragmatic, and discourse dimensions. The comparative analysis of Murphy, Azar, Swan, and Oxford and Cambridge grammar traditions demonstrates that successful mastery of the Past Simple requires an understanding of time reference, narrative function, and contextual use. Integrating structural accuracy with communicative and semantic awareness offers the most effective framework for teaching and learning this tense. This study contributes to grammar instruction and applied linguistics research by highlighting the value of comparative pedagogical analysis.

References

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