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Free Speaking English Lesson To Help With Your Grammar

Summary

Hello and welcome to another "how to improve your English speaking through listening" podcast. This week's podcast focuses on grammar and will help you develop your English speaking skills online. You do not need grammar books to learn to speak English, however, sometimes it helps to have the things you are listening to explained.

Adept English teaches that listening alone will give you all you need for speaking proper English, so please enjoy this learn English podcast and our many free learn English podcasts online.



Transcript

Hi I'm Hilary and welcome to the long podcast from Adept English. We are here to help you become a fluent English speaker. One of the things which we've started to do in the past week, is put our podcasts into categories - so in time, it'll make it easier for you to choose which podcast you'd like to download. And we noticed that we haven't done a podcast on grammar for a while. So here goes - let's do one today. Deep breath - and I'll make it as easy as I can!

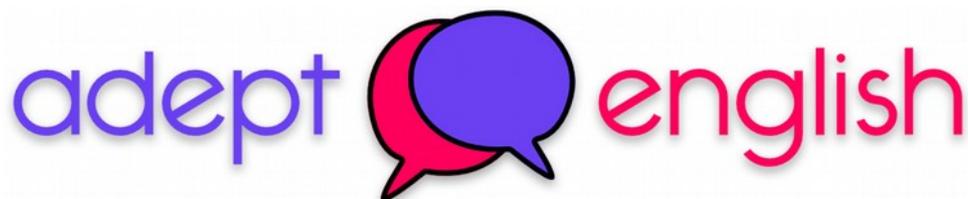
One of the things which I struggle with in my French is verb tenses. And I think this is one of the difficult things in learning a language. Choosing the right tense for the verb is quite difficult. It's harder to get a feel for this than most parts of the language. So let's do a little bit of structured learning. Verbs is a subject where a little structure can go a long way. Knowing the rules is helpful until you get to the point where you just know automatically which form of the verb to use. Now in most languages, you have a past tense - or a perfect tense. It's usually quite simple - it means that the verb can be used to indicate that the action happened in the past, and it's now finished.

I walked out of the house. I went to the shop. I bought some bread. I climbed a mountain. I did all of these things and now they're finished, they're in the past. That's the meaning of that form of the verb. So that's usually called 'the perfect tense'.

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In many languages, there's also a past continuous tense. So this is used to show an ongoing action in the past. It's often used to tell you what was going on, when something else happened. So examples of this in English might be:-

- I was walking out of the house, when I heard a loud noise. (Can you hear how the first part of the sentence is still going on, it's still happening, when the action - the hearing of the loud noise - in the second half of the sentence begins. So they overlap and they're both in the past).
- I was going to the shop, and I met an old friend in the street. (So this



means I was in the middle of going to the shop, when suddenly, I met an old friend.)

- I was buying some bread, then I noticed that there was a hole in my bag.
- When I was climbing a mountain, it started to snow.

So the first part of each of these sentences uses the past continuous tense or sometimes called the imperfect tense - so was climbing, was buying etc.

After A Lot Of Listening To English You Will Find English Talking Practice Much Simpler

There's also in most languages a pluperfect tense, which is used to push things even further back into the past. You may also know this tense as the past perfect.

So using these same examples, the pluperfect or past perfect tense would sound like this.

I had walked out of the house, when I heard the loud noise. (Can you hear how this means that the first part of the sentence is complete, before the action in the second part of the sentence happens? And they're both in the past. So the first part is pushed further into the past - the past perfect or pluperfect.) More examples...

- I had gone to the shop and I was on my way back, when I met an old friend in the street.
- I had bought some bread, when I noticed that there was a hole in my bag.
- I had climbed a mountain, and was driving home when it started to snow.

So this is the pluperfect or the past perfect and it just drives the action further back into the past.

So to summarise this section, on the past tense, there are three main tenses in most languages....



- I was walking – past continuous
- I walked – perfect or simple perfect
- I had walked – pluperfect or past perfect. OK so far.....

But, in English, it's not quite as simple as this.

If you take the middle one of these – I walked – the perfect or simple perfect tense. There are actually two forms of this.

You can say 'I walked' and you can say 'I have walked'. 'I ate' or 'I have eaten'. If you know French at all, 'J'ai mangé' works for both of these. If you know German, you can say 'Ich habe gegessen' for both of these. Now I'm not a Spanish speaker, but I think that Spanish does make a distinction - 'he ate' 'comio' and he has eaten 'el ha comido'. Please don't judge my pronunciation there!

So one of the things that people struggle with in English is what is the difference between I ate and I have eaten – because they're both perfect tense. If you asked an English speaker what the difference was, they would have to think hard to explain to you – but they would always automatically use the right one! So getting this right is something that will make your English sound much better! It's one of those subtle things – a nuance if you like – which will make you sound more like a native English speaker, if you can do it. So let's have a look at the definition.

Definition of the present perfect tense and simple perfect tense

So let's give them their proper names – the simple perfect tense is I ate.

And the present perfect tense – I have eaten.

Now the present perfect – I have eaten – is used to show a link between the present and the past. The idea is that the action is currently finished, but you may do some more. So 'I ate dinner' tends to mean I'm not going to eat any more. 'I have eaten dinner' – suggests you may eat some more, it's possible.



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A really good example to illustrate this. If you say

'Pablo Picasso painted lots of pictures' - that's simple perfect - it's finished, it's completed, it's clearly in the past.

But if you say 'Pablo Picasso has painted lots of pictures' - it sounds to anyone native English speaking as though it's possible that Picasso could still paint some more pictures! Of course, Pablo Picasso died in 1973, so that's not going to happen.

Whereas an artist, a painter like David Hockney - who's still alive, you could say 'David Hockney has painted lots of pictures' because he's still painting and very much alive at 81 years old. But conversely, if you said 'David Hockney painted lots of pictures' - it makes it sound like it's complete, like he's already stopped painting and he's died. So David Hockney probably wouldn't be very pleased to hear someone say it like that.

So just to make it clearer which one to use in which situation, let's use some more examples.

So present perfect:-

- I have lived in Manchester since 2012 (= and I'm still living there).

So simple perfect

- I lived in Manchester in 2012 and now I live in London (so it's ended).

So present perfect:-

- She has been to the theatre twice this week (= and the implication is the week isn't over yet, so she may go again.)

Whereas simple perfect

- She went to the theatre twice this week (means she's now finished going there - at least for this week).



There are two more situations where you may use the present perfect, rather than simple perfect.

If you've just done something in the very recent past, expressed by the word 'just', then you would use it. I have just finished my homework. I have just had a cup of coffee. I have just arrived in the last five minutes.

And if you want to emphasise something. Supposing you're having a dispute with someone, they're saying the opposite to you, for emphasis you might say. 'He has, he has read all the Harry Potter books'.

And....finally if you want to make the perfect tense negative. You can't use simple perfect tense. You can't say I went not to the shop, I ate not the bread, I drove not the car. To an English person this sounds like you come from the time of Shakespeare, so it sounds quite funny to us, if you say it that way.

So, for negatives you have to say

Either (for the present perfect) I have been to the shop becomes I haven't been to the shop

or (in the simple perfect) I went to the shop becomes I didn't go to the shop.

The More (Every Day) Listening To Spoken English Words, The Easier It Gets

I do find myself wanting to apologise sometimes - why is the English language more complicated than it needs to be? I guess because it's a mishmash - it's come from all sorts of different languages and taken a long time to develop. So these things may seem complicated when you're trying to learn them for the first time. But believe me when I say - I don't know a single English speaker, regardless of their level of intelligence or their educational level - they all get it right. No one makes a mistake with this. So anyone can learn the present perfect and the simple perfect. Anyone can pick it up. It's just like everything else, once you've understood how it works, it just takes some more listening practice and speaking practice to nail it.



Goodbye

So listen to this podcast a number of times – so that you understand all the words, and also to give the ideas about the past tense chance to stick! Enough for now. Have a lovely day. Speak to you again soon. Goodbye.

PS

To sound fluent in English you need to learn how to speak correct English and use proper grammar. Listening to native English speakers will train your brain to recognise correct grammar and use English grammar rules automatically. Learning to speak English using the Adept English "Listen & Lean" method will dramatically improve your English communication skills.

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