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# Teaching French in an Israeli Academic Context: Overcoming Challenges Related to the French Past Tense System

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## Résumé

Notre contribution traite des divers défis liés à l'acquisition du mode indicatif français par des apprenants hébreophones dans un contexte universitaire. Elle met spécialement l'accent sur les méthodes d'enseignement des temps du passé. Nous présentons d'abord les différences de base entre les deux systèmes verbaux et les différences relatives à l'expression des aspects perfectif ou/et imperfectif du verbe. Ensuite, nous analysons la façon par laquelle les manuels d'apprentissage du français surmontent les écarts entre L1 et L2. Enfin, nous proposons des outils et des moyens permettant aux étudiants de combler ces divergences et de s'accoutumer à un système où les nuances aspectuelles sont exprimées grammaticalement plutôt que lexicalement.

**Mots-clés:** Français langue étrangère (FLE), enseignement des temps du passé, utilisation de la langue source (L1) dans l'enseignement de la langue cible (L2), méthodes pour l'amélioration de l'enseignement des temps, aspects perfectifs et imperfectifs

## Abstract

Our paper addresses the challenges related to the acquisition of the French indicative mood tenses by Hebrew-speakers learning French as a foreign language in an academic environment, with a particular focus on teaching the past tense-aspect microsystem. After examining basic differences between the two verbal systems and disparities related to the expression of perfective and imperfective aspects, as well as the way Israeli handbooks for French learners attempt to overcome these obstacles, we then present tools to (a) help students fill the gap between Hebrew and French tense-aspect divergences; (b) improve students' awareness of the effective use of different tenses and aspects; and (c) help students become accustomed to a system where aspectual nuances are expressed grammatically instead of lexically.

**Keywords:** French as a foreign language, French past tense-aspect system, use of L1 in L2 teaching, perfective and imperfective aspects

## 1. Introduction

The comprehension and effective correct use of tenses is especially challenging for Hebrew-speaking learners of French, since the Semitic source language (in the case of the Israeli academy, the Semitic L1 is not always a mother tongue) and the Roman foreign target language (L2) have radically different verbal systems.

In French, the tense-aspect-mood forms are categorized into the indicative, subjunctive, imperative, and conditional finite moods, as well as into three non-finite moods (the infinitive, past participle, and present participle). These simple forms can be further categorized into four tenses (future, present, past, and future-of-the-past), or into two aspects (perfective and imperfective). French tenses and moods come in two forms: simple (a single word) and compound, with *être* 'to be' and/or *avoir* 'to have' as auxiliary verbs.

The French indicative mood alone comprises eight tenses – *présent* 'present tense', *passé composé* 'compound past tense', *imparfait* 'imperfect', *plus-que-parfait* 'pluperfect', *passé simple* 'simple past/perfective past', *passé antérieur* 'the perfect form of the simple past tense', *futur simple* 'future', and *futur antérieur* 'future perfect'. This number can be increased to ten tenses for those who also include the future-in-past (i.e., future-as-viewed-from-the-past tense–aspect combination, which is morphologically equivalent to the present conditional) and the future perfect in the past (morphologically equivalent to the past conditional).

Modern Hebrew has only three tenses in total, – past, present, and future – and three moods (indicative/declarative, imperative, and infinitive).

In light of these discrepancies, our paper addresses the challenges related to the acquisition of the French indicative mood tenses by Hebrew-speakers learning French as a foreign language in an academic environment, and focuses particularly on the past tense-aspect microsystem. We start by describing the basic differences between the two verbal systems, and specifically the disparities related to the expression of perfective and imperfective aspects. Secondly, we examine the way Israeli handbooks for French learners (Gabbay, 1972; Shor, 1993; Herr, 2008) attempt to overcome these obstacles. Thirdly, we propose tools and methods designed to (a) help students fill the gap between Hebrew and French tense-aspect divergences; (b) improve students' awareness of the effective use of different tenses and aspects; (c) help students become accustomed to a system where aspectual nuances are expressed grammatically instead of lexically (for instance, by means of adverbs).

## 2. Challenges due to basic differences between two (or three) verbal systems

Modern Hebrew has only three tenses and three moods:

The past tense indicates a completed one-time action, or a process that started at some point in the past and was completed or ceased. Hebrew expresses past perfect by the simple past. The present tense indicates an ongoing action, event or state, or habitual action. The future tense indicates actions or states contemplated, planned or considered for a future time. (Amir Coffin and Bolozky, 2005: 35)

This state of affairs can present a hurdle for learners of French as a foreign language in high school and university. The following facts are particularly problematic:

a. Simple forms in the source language (L1) become compound in the target language (L2):

- 1 a) Fr. : *J'avais fini mes devoirs quand tu as appelé.* (Two compound forms)
- 1 b) Eng.: I **had finished** homework when you **called**. (One compound and one single form)
- 1 c) Heb.: *gamarti shi'urim kshe-hitkasharta.*
- 1 d) Eng. lit.: [**finished-I** homework when **called-you**] (Two simple forms)
  
- 2 a) Fr.: *Elle avait lu toutes les aventures de Tintin quand elle est allée au musée de la BD.*
- 2 b) Eng.: She **had read** all the adventures of Tintin, when she **went** to the Comic Strip Museum
- 2 c) Heb.: *Hi kar'a et kol sipurei Tintin kshé alkha lé muzéon ha komiks*
- 2 d) Eng. lit.: [She **read** all adventures Tintin, when **went** to Museum the Comics]

In contrast to English and French, which can both express the past with an auxiliary verb, Hebrew activates only one simple form.

b. Another complication that can be seen in these examples is that French and English do not make the same distinctions between past tenses. This is pertinent since every student of the Israeli Academy is required to attain a certain level of proficiency in English as a prerequisite to obtain a bachelor's degree, and as a consequence, English frequently becomes a source of comparison for students. It is also important to acknowledge the fact that the effective teaching of English as an international language takes high priority in schools under the supervision of the Israeli Ministry of Education.

c. A further difficulty is posed by the existence of multiple options in the target language, where the pluperfect may be activated to refer to an extra degree of anteriority:

- 3 a') Fr.: *J'ai rencontré mes amis au café, ensuite nous sommes allés faire un tour à Paris.*
- 3 a'') Fr.: *J'avais rencontré mes amis au café, ensuite nous sommes allés faire un tour à Paris.*
- 3 b) Eng.: I **met** / **had met** my friends at the café, afterwards we **went** for a ride in Paris.
- 3 c) Heb.: *pagashiti et hahaverim sheli bebeit hakafe, haharkah halahnu la'asot sivuv beParis*
- 3 d) Eng. Lit.: [**met-I** the friends mine at the café, afterwards **went-we** to make tour in Paris].



We see here that Hebrew does not provide even the smallest hint that one of the past actions was anterior to the other. In order to enhance the chronology, Hebrew may eventually employ the adverb *kvar* 'already' as exemplified in (4) below:

- 4 a) Fr.: *J'avais fini mes devoirs quand tu as appelé.*
- 4 b) Eng.: I had finished my homework when you called.
- 4 c) Heb.: ***kvar** gamarti shiurim kaasher hitkasharta.*
- 4 d) Eng. Lit.: [**already** finished-I homework when called-you]

Thus, the third obstacle is that aspectual nuances are denoted in Hebrew by lexical means instead of a verbal – and thus grammatical – mechanism.

As already described, most academic students have a relatively good command of English, and therefore learning French in the academic context often involve comparisons with English. It should however be remembered that, despite the considerable areas of overlap, there are still numerous discrepancies between the languages that can increase the challenge for learners of French. For instance, with respect to the tense-aspect system, both French and English verb grammars contain auxiliaries, participles, perfective and imperfective aspects, etc. However, forms used to express the French future may not correspond to either Hebrew or English usage:

- 5 a) Heb.: ***Eten** leha kaasher **ekabel** oto*
- 5 b) Eng. lit.: [**will-give-I** to-you when **will-receive-I** it]
- 5 c) Eng.: I **will give** it to you as soon as I **get** it.
- 5 d) Fr.: *Je te le **donnerai** dès que je **l'aurai reçu**.*

Here, Hebrew uses two simple futures, and English uses a future and a present, while French uses the simple future and future perfect.

In fact, the chasm between French and English deepens to a greater extent if we also take into account French sentences in which the *passé composé* is used with a future time adverb, such as in De Saussure's examples (De Saussure, 2009: 45) *J'ai bientôt fini* (lit. 'I have soon finished') and *Dans une heure, le président est sorti de sa réunion* (lit. 'In an hour, the president has exited from his meeting') [1].

Thus, even if English provides real help because its distinction of several perfective tenses allows the teacher to make comparisons with a verbal system familiar with students, this could become a trap when the two systems do not fully overlap.

It is important to clarify at this point that we do not wish to distinguish oral and written language; neither do we seek the ideal translation or correspondence, neither to English, nor to a specific situation. The previous examples illustrate the way (native and non-native) Hebrew-speaking academic students faced with a grammatical issue in French, may look for a possible equivalence in a foreign language with which they are already familiar. Thus, comparisons with English may prove beneficial in certain cases, but problematic in others.

Perhaps the most challenging area for Hebrew-speaking learners of French lies in the French past tense-aspect system, and specifically in the distinction between the perfective and the imperfective aspects, since the imperfective does not exist *per se* in official Modern Hebrew.

Although the *imperfect* does exist in English and in some cases, translates the idea of the French *imparfait* quite well (*Elle est entrée quand il **dormait*** ‘She entered when he was sleeping’), it does not always work the same way either in English or in Hebrew. For instance:

- 6 a) Fr.: *J'**étais** écrivain, j'**habitais** près de Nice et j'**avais** beaucoup d'amis.*  
 6 b) Eng.: I **was** a writer, I **lived** near Nice and I **had** a lot of friends.  
 6 c) Heb.: ***Hayti** [2] sofer, **garti** leyad Nis, ve **hayou** li harbe haverim*  
 6 d) Eng. Lit.: [**was-I** writer, **lived-I** near Nice and **had** to-me many friends]

Another option in English as well as in Hebrew is to use *was V-ing* or the expression *used to + V...* (in Hebrew: the periphrasis *Nahagti* + Infinitive will translate the continuous, habitual aspect):

- 6 b') Eng.: I was a writer, I **was living** / I **used to live** near Nice and I had a lot of friends  
 6 c') Heb.: *Hayti sofer, **haiti gar** / **nahagti lagur** leyad Nis ve hayou li harbe haverim*  
 6 d) Eng. Lit.: [**was-I** writer, **was-I live** / **used-I live** near Nice and had to-me a lot of friends]

These options are repetitive and cacophonous in both English and Hebrew. In any event, even if, at least in theory, English permits both these two options, it is not acceptable in French as the following ungrammatical sentence illustrates:

- 6 a') Fr.: \* *J'**étais** écrivain, j'**ai habité** près de Nice et j'**avais** beaucoup d'amis.*

Moreover, the periphrastic copular construction *haiti gar* in Modern Hebrew, (i.e. “Verb + ing” for the progressive, habitual aspect in English) is officially incorrect, although frequently used as a *calque* from the English construction in spontaneous and in informal spoken and written Hebrew (Dekel, 2011: 144; Boneh and Doron, 2008) [3].

Below is a short text in French which demonstrates how the *imparfait* fails to find an equivalent match, even in a rich temporal system, such as English. While the text contains six French tenses (three types of past, one present and two types of future), it may activate six or seven tenses in English, [4] but only three in Hebrew.

*Hier je suis allé* [French: compound past/ Heb.: simple past/ Eng.: past simple: *went*]  
*chez mon ami Pierre qui ne se sentait pas bien* [French: imperfect/ Heb.: simple past /Eng.: past continuous ‘*was not feeling well*’ / past simple ‘*didn't feel well*’ (US)].

*Nous avons parlé* [French: compound past/ Heb.: simple past /Eng.: past simple 'spoke']  
*du devoir que le professeur avait donné* [French: pluperfect/ Heb.: simple past/Eng.: past perfect 'had given' or past simple 'gave' (Colloquial)] *la veille.*

*Demain, quand je serai rentré* [French: future anterior/ Heb.: simple future /Eng.: future perfect 'will have returned', or present 'return'] *de l'université, je téléphonerai* [French: future/ Heb.: simple future /Eng.: future simple 'will call' or *going to* + verb 'I'm going to call'] *à Pierre pour lui demander comment il va.* [French: Present/ Heb.: present/Eng.: present 'he is' or present progressive 'he is feeling'] [5]

In this example, the *imparfait* creates problems related both to English and Hebrew.

### 3. Israeli handbooks for french learning

None of the handbooks for learning French (Gabbay, 1972; Herr, 2008; Shor, 1993) intended for Hebrew-speaking students, succeed in addressing the very fine nuances related to the use of the *imparfait* and the *passé composé*, a verbal microsystem that represents a considerable challenge for Israeli students. Since Hebrew does not mark the aspect morphologically, and uses only one past form, it is only natural, that the language will fail to distinguish between the different types of the imperfective, such as the habitual, the progressive, or the iterative. These distinctions are context dependent, not reflected by morphology (Dekel, 2011).

A thorough analysis of the available handbooks leads to the conclusion that Gabriella Shor's book is the most comprehensive because of her "stage setting metaphor" explanation, where the *imparfait* is likened to a background for actions, and as a mode for the building up of a plot/intrigue.

It should be noted that this "background" concept (or "state" as it is called in other handbooks), which is supposed to help learners distinguish the *imparfait* from the *passé composé*, becomes less salient in the case of single utterances, as exemplified in (7) below:

- 7 a) *Ce (être) un homme. Il (porter) un manteau noir et un chapeau. Il (fumer) une cigarette*  
 It (to be) a man. He (to wear) a black coat and a hat. He (to smoke) a cigarette
- 7 b) *Soudain, on (entendre) une sonnerie d'alarme*  
 Suddenly, one (to hear) a siren

In this example, students tend to consider the verbs *être* and *porter* as part of the background, in contrast to *fumer*, which is interpreted as an action, especially when the utterance ends after this verb. Although, one might think that the addition of a hint like *soudain* (7b), marking an evolution of the intrigue, would help students figure out that *il fumait une cigarette* (7a) belongs to the background. But even here, some students interpret the sound of the siren (a noise) as a part of the background, and thus incorrectly choose the *imparfait* in French. We have noticed that many Israeli handbooks for

learning French focus on short sentences with no context and thereby sidestep the challenges involved in writing short texts using both *imparfait* and *passé composé*.

#### 4. Teaching methods: tools and methods

In order to raise student awareness of the very subtle nature of the French past tense microsystem, three years ago we initiated a new method of teaching the past with three main objectives:

- (a) help students of the Department of French Culture at Bar-Ilan University to overcome Hebrew and French tense-aspect divergences;
- (b) improve students' awareness of the effective use of the French past tense microsystem;
- (c) help students become accustomed to a system where aspectual nuances are expressed grammatically instead of lexically (i.e., by means of adverbs).

The first step in our system consists of a text in which no unexpected/unforeseen events occur, so that all verbs will be in the *imparfait*. We ask students to conjugate the verbs, which is an easy, technical exercise.

*Aujourd'hui j'habite à New-York mais avant je (habiter) ..... à Turin. Là-bas, la vie (être) ..... très différente. Les gens (être) ..... beaucoup plus calmes et sereins. Dans la rue, ils (sembler) ..... toujours avoir le temps et je ne (voir) ..... jamais les Italiens courir comme les New-yorkais. Ils (passer) ..... des heures dans les cafés de la ville. À l'université, même pendant les examens, les étudiants (étudier) ..... sans stress. Il y (avoir) ..... toujours une bonne ambiance et le soir, on (sortir) ....., on (danser) ..... et on (chanter) ..... ! Ah ! Je regrette Turin ! [6]*

Our purpose is to emphasize the strictly descriptive, decor-like aspect of the narrative. This type of text is also useful for demonstrating the lack of temporal delimitations, which opens the way to an understanding of the essence of *imparfait*. The notion of “temporal delimitation” may be exemplified by the utterances in 8:

- 8 a) *Quand j'étais à Turin, j'ai pris cinq fois le bus pour aller au Palazzo Carignano.*  
[When I was in Torino, I took the bus five times to go to Palazzo Carignano.]
- 8 b) *Quand j'étais à Turin, je prenais / j'ai pris tous les jours le bus pour aller au Palazzo Carignano.*  
[When I was in Torino, I used to take / I took the bus every day to go to Palazzo Carignano.]

In (8a), the only possible tense is *passé composé* because of the temporal delimitation “5 times”, which designates the exact boundaries of the event, while in (8b), both tenses are plausible according to the context [7].

Contrary to usual practice, the second stage does not consist of transposing *imparfait* to *passé composé*; instead, we present the students with a text in the source language (Hebrew) and ask them to intuitively distinguish the elements which establish the decor or set the scene from those that build up the intrigue. It should be remembered that Hebrew has only one morphological past tense and thus, the choices made by Hebrew-speaking students cannot rely on morphological hints.

השעה היתה 4 בבוקר - ירד גשם - ורחובות העיר היו נטושים - מכונות הגיעה - היא נעצרה בכיכר העיר - פנסי הרכב דלקו - במכונת היו שני אנשים - הם דיברו במשך 10 דקות - אחד מהם ירד מהרכב - זה היה גבר - הוא לבש מעיל שחור וחבש כובע - הוא עישן סיגריה - הוא צעד לעבר חלון הראווה של חנות תכשיטים - הוא חזר למכונת ודיבר עם הנהג - הם נראו עצבניים - הם החילו להתווכח - הם דיברו בקול רם - פתאום, האיש הוציא מפתחות מכיסו ונכנס לחנות - לפתע נשמעה ארעקה - האיש רץ לכיוון המכונת - המכונת נעלמה בחשכה - היה זה ניסיון שוד - עשר דקות מאוחר יותר הגיעה מכונת משטרה - זה היה מאוחר מידי - השוודים כבר נעלמו.

Figure 1 – Hebrew text

The Hebrew text [8] allows us to set off a debate in which the students begin to appreciate the respective values of each past tense as it reflects or echoes their intuitions with regard to the different aspects of the verbs.

It is only after this intermediate discussion phase where students are made aware of French verbal aspectual constraints that we move on to a more detailed introduction of the *passé composé* / *imparfait* distinction and their actual use in the target language. For instance, in this third stage, we may take the same Hebrew text, but this time present it in French, with the verbs in the present tense, and ask the students to transform it into the past tense:

*Il est 4 heures du matin. Il pleut. Les rues de la ville sont désertes. Une voiture arrive. Elle s'arrête sur la place de la ville. Les phares de la voiture sont allumés. Deux personnes sont dans la voiture, elles discutent pendant 10 minutes. Une personne descend de la voiture. C'est un homme. Il porte un manteau noir et un chapeau. Il fume une cigarette. Soudain, il marche vers la vitrine d'une bijouterie et revient vers la voiture. Il parle avec le chauffeur. Ils ont l'air nerveux et commencent à discuter. Ils parlent à haute voix et tout à coup l'homme sort des clés de sa poche et entre dans la bijouterie. Soudain, on entend une sonnerie d'alarme. L'homme court vers la voiture. La voiture disparaît. C'est un cambriolage. Dix minutes plus tard, la police arrive. Il est trop tard. Les cambrioleurs disparaissent.*

This intermediate awareness-raising phase provides an encouraging message for learners who realize that the French language does not involve a different way of thinking.

In fact, contrary to the general trend recommending the exclusive use of L2 in L2 classroom, many studies support the use of L1 in L2 teaching and learning. Schweers (1999), Tang (2002), Vaezi and Mirzaei (2007), De La Campa and Nassaji (2009),

Hung (2012), and Haines (2014), all justify the use of mother tongue in the classroom in specific cases. Following Atkinson (1987), Schweers (1999) presented nine specific cases where L1 should or could be used in L2 teaching. These included when checking comprehension, or when checking for sense (see also Cook, 2001; Storch and Wigglesworth, 2003).

The work of Vaezi and Mirzaei (2007) also supports the idea that translating specific structures from L1 to L2 can enhance linguistic accuracy and help students overcome psycholinguistic challenges related to the production of L2 in real life situations. They reported that a purposeful use of mother tongue can have an insightful role in teaching foreign languages, because it functions as a rich source of available linguistic knowledge. As a consequence, they deplored the fact that this practice has been criticized by innovatory-oriented approaches.

A question that needs to be asked at this point is why introduce a French text containing exclusively the *imparfait* option before introducing the Hebrew text? Based on our first year of experience, the *imparfait* morphology does not present any problem. In fact, it creates the impression that this is easy to grasp and master, and thus encourages the students. Furthermore, attempts to raise the students' awareness of the nature and characteristics of the French *imparfait* cannot be made ex-nihilo but become much more effective after a phase of morphological familiarization.

## 5. Conclusion

The difficulty of distinguishing between the perfect and imperfect past tenses stems from a number of factors, including the fact that the choice of tense is not conditioned by the length of the action represented verbally. For example, statement 9 (below) can be used both with *imparfait* or *passé composé* depending on the context:

- 9) *je (sortir) de la maison à huit heures*  
I (**to go out**) of the house at eight o'clock
- 9 a) *je suis sortie de la maison à huit heures*  
I **went out** of the house at eight o'clock
- 9 b) *je sortais de la maison à huit heures*  
I **used to go out** of the house at eight o'clock

On the other hand, example (10) illustrates that habit, for example, does not belong solely to the realm of the *imparfait*, as one might expect:

- 10 a) *Quand j'étais enfant je suis allée une vingtaine de fois au zoo*  
When I was a child, I **went** about twenty times to the zoo
- 10 b) *Quand j'étais enfant, j'allais beaucoup au zoo*  
When I was a child, I **used to go** a lot to the zoo

In our specific case, i.e. Hebrew-speaking students in a university context, the struggle becomes all the greater because the source language does not distinguish verb tense-aspect morphologically. Three years ago, when we introduced the 3-step approach, our

aim was to enhance students' awareness of the “*passé composé – imparfait*” microsystem and to facilitate its acquisition.

Our approach has the advantage of bringing learners to the understanding that Hebrew does express aspect semantically, even if it is not reflected morphologically. This approach also proves to be beneficial in significantly reducing the never-ending class discussions about the "exceptional" or "extremely difficult compared to other languages" nature of French.

Although we have not yet conducted a formal error analysis, we can at least present the fact that over the three years since the introduction of the method in 2015, the average grade for a class of about 30 advanced level students taking a quiz containing a short passage with 25 verbs, has risen from 65 to 80.

In order to support and definitively justify the use of our method, we still have to conduct a quantitative study. Nevertheless, our impression is that (a) less time is wasted to convince students that French is not unique, and that Hebrew also has aspectual nuances, even if they are not morphologically expressed, and (b) student performance has improved since the introduction of this approach.

One question that still remains to be addressed is whether students whose L1 presents a reduced verbal tense-aspect-mood system, as in Hebrew, experience more difficulties than those whose native verbal tense-aspect-mood system is more complex. We do not yet have an answer to this question. Izquiero and Collins (2008) compared the temporal system challenges faced by Hispanophone versus Anglophone, learners of French. These two L1 languages have a similar tense-aspect system, which is by far more complex than the Hebrew one. Interestingly, their study demonstrated that, although in some cases, similarities in tense-aspect marking between L1 and L2 may facilitate the appropriate use of grammatical aspect markers and their distribution, it is not necessarily a general rule. Thus, while Hispanophone learners of French found the use of grammatical aspect markers easier with dynamic-durative verbs, this was not the case with stative and accomplishment verbs. The interpretation was that a paucity of prototypical contexts requires learners to seize the very essence of temporality and a variety of semantic values that tense-aspect markers may offer in a specific context. Their conclusion is insightful in that it proves that difficulties have to be carefully distinguished and identified. It would certainly be worth broadening the scope of such a study to include different types of L1, characterized by simple and complex temporal-aspectual verbal systems. At this stage, we predict that our proposed method is useful and may be applied to other frameworks with considerable gaps between source and target languages.

#### Notes

[1] For the constraints licensing this particular use of the *passé composé* to express the future, see Vuillaume, (2000) and De Saussure (2009, 2012), among others.

[2] In Modern Hebrew, the copula, i.e. the element that links the subject and the predicate, appears in clauses containing a non-verbal predicate. In the present tense, spontaneous Hebrew drops the copula. In the past and future tense, the copula is an inflected form of the verb *haya* 'to be'. In formal Hebrew, the copula in present tense is homophonous with a third person nominative pronoun.

[3] It is incorrect because the simple form of the verb expresses both episodic and habitual readings. The periphrastic form is a conjunction of the tensed form of the auxiliary verb *to be* and the main verb in its participial form.

[4] Six or seven tenses, depending on British or American English, formal or colloquial:

- 4 past simple (went/didn't feel/spoke/gave)
- 1 past continuous (was feeling)
- 1 past perfect (had given)
- 1 future perfect (will have returned)
- 2 present (return/he is)
- 1 present continuous (he is feeling)
- 1 future simple (will call) or future progressive (?) (going to + verb)

[5] Yesterday, I (to go) ...*went*... to my friend Pierre who (not feel well) ...*was not feeling well / didn't feel well* ... (Americans would say). We (to speak) ...*spoke*... about the homework that the teacher (to give) ...*had given / gave*... (acceptable colloquially) the day before. Tomorrow, when I (to return) ...*return / will have returned*... from university, I (to call) ...*will call / I'm going to call*... Pierre to ask him how he (to be) ...*is/is*... feeling.

[6] This is an additional demonstration that English and French past tenses do not overlap (English translation): Today I live in New York but before I used to live in Torino. There, life *was* very different. People *were* much more calm and serene. In the street, they always *seemed* to have time and I never *saw* Italians run like New Yorkers do. They *spent* hours in the cafes of the city. At the university, even during exams, students *studied* without stress. There *was* always a good atmosphere and, in the evening, we *used to go out*, to dance and sing! Oh, I do miss Torino!

[7] Another case to be considered: There is a clear distinction in the interpretation of the following two utterances:

- (a) *Quand le professeur est tombé, ils riaient.* 'When the teacher fell, they were laughing'  
 (b) *Quand le professeur est tombé, ils ont ri.* 'When the teacher fell, they laughed'

Students may not perceive the distinction immediately, since (b) seems natural at first glance: i.e., that the laughing is triggered by the falling (a cause and effect relation) However, (a) could be justified in a scenario where the laughing is prior to the falling (coincidence).

[8] English translation of the Hebrew text:

It was 4 o'clock in the morning. It was raining. The streets were deserted. A car arrived. It stopped at the town square. The car lights were on. Two people were in the car, they talked for 10 minutes. One of them got off the car. It was a man. He was wearing a black coat and a hat. He was smoking a cigarette. Suddenly, he walked towards the window of a jewelry shop and returned to the car. He spoke with the driver. They looked nervous and started arguing. They spoke aloud and suddenly the man pulled out the keys from his pocket and entered the jeweler's shop. Suddenly, an alarm bell rang. The man ran towards the car. The car disappeared. It was a burglary. Ten minutes later, the police arrived. It was too late. The burglars had disappeared.

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