

Grammar Awareness: Literature Review

Read the excerpt from a paper for a sociology class (included in MICUSP) and complete the tasks on page 65.

In a 1975 volume of the *American Sociological Review*, Treiman and Terrell (1975) **reflect** that the 1970s could be characterized as the time when research on women **began** in earnest in the academic community. They **comment**, "Just a few years ago, women **were excluded** from stratification studies on the grounds that their experiences **were** too complicated for analysis" (1974). Thirty years later, research on women—and particularly women and work—**has made** considerable progress both in its quality and inclusion in mainstream sociological journals. While the research agenda on women in work **is** by no means exhausted, it **is** certainly substantial enough to warrant a retrospective of the field and propose some areas where the field **has** room for greater theorizing and empirical research.

In 1975, there **was** little empirical work yet completed that **addressed** the gendered process of status attainment in the workplace (Treiman & Terrell, 1975). The primary interest of status attainment research at this time **was related** to earnings differences between men and women. Treiman and Terrell (1975), for example, **attempted** to unpack the relationship between gender and earnings by comparing earnings of husbands and wives. They **found** that after controlling for hours worked, wives still **earn** less than half of what their husbands earn. The methodological problems with comparing wives' earnings to husbands' wages **seem** obvious to researchers today, but at the time this article **was written**, there **was** a burgeoning interest in comparing husband and wives' participation and success in the occupational sphere. Some **believed** increased wage earnings for women **would threaten** the stability of the family, and research that investigated the effect of women's employment and earnings on divorce rates **began** to emerge (Oppenheimer, 1977; Hannan, Tuma, & Groeneveld, 1978; Huber and Spitze, 1980).

Treiman and Terrell (1975) also **showed** that single women **earn** more than married women, another area of increasing interest as women **entered** the workforce. While this study's design and methodology **seem** simplistic and problematic given the research progress made in the sub-field of women in work over the past thirty years, it **does signal** a new interest in earnings and

4: VERB FORMS

status inequality issues within the academy during the 1970s. This early study **is** also noteworthy for its data disaggregation between white and non-white women. One of the criticisms of research on women and work as well as the first wave of U.S. feminism **is** its lack of attention to gender differences across race. The Treiman and Terrell study **points** to sociologists' understanding of potential interaction effects between race and gender as early as the 1970s, and subsequent sociological research **has continued** to attend to this issue (Burststein, 1979; Greenman, forthcoming).

1. Which verb tenses do you see in this excerpt from a graduate student's literature review?
2. Mark three examples of a shift, or change, in verb tense or aspect within a paragraph. Why do you think the writer made those choices? Do you agree with them?
3. Look closely at the examples of the present perfect. How is this tense used?
4. What do you notice about verb tenses in noun clauses? Are they related to the tense of the main clause or independent?
5. Are there any verb tenses/aspects that you do *not* see in this excerpt? Are you surprised by their absence?

4.1 Summary of Verb Tenses

A. Table 4.1 shows the forms of the English tenses for a regular verb (*explain*) and an irregular verb (*find*).

Table 4.1 Summary of Verb Forms				
	Simple	Perfect	Progressive	Perfect Progressive
Present	(4.2)	(4.3)	(4.4)	(4.5)
Active	He explains She finds	He has explained She has found	He is explaining She is finding	He has been explaining She has been finding
Passive	It is explained It is found	It has been explained It has been found	It is being explained It is being found	It has been being explained It has been being found
Past	(4.2)	(4.5)	(4.4)	(4.5)
Active	He explained She found	He had explained She had found	He was explaining She was finding	He had been explaining She had been finding
Passive	It was explained It was found	It had been explained It had been found	It was being explained It was being found	It had been being explained It had been being found

The three tenses (in active and passive voice) in shaded boxes account for the majority of tensed verb phrases¹ in academic writing: the present simple (about 70 percent of tensed verbs); the past simple (around 23 percent); and the present perfect (about 5 percent of verbs). The other tenses occur extremely rarely: that is, you can choose from these three tenses for more than 98 percent of verbs that need tense (Biber et al., 1999, pp. 456–461).

B. Certain types of verbs prefer certain tenses. For example, linking verbs are predominantly used in the simple tenses (present simple and past simple) but very rarely in progressive tenses. Reporting verbs are common in both simple and perfect tenses, but again not progressive ones. Only action verbs are used with any frequency in progressive tenses, but this type of meaning (something that is happening right now) is not often useful in academic writing.

C. The choice of tense affects all three levels of meaning (1.8). The tense can tell the reader when an event happened or started and whether it is completed or ongoing (*experiential* meaning); it can indicate whether the writer considers the event or state to be relevant or true today (*interpersonal* meaning); and it can reorganize information through the choice of passive voice (*textual* meaning).

4: VERB FORMS

4.2 Present and Past Simple Tenses

A. The present simple tense is the basic tense of academic writing. Choose this unless there is a good reason to use another tense. Specifically, the present simple is used:

1. to “frame” a paper. In an introduction, the present simple tense describes what *already known* about the topic (Sentence 1); in a conclusion, the tense says what is *known* about the topic and what further research *is still needed* (Sentence 2).
- (1) Scholars **share** a common argument that engineering **is** the most male dominated of all professions.
- (2) Timing of college enrollment **is** associated with a number of variables.
2. to make general statements, conclusions, or interpretations about previous research data, again focusing on what is known *now*.
- (3) Graduate school **is** regarded as crucial for starting an engineering career because failure at this stage effectively **closes** the door to professional engineering careers, and later career trajectory change **is** more difficult the longer it **is** delayed.
3. to cite a previous study or finding without mentioning the researcher in the sentence (Swales & Feak, 2012, p. 344).
- (4) Children **ingest** roughly 50–200 mg soil/day [2,3].
- (5) Job satisfaction **is** the most extensively studied variable in organizational behavior research (Spector, 1997).
4. to introduce evidence or support with *there + be* (4.8).
- (6) There **is** evidence that defense pathways for multiple stresses will simultaneously activate.
5. to show agreement with the general results of a previous paper (Hawes & Thomas, 1997).²
- (7) A 1999 meta-analysis of papers concerning the Mozart Effect **shows** for good that the effect **is** not due to what the researchers originally speculated (Chabris et al., 1999).

² Although it is possible for writers to use the past tense to distance themselves from a research finding, this is not recommended.

ie past simple tense is used for two main functions in most academic fields:

to introduce a specific study, usually completed by a named researcher (Swales & Feak, 2012, p. 344). The research often provides an example that supports a general statement about the topic (Hawes & Thomas, 1997).

- (8) Probably the most commonly discussed phenomenon in music cognition **is** the Mozart Effect. [*← General claim / Specific example →*] Rauscher and colleagues first **documented** the effect in their 1993 *Nature* paper.

to describe the methods and data of a completed experiment. In many fields, the passive voice is commonly used in methods sections, although the active voice (with the pronoun *we*) may be possible (Sentence 10).

- (9) Statistical analyses **were used** to determine relationships between variables.

- (10) We **conducted** a secondary data analysis.

he past simple is usually required after any past **time marker**, such as:

in 1997 after the war at that time previously

Although most English verbs have regular past simple forms, many of the verbs that are common in the past simple are irregular; see Table A.2 in the Appendix.

Exercise 1: Paragraph Completion

Read this excerpt from an academic article on changes in the travel industry (Mamaghani, 2009). Choose between the present and past simple tenses, and write the correct form of the verbs in parentheses. If necessary, make sure the verb agrees with the subject.

During the pre-computerized time, the role of the travel agent

① _____ (be) to advise clients on travel destinations and to act as an intermediary in the complicated process of arranging travel bookings. Even as late as the early 1990s, consumers ② _____ (book) cruise travel and tourism through travel agents as many companies ③ _____ (no offer) direct bookings. There ④ _____ (be) two waves of information technology that have had a major impact on the industry. The first of these ⑤ _____ (be) the development of the direct reservation systems, such as the American Airlines SABRE system. The second ⑥ _____ (be) the development of online sales.

By 2000, consumers no longer ⑦ _____ (need) travel agents to access the reservation system. In addition, they ⑧ _____ (be) able to manage their own travel plans efficiently. With a new structure, travel agents ⑨ _____ (have) a smaller pool of individual customers that did not wish to spend the time searching for lower-priced travel. The travel industry ⑩ _____ (face) increasing threats with the dynamic pricing of online and direct sales channels. Online travel agents, like Expedia, Lastminute, and Ebookers, ⑪ _____ (compete) with traditional high street travel agents. They ⑫ _____ (promise) lower costs, greater flexibility, and wider choice. Today's travel retailers ⑬ _____ (need) increased knowledge about product and service offerings. Knowledge ⑭ _____ (play) a key role in not only selling breaks in recent years but cementing a customer relationship that will mean more business in years to come.

Exercise 2: Sentence Writing

ink of an idea or finding in your field of study or research. Complete each sentence using the correct verb tense.

- Most researchers today believe _____
- It is not known whether _____
- _____ years ago, most people _____ but now, _____
- Generally, it is true that _____
For example, _____ found that _____
- In this study, the authors _____

Exercise 3: Vocabulary and Writing

Choose a topic from the list, and write a paragraph using as many different verbs as possible. Some suggestions are provided in parentheses; they are statistically among the most common verbs used in past and present simple tenses (see Tables A.1 and A.2 in the Appendix for a complete list of common verbs).

- What is the role of the Internet in your field of work, research, or study? (*bring, provide, make, appear, offer, exist, reveal, consist, add, need, know, contain, allow, apply, affect*)
- How did your field of work, research, or study first develop? (*begin, become, ask, want, occur, reveal, think, continue, need, lead, seek, start, argue, create, develop, choose, mean, fail, try, grow, allow, learn, increase, use, show, feel, tell, produce, happen*)
- How do other people use the results or outcomes of your study, work, or research? (*use, take, become, work, depend, receive, move, include, follow, begin, try, add, tell, explain, apply, concern, enable, allow, cause, relate, run, take, need*)
- Describe an important experiment, study, book, or piece of research in your field. What did the researchers do? Why is it important? (*use, make, suggest, develop, determine, reveal, examine, demonstrate, report, conclude, address, recognize, find, result, allow, understand, indicate, mean, lead, serve, help, explain, provide, apply, illustrate, concern, relate*)
- Choose a table or graph that interests you from a journal, magazine, or newspaper and describe it. (*show, refer, explain, mean, see, represent, tend, contain, help, note, demonstrate, change, focus, concern, relate, describe, reflect, imply, illustrate, tell, address*)

4.3: Present Perfect Tense

A. The present perfect is primarily used for referring to previous research in the field or to the writer's own previous findings. Since the present perfect is a present tense, it implies that the result is still true and relevant today. Although it is rarely required (that is, a different choice of tense would also produce a grammatical sentence), correct use of the present perfect is a sign of sophisticated and effective writing. Academic writers use the present perfect in several ways:

- to introduce a new topic, or an entire paper or report, sometimes using *there has/have been* (4.8).
- There **has been** a large body of research regarding
 - The percentage of part-time faculty in higher education **has grown** considerably over the last forty years.

2. to summarize previous research with general subjects, such as *researchers have found*, or *studies have suggested* (Hawes & Thomas, 1997).

(13) Some studies **have shown** that girls have significantly higher fears than boys after trauma (Pfefferbaum et al., 1999; Pine & Cohen, 2002; Shaw, 2003). Other studies **have found** no gender differences (Rahav & Ronen, 1994).

The present simple could also be used here, but the present perfect focuses more on *what has been done* than on *what is known to be true now* (present simple).

3. to indicate a connection between the past (*what has been found*) and the present (how you will contribute to the field).

This is also useful when you want to point out a "gap" in the existing research. For more information, see Unit 8 of *Academic Writing for Graduate Students*, 3rd edition.

(14) While these measures **have proved** to be reliable and valid predictors of what they are measuring [*← previous research*], [*→ current study*] there **is** little data on how they relate to each other.

4. to describe previous findings without referring directly to the original paper, especially in the passive voice (Swales & Feak, 2012, p. 344).

(15) **It has been shown that** biodiversity is not evenly distributed throughout the world.

(16) Small differences in relation to trust and gender **have been** found; however, manifestations of trust across cultural contexts may differ.

In Sentence 15, the use of *it* + passive verb + noun clause moves the result (*biodiversity is not evenly distributed*) to the "new" information position at the end of the clause

5. to tell the history of an idea (what *has created* it?), describe the results of research, or draw conclusions.

(17) The framework we **have developed** will be integrated with the use of an assessment tool.

(18) This finding **has led** researchers to conclude that all the extrasolar worlds are giant gaseous planets similar to Jupiter and Saturn.

B. A small but frequently used number of verbs have irregular past participle forms (the past participle is the form of the verb after *have*); see Table A.3 in the Appendix.

Exercise 4: Vocabulary

Table A.3 in the Appendix shows the verbs that are most commonly found in perfect tenses in academic writing. Look through the list, checking the meaning of any verbs that are new to you. Then, categorize them according to some of the different functions of the present perfect tense. Write at least five verbs for each meaning:

1. To show change over time: _____
2. To introduce another writer's ideas and describe previous research: _____
3. To tell the history of an idea: _____

Exercise 5: Vocabulary and Writing

Write answers to at least three of these questions about your current reading or research using verbs from Table A.3 in the Appendix and others in the present perfect tense.

1. What have experts said about the topic? _____
2. Have there been any changes in the way your topic is understood? _____
3. What has created the current situation in your topic? _____
4. What developments have been made in your topic? _____
5. What has been concluded about your topic? _____

Exercise 6: Sentence Completion

Choose the best form of the verb in parentheses to complete the sentences.

1. In the past 20 years, the prevalence of autism (increased / has increased) dramatically.
2. This prevalence is controversial, however, since some experts question whether the diagnostic criteria for autism (expanded / have expanded).
3. Favor (has developed / has been developed) that this increase in prevalence may be associated with childhood vaccinations.
4. The following paper (reviews / has reviewed) current research to determine if any causal relationship (has found / has been found) between autism and vaccines.
5. Vaccines as a cause of autism (were suggested / have been suggested) as early as 1995.
6. The apparent increase in autism diagnoses (coincided / has coincided) with the increase in the number of vaccines children (received / have received).
7. At that time, the American Academy of Pediatrics (recommended / has recommend) removal of thimerosal from vaccines.
8. Despite thimerosal's progressive removal from vaccines, autism rates (did not decrease / have not decreased).

4.4 Writing about the Future

A. Most academic writing focuses on discussions about previous and current research and thinking. Predictions and projections about the future occur only in particular contexts, such as calls for further research, proposals, previews in the introductions to papers, and implications sections. Most linguists argue that English has no future tense because a verb cannot be marked for the future in the same way as for past or present. As a result, there are various ways to write about the future.

B. The present simple often expresses a logical future, especially in the common phrase *further research is needed* or when previewing a paper or writing an abstract. However, there are variations, with some writers choosing *will* instead.

- (19) The paper then **calls** for future research to be performed.
- (20) This paper **will discuss** the power of the black-white binary as a paradigm.

4.7 Common Problems with Verb Tenses

- A. Choosing a default tense: In academic writing, the present simple is usually preferred unless you have a good reason to use a different tense. If your clause is essentially timeless (the verb is general or factual), choose the present simple.
- B. Changing tenses: It is common to use different tenses in the same paragraph or even sentence, but there must always be a clear reason for the shift, such as an adverb or prepositional phrase of time (*since, in 2007, etc.*).
- C. Overuse of *be*: Writers from certain language backgrounds tend to insert *be* where it is not needed, for example, in present and past simple tenses. *Be* is only correctly used: (1) as a main verb; (2) in the progressive aspect; and (3) in the passive voice.
- D. Present perfect with past time markers: Since the present perfect is a present tense, it is incorrect after past time markers such as *in 2001, ten years ago, in the past, before that, and at that time*. These markers require a past simple or (less frequently) a past perfect tense.
- E. Required present perfect: The present (or past) perfect must be used after time markers using the prepositions *since* and *for*. *Since* introduces a specific time (*since 2001*); *for* indicates a period of time (*for centuries*).

Exercise 13: Paragraph Writing

Answer the questions in a paragraph or two on a separate piece of paper, paying particular attention to the verb tenses.

1. What is your current research topic?
2. What have experts already learned about this topic?
3. Choose one research article. What did it find?

4.8 Subject-Verb Agreement

- A. English verbs **agree** in number (singular or plural) in the present simple, present perfect, and all progressive and passive forms. Subject-verb agreement may require some attention in certain cases.
- B. When the subject and verb are separated, the verb always agrees with the head noun (1.2). This may not be the closest noun to the verb. Generally, look to the left to find the head noun.
- (48) After WWII, the rapid **advancement** of military and space technologies **was** deemed crucial to countering the Soviet threat.
- C. Indefinite pronouns are always singular (*somebody/no/every + one/body/thing/time*). Some other pronouns are always singular (*none*,⁴ *each, every, one, little*), while others are always plural (*all, both, some, few, most, many*).
- (49) Under common coordination, **each is** doing his own assignments and simultaneously shares information with others.
- D. When the subject is a clause, the verb is singular.
- (50) What this means in practice **is** that MTCT must be combated at multiple stages of pregnancy and birth.
- E. The verb in a relative clause agrees with the referent if the subject is a relative pronoun (Sentence 51). Non-restrictive relative clauses that refer to an entire clause or idea are always singular (Sentence 52).
- (51) The unemployment rate does not include **people who are** no longer looking for jobs.
- (52) The characters are two professors, which **suggests** that their interaction is somewhat formal.