University of Heidelberg
English Department
Proseminar II Linguistics: Linguistic Research Methods
Instructor: Pd Dr. Sandra Mollin
SS 2023

Did you eat yet?

Study on Present Perfect and Past Simple Preference in Presence of Time Adverbials *yet*, *already*, and *lately*

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English Studies/Computational Linguistics, 4th Semester
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30th of October 2023

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Introduction

The choice between the Present Perfect and Past Simple in questions depends on various factors and can create a number of difficulties for non-native as well as native speakers of English. It is argued that aspects other than the semantic contexts featuring the perfect and preterit may condition their variation (Tagliamonte 2000; Van Herk 2008). Occurrence of these grammatical forms may be triggered by some other elements constituting the sentence, particularly time adverbials. Among these time adverbials, three groups have been established: the ones that collocate with SP exclusively, the ones that collocate with PP exclusively, and the ones that are considered to collocate with both, even though only one option can be strongly preferred in certain varieties (Davydova 2011a; McCoard 1978). The aim of this study is to establish the use of the PP and SP in presence of time adverbials among L1 and L2 speakers and pinpoint to whether the linguistic background of the speaker affects the employment of the tense.

Previous studies

The Present Perfect and its employment by the L1 and L2 speakers have been a subject of great interest among linguists of various fields of specialty. Bulut (Delen and Bulut 2011) conducted research on the acquisition of English Present Perfect by Turkish speakers and discovered that L2 learners use Past Simple instead of Present Perfect due to the native language influence. Similar results were found for Japanese (Nakayama 2015), Korean (Noh, Hong, and Han 2015), Portuguese (Santos and Rocha 2004), German and Chinese (Liszka 2004, 2005). Winford (Winford 2005) made an observation that L2 learners project features of their mother tongue on the second language, thus compensating for their limited proficiency in L2 (Winford 2005, 379). Comrie (Comrie 1976) notices that the Perfect can render both the perfective and non-perfective meaning in some languages like Latin, French, and Italian, especially in their spoken forms. He also claims that the Perfect has in fact become the only Past Tense irrespective of aspect in some varieties of German, meaning that it took over the Simple Past (Comrie 1976), 53). These observations provide important context for this study and can be used to hypothesize on the possible variations in tense usage among people with different linguistic backgrounds.

Davydova (Davydova 2011a) conducted an extensive corpus-based study on the use of Present Perfect in non-native English. The aim of the study was to explain variation between

the Present Perfect and other verb forms in PP contexts and to explore the mechanism that triggers the occurrence of the PP in Indian, Russian, East-African, Singaporean, and German varieties. The independent linguistic variables outlined in the research were of semantic context, time adverbial specification, Aktionsart, and transitivity, independent extra-linguistic variables – sex, native language, and the length of exposure to the target language. Davydova's hypothesis was that the native language exerts a persistent influence ("mother-tongue interference") on the use of the Present Perfect. She particularly assumed that the speakers of German would use the PP more consistently than speakers of Russian, as Russian lacks the category of the Present Perfect. (Davydova 1977, 114). For the analysis, Present Perfect contexts were identified in the large-scale and small-scale corpora, wherein Present Perfect context implies a situation or an event that occurred or began to occur in the past and is oriented towards the moment of utterance (Davydova 2011b, 121). Another strategy used to extract the contexts was to search for the sentences time adverbials whose semantics are compatible with the meaning rendered by the PP, such as *up till now*, *lately* etc. Davydova reports that in Russian-English data, the PP is underrepresented as it occurs only in 32% of all Present Perfect contexts attested, which suggests a fairly strong influence from the Russian tense and aspect system. German speakers seemed to avoid using the Present Perfect, which Davydova called a „semantic mismatch between the German *Perfekt* and the English Present Perfect." She suggested that this could be explained as follows: the German speakers used the past tense as a strategy to avoid the ambiguous HAVE-perfect when unsure about its exact meaning in a sentence (Davydova 2011a, 288).

Present Perfect & Past Simple

To establish the ground for a contrastive account of the Present Perfect and Past Simple, it is necessary to outline the semantic status of these tenses.

English Present Perfect (also referred as HAVE-perfect, the PP, and perfect) can be characterized in terms of three properties: focus on the present time, current relevance, and indefiniteness (Radden and Dirven 2007, 212). Generally speaking, Present Perfect expresses a relation between present state and past situation. This property has different manifestations in English, such as Perfect of result, experiential Perfect, Perfect of persistent situation, and Perfect of recent past (Comrie 1976, 56-61). Perfect of result focuses on the present state which is referred to as being the result of some past situation, such as *John has had a bath*. In this case, the Present Perfect implies an existence of some continuing result (John is clean

and does not need another bath). The experiential Perfect on the other hand indicates that a situation has occurred at least once during some time in the past. Comrie (Comrie 1976, 59) gives an illustrative example for distinction between the experiential PP and the PP of result in sentences like *Bill has been to America* and *Bill has gone to America*, wherein the sentence with *be* implies that Bill did in fact go to America at least once (experiential Perfect) and the sentence with *go* implies that Bill is still in America (Perfect of result). The extended-now perfect describes a situation that started in the past and continues into the moment of utterance, such as *It has been raining since morning*. The last type of the PP, the perfect of recent past, is used for past situations that are temporally close to the moment of utterance, i.e. occurred very recently (for example, *She has just been to Paris*). This type of Perfect collocates with time adverbials such as *recently, lately, just*, etc. (Comrie 1976). The questionnaire designed for this study embraces situations rendered by the perfect of recent past and the resultative perfect and includes the adverbs collocating with these types of the PP.

The only other form which alternates with the English perfect in all its contexts is that of the preterit (referred in this paper as Simple Past or SP), the basic functions of which are the location of the past actions occurring prior to the present moment and the narrative function. (Davydova 2011a, 53). The meaning of the Simple Past tense can be described as definite past time reference, wherein the definiteness is implied either by the context or by a time adverbial (Elsness 2011). So the preterit and the perfect differ in the semantic feature of current relevance, definiteness, and the focus on present or past time.

Time adverbials

As mentioned above, time adverbials may influence the occurrence of the perfect and preterit. McCoard categorized them in three groups in terms of the notion of current relevance (McCoard 1978, 134):

a. +current relevance (occur with Simple Past)

long ago, five years ago, once, yesterday, the other day, those days, last night, in 1900, at 3:00, after the war, no longer

b. ±current relevance (occur with either Simple Past or Present Perfect)

long since, in the past, today, in my life, for three years, today, recently, just now, often, always, never, already, before

c. −current relevance (occur with Present Perfect)

at present, up till now, so far, as yet, (not) yet, during these five years past/during these last five years, herewith, lately, since the war, before now, by now Davydova, 53).

According to Quirk (Quirk et al. 1972, 276), certain adverbs (*already, just, at last, (not) yet*, etc.) signal about the presence of the perfect of result. Davydova also claims that adverbs such as *yet, ever, always*, etc. collocate with perfect or preterit depending on the variety of English (Davydova 2011a). Due to the small scope of this study, only three time adverbials will be of interest: *yet*, *lately*, and *already*. These adverbials were chosen for the survey as they have been observed to be collocating with both the PP and the SP in the everyday conversations of students of Heidelberg University.

Methods

Survey

In order to gain insight into the preferences in use of PP and SP among people with different linguistic backgrounds, a survey was conducted. The survey was carried out via Google forms and consisted of a written questionnaire. The link to the survey was published in the group chats of already enrolled students and newly arrived exchange students of University of Heidelberg; the respondents were chosen randomly. It was decided to give preference to the number of respondents rather than how detailed the questionnaire is, so the survey consisted of the minimum number of questions so as to take the minimum amount of time to get completed by respondents. The native language and age were the independent variables in this study; tenses, time adverbials and verbs were the dependent variables. Providing age was required in this study in order to later present the age range of the participants. The survey consisted of five questions encompassing situations that might occur in everyday life, such as asking a friend out for lunch or offering them help with math. Questions in each situation included a time adverbial with varying degrees of “current relevance“; semantic classification of time adverbials was adapted from (McCoard 1978). It was of greatest interest to investigate the tense use in the presence of the time adverbial “yet”, so this adverbial was present in 3 out of 5 questions of the survey. All the response options in

the questionnaire were formed as positive interrogative sentences. Each situation presented in the survey has been observed in real life at least twice; the situations have been noted specifically because of the fact that both the PP and the SP were used in the contexts and questions otherwise identical.

At the beginning of the questionnaire, the respondents were instructed to imagine themselves having a casual conversation with a friend in each of the situation. It was pointed out that there were no right or wrong answers and that respondents were to choose the option they would prefer in an actual dialogue. The structure and the contents of the survey are presented in the table below.

No.	Question	Response options	Remarks
1	Please choose your native language.	English (AU) English (UK) English (US) French … Other (please specify)	
2	Please enter your age.	Short-answer text	
3	What would you rather say?	A) I'm starving… **Did you eat yet?** We could go grab a bite. B) I'm starving… **Have you eaten yet?** We could go grab a bite. C) No preference.	To minimize the effect on the respondents, the question in all the cases remained the same ("What would you rather say?"); the situation context was inserted directly in the response options. The marker of the PP 'yet' (+current relevance) present.

4	What would you rather say?	A) The election is almost over... **Did you vote yet?** If not, I can show you how to do it online. B) The election is almost over... **Have you voted yet?** If not, I can show you how to do it online. C) No preference.	The marker of the PP 'yet' (+current relevance); It was hypothesized that pronunciation of the verb forms could be of relevance in this question. The verb form *voted* contains an extra syllable with an alveolar /d/ sound, which some speakers might find difficult to pronounce due to accumulation of alveolar /t/ and /d/ sounds within one place in the sentence (/voʊ**tɪd** je**t**/ - suggested American pronunciation). To see if there might be a correlation between the pronunciation of a verb form and the tense preference, question 7 was designed in this study.
5	What would you rather say?	A) I heard you have difficulties with math. **Did anyone offer you help already?** B) I heard you have difficulties with math. **Has anyone offered you help already?** C) No preference.	The marker of the PP 'already' (+current relevance);
6	What would you rather say?	A) John hasn't been at school for a while now. **Did you check on him lately?** B) John hasn't been at school for a while now. **Have you checked on him lately?**	Time adverbial 'lately' collocates with both SP and PP (± current relevance)

		C) No preference.	
7	Imagine there exists a regular verb "to bote"(pronounced as /bout/). The meaning of the verb is irrelevant. What would you rather say?	A) The laptop doesn't start for some reason. Did you bote (pronounced as /bout/) it yet? B) The laptop doesn't start for some reason. Have you boted (pronounced as /boutɪd/) it yet? C) No preference.	The marker of the PP 'yet' (+current relevance); The imaginary verb was designed to resemble the spelling and pronunciation of the verb "to vote" and was incorporated in the survey to partly exclude the semantic factor. It enables to analyze whether the pronunciation is taken into consideration by the respondents, as both „voted" and "boted it" can be considered as more difficult to pronounce in comparison with their PS forms.
8	Were you ever taught that you are supposed to use Present Perfect (for example, *have done* or *have voted*) in the presence of such words as *yet, already, ever, never, before* etc.?	A) Yes. B) No, but I've heard of it. C) Never heard of it. D) Other (please specify)	This question enables analyzing whether speakers of specific languages are actively taught to use the PP in presence of collocating time adverbials.
9	If you have any comments regarding why you chose one option or another, please leave them	Long-answer text	

	here.		

Hypothesis testing

As there was no prior expectation or hypothesis about the tense usage of the respondents. A neutral null and a neutral alternate hypothesis was adapted as follows:

The null hypothesis H0: There is no significant difference between the preferential usage of Present Perfect vs Simple Past in the presence of time adverbials.

Alternative hypothesis H1: There is a preference in towards the usage of either Present Perfect or Past Simple in the presence of time adverbials.

Since the null hypothesis can be rejected in either case of preference, a two-tailed analysis was used throughout the paper. As per the conventions, the pre-determined cut-off for the p-value (called α) was set to 0.05, as in the case of all two-tailed hypotheses.

p-value

A p-value (sometimes called as probability value) is a probability of obtaining results more extreme than the observed results given that the null hypothesis is true, was found in each case. (Dorey 2010)

Chi Squared (χ^2) test

A chi-squared test is a statistical test used to compare observed results with expected results, in case of was conducted to determine if a difference between observed data and expected data is present due to a correlation between the variables studied (a specific verb and a tense in this case). Chi-squared values (χ^2) were calculated by the formula:

$$\chi^2 = \frac{(\text{Observed} - \text{Expected})^2}{Expected}$$

It is best employed when one wants to study the presence of an association between two seemingly independent variables, as in our case (Cochran 1952).

Degrees of freedom

Degrees of freedom is a statistical concept that indicates the number of independent values that can vary in an analysis without breaking any constraints. Even though the data had 2 degrees of freedom, the data was analyzed in two segments, rendering the effective degrees of freedom = 1. This was done so due to “no preference” not being an independent category like Simple Past or Present Perfect, hence, instead of analyzing it separately, it was clubbed up with the main categories in the analysis. This further leads to the tables being not symmetric. Due to a single degree of freedom, chi-squared test was considered the best tool to analyse the data (Pandey and Bright 2008).

Results

Analysis for general bias in the data

First, it was analysed whether a single verb has a higher probability to be used in Present Perfect in either one of the cases as compared to the others (independently of the verb used). The observations are summarised in the Figure 1.

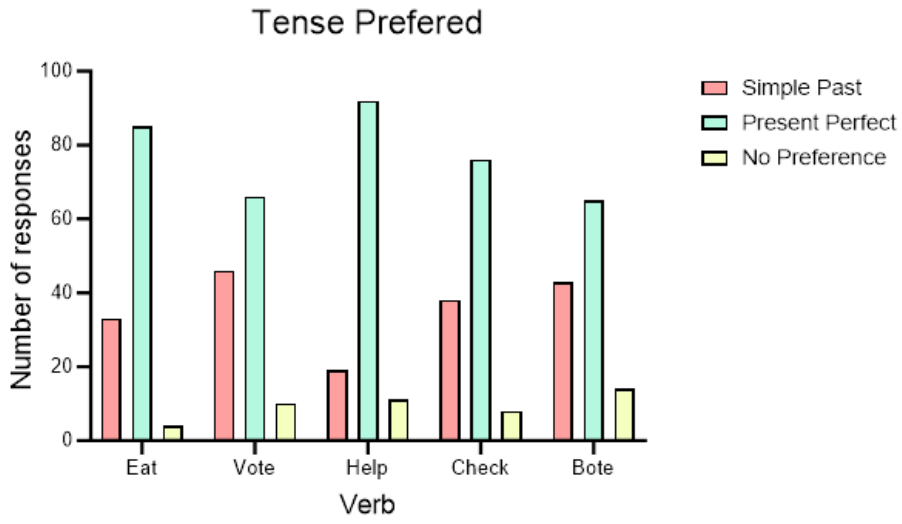

Figure 1. Prefered tense in each of the questions

The big difference in number of responses between Present Perfect and Past Simple shows that there in an inherent bias in the data, i.e. people‘s preference to choose Present Perfect. This observation supports the hypothesis H1. For further analysis the inherent bias was taken into account, which required calculating the ratio of votes given for Present Perfect options to votes given for Simple Past options. The ratio was calculated as follows: 122 people gave 5

responses each, which equals to a total of 610 responses, 431 out of which corresponded to the options with Present Perfect (including the no preference choices). The number of responses with PP divided by the total number of responses gives us 431/610 = 70.65, i.e. the ratio of the responses with Present Perfect to the responses with Present Simple is approximately 7:3.

This fact has been used further in the analysis to calculate the expected values "with bias."

	Likeliness to appear with Present Perfect		Assuming null hypothesis, 1:1 ratio	
Observed	Expected (with bias)	Expected (no bias)	χ^2	p-value
431,00	431,00	305,00	52,05	5,40E-13

Table 1. Expected and observed values of responses with Present Perfect in the overall data. The p-values <0.05 are highlighted in yellow

Table 1 shows that as p-value is <0.05, the inherent bias is considered significant and needs to be corrected for in the analysis.

Analysis on the basis of verb used

The expected frequencies in Tables 2 and 3 were calculated by two different ways: by assuming the null hypothesis (i.e. expecting no preference to choose one over another, 1:1 ratio) and by assuming the expected frequency from the overall data (7:3 ratio).

Apart from conducting the chi-squared test, the corresponding p-value, a probability of obtaining results more extreme than the observed results given that the null hypothesis is true, was found in each case. Results of the calculations are presented in the Tables 2 and 3.

	Likeliness to appear with Present Perfect	Given 7:3 (PP:SP) ratio	Assuming null hypothesis, 1:1 ratio

Verb	Observed	Expected (with bias)	Expected (no bias)	χ^2	p-value	χ^2	p-value
eat	89	86,20	61,00	0,09	0.763	12,85	3,37E-04
vote	76,00	86,20	61,00	1,21	0.272	3,69	5,48E-02
help	103,00	86,20	61,00	3,27	0.070	28,92	7,55E-08
check	84,00	86,20	61,00	0,06	0.811	8,67	3,23E-03
bote	79,00	86,20	61,00	0,60	0.438	5,31	2,12E-02
All	431,00	431,00	305,00	0	1	52,05	5,40E-13

Table 2. Expected and observed values of responses with Present Perfect along with verbs. The p-values <0.05 are highlighted in yellow.

		Likeliness to appear with Past Simple		Given 7:3 (PP:SP) ratio		Assuming null hypothesis, 1:1 ratio	
	Observed	Expected (with bias)	Expected (no bias)	χ^2	p-value	χ^2	p-value
eat	37	45,20	61,00	1,49	2,23E-01	9,44	0,002
vote	56,00	45,20	61,00	2,58	1,08E-01	0,41	0,522
help	30,00	45,20	61,00	5,11	2,38E-02	15,75	$7.2x10^{-5}$
check	46,00	45,20	61,00	0,01	9,05E-01	3,69	0,054

bote	57,00	45,20	61,00	3,08	7,92E-02	0,26	0,608
All	226,00	226,00	305,00	0	1	20,46	6,08E-06

Table 3. Expected and observed values of responses with Past Simple along with the verbs. The p-values <0.05 are highlighted in yellow.

All the p-values lower than the predetermined significance level (<0.05) have been highlighted in yellow. At this point one can reject the H0, as the p-values for "all verbs" (p-value=6.02E-06) is less than 0.05. The p-value for all of the verbs individually also are very small (Table 2), indicating that the observed results are unlikely to occur by random chance alone and there is a clear preference for Present Perfect.

When checking the deviation from the global mean, only the verb "help" has a p-value<0.05 (Table 3). When considering a threshold of $\alpha<0.1$, one can see that people tend to use Simple Past for verb "bote" significantly more than the other verb forms as well (Table 3). However, this does not imply that they use the Present Perfect form significantly less than the average, as none of the verbs have a p-value <0.05 in Table 1.

Dividing the data into two sections helps us to look at the tails of the data independently, and make statements such as "English UK speakers not only preferred Present Perfect, but also avoided using Simple Past." The statement was found to be true for only English UK speakers.

Analysis on the basis of time adverbials

		Likeliness to appear with Present Perfect		Given 7:3 (PP:SP) ratio		Assuming null hypothesis, 1:1 ratio	
	Observed	Expected (with bias)	Expected (no bias)	χ^2	p-value	χ^2	p-value

Yet	244	258,60	183,00	0,82	0,36	20,33	$7x10^{-8}$
Already	103,00	86,20	61,00	3,27	0,07	28,92	$6x10^{-8}$
Lately	84,00	86,20	61,00	0,06	0,81	8,67	$3.2x10^{-3}$
All verbs	431,00	431,00	305,00	0	1	52,05	5,40E-13

Table 4. Expected and observed likeliness of choosing Present Perfect along with time-adverbials.

		Likeliness to appear with Past Simple		Given 7:3 (PP:SP) ratio		Assuming null hypothesis, 1:1 ratio	
	Observed	Expected (with bias)	Expected (no bias)	χ^2	p-value	χ^2	p-value
Yet	150	135,60	61,00	1,53	0,22	129,85	$<10^{-10}$
Already	30,00	45,20	61,00	5,11	0,02	15,75	$7.2x10^{-5}$
Lately	46,00	45,20	61,00	0,01	0,91	3,69	0,054788
All verbs	226,00	226,00	305,00	0	1	20,46	$6,08x10^{-6}$

Table 5. Expected and observed likeliness of choosing Past Simple along with time-adverbials. The p-values < 0.05 are highlighted in yellow.

Time-adverbials used in the questions are not independent from the verb form used, yet an analysis of the tense preferred on the basis of one of the time-adverbials was performed.

It was found that *already* (always combined with the verb "help") had the highest correlation which induced people to use Present Perfect, and *lately* (combined with verb "check") was the lowest in those terms (Table 5). All of the time adverbials had a significant correlation with the use of Present Perfect.

Analysis on the basis of linguistic background

Further analysis was conducted on the biggest groups of the respondents with the same linguistic backgrounds, which are Russian (33), Hindi (16), German (15), English UK (14), English US (13), and French (7). The native language distribution is presented in the Figure 1.

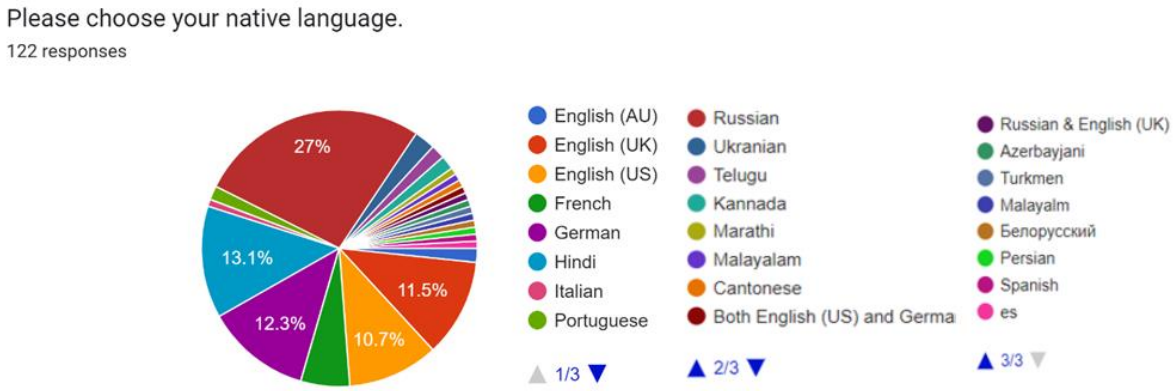

Figure 1. Language background distribution

		Likeliness to choose Present Perfect		Given 7:3 (PP:SP) ratio		Assuming null hypothesis, 1:1 ratio	
	Observed	Expected (with	Expected (no bias)	Chisq	p-value	Chisq	p-value

		bias)					
English UK	61	52,99	37,50	1,21	0,27	14,73	$1x10^{-4}$
English US	47,00	49,46	35,00	0,12	0,73	4,11	0,0425
German	48,00	52,99	37,50	0,47	0,49	2,94	0,0864
Russian	120,00	116,58	82,50	0,10	0,75	17,05	$1x10^{-5}$
French	25,00	24,73	17,50	0,00	0,96	3,21	0,0730
Hindi	62,00	56,52	40,00	0,53	0,47	12,10	$5x10^{-5}$

Table 6. Expected and observed likeliness of choosing Present Perfect with regard to the linguistic background. The p-values < 0.05 are highlighted in yellow.

		Likeliness to choose Past Simple		Given 7:3 (PP:SP) ratio		Assuming null hypothesis, 1:1 ratio	
	Observed	Expected (with bias)	Expected (no bias)	Chisq	p-value	Chisq	p-value
English UK	18	27,79	37,50	3,45	0,06	10,14	0,001451
English US	30,00	25,93	35,00	0,64	0,42	0,71	0,398025
German	27,00	27,79	37,50	0,02	0,88	2,94	0,086411
Russian	60,00	61,13	82,50	0,02	0,88	6,14	0,013243

French	11,00	12,97	17,50	0,30	0,58	2,41	0,120233
Hindi	25,00	29,64	40,00	0,73	0,39	5,63	0,017706

Table 7. Expected and observed likeliness of choosing Past Simple with regard to the linguistic background. The p-values < 0.05 are highlighted in yellow.

As one can see from the tables 6 and 7, the English UK, English US, Russian, and Hindi speakers tend to prefer using Present Perfect over Simple Past in the questions. An interesting observation is that the English UK speakers tend to avoid using Simple Past in questions (Table 7). It is worth noticing that although Russian speakers prefer using Present perfect more than English UK speakers, they do not avoid using Simple Past, whereas English UK speakers do (Tables 6 and 7). The bias to a certain tense depending on the linguistic background is presented in the Figure 2.

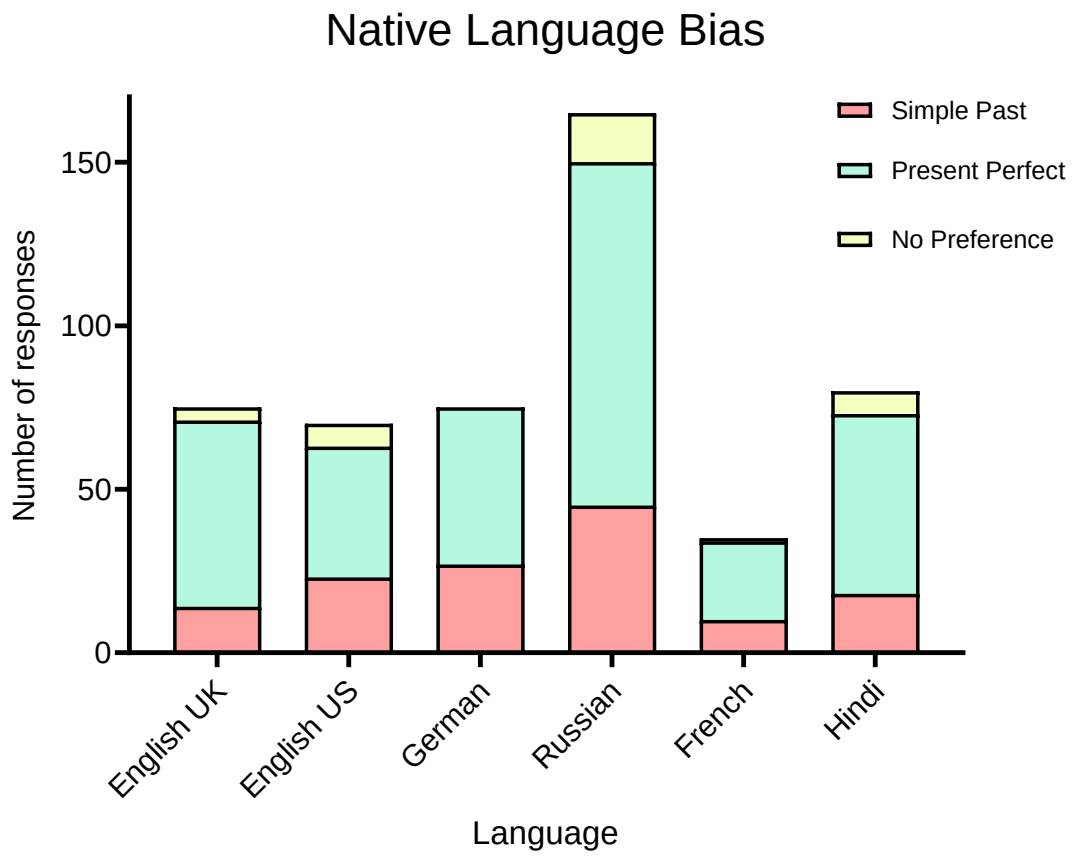

Figure 2. The native language bias to use a certain tense

Finally, the responses to the question about whether the respondents were taught to use the PP in presence of specific time adverbials were analysed and the normalised results are presented in the Figure 3.

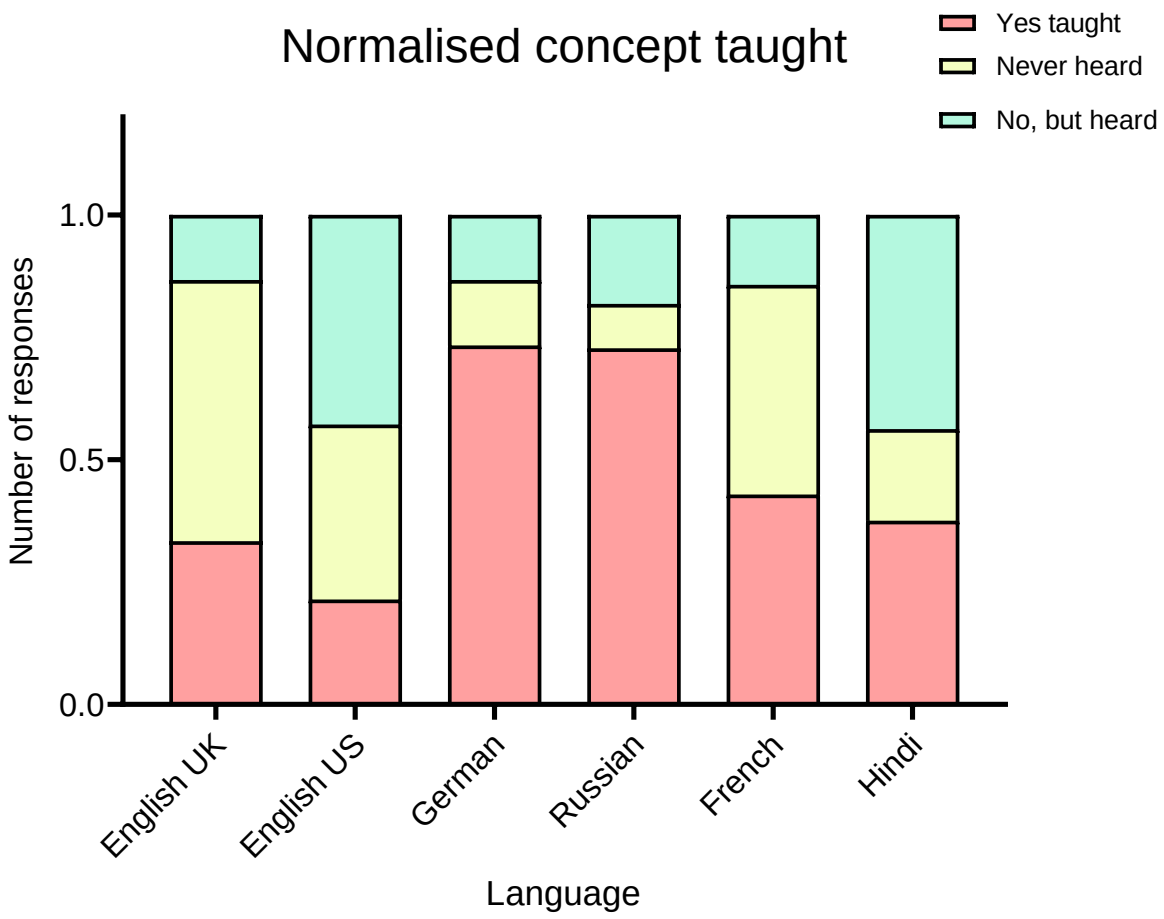

Figure 3. Normalised analysis of the responses to the question 8

One can see from the Figure 3 that Russian and German speakers are actively taught the concept of using Present Perfect in the presence of certain adverbials. One can hypothesize that this can be connected with the fact that these languages do not have a tense whose grammatical and semantic features fully correspond to the English perfect.

Feedback from the respondents

At the end of the questionnaire, the respondents were given an opportunity to leave their feedback or explanations why they chose one option or another, and some participants of the study used this opportunity. The summarized feedback is presented below:

- 3 respondents called "Did you vote yet" and "Did you bote it yet" better-sounding and “easier to pronounce” rather than their perfective forms;
- 1 person stated that "have eaten" resembled the German Perfekt-form "hast gegessen" because of the -en ending;
- 3 respondents claimed Present Perfect to be “more correct” and “more natural” than Past Simple with the time adverbials presented in the survey;
- 4 respondents regarded to Present Perfect as a “more polite” and “more formal” option than Past Simple;
- 3 people pointed out that they would rather use Past Simple in oral conversations whereas Present Perfect in written speech;
- 1 person stated that “the Present Perfect felt more polite because it made the sentence look longer, at least syllable-wise, and an utterance sounds more polite if it is longer.”

The comment saying that the Simple Past options with the verbs *vote* and *bote* are better-sounding than their PP-analogue speaks in favor of the hypothesis that the pronunciation might play a role in the speaker’s choice of tense. This can also explain people why the Simple Past form of the verb *bote* was attested significantly more than the other verb forms. However, as only 3 people regarded to this option as a better-sounding one, this observation cannot be held significant and further research on this topic must be conducted before making any statements. Finally, Present Perfect was attested as a more polite, more correct and more of a “written-speech” option by 11 people in total. It can be speculated that this attitude towards the Present Perfect may be one of the reasons why there was such a strong preference to the PP present in the overall data.

Concluding remarks

Overall, the analysis demonstrates that there is a significant preference for Present Perfect in questions with the time adverbials *yet*, *already* and *lately* regardless of the linguistic background of the respondent, which supports the H1 hypothesis. The Chi-squared test played a crucial role in the interpretation of results, some of which were statistically significant. Some native language-specific patterns were found, e.g. British respondents showed a tendency to avoid using Past Simple in the presence of the chosen time adverbials. It was remarkable that Russian and German speakers reported that they were actively taught the concept of linking Present Perfect with specific time adverbials more than respondents

with other linguistic backgrounds. Interestingly, the respondents did not avoid using Past Simple in the case with the verb *check on* and the time adverbial *lately*, and preferred using Present Perfect with the verb *offer* and time adverbial *already*. Finally, some respondents regarded to the PP as a "more polite" and a "more correct" tense, whereas the SP forms of the verbs *bote* and *vote* were described as "better sounding."

Due to the small scope of the study, only three time adverbials and five verbs have been used in the questionnaire, and the time adverbials *already* and *lately* were not independent from the verbs *offer* and *check* respectively. The tense preferences in presence of these time adverbials can be tested in future studies using a broader spectre of verbs and contexts. Furthermore, the study only focused on the tense preferences in the interrogative sentences; tense preferences in other sentence categories can be of interest. Another important variable which was missing in this study and one must be aware of in future research is the length of exposure to L2 among non-native speakers of English. This variable might have significant influence on the tense preference among L2 learners. Apart from that, the small sample size did not make it possible to prove or disprove the influence of the pronunciation of a verb form on a speaker's choice of tense; this hypothesis can be adapted in a future study. Further research could also focus on explaining the possible ways and reasons for the mother-tongue interference in English spoken by L2 speakers.

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