

# The Use of Tenses in British and American English

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Diplomski studij engleskog jezika i književnosti

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**Uporaba glagolskih vremena u britanskom i američkom engleskom**

Diplomski rad

Mentor: izv. prof. dr. sc. Tanja Gradečak Erdeljić

Osijek, 2016

Sveučilište J. J. Strossmayera u Osijeku

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## Summary

American and British English are the best known and the most frequently used varieties of the English language. They differ in many aspects: pronunciation, vocabulary, grammar. The starting point for this work was the difference in the use of Past Simple and Present Perfect with particular time adverbials (*yet, since, just, never, recently*) in these two varieties of English. Previous research showed that speakers of American English prefer Past Simple with the above mentioned time adverbials, while speakers of British English prefer Present Perfect in the same situations.

In order to find out, which of the two varieties of English EFL learners in Croatian high schools prefer, we conducted a research which has shown that learners prefer American English. Also, the research has shown that with time adverbials *yet, since, just, never, recently* learners mostly used Past Simple. These results could help teachers to understand the errors learners make while acquiring Present Perfect.

Keywords: American English, British English, Present Perfect, Past Simple, error analysis

## 1. Introduction

English language is the most widespread language in the world. It is used every day by a large number of speakers, some of whom are native speakers of this language and some of the speakers learned it as a foreign language. Since there are so many speakers, there are also a lot of different versions of English language: American, Australian, African, British, Indian English, etc. All of those varieties differ in some parts of the language. The largest number of differences is to be found in pronunciation, vocabulary and grammar. Two of the best known and most frequently used varieties of English are American English (AmE) and British English (BrE). Those varieties are probably the best known due to the social and political power of their speakers. AmE and BrE differ in pronunciation, grammar and vocabulary. Except for the differences in accent and pronunciation, other differences are hardly noticeable to the unexperienced learner or speaker of the English language. Differences in vocabulary or grammar would not hinder the communication between American and British people, but because of some same names for different things misunderstandings might be possible. Some of the examples are clothing items. In AmE *vest* refers to a piece of clothing that one wears over a shirt, while in BrE *vest* refers to a type of underwear.

One of the differences in grammar is the use of different tenses with time adverbials *yet, just, never, recently, already*. As some of the corpus research showed, speakers of AmE prefer to use Past Simple with these adverbials, while speakers of BrE prefer to use Present Perfect in the same situations. (Aarts et al., 2013; Algeo, 2006: 26) This difference is the starting point for this work and we shall test the hypothesis that there is confusion about the use of those two tenses among EFL learners, especially in connection to the above mentioned time adverbials.

In many societies learners learn English, but soon they start to realize that there are many different varieties, but AmE and BrE are predominant. Since EFL learners are exposed to both of these varieties, sometimes through media, sometimes through their course books, the fact that speakers of AmE and BrE use two different tenses in the same situations might be confusing for the learners. They are taught one thing in their schools and they are exposed to something different at their homes. Errors and bad grades are the inevitable result of this. When it comes to this, error analysis and its intralingual transfer might be helpful.

In order to determine whether there is a clash between the use of Past Simple and Present Perfect by the EFL learners in Croatia, a research was conducted. Learners were asked which



one of the two varieties they prefer and they had to solve a test in which they had to choose a single verb form, either Past Simple or Present Perfect, with time adverbials *yet, just, never, recently, already*.

At the beginning of this work there is the history of American English. After that, the main differences between AmE and BrE are introduced and discussed. Since the starting point for this paper is a research of the use of Past Simple and Present Perfect, the rules for the use of both tenses are presented.

The research that was conducted among the EFL learners in a high school in Orahovica is thoroughly described in the second part of this paper. The last part of this paper is the error analysis of the results of the test used in this research.

## **2. Development of American English**

Even though both American and British English have the same predecessor language, they developed in different ways. We are often taught the history of English, but we do not learn histories of both varieties. Since American and British English are separated by the ocean and are under different influences, the changes which make them more distinct are inevitable. American English developed under the influence of many languages, among which are Dutch, French, Spanish, Indian, African, German, etc.

Consequently, whatever linguistic processes operated to produce the differences between American and British English which exist today must either have taken place in American English after the colonists settled on this continent or have occurred in British English after the emigrants left their homeland. (Marckwardt, 1967: 8)

The English language started to change rapidly as England became one of the greatest colonial and trade forces. In order to communicate with many different nations, many Pidgin Englishes developed. Pidgin English is a simplified version of English, but also a mixture of English and other languages. Some of Pidgin Englishes still used are Nigerian Pidgin English, West African Pidgin English, Hawaiian Pidgin English, Micronesian Pidgin English, etc.

### **2.1. Foreign language influence on American English**

First English-speaking settlers of America were the passengers on the *Mayflower*. Although they were coming from England and were speaking and writing in English, their language had

already been changed. Before coming to the America, the Pilgrims had lived in Holland. In Holland they were exposed to the Dutch language which left marks on their English. Many of them were sailing under the Dutch flag and were also exposed to Pidgin English. Pidgin English is a simplified version of English language which was used mainly among sailors and traders. The main goal of this type of language is the communication and not the grammar.

When the Pilgrims arrived to the American soil, they encountered many things that were unknown to them and that they, consequently, had no name for. For these things they took Indians words. English borrowed names for trees, plants, fruits (e.g. *squash*, *hickory*, etc.), animals (*chipmunk*, *opossum*), fish, political terms, and culture. “[...] the largest number of loan words are connected with Indian institutions and civilization. Here it was obviously easier to borrow the Indian term than to create a new one out of English elements.” (Marckwardt, 1967: 26). Although Indians were native people in America, they had no unique language. Their languages consisted of sounds that were not common in English language, so speakers of English approximated these sounds. The number of loan words from Indian languages is in decrease, since the Indian culture is not that powerful and spread anymore.

After the first changes in the English language were made under the Indian influence, the influence of French made another changes during the 17<sup>th</sup> century. Frenchmen were traders, explorers, missionaries and they “held virtually all the strategic posts along these great rivers and a number of vital points on the shores of the Great Lakes as well.” (Marckwardt, 1967: 34) French was considered to be a very influential language and many people had some French knowledge. It was even taught and spoken in England. Fields that gained most from the French are plants and animals (*pumpkin*), foods (*brioche*, *praline*), furniture and building (*shanty*, *depot*), exploration and travel (*voyageur*). French words had almost the same destiny as the Indian ones. The number of French borrowings is becoming a less active part of the language. French had had a great influence on English language even before the exploration of America, so many of the words had been acquired into English during the Middle Ages after the Norman Conquest in 11<sup>th</sup> century. Meanings of some of the words changed over the years and some words, originally French, were taken over by British English from American English.

Spanish influence also played a great role in the development of American English. When the Spanish arrived to America, they populated southern part of the continent, especially the Gulf of Mexico. English loaned from Spanish words for animals and plants (*cockroach*, *coyote*, *marijuana*), food and drink (*enchilada*, *tequila*), ranch life (*hacienda*, *ranch*, *rodeo*), building (*cafeteria*, *plaza*), etc. The greatest number of words borrowed from Spanish is still in use,

although some of them are mostly known around the Mexican border. Spanish influence is still very strong, because many of Spanish-speaking people, mostly from Mexico, come to America every day.

As previously mentioned, Dutch influence began even before the arrival to the American continent. Although the Dutch regiment in America did not last long, they established a culture which left a huge mark on the American English vocabulary. Areas of influence are: food (*cookie, waffle*), toponymics (*bush*), transportation (*sleigh*), and social classifications (*boss, patron*). Dutch language is the language which is typologically the most similar to the English. “Consequently there are fewer changes in form and pronunciation in the Dutch borrowings than in those from somewhat more remote and differently constructed languages.” (Marckwardt, 1967: 50)

Above mentioned nationalities tried to conquer and colonize American continent and played a big role in the development of American English in that way. Germans, on the other hand, came to America only to find a better life. At first they arrived to the American soil during the 17<sup>th</sup> century but a larger number of Germans arrived during the 19<sup>th</sup> century. “Those Germans developed a language consisting of a compromise of their own various dialects with a strong admixture of English words and constructions.” (Marckwardt, 1967: 51) Germans enriched vocabulary in the fields of food and drink (*hamburger, noodle, beer*), and education (*semester, seminar*).

There were also many other languages that played a role in the development of American English, such as various African languages, Scandinavian languages, Italian, Chinese, etc. Vocabulary of AmE is full of borrowings from other languages, but we are not even aware that those words are borrowed.

## **2.2. American English as a new language**

As Marckwardt (1967: 5) writes:

“*American English* suggests precisely this. The term *English* denies the implication of a separate language. At the same time the adjective *American*, unblushingly appropriated, as is our wont, without regard for the feelings of the inhabitants of this continent outside the national borders of the United States, is intended to indicate more than the mere transplanting of a vernacular to a new soil, but rather to suggest its new growth as a somewhat changed and wholly indigenous organism.”

Throughout the history, Great Britain was a powerful country and British English spread over its colonies. Sometimes British English was simplified in order for everyone to understand it and to be able to use it. In spite of this, some parts of world still cherish the British accent. As the British power decreases, the American power is in constant rise. In today`s world, economic power means everything and America has this power. Dillard remarks in his work on AmE: “More and more, American power and influence are being felt throughout the world; and its American English that provides the initiatory power for the world`s lingua franca.” (1975: 223). Today American power and influence are even greater than thirty years ago. We are under constant influence of English language, either American or British, through different media or at schools. English language is taught all around the world. Children, who are not native speakers, learn English as early as they are five or six years old. Even older people start learning English. Although most of the people are taught English as such, they can soon realize that what they are learning is actually British English. But only a small number of learners later actually uses only British English. Learners acquire much more of the American English since it is much more communicated through different media. As Strevens writes: “At the same time as the *quantity* of English being communicated increases, so the *mixture* of British and American varieties becomes greater.” (1972: 82)

Speakers of both varieties of English will be able to understand each other, since there are much more similarities than there are differences. Because of that it is hard to say that American English is a language on its own. It is clear that Americans would use a larger number of so called *Americanisms*, while Britons would use *Briticisms*. This thing is not complicated at all since it only has to do with patriotism and the feelings for country.

### **3. Differences between American and British English**

Being divided by the ocean caused some differences between American and British English. These differences do not disable communication between Americans and Britons, but they might confuse learners of English. Differences can confuse learners because there are many words that mean one thing in AmE and other thing in BrE. In this section some of the main differences will be explained.

### 3.1. Pronunciation

When we listen to an American and a Briton it is easy to distinguish who comes from where. In the United Kingdom the Received Pronunciation is a kind of a standard language, although it has been losing its prestige over the last few decades. Names such as “Oxford English”, “Queen’s English” or “BBC English” can also be heard. The American standard is General American.

These two forms of English do not differ in the number of consonants, but the number of vowel sounds is not identical in both of them. “They are nearly the same in number, but they are different in sound quality.” (Stevens, 1972: 68) The best example for this is *can* and *can`t*. “In general American pronunciation these two words have the same vowel-sound; in British pronunciation they have different vowel-sounds.” (Stevens, 1975: 69) If one compares British and American pronunciation of words containing letter *a*, the difference becomes clear. For example, word *bath* is in BrE pronounced /bɑ:θ/ and in AmE it is pronounced /bæθ/. Differences can also be heard in words ending with *-ile*. Word *hostile* would be pronounced /`hɒs.taɪl/ in BrE and /`hɑ:.stəl/ in AmE.

Another difference that can be heard is the pronunciation of the sound /r/. BrE is a non-rhotic variety, which means that its speakers do not pronounce sound /r/ in word that contain it. On the other hand, AmE is a rhotic variety and speakers of this variety do pronounce sound /r/. For example, a Briton would pronounce word *hard* like /hɑ:d/, while an American would pronounce it /hɑ:rd/.

What can be heard is also a different stress in some of the words. Stevens (1975: 73) mentions some of the words with different stress and these words are listed in Table 1.

Table 1: Words in AmE and BrE with different stress (Stevens, 1975: 73)

<i>American English</i>	<i>British English</i>
ADress	adDRESS
ARTisan	artiSAN
CIGarette	cigaRETTE
deTAIL	DEtail
DOCtrinal	docTRInal

gaRAGE	GArage
LABoratory	laBORatory
REcess	reCESS
REveille	reVEille

### 3.2. Vocabulary

The second most noticeable difference between AmE and BrE is the difference in vocabulary. As Strevens (1975: 55) writes: [...] an idea or an object exists in both British and American English, but where different words are used for them in the two forms of English.” Some of these words could cause misunderstandings between speakers of AmE and BrE.

If terms for clothing in AmE and BrE are compared, there are some same words which denote different clothing items. Here are some of them (definitions are taken from Cambridge Online Dictionary):

(1) vest:

- AmE: a piece of clothing that covers the upper body but not the arms and usually has buttons down the front, worn over a shirt (waistcoat in BrE)
- BrE: a type of underwear, often with no sleeves, that covers the upper part of the body, worn for extra warmth (undershirt in AmE)

(2) shorts:

- AmE: men’s underpants
- BrE: trousers that end above the knee or reach the knee, often worn in hot weather or when playing a sport

Also car parts contains a large number of words that can confuse speakers of AmE and BrE. For example: “A car in America has *a trunk* (BE *boot*), *a hood* (BE *bonnet*), and *fenders* (BE *bumpers*).” (Strevens, 1975: 55).

A list of other words which are different in AmE and BrE can be found in Appendix 1.

### 3.3. Spelling

There are some differences in spelling in AmE and BrE. Although the spelling was the same in both varieties, it started to change on 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century under the influence of Dr Samuel Johnson (BrE) and Noah Webster (AmE) and their dictionaries of British and American English, respectively. It is advisable, however, that, although both types of spelling are acceptable, one should keep writing in only one type throughout a text.

Some of the differences are:

- words ending in *-re*: BrE kept ending *-re*, while AmE changed it to *-er*

(3) *centre* (BrE) – *center* (AmE); *theatre* (BrE) – *theater* (AmE)

- words ending in *-our*: words in BrE end in *-our*, while AmE words end in *-or*

(4) *colour* (BrE) – *color* (AmE); *honour* (BrE) – *honor* (AmE)

- words ending in *-yse*: in BrE words have the ending *-yse* and in AmE they have ending *-yze*

(5) *paralyse* (BrE) – *paralyze* (AmE)

- words ending in *-ise*: in BrE endings *-ise* or *-ize* is possible, while in AmE only *-ize* is possible

(6) *apologise/apologize* (BrE) – *apologize* (AmE)

- words ending in *-ence*: in BrE it is spelled *-ence* and in AmE it is spelled *-ense*

(7) *defence* (BrE) – *defense* (AmE)

- words with double vowels: in BrE those words are spelled with *ae*, but in AmE only with *e*

(8) *paediatric* (BrE) – *pediatric* (AmE); *leukaemia* (BrE) – *leukemia* (AmE)

- words ending in a vowel + *l*: in BrE letter *l* is doubled

(9) *traveller* (BrE) – *traveler* (AmE)

### 3.4. Grammar

The differences between grammar of BrE and AmE are mostly hard to notice. “The number of grammatical differences turns out to be rather small and their nature seems to

be trivial.” (Strevens, 1975: 47). There are some differences in the use of verbs, in the use of nouns and prepositions.

One of the differences in the use of verbs is the use of different forms of Past Simple and Past Participle. In BrE Past Participle form of verb *got* is *got*, while in AmE it is *gotten*. Verbs *burn*, *dream*, and *spoil* in AmE can have irregular form *burnt*, *dreamt*, and *spoilt*, but the regular form *burned*, *dreamed*, and *spoiled* is more common.

There are two possibilities to express possession. In AmE one would use verb *have*. In BrE the expression *have got* would be used.

(10) *She has a beautiful dress.* – AmE

*She has got a beautiful dress.* – BrE

Speakers of AmE and BrE tend to use different tenses for expressing of events which happened in the recent past. In AmE Past Simple is used for this, while in BrE Present Perfect would be used. The same situation happens when there are time adverbials *already*, *just*, *never*, *recently*. In AmE both Past Simple and Present Perfect would be accepted, but in BrE only Present Perfect is considered to be correct.

(11) *I just got a new job.* – AmE

*I've just got a new job.* - BrE

When it comes to the agreement between collective nouns and verbs, there is a difference between AmE and BrE. In AmE singular would be used with collective nouns. On the other hand, in BrE plural is considered to be correct.

(12) *The government is making a decision.* – AmE

*The government are making a decision.* – BrE

There is also difference between the uses of some prepositions. In BrE preposition *at* is used to express time. In the same situations speakers of AmE would use *on*.

(13) *I am going out on the weekend.* – AmE

*I am going out at the weekend.* – BrE

When it comes to the use of preposition after *different* there are a few possibilities. The most common preposition in both varieties is *different from*. In BrE is possible to find



sentences containing *different to*, while in AmE one can mostly hear *different than*. (Examples from Oxford Dictionaries Online)

(14) *We want to demonstrate that this government is different from previous governments.* – BrE

*This part is totally different from anything else that he's done.* – AmE

*Teenagers certainly want to look different than their parents.* – AmE

*In this respect the Royal Academy is no different to any other major museum.*  
– BrE

## 4. Past Simple and Present Perfect

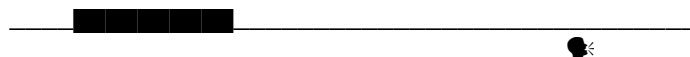
### 4.1. Past Simple

Past Simple tense is used to refer to events that happened in the past. According to different grammars of English language, there are two major elements that determine the use of Past Simple tense: (a) `the happening takes place before the present moment` and (b) `the speaker has definite time in mind`.

The first element `the happening takes place before the present moment` implies that the event happened in the past and that it is not connected to the present. On the other hand “there is no strong difference between states and events here, because every past situation is in a manner of speaking complete.” (Brdar et al., 2001: 98) Considering this Brdar et al. (2001: 98) mention three possibilities:

- i. situation occupied a period of time in the past now terminated

(16) *He lived in London for two years.*



for two years                      now

Figure 1: Timeline for Past Simple (Brdar et al., 2001: 99)

ii. situation occurred at a moment in a past period now terminated

(17) *My father once met Sir Winston Churchill.*

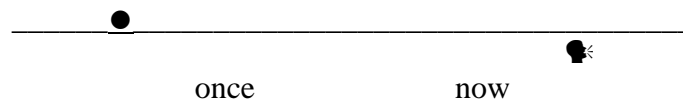


Figure 2: Timeline for Past Simple (Brdar et al., 2001: 99)

iii. situation took place regularly, habitually in the past, but not anymore

(18) *She always read before falling asleep.*

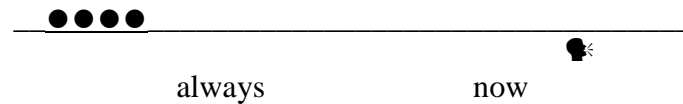


Figure 3: Timeline for Past Simple (Brdar et al., 2001: 99)

To mark that something happened in the past and that it does not belong to the present adverbial expressions are used. Possible adverbial expressions are *last week/month/year, in 2009, yesterday.*

(19) *I visited my grandmother yesterday.*

*He lost his job last month.*

Also, there is no need for an adverbial expression to mark the past. It is possible that one can conclude from the context that the situation is in the past.

(20) *She met her friend (when she was visiting her hometown).*

Past Simple can be used to refer to the present or to the future.

Past Simple refers to the present when it is used in reported speech, i.e. when back-shifting occurs.

(21) *Maria: "I like this game." → Maria said she liked that game.*

Past Simple refers to the future in reported speech: if one uses present tense with future reference in direct speech, it becomes Past Simple in indirect speech.

(22) *"I will help him if he asks me." → I said I would help him if he asked me.*

In everyday communication past simple is often use to “express the present feelings or thoughts, requests, etc. of the speaker in a less imposing fashion.” (Brdar et al., 2001: 101)

(23) *What was your name?*

#### 4.2. Present Perfect

Although one can often hear that Present Perfect is a tense, it is actually an aspect. “Perfect aspect is used for a past happening which is seen in relation to a later event or time.” (Leech, 1971: 30)

Present Perfect is used for describing events that are somehow connected to the present. A past event may be related to the present in two ways: (a) it involves a period of time which lasts up to the present moment or (b) it has results in the present time.

There are four different uses of the Present Perfect (Brdar et al, 2001: 153):

i. continuative Present Perfect

(24) *We have been friends since childhood.*

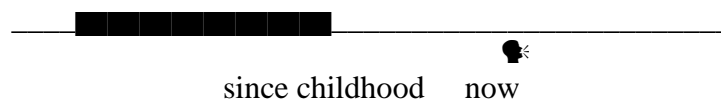


Figure 4: Timeline for Present Perfect

This use of Present Perfect suggest that a state extends over a period of time and it may also extend in the future. If Present Perfect is used in this way, it is almost always marked by an adverbial of duration *for a long time, since, so far, etc.*

ii. iterative Present Perfect

(25) *The Smiths have come to this village for fifty years.*

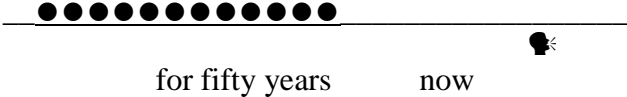


Figure 5: Timeline for Present Perfect

This use is related to events that occurred repeatedly from some period in the past up until the present time. It is sometimes called *habitual Present Perfect*. The use of the Present Perfect for this purpose is marked by an adverbial of frequency.

iii. resultative past

(27) *The taxi has arrived.*

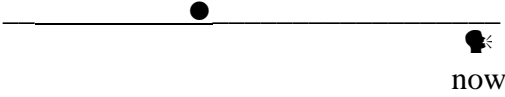


Figure 6: Timeline for Present Perfect

“The Present Perfect is also used in reference to a past event to imply that the result of that event is still operative at the present time.” (Leech, 1971: 39) This resultative implication is mostly not obvious in the meaning of the verb.

(28) *I've taken a bath. (So now I'm clean.)*

This use of the Present Perfect does not need to be supported by adverbials.

iv. indefinite past

(26) *This is one of the best books I have ever read.*

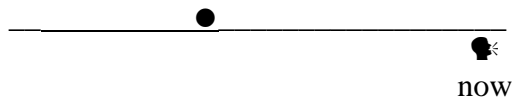


Figure 7: Timeline for Present Perfect

This use of the Present Perfect refers to a situation that took place in the past and extends to the present moment, but the definite time at which this situation happened is not given. Since the Present Perfect in this case refers to something that speaker experiences, it is called *the perfect of experience*. This indefinite meaning is marked by adverbials *never*, *ever*, *before*, etc.

#### 4.3. Contrasts between the Present Perfect and the Past Simple

As both refer to the past, the Present Perfect differs from the Past Simple on three counts (Brdar et al, 2001: 149):

- i. continuation up to the present time

The contrast between the Present Perfect and the Past Simple can be seen in pair of sentences:

(29) *He has been deaf all his life. (He is still alive and deaf.)*

*He was deaf all his life. (He is dead now.)*

It is assumed that both the speaker and the listener have the same person or event in mind and that they know which period of time is mentioned in these sentences.

- ii. present result

(30) *Peter has injured his ankle (His ankle is still bad.)*

*Peter injured his ankle (...but it is better now.)*

In this case it is assumed that the injury does not exist anymore.

- iii. indefinite time

This contrast causes most difficulties. The Present Perfect is used where there is no specific point in time when an event occurred. On the other hand, the Past Simple requires definite point in time. There are three ways in which this reference point can be made:

- i. by an adverbial expression of time – when

(31) *I saw him on Friday.*

- ii. by a preceding use of a past or perfect tense

(32) *I have met her, we flew on the same plane to Sydney.*

- iii. by implicit definition; i.e. by assuming a particular time reference

(33) *Did you hear that noise?*

#### **4.4. Adverbials in relation to the Present Perfect and the Past Simple**

Adverbials that are associated with the Past Simple are supposed to refer to definite point in the past. Because of this, adverbials such as *yesterday, last month, a year ago, in 2001*. Adverbials such as *in the morning, soon, then* can occur with the Past Simple since they denote definite time in the past, but they do not refer explicitly to the past. They can sometimes be found with the habitual use of Present Perfect.

Adverbials such as *so far, up to now, lately, since, until* are normally associated with the Present Perfect because they include continuation up to the present moment.

There is a group of adverbials that can occur with both the Present Perfect and the Past Simple. In this group are adverbials *today, this morning, this afternoon, this evening*. These adverbials can refer to a longer period which is still a part of the present time and therefore it is not a part of the past and because of this the Present Perfect can be used.

The fourth group of adverbials makes one of the major differences between the AmE and BrE. In this group there are adverbials *recently, just, until now, never, ever, already, yet*. In AmE it is normal that the Past Simple is used when these adverbials occur. BrE in these cases requires the Present Perfect.

## **5. The Use of Tenses in American and British English**

### **5.1. Aims**

The aim of this research was to find out which of the varieties of English language learners in high schools in Croatia prefer and how their choice influences the use of Past Simple and Present Perfect with adverbials *yet*, *recently*, *just*, *ever*, *never*, and *already*. This research also tried to make the connection between the influence of different media to the use of British or American English and the influence of media to the use of Present Perfect or Past Simple.

### **5.2. Participants**

This research was conducted on a total number of 35 learners. There were 14 male participants and 21 female participants. Participants in this research were the students of the “Stjepan Ivšić” High School in Orahovica. All of them attended 4<sup>th</sup> grade of the grammar school programme at the time of the research. Participants were aged between 17 and 18 years of age and they had learned English as their first foreign language for at least 11 years. Their grades in English varied from A to B. They had been leaning English for some longer time, so they had been acquainted with both tenses used in this research. The other reason for including them in the study was that they are more aware of different varieties of English and the differences between American and British English. Two surveys were eliminated from the research since those two participants had grade D and their tests had too many mistakes so they cannot give any relevant pieces of information.

### **5.3. Instrument**

The instrument for this research was developed by the researcher for the purposes of this study and consisted of two parts. The first part was a survey. This survey was created to find out some facts about the participants: they had to write down the number of years spent learning English, the name of the course book they used for their English classes. Also, the participants had to determine how often they were exposed to the English language through media. To do this, they had to write down numbers from 1 to 3 (1 –

rarely, 2 – sometimes, 3 – often). Participants were also asked to define through which media they were exposed to the English language the most. The last question in this part was to define which variety of English participants believe they used.

The second part of the research was in a form of a test. This test consisted of three grammar tasks. In the first task there were ten sentences and two verb forms for each sentence. One verb form was in Past Simple and the other one was in Present Perfect. The participants had to choose the answer which sounded better to them. These sentences had time adverbs *yet, ever, already, just*. Two of the sentences were control sentences. These two sentences were given in order to see whether participants would recognize a typical example of Past Simple and choose the Past Simple form. In the second task there were five sentences. Participants were asked to correct these sentences if they thought it was necessary. All of the sentences needed correction and this correction could have been done to create the Present Perfect or the Past Simple form of the verb. This whole task was more of a control task to check if the participants knew how to build Past Simple and Present Perfect. The third task was a productive task where participants needed to translate five sentences from Croatian to English. Croatian sentences contained Croatian equivalents of time adverbs *just, yet, never, and recently*. Participants could use Present Perfect in these sentences, or they could use Past Simple to translate those sentences. The survey and the test were administered to learners on the same day. The learners were administered the survey and the test during their regular English classes. The overall topic of the research had not been mentioned to the learners or discussed with them, so they could not have prepared themselves in any way prior to their administration. After they had finished with the survey and the test, the topic was explained to them. There was no time limit for the test.

The whole instrument used in this research can be found in Appendix 2.

#### **5.4. Results and discussion**

The starting point of this research was to determine which variety of English learners in high schools prefer: American or British English. They had to opt for one of the answers on the scale from 1 to 5 (1 – never, 2 - mostly no, 3 – I don't know/I don't care, 4 – Mostly yes, 5 – always). The mean value for the use of American English was 3.76, while the mean value for the use of British English was 2.58, as can be seen in Table 1.



Table 1: Differences between the use of American and British English

Variable	Mean	Standard Deviation
I use American English	3.76	1.03
I use British English	2.58	1.17

The results like these were expected. Learners mostly relate British English to the British accent and very few of them even try to acquire accent like this. Since they do not sound like the speakers of BrE, the largest number of learners said that they used American English: 22 learners said that they used AmE, only 6 learners chose BrE and 5 learners did not know which variety they used or they did not care about that. This is shown graphically in Figure 8.

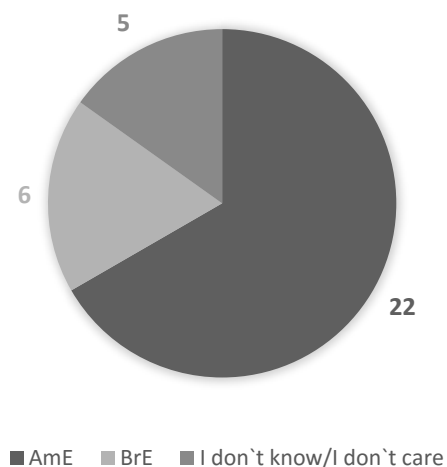


Figure 8: Learners' perception of the use of varieties of English

According to the test results, 19 learners mostly used Past Simple to complete sentences, correct or translate them. Only 9 learners used a larger number of Present Perfect forms and 5 learners used both of the verb forms in equal proportions. This is shown graphically in Figure 9.

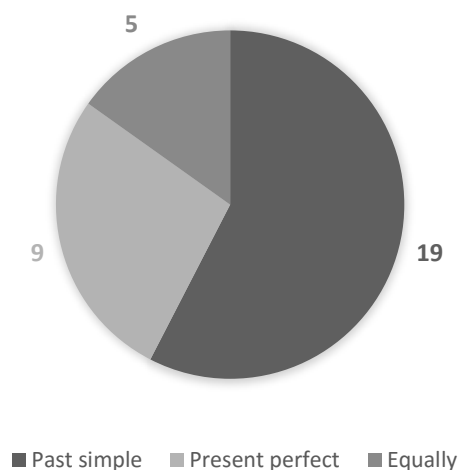


Figure 9: Learners' use of present perfect and past simple

Out of 22 learners who said that they used AmE, 14 used mostly Past Simple verb forms in the test. From those 22 learners, 4 used mostly Present Perfect and 4 learners used both Past Simple and Present Perfect equally. There were 6 learners who said in the survey that they used BrE. Present Perfect was used by 3 of those 6 learners, while Past Simple was used by 2 of those 6 learners. One learner used both forms equally. Also, 5 learners said that they did not know or did not care about what variety of English they used. The test results showed that 3 of those learners mostly used Past Simple and 2 of them used mostly Present Perfect. It is noticeable from these results that those learners who said that they used AmE actually used a larger number of Past Simple forms in sentences which contained time adverbials *yet*, *recently*, *just*, *already*, or *never*. Learners who had chosen BrE used Present Perfect in most cases. These results confirm what is suggested in many grammars: in BrE Present Perfect is required if time adverbials *yet*, *recently*, *just*, *already*, or *never* are present in the sentence, while in AmE it is common to use Past Simple. The results of the test used in this research are further discussed in the following part of this work.

The other aim of this research was to find out how much the media influence the choice of one variety of English and accordingly, the use of Past Simple or Present Perfect. It was really hard to answer this question since 31 learner said that they were often exposed to the media in overall, while only two learners said that they were sometimes exposed to the media. The results like these were expected. We are surrounded by different media every day and it is very difficult to spend even five minutes without hearing something in English. Learners were also asked to determine how often they were exposed to English

through some specific medium: the Internet, music, and TV. They were allowed to write down some other media they are exposed to, but that were not mentioned in the survey. Learners suggested: comics, books, radio, video games, and movies. The learners who suggested books and comics said that they used BrE. On the other hand, learners who suggested movies and video games said that they used AmE. This last result was somehow expected. Most of the movies Croatians watch are produced in the USA, show the American way of life and American people. It is thus normal that the learners would assume that they have acquired more of American English. If the learners' test results and their exposure to different media is compared, those learners who said that they were often exposed to TV, music, and movies mostly used Past Simple. Those learners who suggested books, comics, and radio used larger number of Present Perfect constructions. An interesting fact is that learners who mentioned that they were often exposed to books and comics in English used larger number of correct verb forms in the second task. The learners who said that they were often exposed to the English language through the Internet, TV, music, and video games solved the third task more successfully.

## **6. Error Analysis of Test Results**

### **6.1. Theoretical background**

Error analysis appeared in 1960s as a part of Second Language Acquisition. It was developed by S. P. Corder. Error analysis deals with errors and mistakes learners make while acquiring a foreign language. Error analysis is in Routledge Dictionary of Language and Linguistics defined as follow: "In second language acquisition, Error Analysis studies the types and causes of linguistic errors. This sometimes includes the evaluation and correction of errors." (Bussmann, 2006: 378) Error analysis can also be described as "the study of linguistic ignorance, the investigation of what people do not know and how they attempt to cope with their ignorance" (James, 1998: 62).

Within this discipline we can distinguish errors and mistakes. According to Ellis (2002) "[e]rrors reflect gaps in a learners knowledge; they occur because the learner does not know what is correct. Mistakes reflect occasional lapses in performance; they occur because, in a particular instance, the learner is unable to perform what he or she knows (17)." Among these two basic types of errors there are many other subtypes, e.g.

intralingual errors, interlingual errors, errors in performance, errors in competence, occasional errors, systematic errors, etc.

Investigating learners' errors and mistakes can help teachers understand the processes that happen while learners learn or acquire a foreign language. If teachers understand the sources of learners' errors and reasons why learners make them, they can try harder to correct these errors and help their learners to use English without fear of saying something wrong.

## 6.2. Error analysis

Since this research was conducted on the sample of high school learners of English, there are too many different factors which could have had influence beside the differences in the use of Present Perfect and Past Simple in AmE and BrE. One of these factors could be the fact that many of the learners are not sure how to build Present Perfect even after many years of learning English. Many learners still have problems with irregular verbs. Learners have to learn the list of irregular verbs organized in three columns (Infinitive, Past Simple, Past Participle) by heart and they should be able to repeat all three forms of one verb when it is demanded from them. Unfortunately, many of them forget which column which verb form is in, so they use a Past Simple form instead of the Past Participle form and vice versa.

In the first task learners were asked to choose one of the given verb forms according to which one sounds better to them. Among ten sentences in this task there were two control sentences. In these sentences there appeared time adverbials of specific time in the past and only one answer was correct. Those two sentences were: *Sam arrived in San Diego a week ago* and *She visited her grandmother last month*. Unfortunately, not all of the learners recognized this. In the Table 3 there are results which show how learners solved these two control sentences.

Table 3: Number of learners who correctly solved control sentences in the first task

Correct sentences	0	1	2
Number of learners	3	7	23

The second task in the test was actually a test task to find out if learners know how to recognize a wrong verb form and correct it. In Table 4 it is shown how many points learners got in this task out of the maximum of 5 points awarded for each corrected verb form.

*Table 4:* Number of learners by points scored in the second task

<b>Points</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Number of learners</b>	4	3	7	2	6	11

It is visible from this table that only 11 learners recognized all mistakes and corrected them in the right way. Other learners either failed to recognize the mistakes or failed to use the correct verb form. In Table 5 there are listed the numbers of learners who failed to recognize mistakes, who did not manage to correct mistakes, or who failed to do both. The learners who scored 5 points, i.e. recognized all the mistakes, are excluded from these results.

*Table 5:* Number of learners by the type of the incorrect answer in the second task

	<b>Number of learners</b>
<b>Did not recognize</b>	9
<b>Wrong form</b>	4
<b>Both</b>	9

Not all of the learners did the same mistake for the same sentences. Some learners recognized mistakes, but failed to correct them, while others did not recognize those mistakes. In the following table there are results for each one of the five sentences from this task.

*Table 6:* Results for each sentence from the second task

	<b>1.</b>	<b>2.</b>	<b>3.</b>	<b>4.</b>	<b>5.</b>
<b>Correct</b>	22	18	20	21	21

<b>Not recognized</b>	6	7	7	8	6
<b>Wrong form</b>	5	8	6	4	6

Table 6 shows that a large number of learners actually did solve each of the sentences correctly. Each of the sentences was correct in more than 55% of the cases. The sentence that caused the most difficulties is the second sentence which sounds *He has just ate*. Those eight learners who recognized the mistake, did not know the correct form of verb *eat*. The other problematic sentence was the fourth sentence *Did you phoned her?* Eight learners did not even recognize that this sentence is somehow wrong. This can lead to the conclusion that some of the learners cannot recognize mistakes when they have been made and potentially self-correct them. If they cannot recognize them, it may also mean that they have not learned the rules completely and that they cannot apply these rules in practice. It is also surprising that the number of the mistakes that were not recognized is in most cases higher than the number of the recognized, but not corrected mistakes.

The third task in this test was to translate five sentences from Croatian into English. The sentences were relatively simple and the learners had to use simple vocabulary which is actually used in everyday speech. Although the sentences are not that difficult, the learners had some problems with this task. There were 31 learners who wrote translations for all five sentences, but only 21 managed to translate all sentences more or less correctly. Even in those translations some of the words were misspelled or their word order was not completely correct. In Table 7 there are some of the errors and the number of times these errors occurred.

*Table 7: Mistakes made by learners in the third task*

<b>Misspelled words</b>	9
<b>Wrong verb form</b>	27
<b>Wrong word</b>	18
<b>Word order</b>	6

As it can be seen, wrong verb forms are the most common errors learners make. In the most of the cases the learners used Past Simple instead of Past Participle, which is evidence that they have not learned all of the forms correctly. In a large number of cases learners used the structure *did+ verb+ed*. When it comes to this structure, it can be

assumed that learners overuse the rule for the past simple. If all of these results are analyzed, it may be assumed that those errors are real errors and not mistakes. Many learners used wrong structure in more than one sentence. This would mean that it was not a mistake, but rather an error since the rule has not been learned completely or it is overused.

Wrong words occurred often, but they did not change the meaning of the sentence. The most common mistake was *kino* instead of *cinema* or *movies*. Some of the learners used *Spanish* instead of *Spain*.

The words that were misspelled were mostly time adverbials *recently* and *already*. In some sentences appeared *her* instead of *here*. Although some errors occurred, they can hardly be considered real errors. They are merely mistakes. These mistakes could have occurred in the hurry or because something like this test was not expected.

## **7. Conclusion**

This research showed that the learners of English in high school prefer American English, according to both their perception and their test results. The possible reasons for this are numerous. Some of the learners could probably be aware of the difference in the use of Present Perfect and Past Simple with the two varieties and may have used a particular tense form because of this. Some of the learners are maybe not sure how to build Present Perfect and for this reason reach for Past Simple which is far less complicated. In this case the simplification method could be considered as one of the forces behind the process. When it comes to the choice of one of the varieties, many of the learners probably first think of the British accent when they hear or read “British English” and relate only that to British English. They are not accustomed to using this accent, so they might have chosen American English as the preferred variety. Also, the influence of the media plays a great role in this decision. As the results showed, learners who are exposed to the media more frequently chose American English.

Through the media we are exposed to American TV shows and movies much more than to the British ones. Since Americans promote their culture through TV shows and movies, they will also promote their type of language. Other interesting thing is that participants use British course books (New Matrix, Oxford) in their classes and still use American English more frequently. The results of this research could be useful for the error analysis, which investigates errors made by learners while they learn a foreign language. Since learners are taught to use Present Perfect with adverbs *yet*, *never*, *already*, and *just*, which is typical for British English, there may be many errors in revision tests if learners actually preferred American English, which uses Past Simple with mentioned time adverbs. Because of this, EFL teachers should consider introducing some of the American course books in their classes. Another solution would be that they should take both tenses into consideration when correcting revision tests concerning this grammatical item or instruct their students about the use of Past Simple and Present Perfect in different varieties of English.

## **Sažetak**

Američki i britanski engleski su dvije najpoznatije te ujedno i najrasprostranjenije varijante engleskog jezika. One se razlikuju u nekoliko područja: izgovoru, rječniku, gramatici. Polazna točka ovoga rada su razlike u korištenju glagolskih vremena *past simple* i *present perfect* uz pojedine vremenske priloge (*yet*, *since*, *just*, *never*, *recently*). Prethodna istraživanja su pokazala da govornici američkog engleskog češće koriste *past simple* uz navedene vremenske priloge dok govornici britanskog engleskog koriste *present perfect* u istim situacijama.

Kako bi otkrili koju varijantu engleskog jezika koriste učenici engleskog jezika u srednjim školama, provedeno je istraživanje. To istraživanje je pokazalo da se učenici češće odlučuju za američki engleski. Istraživanje je također pokazalo da učenici većinom koriste *past simple* uz vremenske priloge *yet*, *since*, *just*, *never*, i *recently*. Rezultati ovog istraživanja mogu pomoći



učiteljima kako bi utvrdili razloge za pojedine greške koje učenici rade tijekom usvajanja *present perfecta*.

Ključne riječi: američki engleski, britanski engleski, present perfect, past simple, analiza pogrešaka

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## Appendix 1

Differences in AmE and BrE vocabulary (Stevens, 1975:102)

British English	American English
autumn	fall
bed-sitter	one-room apartment
biscuits (dry)	crackers
biscuits (sweet)	cookies
block of flats	apartment building
bobby	policeman
bonnet (of car)	hood (of car)
boot (of car)	trunk (of car)
braces	suspenders (man`s)
caravan	house-trailer
caretaker	janitor
carrier bag	shopping bag

chemist (in a shop)	pharmacist, druggist
chips	French fries
clearing bank	commercial bank
coach	(long distance) bus
cooker	stove
corn	wheat
cot	crib
cotton	thread
cotton wool	absorbent cotton
crisps	potato chips
crossroads	intersection
directory enquiries	information
drawing pin	thumbtack
dual carriageway	divided highway
dummy	pacifier
dustbin	garbage can, trash can
dust-cart	garbage truck
dynamo	generator
elementary school	grade school, primary school
engine	motor
estate agent	realtor
film	movie
first floor	second floor
flat	apartment
flyover	overpass
gear lever	shift stick
gentleman`s hairdresser	barber
give way (traffic sign)	yield
ground floor	first floor
gym-shoes	sneakers
hair grip	bobby pin
headmaster	school principal
hoarding	billboard
holidays	vacation
hood (of open car)	top (of convertible)
ill	sick
interval	intermission
jug	pitcher
knickers	panties
ladies` hairdresser	beauty parlor
lay-by	emergency roadside parking
lift	elevator
lorry	truck
maths	math
motor car	automobile, car
motor caravan	camper
motorway	expressway, parkway, highway, etc.
mudguard, wing	fender

nappy	diaper
off-licence	retail liquor store
opposite number	counterpart
optician, oculist	optometrist
pants (i.e. underpants)	shorts (men`s)
pavement	sidewalk
petrol	gas, gasoline
the picture, the cinema	the movies
post	mail
postgraduate student	graduate student
public house	bar
public lavatory	rest room, comfort station
public school	private school
puncture, flat tyre	flat
push-chair	baby stroller
to queue	to stand in line
railway	railroad
repair	fix
return (ticket)	roundtrip
rise	raise (in salary)
roller blind	window shade
roundabout	traffic circle
rubbish	garbage, trash
serviette	napkin
shop assistant	salesgirl
silencer	muffler
suspenders (men`s, women`s)	braces (for men), garters (for women)
sweet	desert
sweets	candies
tap	faucet, spigot
taxi	cab
tea towel	dish towel
toilet	lavatory
torch	flashlight
tram	streetcar
trousers	pants
the Tube	subway
van	truck
vest	undershirt, T-shirt
waistcoat	vest
waste paper	trash
windscreen	windshield
zebra crossing	pedestrian crossing
zip	zipper

## Appendix 2

*Draga učenice/Dragi učenice!*

*Pred tobom se nalazi upitnik koji je dio istraživanja koje provodim u svrhu polaganja kolegija Istraživanje u nastavi engleskog jezika te izradu diplomskog rada.*

*Upitnik je anonimn.*

*Molim te da popuniš cijeli upitnik.*

*Hvala na sudjelovanju!*

Spol: \_\_\_\_

Godine: \_\_\_\_

Koliko godina učiš engleski jezik? (upisati broj godina) \_\_\_\_

Ocjena iz engleskog jezika: \_\_\_\_

Koji udžbenik koristite u nastavi engleskog jezika? \_\_\_\_\_

Na slijedeće pitanje odgovori zaokruživanjem broja uz tvrdnju koja se odnosi na tebe.

1 – rijetko    2 – ponekad    3 - često

Koliko si često izložen/a engleskom jeziku putem medija?                    1            2            3

Na slijedeće pitanje odgovori upisivanjem broja tvrdnje koja se odnosi na tebe na za to predviđeno mjesto.

1 – rijetko    2 – ponekad    3 - često

Putem kojih medija si izložen/a engleskom jeziku?

TV \_\_\_\_

Glazba \_\_\_\_

Internet \_\_\_\_

Nešto drugo? (upisati što) \_\_\_\_\_

Na slijedeća pitanja odgovori zaokruživanjem broja ispred tvrdnje koja se odnosi na tebe.

1 – nikada    2 – u principu ne    3 – ne znam/svejedno mi je    4 – većinom da    5 - uvijek

Koristim američki engleski.                    1            2            3            4            5

Koristim britanski engleski.                    1            2            3            4            5

### 1. Choose the answer which sounds more natural.

1. A: Is Samantha here?

B: No, she \_\_\_\_\_.

a) just left

b) has just left

2. Jenny feels ill. She \_\_\_\_\_ too much.

a) ate

b) has eaten

3. \_\_\_\_\_ the golf team yet?

a) did they pick

b) have they picked





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3. Nikad nismo bili u Španjolskoj.

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4. Samo sam ju vidjela, ali ju nisam pozdravila.

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5. Jeste li išli nedavno u kino?

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