

NARVA COLLEGE of the UNIVERSITY of TARTU

DIVISION of FOREIGN LANGUAGES

Aleksandra Burkova

THE USE OF THE PAST SIMPLE AND THE PRESENT PERFECT  
TENSES IN BRITISH AND AMERICAN ENGLISH ON THE BASIS OF  
ELECTRONIC PRINT MEDIA

*Bachelor's thesis*

Supervisor: MA. O.Orehhova

NARVA 2013

## **PREFACE**

Nowadays there are different varieties of the English language. British and American Englishes are the main types that are used and researched. The differences between the two varieties are usually the basis for such research.

The present paper is dedicated to studying particular cases of using the Past Simple and the Present Perfect tenses in British and American English. The research is held on the basis of electronic print media for various target groups and on different topics.

The research paper is divided into The Introduction, two chapters and The Conclusion. The Introduction provides an overview of the electronic print media and its peculiarities. Chapter I demonstrates basic differences between American and British English, especially grammar and particular examples of the use of tenses. It also includes an overview of the previous research on grammatical differences between British and American English. Chapter II presents a corpus analysis on the basis of different electronic print media sources and discusses results of the analysis. The Conclusion sums up the results of the research and comments on the hypothesis.

<b>PREFACE</b> .....	2
<i>Contents</i>	
<b>INTRODUCTION</b> .....	4
<b>1. CHAPTER I.</b>	
1.1 British and American English.....	7
1.2. Basic differences between British and American English.....	7
1.3 Previous observation of the differences between British and American English.....	8
1.4 English Tenses in British and American Grammar Books.....	9
<b>2. CHAPTER II. Discussion of Empirical Research</b>	
2.1 The Method of the Research.....	13
2.2 The Sample of the Research.....	15
2.3 Discussion of the Data analysis.....	17
<b>CONCLUSION</b> .....	22
<b>REFERENCES</b> .....	24
<b>RESÜMEE</b> .....	26

## INTRODUCTION

Our world is the world of high technologies, new scientific findings, world of information and developed international communications. Nowadays society is nearly living in the net of mass media that provides us with different facts from absolutely various spheres of life and has a great impact on the society.

The need for spreading of information appeared already in earlier civilizations and led to emergence of the first media. They were presented as large white boards displayed in popular places and usually contained information about government scandals, military campaigns, trials and executions, says *World Association of Newspapers*. Transferring of information by means of media was very important just like in our epoch of globalization. (*World association of Newspaper, 2004: para:5*)

The mass media can be divided into print and electronic media. Both are the ways of receiving information required. “The main goals of media are to inform, entertain and educate people” (ibid. para 8).

The print media can be defined as a piece of information printed on paper. It involves newspapers, magazines, books. Electronic media, however, cover all the modern technologies and gadgets such as a TV-set, Internet, radio. In contrast to traditional media it may have visual or audial support. Electronic media may also include printed sources but the main difference is that they are presented on the computer, telephone or other electronic device display.

“The earliest “newspaper” recorded was *Acta Diurna*. It appeared around 59 B.C. in Rome and barely reminded modern newspapers until the invention of Johann Gutenberg in 1447, the printing press” (*World Association of Newspaper, 2004: para 2*).

“Other ways of electronic transmission of information started its developing only after the invention of the telegraph by S. Morse in 1834” (Morse, 1914: para 7).

Radio was introduced in 1895, the telephone appeared in 1876, television – in 1927 and early computers in 1942.

Hence, in the middle of the 19-th century the primary means of disseminating and receiving information were definitely newspapers. The “Golden Age” of print media takes its beginning around 1890-s and lasts up to 1920-s. (*World Association of Newspaper, 2004: para 6*)

Electronic print media comparing to traditional printed appeared much later. “The first electronic source, a web site, was created in 1991” (Blum: para1).

Nowadays traditional print media, however, is partially substituted by electronic print media. Technological revolution caused the birth of thousands of online sources. And there are some reasons for them becoming so popular.

Electronic media can be characterized as more convenient, first of all. “Modern devices of communication allow to find information you are interested in rather quickly. Moreover, it is available any time if you need to get information instantly” (*Electronic Media Evaluation*, 2013: para 6).

“Fast access to a great amount of sites caused American Newspaper circulation decrease. It dropped from one newspaper for every two adults to one to every three adults” (*World Association of Newspaper*, 2004: para 9)

A short statistics registered from 2009 to 2012 implies that people spend only about 2 hours a week on reading a newspaper or a magazine, while Internet consuming takes about 20 hours a week. It highlights how popular the new media has become and how important it is to pay attention to it (Nielsen 2012)

Obviously, there are some differences between print and electronic print media. First of all, there is a certain difference in the style of languages. Printed newspapers, for example, as a rule have strict structure and formal language, whereas in electronic sources there is more freedom in the use of language and presentation of information. It is possible to see a lot of contractions and abbreviations as well as audio-visual content and links to other sources because electronics has more functions initially. In electronic print media there may be also seen more emotional state for the language use is more expressive.

However, print media has its own big privilege – it is usually considered the most reliable and detailed source.

No matter the plausibility, new online reading adherents appear every day. “According to the facts, a lot of newspapers are available only online now for it is difficult for them to compete with electronic media.” (Velmakina 2012) Thus, there are plenty online sources throughout the informational net.

It must be also noted that the majority of online sources are in the English language. And there is a clear explanation of such phenomenon. It is logical the majority of information is presented in the language that is proclaimed international. A lot of people speak English as their native or second/foreign language and study English at schools, so a valuable part of information exists precisely in English.

Speaking of the English language, it must be marked that it has different varieties. The variation is mostly connected with regional location and cultural peculiarities. American English and British English are two main varieties that have a great number of speakers. Certainly, both English varieties have definite similarities and differences, and a lot of researchers are devoted to such topic, especially to finding differences between the varieties.

The *British Council* website (2013) also points out general notable differences. “Spelling, vocabulary and grammar are the first that have contrast in American and British English. Although people can understand each other rather well, some cases of language usage may be considered as incorrect or even impolite if you are not aware of it.”

There are definitely a lot of researches conveying both grammatical and vocabulary differences but the present paper is aimed at finding out whether there are differences in the use of tenses in British and American English, particularly in the use of the Past Simple and the Present Perfect tenses, on the basis of electronic print media.

The research is not only connected with the popularity of electronic print media but is also directed on revealing peculiarities that language of print media may have in the United Kingdom and in the United States of America with the accent on the use of tenses.

The findings of the present research may help to improve the language knowledge of English learners, to enlighten some linguistic aspects and to get a clearer and more up-to-date picture of English varieties in reality. The discovery of particular cases of tense usage will help prevent rude mistakes that may cause uncomfortable situations and will help in further translations made from English.

The research held is also very important because, to my surprise, I have not been able to find exactly the same investigations registered before what gives special relevance to the present research. Language data is collected by means of conducting a corpus analysis of the articles taken from British and American electronic print media. All the analyzed sources are targeted at different audience and on different topics what allows to broaden the scope of the research.

## CHAPTER I

### 1.1 American and British English

Every language is the system of symbols and signals aimed at cooperation among the particular individuals. At the same time, every language has specific features distinguishing it from any other language in the world. Even the world of animals and insects use their own system of communication, their own language.

English is the language that has its definite peculiarities too. “It belongs to Germanic branch of Indo-European family.” “First arrived in Britain to its current status of the world language” (Crystal 2002: 161). English has got a great history that influenced the language and changed it. “Cultural and geographical impact made it possible to categorize into different varieties of English – Australian English, New Zealand English, Canadian English, Indian English, Irish English, etc.” (ibid: 88)

There is one historical factor that influenced English considerably. “It dates from 1607, when the first permanent English settlement was founded near the Chesapeake Bay” (ibid: 242) It gave the beginning to American English that is often discussed in comparison with British English nowadays. “Geographical origin is usually identified by the way speaker pronounce words and sentences. ” It is called accent. “Dialects, however, have variations in grammar, vocabulary, and spelling” (ibid: 88) Hence, American English and British English nowadays are the two main varieties of English language that are commonly used. And as mentioned above, there are some noticeable differences between the language varieties.

### 1.2 Basic Differences Between American and British English

According to David Crystal (2002), there are no researches conveying all the differences, but a lot of them are well known among the people.

“First af all, there are several words pronounced differently. For example the word *Schedule* in American English is pronounces with first *sk* letters, in British English it begins with *sh* consonants. Such contrasts are rather frequent and must be taken into consideration in language use” (ibid: 264)

Spelling is another aspect that American and British English have differences in. American word *color*, for instance, has got analogy in British-*colour*, in British we say enclose, whereas in American- inclose (ibid: 266).

There is also a great amount of words that are different in their meanings. For example, a very popular word *pants* in American English means *trousers*, and the meaning from British English stands for *underpants*.(Ibid: 268)

Colossal difference in some cases may lead to unpleasant situation. That is why people should learn and improve their language all their life long.

Grammatical differences are one of the main factors that have influence on English learning and are also presented in comparison between the Englishes. “Mostly, it is connected with the usage of prepositions, auxiliary verbs, pronouns, adjectives, adverbs, tense and subjunctive mood” (ibid: 88). That is why it is sensible to examine previous works dedicated to grammatical peculiarities of English varieties.

### **1.3 Previous Observation of the Differences between British and American English**

Bin Zhang (2008) a Chinese student from Guangxi Administrative School, tried to examine possible differences on the basis of his own teaching experience and on the experience he got in the United Kingdom.

The result of his survey shows that British English differs from American in word spelling, idioms, and in a number of expressions. Distinguishing such cases will prevent further troubles or misunderstanding, in his opinion.

The very first grammatical difference we may see is the past tense of some verbs. American people use participle *gotten* whereas British people say *got*. The verb to have is “tricky” too. In British English it is better to ask “*have you got any children?*” comparing to American variant “*do you have any children?*” Another distinguished feature is the use of prepositions. When British English requires particular preposition, American English may easily omit it without any change of meaning. For example, it is normal to say in the United States “*I will see you Monday*”, however British English variety insist on using the preposition “*on*”- “*I will see you on Monday*”

It is also mentioned that the use of articles, nouns, and subjunctive mood is not similar in the varieties too what makes English learners to be even more cautious.

As the present paper is intended to find out differences in the use of tenses between the two varieties of the English language, Bin Zhang's observations concerning the topic should be taken into account.

It is said that the main difference can be seen in expressing the event that has just happened.

“British English usually uses present perfect tense, such as “I have just seen your brother” and “I have already eaten.” However, American English adopts the past tense, such as “I just saw your brother” and “I already ate.” Here we must add that the adverbs “yet” and “already” in British English are used only in the Present Perfect tense, while American English allow using these adverbs both in the past simple and present perfect tenses.

A short observation by the author does not give the full picture of the present grammatical differences between the forms of English. But it touches the most commonly used ways of expressing the idea of past events in English.

#### **1.4 English Tenses in British and American Grammar Books**

Definitely, it is not easy to mention all the similarities and differences in the language varieties, however we may take a look at what is implied by nowadays English grammar books from the United States of America and from the United Kingdom. It will give us the opportunity to compare whether there are any differences or not.

A review of the English tense system by Patricia Wilcox Petersen (2008) titled *Changing Times, Changing Tenses* will be taken as an example of an American grammar book. It will be compared with the British grammar book called *Advanced Learner's Grammar*, written by Mark Foley and Diane Hall (2003). The books were chosen because of its relevance to the topic of the research and good demonstration of the examples of the use of tenses.

The American textbook tells that the Present Perfect tense is used in two cases. First of all, it is used when the action was completed before the present time and has an effect on the present situation. For example, the sentence “*I have lost my job*” means that it has just happened and, ofcourse, the event will have some impact on the present.

Another case of use is to show that an activity or a state has continued for a period of time from the point in the past until present. But the action is not completed, it is still continuing. The length of time is the most important here.

For example, “*they have visited each other every day for fifteen years*”, as the book implies, shows the frequency and the duration. The action was repeated for some time, and it still continues. Such sentence emphasizes the long period of the action.

The British textbook presents the following cases of the use of the Present Perfect tense:

1. To talk about states that started in the past and still continuing in the present. The sentence “ This hospital *has stood* here over 70 years ” , for instance, is a good example the use of the tense if the hospital is still there;
2. To talk about actions that happened in the past but may happen again in the future (once or more). For example, “NASA *has sent* probes to various planets in the solar system” (and may send more) ;
3. The Present Perfect tense is used after superlatives. For example, “It was *the best* shot I *have ever seen*”;
4. Is used with a number of adverbs like: ever, often, seldom, never, so far, already, yet, still. “I *have never seen* such beauty”, for example;
5. To talk about completed action in the past that has relevance to the present;
6. To talk about recent actions;
7. Together with the following adverbs : just, recently, lately;
8. When the time is indefinite. (“ Mr. Brown *has arrived*”);
9. News broadcasts use the Present Perfect tense to introduce a story before moving into past tenses (“Former zookeeper *has died* at the age of 50 in his flat”);
10. To introduce a new topic in conversation (“ I *have heard* from Maurice that.. ”);
11. In time clauses (e.g. after, when) with future reference (“we will make a move *as soon as* the rain *has stopped*”).

If we take a look at the remarks of the Chinese student and compare it with the two textbooks mentioned above, we may see that recent events are not used with the Present Perfect tense in American English. This aspect was not also mentioned in the textbook by Patricia Wilcox Petersen (2008) what only proves the previous observations and investigations. Moreover, in American English it is normal to say about recent events in the Past Simple, often using the adverbs “already” and “yet” says Bin Zhang. British

textbook tells, however, that these adverbs are used only with the Present Perfect tense what may highlight the difference between British and American English. American grammar book implies that these time markers are rather common for American English.

We may also notice that the cases of the use of the Present Perfect tense in American and British English have some similarities. Both Englishes use the Present Perfect to show a repeated action happening for a long period of time that is not completed in the present, and to talk about completed actions in the past that have important impact on the present.

The use of the Past Simple also has got some differences in British and American English. The description of the tenses published in the United States identifies the following principles of use of the Past Simple tense:

1. To describe 1 completed action in the past (“He *arrived* two days ago”);
2. To tell about events that happen quickly, one right after the other (“he *came back*, *took* his hat and *went out* again”);
3. To describe a period of time in the past, which began and ended in the past. (“Dinosaurs *ruled* the earth”);
4. Describe repeated, habitual actions for a period in the past (“Sometimes dry periods *lasted* for many years. Then winds *came along* and *blew* the good land away. This *happened* year after year”).

If we take a look at the rules of use of the Past Simple tense in the British textbook, we will point out following cases:

1. To describe single completed actions in the past;
2. To describe two actions at the same time (“At the museum I *took* the left turn while Micky *took* the right”);
3. To describe repeated actions (“My brother *applied* for a visa six times before he got one”);
4. To show sequence of actions;
5. To describe states in the past (“We *lived* just outside Oxford in the nineties, but we *did not have* a car”).

Comparing these rules from the textbooks, we may find a lot of similarities no matter their “origin”. Perhaps, it shows that the use of the Past Simple tense according to the American and British textbooks is more or less the same. However, the research by the

Chinese student also tells us about other use of the tense with adverbs in American English which is not mentioned here.

On the whole, it is still can be seen that tenses in British and American English differ from each other. It particularly concerns the Present Perfect tense. It must be connected with the fact that either American textbook does not have such long and exact list of the use of the tense, or American English is rather scarce in the use of the Present Perfect.

The present paper will try to describe any differences found in use of the tenses above on the basis of the magazines and newspapers printed electronically. Such attempt is intended to clear up the use of tenses in our modern world of high technologies.

## **CHAPTER 2. Discussion of Empirical Research**

The present chapter is a practical part of the thesis and it is intended to describe the process of an empirical research into the use of English and analyse the results of the data. The empirical research will allow whether to confirm or refute the hypothesised differences of use of the tenses in American and British English, particularly of the use of the Present Perfect tense and the Past Simple tense. The research is held on the basis of electronic print media and the analysis itself is conducted by means of corpus analysis. The comparative analysis of the use of the tenses will be demonstrated in charts with the further explanations and comments.

### **2.1 The method of the research**

As the present paper is aimed at finding out whether there are differences in the use of the Past Simple and Present Perfect tenses in British and American English, the research will be made on the basis of texts. These texts, in their turn, will be analysed by means of corpus analysis. Actually, "Corpus" is identified as a "collection of naturally occurring language texts, chosen to characterise a state or variety of a language" (Sinclair, 1991). Corpus analysis means "computer assisted analysis for studying texts" (Li-Shih Huang 2011)

The method chosen is rather often used by philologists in order to conduct an important research within linguistics but also, definitely, can be applied in translations, literature, pedagogy or sociology as the concordance program is not difficult to use. Also, It does not mean that oral speech cannot be analyzed by such method, it just implies a compulsory printing of the conversation appeared on the computer in order to create a corpus – "a mass of structured, unitized electronic data that includes different information not only about the content and structure of the material but also others formalized methods of its presenting like morphological information or letters indexing" (Nagel 2004).

The analysis itself is held on the basis of the corpus gathered due to electronic software that has a particular "language competence, contextually correct use of different language registers" (ibid. para 7), which became available with technological growth around the world.

The present research is held by means of the KWIC software. The capital letters stand for the acronym of the free software called Key Word in Context. It is “a computer-generated index alphabetized on a keyword that appears within a brief context” (*Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary*, 2013).

KWIC is a “corpus analytical tool for making word frequency lists, concordances and collocation tables by using electronic files” (*KWIC Concordance for Windows*, para 1). Moreover, it concerns the place of the key word within the text and tries to structure it in all the possible ways the software is only capable of what makes the analysis even more valuable from the point of view of changes happening in the language. Another advantage of the method chosen in the present research is that “corpus data suggest that individuals often do not use language as specified in grammar books and that word meanings vary across contexts and users” (Biber, Reppen 2002). It will create a clearer picture of the research held with reliable results in charts. To highlight the relevance of the corpus analysis we may pay our attention to the fact that it can discover “aspects that are often missed by qualitative approaches” and “often generate new insight into the underlying themes and threads in various fields” (Krishnamurthy R., 2001). So, corpus analysis is presented as very fast in terms of processing speed, it produces detailed and maybe even specific analysis, not general one, and it has a simple fully documented tool to make the research needed quickly. These are perfect conditions for the present research. (ibid. para 5)

To conduct a proper research by the comparison of the corpora, we should understand that texts must be relevant from the point of the research aim. It means that if the research is concentrated on finding frequency of slang words and expressions among the people aged 14 to 18, the electronic data must be prepared including the query. If the query is more complicated then you have to be even more cautious in corpus selection not to make the research senseless. The research may be complicated by the gender factor, for instance, it means that the corpus should be gathered not only including the age of young people, but it also must be prepared separately between young boys and girls for the further comparative analysis.

## 2.2 The Sample of the Research

As the present paper aimed at finding differences in the use of the tenses in British and American English, there were particular criteria established for the newspapers' choice:

1. Time of publishing

First of all, it is important to select newspapers approximately of the same time of publishing in order not to influence the research results by time differences.

As all the electronic sources are usually dated, corpus will be made of the latest one.

2. Newspaper circulation

Another factor that must be considered is the range of spreading of the newspaper. It will be wise to compare as local publishing of some particular areas of the countries, and newspapers of country-wide spreading in the United States of America and in the Great Britain.

3. Different age

4. Different sexes

To conduct a good research and make it more valuable it is possible to make an attempt of comparing the use of the tenses between the sexes. To achieve such aim there must be chosen, for example, popular women's and men's magazines from both countries that is going to be presented later in the research.

5. Different topics

Another possible criterion is the content of the source. Here we should take into account different interests that are often connected with the particular age group. To compare any potential differences there must sources targeted at young people (fashion, trends, style, travelling), grown up people (politics, economics, sociology, science) and older people ( health, gardening).

Out of the principles mentioned above, for the research were chosen the following newspapers and magazines:

1. American sources: The New York Times, Washington Post, USA Today, Car and Driver, Food Processing, Cosmopolitan;
2. British sources: The Independent, The Guardian, The Telegraph, Car Magazine, Food Magazine, Glamour

The next thing that should be done is the selection of the articles included in the newspapers and magazines. In order to make it properly there must be also definite conditions that articles should answer to. The main principles of choice are the following:

1. Different topics

One of the criteria is analysis of different topics. The newspapers that have a circulation within the whole country are usually separated according to the main topics such as sport, culture, politics, travelling etc. So, the research is going to be held by turning to every sphere of life that is covered in the sources taken from both countries.

2. Time of publishing

It is important not to take outdated newspapers and magazines for the research value and the date of the article should be recent and marked clearly. The period of publishing of the articles taken for the analysis was maximally reduced to get a clear situation of the use of the English language, particularly the use of the tenses.

3. The size

Another principle that would narrow the amount of suitable articles is their size. Certainly, there would be no exact and strict borders that every article should have but generally they should be of the same length, about one and a half pages presented in Microsoft Office Word. The approximate size of the articles will not allow influence the frequency index which is also important in the research.

4. Location of the article

As mentioned previously the research is held on printed electronic media and the priority will be given to those articles that are found on the first page of every electronic source. Firstly, because there are presented the latest articles and what is more important the most popular with people at the present time.

On the whole, there were chosen twenty six articles all in all – 13 out of American sources, and 13 from British sources, where there were two articles selected from every source, and 3 articles from Cosmopolitan and Glamour magazines as there were presented shorter pieces of writing.

The further actions included converting of the collected articles into separate text files and putting them into the KWIC concordance program. Next step was to find all the

cases of the use of the Present Perfect and Past Simple tenses, what was achieved by inserting key words into a special query column of the same program.

The main key words in the query were “have” and “has” as to find the collocation with Present Perfect tenses. In order to find all the Past Simple tense used, the ending “-ed” was inserted as a sign of the past form of the verb.

Concerning the fact that British and American English have irregular verbs, it was not enough to look only at regular verbs. So, besides “-ed” ending there were also inserted all the irregular verbs in its second form as it is used in cases of the Past Simple.

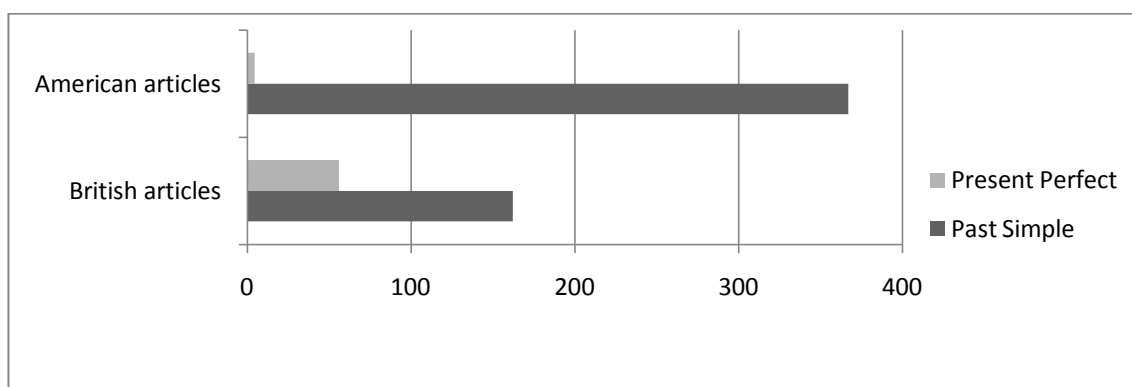
After the data were presented by the program it was necessary to filter out inappropriate to the present analysis collocations as the program aimed at finding any possible variants of the key words in the text, as mentioned above.

When all the important data were collected, it became possible to make the first comparison charts showing the difference in frequency of the tenses used between the varieties and to clear up the exact principles of choosing between the two.

### **2.3 Discussion of the Data Analysis**

As the analysis of the articles was conducted, we are able to proceed to comparative analysis of the use of tenses in British and American English.

First of all, there can be seen obvious difference in the amount of Past Simple used between the American and British articles. General number of the cases of the Past Simple found in the American articles reaches 367, while the number in the British is equal to 162, which is half as many. If to take a look at the use of the Present Perfect tense in the two Englishes, there is also definite difference. British articles included Present Perfect tense 56 times, which is also twice more comparing with American articles, where the Present Perfect tense was found only 26 times. Such results may allow us to make an initial conclusion that would imply that there are some differences in the use of the tenses. Presumably, the minimization of the use of the Present Perfect tense in American sources is connected with the difference of some particular cases where British sources used to use the Past Simple, what will be later checked and discussed. A great amount of the Past Simple tense in American articles is also may be considered, supposedly, as a sign that the Present Perfect tense may be substituted by the Past Simple in American English. What also will be analyzed later in order to clarify the present condition of the language in the USA and the UK.



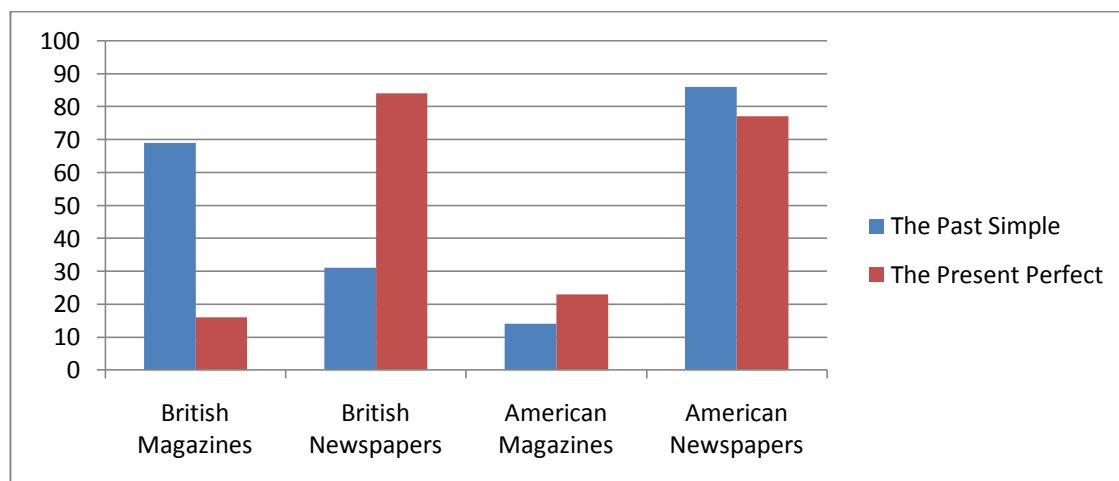
*Chart 1. The amount of the Past Simple and Present Perfect tenses used in British and American newspapers and magazines*

Besides general comparison, there was also made comparison considering the age and sex factors. It showed that the Present Perfect tense in American sources was mainly used in the newspapers that has wide circulation and aimed at wider audience, whereas articles from the specific magazines on different topics and age included only 6 examples of the Present Perfect out of 26: 3 from car magazines, 1 from food magazine and 2 from youth magazines, what is about 23 per cent.

British articles showed approximately the same picture of the use of the Present Perfect – the main concentration of the tense was also found mostly in the state newspapers – out of the 56 cases marked only 8 examples were found within the specific magazines. Car magazines included 2 examples, food magazines- 4 examples, and youth magazine – 2 examples, what is about 16 per cent.

The obvious difference in the use of the tenses among the age groups was not identified, just as between the sexes. However, we may suppose that newspapers contains more examples of the Present Perfect tense just because it can be thought to cover broader topics of general interest and recent events and are intended more for grown up people, what allow us to think and check one more time whether there is a connection with the age groups or not. If to take a look at the use of the Past Simple tense, we may see that in American sources it is mostly used in the newspapers- out of the 367 cases only 54 of them were found within the specific magazines, which is about 14 per cent. British specific magazines included 39 examples of the use of the Past Simple what is about 69 percents of the whole cases identified.

The chart below clearly shows that British newspapers, for instance, use the Past Simple tense not so intensively as American newspapers, paying more attention on the Present Perfect tense. At the same time, we may notice that the Past Simple in British magazines in its ratio to American magazines seem more preferable to use as there is definite difference in percentage.



*Chart 2. Differences in use of the Past Simple and Present Perfect within the British and American newspapers and magazines*

After performing quantitative analysis there is a need to turn to qualitative analysis in order to understand the peculiarities of the use of both tenses in the USA and the UK and compare them on the basis of the grammar books mentioned earlier.

Starting with the analysis of the Present Perfect tense we found out the following:

As the American grammar book implied two cases of the use of the Present Perfect, we tried to look through all the cases found in American sources and check it. It showed that the articles really have cases of the use of the Present Perfect when the action was completed before the present time and has an effect on present situation, there were 9 such examples presented in the sources. For example: “Businesses like Pinterest and MakerBot have grown out of hacker spaces..”

There were also found cases of use of the Present Perfect to show that an activity or a state has continued for a period of time from the point in the past until present, but action is not completed, it is still continuing. There were 8 examples registered. For instance: “...the hunger strike has long been a political weapon...”

However, there were identified other cases, where the Present Perfect is used.

The following are examples of talking of recent actions, 6 cases, and examples of talking about actions that happened in the past but may happen again in the future - 3 cases. For example:

1. “North Korea has sentenced a Korean American to 15 years of hard labor for unspecified "hostile acts" against the state...”
2. “The hunger strike has also reopened a debate about whether it is ethical for medical personnel at Guantanamo Bay...”

So, we may see that the use of the tenses is not completely depicted and registered in American grammar books, but there are cases that are registered in British grammar books, what means there are more similar situations, when British and American people use the Present Perfect contradictory to the information stated in the book. There is also discrepancy with the research conducted by Bin Zhang, who says that American English speakers do not use the Present Perfect to talk about recent actions, events.

After the detailed analysis of the British sources it became clear that there are more situations when British people use the Present Perfect tense comparing to American. The Present Perfect used to show that the action was completed before the present time and has an effect on present situation was found 19 times, to show that an activity or a state has continued for a period of time from the point in the past until present, where action is not completed and is still continuing, was found 20 times. Also, there were examples of the use of the tense to talk about recent actions – 8 examples, and to talk about actions that happened in the past but may happen again in the future – 6 times.

These are the categories identified in both texts. But with British sources there must be marked another case when the Present Perfect tense is used- with a number of adverbs like “already”, “ever”, “still”, etc. For example:

1. “In fact, that process has already begun...”;
2. “...Conservative government that has ever existed...”

Other variants of using the Present Perfect, offered by the British grammar book, were not found within the collected articles. It may mean that the categories identified are more frequently used.

It was also not possible to find peculiar differences in the use of the Present Perfect among the specific magazines intended for different age and sex, what implies that there is no correlation in the use of the Present Perfect with gender, or years of life.

The next stage of the analysis consisted in a detailed investigation of the particular situations, when both American and British English speakers use the Past Simple in their speech.

The majority of the Past Simple identified within the British articles had two goals – to show a single completed action in the past and to describe states in the past.

Approximately half of the cases followed the first aim, and another half of the cases selected has a connection to the second.

Also, there were found two examples of the use of the Past simple that show sequence of actions:

1. “Hall went on to say he hoped he survived those two years...”
2. “Also possessed a remarkable personal courage which enabled him to brave insult, misrepresentation and smear.. “

As a result of the analysis of the American texts there were also found a lot of constructions of the Past Simple that described single completed actions and states in the past. The only difference here is that American sources contained more other examples of the Past Simple, that is there were examples:

1. of the events that happened quickly, one right after the other (7 times):  
“...He drove to the New Bedford apartment and stayed until about midnight...”  
“...A garbage truck emptied it and drove away...”

2. of the things that began and ended in the past(2 times):  
“...he admitted that he committed crimes aimed to topple the DPRK...”

All the cases just mentioned were presented in the American grammar book; however, there were also found such examples that may have their description in the British grammar book.

Actually, there were identified two cases of use of the Past Simple to describe two actions at the same time:

1. “...Mr. Kadyrbayev drove to Mr. Tsarnaev’s dormitory and, standing outside, chatted while Mr. Tsarnaev smoked a cigarette...”
2. “...As the visitors watched a movie, the affidavit states, they noticed a backpack stuffed with fireworks that had been emptied of their powder...”

Taking into consideration that the American grammar book did not have such point mentioned, we may suppose that American English speakers do not often resort to using the construction of that kind. At the same time, we may also see a slight perplexing of the rules among the grammar books used for the research.

## CONCLUSION

The following research was aimed at comparing British English with American English and at finding possible differences between the two. In particular, it was dedicated to compare the use of the Past Simple and Present Perfect tense.

Before proceeding with the analysis it was necessary, first of all, to collect relevant material on the basis of which the results are to be taken. It was also important to take a look at whether somebody has already tried to conduct the same research and whether there are already some differences registered officially. For that reason, the following paper has a short observation of the American and British Grammar books, and an individual scientific work of one student, who tried to understand the differences in use of the tenses, that are presented in Chapter 1.

Chapter 2, in its turn, contained information about the method of the research chosen and the description of the tool that helped to conduct this research. After the practical part the data were presented also in Chapter 2 that confirms that there are some differences in the use of tenses between British and American English.

When all the sources have been collected, compared and analyzed we are able to make a conclusion. The first main difference found is the amount of the use of the Past Simple and Present Perfect tenses. As British English uses the Present Perfect tense twice more, the American English contains twice more cases of the use of the Past Simple tense. Comparing these results with the grammar books, it has been decided that the cause of such difference is connected with the fact that there are more situations when British English speakers tend to use the Present Perfect tense. However, the same cannot be said about the Past Simple tense. The American grammar book has only four situations when the Past Simple is used, whereas British grammar book has got five examples when the Past Simple is suitable, what, in its turn, allow us to think that the Past Simple is just more preferable to talk about the events and news. Taking into consideration the fact that both British and American sources contained more examples of the Present Perfect in the general newspapers, it was also decided that, perhaps, it is connected with the more formal style of the language that such newspapers are known for and also due to the fact that such newspapers tend to focus on recent news.

Another difference identified is that British English sources contained about 70 percent of the Past Simple in specific magazines. That means that British newspapers do

not prefer much Past Simple in the writings of “higher quality”. This fact also allows to think that in everyday life British English speakers use the Past Simple more frequently than in writing, like in youth and food magazines.

If to compare the peculiarities of use of each tense presented in the sources, we may say that there are also some differences. The American sources contained four main divisions of the use of the Present Perfect, although the American grammar book described only two. Also, there is a discrepancy with the statement of the Chinese student, who says that American English does not use the Present Perfect to talk about recent actions and events. The results of the present research do not support this statement. Within the British texts there were also found these four categories when the Present Perfect is used, that is to say about actions that were completed before the present time and have an effect on the present situation, to show that an activity or a state has continued for a period of time from the point in the past until present, where action is not completed and is still continuing. Also, to talk about recent actions and to talk about actions that happened in the past but may happen again in the future. However, one more category was also found – the use of the Present Perfect with a number of adverbs like “already”, “ever”, “still”, which were not identified in the American English sources. So, there are some differences in the use of the Present Perfect, however, there are no clear borders. The differences are not as transparent as it may seem, so it is rather difficult to reveal the exact rules.

If to take a look at use of the Past Simple tense, it is clearly seen that both American and British English use it mainly to show a single completed action in the past and to describe states in the past. However, one difference was found. The American English sources contained few examples of use of the Past Simple tense to describe two actions at the same time, what is mentioned, actually, in the British grammar book, not in American. We may also say that these examples are not exceptions for there is not only one such case identified.

The research showed that there are still some definite differences between the Englishes. We may notice confusion with the grammar book and some discrepancy with the previous research made. What, probably, means that it is necessary to conduct much more substantial research that would be carried out on the basis of a wider corpus chosen that would allow to find more peculiar differences in the use of the tenses and to examine oral communication that will allow us to understand the state of modern American and British English.

## REFERENCES

- Biber D, Reppen R. 2002. What does frequency have to do with grammar teaching? *Studies in Second Language Acquisition* 2002; 24:199-208.
- Bellis, Mary. *The History of the Electric Telegraph and Telegraphy: The Beginning of Electronic Communications*. Available at <http://inventors.about.com/od/tstartinventions/a/telegraph.htm>, accessed May 26, 2013.
- Blum, Matt. 2011. 20 Years Ago Today: The First Website Is Published. Available at <http://www.wired.com/geekdad/2011/08/world-wide-web-20-years/>, accessed May 26, 2013.
- Crystal, David. 2002. *The English Language. A guided tour of the language*. 2nd ed, Penguin Books Ltd., England.
- Huang, Li-Shih. 2011. Corpus-aided language learning. Available at <http://eltj.oxfordjournals.org/content/early/2011/05/05/elt.ccr031.full>, accessed May 26, 2013.
- Krishnamuthy, Ramesh. 2001. Corpus Analysis methods in inter-disciplinary applications. Available at <http://acorn.aston.ac.uk/SummerSchool2011/001-ramesh-york-160311.pdf>, accessed May 26, 2013.
- KWIC tool: KWIC Concordance for Windows Ver.5. Available at [http://www.chs.nihon-u.ac.jp/eng\\_dpt/tukamoto/kwic\\_e.html](http://www.chs.nihon-u.ac.jp/eng_dpt/tukamoto/kwic_e.html), accessed May 26, 2013.
- Media Evaluaton. Effectiveness of media relations. *Electronic Media Evaluation*. Available at <http://www.paperclippartnership.co.uk/electronic-media-evaluation.html>, accessed May 26, 2013.
- Merriam-Webster Dictionary. An Encyclopaedia Britannica Company. Available at <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/kwic>, accessed May 26, 2013.
- Morse Samuel F. B. 2004. *His Letters and Journals In Two Volumes, Volume 2*.
- Nagel – Нагель, О.В. 2004. Корпусная лингвистика и ее использование в компьютеризованном языковом обучении. Available at <http://www.lib.tsu.ru/mminfo/000349304/04/image/04-053.pdf>, accessed May 26, 2013.

- Nielsen. 2012. Social Media Report. Available at <http://www.frankwbaker.com/mediause.htm>, accessed May 26, 2013.
- Reppen, R. Biber D. 2002. *Using Corpora to Explore Linguistic Variation*. John Benjamins Publishing Company, Amsterdam.
- Sinclair, John McH. 2004. *How to Use Corpora in Language Teaching*. John Benjamins Publishing Company: Amsterdam.
- The British Council website. British English and American English. Available at <http://learnenglish.britishcouncil.org/en/grammar-reference/british-english-and-american-english>, accessed May 26, 2013.
- Velmakina - Вельмакина, А.2012. Вышел последний номер печатного Newsweek. Available at <http://buro247.ru/main/13013.html>, accessed May 26, 2013.
- World association of Newspaper. History of Newspapers. Available at <http://sayville.k12.ny.us/webpages/bhall/newspaper.cfm?subpage=4605>, accessed May 26, 2013.
- Wilcox Peterson, Patricia. 2008. *Changing Times, Changing Tenses*. USI Agency: Washington, D.C.
- Zhang, Bin. 2008. *On grammatical Differences between Daily British and American English*. Guangxi Teachers Education University, China.

## RESÜMEE

Käesoleva töö teema on Past Simple ja Present Perfect ajavormide kasutamine Ameerika inglise keeles ja Briti inglise keeles e-meedias. Töö eesmärgiks on selgitada välja iga ajavormi kasutamise iseärasusi empiirilise uuringu ning teoreetiliste materjalide kõrvutava analüüsi kaudu. Töö hüpotees eeldas, et ülalmainitud ajavormide kasutus Ameerika Ühendriikides ja Suurbritannias erineb. Töö koosneb neljast osast. Sissejuhatuses räägitakse elektroonilisest meediast. Esimeses peatükis räägitakse Ameerika ja Briti inglise keele vahelistest erinevustest, tuuakse näiteid ning esitatakse varasemate uuringute lühiülevaade ja kirjeldatakse ajavormide kasutamist õppematerjalide näitel. Teises peatükis ehk praktilises osas räägitakse valitud empiirilisest meetodist ning see peatükk kujutab endast kogutud materjali korpusanalüüsi. Edasi tuuakse välja saadud tulemuste arutelu. Oli uuritud kahte korpus: üks ameerika allikatest artiklitega, teine briti allikatest artiklitega. Läbiviidud uuringu tulemuste järgi olid mõned erinevused Past Simple ja Present Perfect ajavormide vahel välja selgitatud, mis on ka tõstatatud hüpoteesi kinnituseks. Kokkuvõttes on tehtud järeldused ning antud soovitusel võimaliku tulevase teemakohase töö kohta.

**Non-exclusive licence to reproduce thesis and make thesis public**

I, Aleksandra Burkova

(date of birth: 17.04.1989),

1. herewith grant the University of Tartu a free permit (non-exclusive licence) to:
  - 1.1. reproduce, for the purpose of preservation and making available to the public, including for addition to the DSpace digital archives until expiry of the term of validity of the copyright, and
  - 1.2. make available to the public via the web environment of the University of Tartu, including via the DSpace digital archives until expiry of the term of validity of the copyright,

THE USE OF THE PAST SIMPLE AND THE PRESENT PERFECT TENSES IN  
BRITISH AND AMERICAN ENGLISH ON THE BASIS OF ELECTRONIC PRINT  
MEDIA

supervised by *Lect.* O.Orehhova, MA

2. I am aware of the fact that the author retains these rights.
3. I certify that granting the non-exclusive licence does not infringe the intellectual property rights or rights arising from the Personal Data Protection Act.

Narva, **27.05.2013**