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*Julia Davydova*

# THE PRESENT PERFECT IN NON-NATIVE ENGLISHES

## A CORPUS-BASED STUDY OF VARIATION

TOPICS IN ENGLISH LINGUISTICS

DE

# The Present Perfect in Non-Native Englishes

## A Corpus-Based Study of Variation

*by*

Julia Davydova

常州大学山书馆
藏书章

De Gruyter Mouton

ISBN 978-3-11-025501-0
e-ISBN 978-3-11-025502-7
ISSN 1434-3452

*Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data*

Davydova, Julia, 1977–
The present perfect in non-native Englishes : a corpus-based study of variation / by Julia Davydova.
p. cm. – (Topics in English linguistics ; 77)
Includes bibliographical references and index.
ISBN 978-3-11-025501-0 (alk. paper)
1. Language and languages – Variation. 2. English language – Globalization. I. Title.
P120.V37D38 2011
427–dc23 2011024518

*Bibliographic information published by the Deutsche Nationalbibliothek*

The Deutsche Nationalbibliothek lists this publication in the Deutsche Nationalbibliografie; detailed bibliographic data are available in the Internet at http://dnb.d-nb.de.

© 2011 Walter de Gruyter GmbH & Co. KG, 10785 Berlin/Boston

Cover image: Brian Stablyk/Photographer's Choice RF/Getty Images
Printing: Hubert & Co. GmbH & Co. KG, Göttingen
♾ Printed on acid-free paper

Printed in Germany

www.degruyter.com

# Topics in English Linguistics 77

*Editors*

Bernd Kortmann
Elizabeth Closs Traugott

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# Acknowledgements

The present work is the result of a two-year project (from 2007 till 2009) carried out at the collaborative research centre (SFB 538) on multilingualism and at the University of Hamburg. First and foremost, I would like to thank Prof. Peter Siemund, my *Doktorvater*, for giving me a chance to embark upon a journey that has taken me as far as Briansk (Russia) and New Delhi (India); for providing input to my work in the form of discussions; for challenging and nurturing and, more importantly, for giving me enough time and space for my ideas to grow. Funding by the *Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft* is gratefully acknowledged.

I am grateful to many institutions and people for granting their permission to reproduce material from previously published sources and hereby acknowledge that two text passages from Housen (2002: 165, 166), two tables from Housen (2002: 158, 162, Table 1 and Table 2) and the graphs from Radden and Dirven (2007: 204, 205) were reproduced with kind permission by John Benjamins Publishing Company, Amsterdam/Philadelphia, www.benjamins.com. Five charts from Petersen (2004: 57, 105) were reproduced with permission by Peter Lang. One table from Brinton (1988: 29, Table 1.6) was reproduced with permission by Cambridge University Press. The text passage from Melchers and Shaw (2003: 180) was reproduced by permission of Hodder Education (p. 20). The text passage from Winford (2009: 208) was reproduced with permission by Taylor and Frances. The text passages from Leather and James (1996: 272) and from McCoard (1978: 135) were reproduced with permission by Elsevier. One text passage from Göbelsmann (1995: 116) was reproduced with kind permission by Rüdiger Köpper. I thank Marianne Hundt for allowing me to reproduce one table from Hundt and Smith (2009: 63). While getting this book ready for publication, I made every effort to obtain necessary permissions for the publication of the previously published material. If any omissions are brought to my attention, I will be happy to provide appropriate acknowledgements in subsequent editions of this work.

I also feel much indebted to Prof. Bernd Kortmann, Birgit Sievert, Ulrike Swientek and Frank Benno Junghanns for their invaluable help at various stages of the publication process.

I would also like to thank Prof. Anvita Abbi, Prof. Östen Dahl, Prof. Peter Trudgill, Prof. Donald Winford, Dr. Martin Elsig, Dr. Shantanu Gosh,

Dr. Lukas Pietsch, Dr. Devyani Sharma, Dr. Bidisha Som and Tomke Brüggemann for sharing their expertise and providing constructive criticisms in the form of discussions and (written) comments. I thank Prof. Dan I. Slobin for his generous encouragement in the initial stages of my project and Prof. Thomas Berg, from whom I learnt that it takes a critical mind to tackle and conquer the most complex issues in linguistics and in life.

I thank my numerous informants for the time they took to explain to me the intricacies of the tense-aspect distinctions inherent in their native-language grammars. I am just as grateful to those informants who consented to give me an interview during the data collection period. My special thanks are due to L.M. Khokhlova, Florian Zieger and Mayank Jain for their invaluable help in organising the interviews and introducing me into their communities. This project started to become a reality as a direct result of their kind support.

Finally, I would like to thank Prof. Sali A. Tagliamonte for her encouragement and support at various stages of my Ph.D. project and her genuine interest in my work, and, more importantly, for being who she is: the perfect role model that shaped my linguistic thinking in an essential way. It goes without saying that all remaining shortcomings are my own responsibility.

Last but not least, I thank and dedicate this work to my family: Jean Rémy, Robert, Dasha, Zhenja and my Mom. This work would not have been possible if it were not for their unconditional love and belief that everything will turn out just fine.

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# 1. Introduction

## 1.1. General background

The overarching aim of this study is to provide a comprehensive account of the category of the English present perfect (also referred to as the perfect or HAVE-perfect) in the light of data obtained from non-native varieties of English, both second-language (or L2) varieties such as Indian English (Ind-Eng), East African English (EAfEng) and Singapore English (SingEng) as well as foreign-speaker varieties of English exemplified by the English spoken in Russia and Germany (RusEng and GerEng respectively). We focus on the present perfect because "the sheer complexity and abundance of grammatical apparatus concentrated in this area of the grammar make it an excellent site for examining the differences and similarities amongst related [forms of English]" (Tagliamonte 1996: 351).

In more concrete terms, the study aims at investigating the perfect and other surface variants in what has become known as present perfect contexts in the relevant theoretical literature. Thus, some scholars distinguish as many as three dominant contexts for the present perfect (cf. Jespersen 1924; Zandvoort 1932; Bauer 1970; Fenn 1987; Winford 1993; Tagliamonte 2000). These contexts are (i) resultative contexts, (ii) extended-now or continuative contexts and (iii) experiential contexts. They are illustrated in (1) through (3).

(1) resultative context
*He **has broken** his arm.*

(2) extended-now context
*I **have lived** in Hamburg since 2001.*

(3) experiential context
*I **have** never **been** to Russia.*

In addition, some researchers single out a context of recent past and its subtype, a hot-news context, as a distinct semantic environment requiring the present perfect in Standard English (Leech 1971a; McCawley 1971; Comrie

1976; Brinton 1988; Klein 1994; Huddleston and Pullum 2002; Siemund 2004; Radden and Dirven 2007), as exemplified in (4).[1]

(4) context of recent past
*The Prime Minister* ***has resigned*** *recently.*

In a nutshell, the resultative context suggests that a past action results in a change of state at the moment of utterance, whereas the extended-now context implies that a situation that started in the past still obtains at the moment of utterance. In contrast, the experiential context typically refers to a situation or an event that occurred once or several times prior to the moment of utterance. Finally, the context of recent past is taken to describe a recent event. (A meticulous description of these semantic environments is given in Chapter 4.)

The project was initiated by the basic empirical observation that forms other than the present perfect surface in present perfect contexts across non-native varieties of English. These forms are the present tense, the simple past tense, the past perfect, lone past participle, etc. Moreover, the previous research has revealed that the only other form which alternates with the present perfect in *all* present perfect contexts across all above-mentioned varieties of English is the simple past tense, otherwise known as the preterite (cf. Davydova 2008). Even in standard varieties of English, namely British English and American English, there is always a considerable amount of variation between both forms in present perfect contexts despite clear preferences in favour of either one form or the other in a specific context in a given standard variety.

Such a robust variation between the present perfect and other forms does not seem to be a matter of a mere cross-varietal coincidence. Rather, what we deal with here is a subtle phenomenon that needs to be elaborated on. Along these lines, the study proposes to consider the matter by adopting a second- (and foreign-) language learner perspective and to examine the variation between the perfect and other verb forms in varieties that have been labelled together as non-native Englishes.

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1 We use the term 'Standard English' to refer to the variety of British English promoted by normative pressures and codified in various (grammatical and typological) descriptions of English (e.g., Leech 1971a, 1971b; Comrie 1976, 1985; Quirk et al. 1985; Huddleston and Pullum 2002; Radden and Dirven 2007, etc.).

But why should one study variation in non-native varieties of English? To start with, variation in non-native Englishes has remained a much neglected issue because for a long time non-native English was thought of as simply wrong English. The present study is thus supposed to bridge this gap by providing a comprehensive description of the category of the English present perfect across different forms of non-native English. Moreover, the existing studies dealing with non-native forms of English (mostly indigenised varieties) are largely descriptive, thus frequently failing to provide a differentiated account of various morpho-syntactic phenomena. The present study is therefore concerned with working out a methodologically sound and theoretically insightful framework within which non-native varieties of English (both second-language varieties and foreign-speaker varieties) can be examined and compared across the board.

Since many morpho-syntactic peculiarities of non-native varieties of English have been described as having emerged as a result of (imperfect) second-language acquisition, studying non-native variation of English may help us to understand what co-occurrences are results of the processes frequently claimed to underlie L2 acquisition (e.g., transfer or substrate influence) and are thus of a specific and localized nature, and what patterns of variation can be claimed to possess a more general character. Thus, studying non-native Englishes should ideally lead us to a better understanding of cross-varietal patterns, their pervasiveness as well as their limits. By the same token, studying variation across non-native varieties of English seems to be a promising approach since it may provide us with additional insights and clues leading to a better understanding of mechanisms governing language variation because variation attested in second-language output is arguably just as rule-governed as the native-speaker variation.

Finally, the spread of English as a global lingua franca has repercussions for its non-native users, who – to put it in Berns' (1995: 10, cited in Jenkins 2003: 43) words – find themselves "in the midst of an exciting, challenging, and creative social and linguistic phase of their history". Studying this "sociolinguistic history-in-the-making" becomes particularly important as empirical evidence becomes increasingly available through, for instance, the Internet and other advanced communication technologies (cf. Jenkins 2003).

Since most non-native Englishes are to a large extent products of educational systems, language-internal variation observed in non-native varieties is compared to the variety of Standard English English (StEngEng), a form of English spoken by the educated native speakers in England. This perspective on studying non-native variation is very attractive for two major reasons. First, it provides a researcher with a straightforward design for

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