

Surya Budi Putra Johan, 2017

Volume 3 Issue 3, pp. 624-643

Date of Publication: 18th December 2017

DOI-<https://dx.doi.org/10.20319/pijss.2017.33.624643>

This paper can be cited as: Budi Putra Johan, S. (2017). A Corpus-Based Analysis of English past Perfect Tense in Written and Spoken English. *PEOPLE: International Journal of Social Sciences*, 3(3), 624-643

This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-Non-commercial 4.0 International License. To view a copy of this license, visit <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/> or send a letter to Creative Commons, PO Box 1866, Mountain View, CA 94042, USA.

A CORPUS-BASED ANALYSIS OF ENGLISH PAST PERFECT TENSE IN WRITTEN AND SPOKEN ENGLISH

Surya Budi Putra Johan

Department of Industrial Engineering, Universal University, Batam, Riau Island, Indonesia
sjohan@my.hpu.edu

Abstract

The ability to use English past perfect tense in different functions such as setting a background information, or explaining cause-effect relationship is an important aspect of language use. This research paper focuses on the different functions of past perfect tense in academic writing and speaking. The Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA) was used for an analysis of the functional patterns of past perfect tense in different functions. A combination of both quantitative and qualitative research techniques was used during the research. Based on the corpus data, the top two patterns of past perfect tense have been mainly used – to set background information, and to provide reason/cause. The function of providing (or setting) the background information is further analyzed into seven sub-functions. It is hoped that the corpus findings can be applied in language teaching so that language learners can discover language rules based on corpus data.

Keywords

Past Perfect Tense, Corpus, Contextualized Functions of Past Perfect Tense, Setting Background Information, Explaining Cause and Effects Relationship

1. Introduction

This paper focused on one of the 16 tenses in English: past perfect tense. Past perfect tense has been pointed out by (Richards, 2004) and (Garner, 2009) as an action that occurred before another action in the past (Esfandiari & Rath, 2014). However, English language learners do not necessarily understand the idea of using a “past before a past” (or when to use present perfect and past perfect in sentences), which contributes to more errors in both tenses. English language learners might have learned some of the rules of past perfect from textbook, but the usefulness of such knowledge might be restricted because (M Celce-Murcia, 1991) explained that students, non-native students, deal more with accuracy, less with meaningfulness, and rarely with appropriacy (context) (Beloso, 2015). In addition, when native speakers of English use past perfect, the rules and context are often flexible and context-driven.

However, past perfect is not a distinct system like mathematics. Instead of providing learners of English with explicit grammatical instruction, Nagata (Ella & Mizunuma, 2015) revealed that output-focused program with grammatical instruction and production exercises is better than the input-focused program. After learners of English are given brief deductive instructions of important terms and rules, they shall be guided to focus on the key aspect of the grammatical feature such as how and when the students should use it. If English learners are going to form past perfect sentences communicatively or spontaneously, grammatical accuracy alone is insufficient because grammar should be taught to serve communicative purposes with consideration for its form, meaning, and use (Hoek, Zufferey, Evers-Vermeul, & Sanders, 2017).

For learners to become familiar with a form or construction, (Esfandiari & Rath, 2014) suggested that contextual knowledge is of paramount importance as it paves the way for a deeper understanding of its function at the discourse level (M Celce-Murcia, 1991) (Esfandiari & Rath, 2014). Indeed, in the absence of these contextual clues, the complete meaning is difficult to determine. Therefore, on these grounds, Larsen-Freeman, 2003 advised teachers to re-create authentic acquisition conditions in their reading and writing (Bardovi-harlig, 2017).

In addition, the role of teacher is crucial in helping to amend the mindset of students and help them understand that learning English, particularly grammar and reading, requires direct experience using the language if their goals are to be obtained (Ocampo & City, 2017) . This statement is further supported by (Bardovi-harlig, 2017), who emphasized the need for materials that illustrate authentic interaction in the target language and by authentic, it is to be understood

by (Bardovi-harlig, 2017) as “naturally occurring attested language.” Besides, English teaching materials should be made as authentic as possible or else, it may have a negative influence on students’ language learning, which according to (Zhang, 2016), is one of the reasons for overuse, underuse, and misuse in the process of language learning. For such purpose, corpus: i.e., COCA is used to investigate the functions of past perfect in context, to consider detail at differences between the use of past perfect in written and spoken register, and to provide examples of actual language usage.

2. Literature Review

2.1 English Past Perfect Tense

When it comes to past perfect tense, pedagogical grammars often state that Past Perfect (PP) tense is used to describe event(s) that happened before another event in the past (McCarthy, McCarten, & Sandiford, 2006). Hence, learners can make sentences such as “I had set up camp and was cooking, and this van appeared out of nowhere, I had just met my husband-to-be, and he was showing me photos ... when the phone rang.” Therefore, according to (McCarthy et al., 2006) the rule explains grammatical choice after the fact but does not provide sufficient precise guidelines for learners to decide upon the choice of simple past or past perfect when appropriate. Indeed, it is important to know the contexts of use of Past Perfect tense because contextual awareness assists in the understanding of choice, and grammar becomes a question of discourse once more (Hughes & McCarthy, 1998). To better understand the choices that real writers have made in real contexts, (Yoo, 2015) studied the connection between past perfect and the adverb “last” to determine what allowed the use of last with the Past Perfect. In his analysis that was based on the 1996 Los Angeles Times and Washington Post (Latwp) Corpus and the Brown Corpus, he found that there are four types of context in which past perfect verb phrases occur:

1. “Hypothetical present” in which present situations are described in the past orientation.
For example,
 - i. Buyouts this time would be available only to the young or short-service. Congress doesn’t want any more bonuses for retirees. That’s why it will restrict buyouts to workers who are not eligible for immediate annuities, via regular or early retirement... Buy-out payments also would be denied to employees who **had been** given relocation bonuses within the last 24 months. Workers who had been given a

retention bonus within the 12 months preceding a buyout also wouldn't be eligible (Latwp).

The sentences in (i) discuss a hypothetical situation if Congress did make those changes. Moreover, hypothetical, as well as counterfactual, present situations are always described in the past orientation, in which the past perfect *had been* is used with *the last 24 months* (Yoo, 2015).

2. "Back shifting" in which a present tense in direct speech is changed to a past tense in reported speech (or past tense to past perfect). In his study (Yoo, 2015), the past perfect was found in the remaining 2 tokens of *last* from the Brown Corpus and the remaining 11 tokens from the 1996 Latwp Corpus; and this according to (Yoo, 2015), has resulted from back shifting, which allow the verbs in both the main and the subordinate clauses to stay in the same past-axis orientation. In example (ii) and (iii) below, the back shifting of *consulted* and *used* to the past perfect, respectively, has been induced by the past-tense verb *said* in the main clause:

ii. Mr. Bourcier said that he **had consulted** several Superior Court justices in the last week and received opinions favoring both procedures. (Brown)

iii. Prosecutors are considering whether Fuhrman lied under oath in Simpson's criminal trial when he said he **had not used** racial epithets in the last decade (Latwp).

3. "Change in reality" in which things are no longer relevant or true as they used to. For example, the use of the past perfect in (iv) and (v) below, is to emphasize that Gephardt does not accommodate less drastic approaches anymore and the profession of friendship with the United States is no longer considered as an article of faith with Trujillo, respectively:

iv. Congress first embarked in 1990 on what has become an annual debate over whether and how to renew China's trade benefits. For the last five years, Gephardt **had favored** less drastic approaches than revocation, such as granting China an extension of the benefits but with conditions attached to further renewals. (Latwp).

v. Until the last year or so the profession of friendship with the United States **had been** an article of faith with Trujillo, and altogether too often this profession was accepted here as evidence of his good character (Brown).

4. “Free indirect style” in which the use of past perfect takes the perspective of a third person’s voice rather than the narrator.

- vi. Ferrechio and African-American police officers who went into the school with her said Wednesday that school staff members and students referred to her race repeatedly when trying to get her out of the school ... Ferrechio, who went to Garvey to research an article on charter schools, stood by her story. The legal pad she was using was from the Times and full of 30 pages of notes she’d **taken** over the last month, she said. Anigbo grabbed for it, Ferrechio said, and wrestled it away as students and staff members surrounded Ferrechio, kicking and pushing her and pulling at her arms (Latwp).

(Yoo, 2015) explained that the shift from the non-deictic she’d **taken** to the deictic **over the last month** in the same clause, has allowed the author to take “the perspective of the third person,” (instead of the narrator) and that has been perceived as free indirect style.

In (Yoo, 2015) study, the Brown Corpus and the 1996 Latwp Corpus have provided all tokens of (the) *last* + Temporal Noun (TN) occurring with the past perfect tense. “*The Brown Corpus contained 674 tokens of last, of which only 8 tokens of (the) last + TN occurred with the past perfect; the 1996 Latwp Corpus, on the other hand, contained 26,804 tokens of last, of which 50 tokens of (the) last + TN occurred with the past perfect*” (p. 347). In other words, the use of past perfect seems to occur more often in news than the Brown Corpus which has approximately one million words representative of American English printed in 1961. However, (Yoo, 2015) investigated the uses of *last* with past perfect through a corpus-based analysis only. Although Yoo’s findings show some patterns of past perfect, O’Keeffe et al. explained that past perfect has a broader and more complex function (O’Keeffe, O’Keeffe, & Carter, 2007).

To fill this gap, (Hughes & McCarthy, 1998) looked at the use of past perfect verb forms and found that, across a wide range of speakers in the CANCODE corpus, the past perfect has *three* significant functions which are found in the following dialogues.

- vii. Indirect speech reports, such as the following.

[Speakers are discussing the contents of a letter.]

Speaker 1: Did he explain what he **had done** when he looked into it?

Speaker 2: Well he just said he, he'd, er, he'd **looked** into it and had a word with Mr. [name].

Speaker 3: We've got the letter. Would you like to see the letter?

Speaker 1: If that's all right by you. Is it?

Speaker 3: Yes. Yes. (CS90195001)

- viii. An additional information to the main statement because words like *we'd done* and *we'd saved*, are not constrained by **already**, such as the following.

[Speaker 1 is talking about Christmas.]

Speaker 1: Well yeah, I mean Christmas was really good for us this time.

I mean we'd **done** a lot of pre-planning for it hadn't we Mary you know we'd er

Speaker 2: [saved]

Speaker 1: [saved money for the, obviously to cut the costs down towards, er we'd **saved** you know a fair a fair bit for presents and we'd **already saved** a hell of a lot of money for the food.]

Speaker 2: Mm (CS80265001)

- ix. Reason or justification for the main events of the narrative. In other words, past perfects are used as the background information to what happened, such as the following.

Speaker 1: and they just missed us by half an hour they were really pissed off because apparently, they'd **been driving** really fast like trying to get back but erm I mean we didn't know they were trying to get back, we didn't leave until like very late, we went to the Little Chef for breakfast on the Sunday cos it was only over the road from where they were living and Andy Symons the bar manager like came back with us and stayed the night at Glynbob's house as well so he came to Little Chef with us in the morning as well.

Speaker 2: Oh God.

Speaker 1: There was like loads of us in the Little Chef . . . and we got there and we had to wait like ages for them to do the food and stuff and we were going oh we don't mind we don't mind . . . I remember going to the Little Chef after the Valedictory and erm we took the minibus down and Cooksie drove cos he'd **been driving all night** and he drove the minibus down and it was in the morning it was after like the ball and PQ still had some wine left. (CSSHAR.05)

In addition, (Sedlatschek, 2009), also found that Past Perfect occurred in text and turn-initial positions to place the actions, states, and events reported on firmly in the past.

- x. Sir, my wife and I **had invested** in a fixed deposit (FDR 61673, date of maturity, 22 January 1998) in DCM Financial Services.

(116) <SA><#>Zee News had invited Mothers' Day messages from people all over India<,> <#>the response has been overwhelming<,> <#>for the ten best messages watch our English bulletin at eleven tonight<,>
[IND2000 Broad News 20]

- xi. (117) <SD><#>Sonal now you're actually you're just seventeen years old so you're still actually in the junior circuit which you have been playing<,> <#>but now you're playing the ladies' circuit as well <#>how do you manage to uh yah to juggle between the two circuits<,>
<SE><#>uh I'd been playing the junior circuit last year<,> <#>and uh this year is my uh I'll be turning eighteen on the ninth of June <#>so I'll get to play the juniors only till uh December two thousand <#>so I decided maybe<,> after that I have<,> as it is I have to play the women circuit so maybe start<,>

(Sedlatschek, 2009)

And note again the occurrence of Past Perfect forms in (x) and (xi) with past-time adverbials such as specific date (22 January 1998), last year; all of which, suggested notion of immediacy (Sedlatschek, 2009).

So far, the literature suggests seven patterns of past perfect tense functions and meanings: (a) making indirect speech report, (b) giving additional information, (c) giving reason or justification, (d) expressing notion of immediacy, (e) describing hypothetical present, (f) emphasizing change, and (g) making "free indirect style" speech (Hughes & McCarthy, 1998), (Sedlatschek, 2009), (Yoo, 2015).

3. Research Issues

In general, per the deterministic rules, past perfect is used to talk about things that happened before another event in the past. However, there seems to be a wide range of patterns emerged from the recent studies (as shown in the examples above). How past perfect tense is used and in what function and context it mostly appears in writing and speaking will be the focus of this research paper's analysis. The objectives of this research paper are (1) to identify the various functions of past perfect in both writing and speaking registers and (2) to study in-depth on the top two most frequently-used functions of past perfect in context. The limitation of this research is as follows: online corpus named Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA)

with data from 1990 to 2015. The research methodology used are both quantitative and qualitative.

4. Methodology

4.1 Corpora

One popular way of providing a ready resource of natural, or authentic texts for language learning is through a corpus. Corpus is a large principled collection of naturally occurring texts (written or spoken) stored electronically. Currently the online corpus: Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA) consists of approximately 520 million words in 5 different registers: spoken, fiction, magazines, newspaper, and academic texts, and it is annually updated.

The use of past perfect tense is usually overlapped with simple past tense. There is also a tendency for learners to use simple past tense over past perfect tense. Besides, the use of simple past tense is claimed to be more frequent than past perfect tense. Therefore, it is necessary to identify the overall frequency of the past perfect tense compared to simple past tense.

To identify the overall frequency of simple past tense, COCA can be used to generate a table showing the use of simple past tense across different registers and in different range of years from 1990 to 2015.

The General Distribution of The Simple Past Tense Across Registers

Table 1: *The Frequency of Simple Past Tense in COCA [v?d*]*

SECTION (CLICK FOR SUB-SECTIONS) (SEE ALL SECTIONS AT ONCE)	FREQ	SIZE (M)	PER MIL	CLICK FOR CONTEXT (SEE ALL)
SPOKEN	3,464,182	109.4	31,667.70	
FICTION	7,222,475	104.9	68,850.51	
MAGAZINE	3,197,160	110.1	29,035.89	
NEWSPAPER	3,636,837	106.0	34,321.49	
ACADEMIC	2,560,968	103.4	24,762.32	
1990-1994	3,830,432	104.0	36,831.39	
1995-1999	3,755,474	103.4	36,303.30	
2000-2004	3,776,864	102.9	36,689.71	
2005-2009	3,851,504	102.0	37,744.65	
2010-2015	4,867,348	121.6	40,037.78	
TOTAL	20,081,622			SEE ALL TOKENS

Table 1 show that the use of simple past tense is much higher than the use of past perfect tense, when compared with the data from Table 2 (below). The total frequency of simple past tense in overall is almost twice as often as past perfect tense. According to Table 1, the use of

simple past tense is mostly found in fiction, but it is least found in academic. In addition, the use of simple past tense in spoken register is at least 40 percent more frequent than the spoken register in past perfect tense. The corpus result also indicates that the use of simple past tense has increased slightly in their overall frequency over time; it went from 36,303.30 per million words in 1995-1999 to 40,037.78 per million words in 2010-2015. In short, the overall frequency of simple past tense is much higher and more frequent than past perfect tense.

The General Distribution of The Past Perfect Tense Across Registers

Table 2: The Corpus Chart (PP) had [v?n*]

SECTION (CLICK FOR SUB-SECTIONS) (SEE ALL SECTIONS AT ONCE)	FREQ	SIZE (M)	PER MIL	CLICK FOR CONTEXT (SEE ALL)
SPOKEN	1,978,158	109.4	18,083.26	
FICTION	2,196,229	104.9	20,936.24	
MAGAZINE	2,172,945	110.1	19,734.20	
NEWSPAPER	2,221,288	106.0	20,962.70	
ACADEMIC	2,671,622	103.4	25,832.25	
<hr/>				
1990-1994	2,266,966	104.0	21,797.93	
1995-1999	2,171,455	103.4	20,990.95	
2000-2004	2,164,691	102.9	21,028.52	
2005-2009	2,100,802	102.0	20,587.81	
2010-2015	2,536,328	121.6	20,863.30	
TOTAL	11,240,242			SEE ALL TOKENS

Table 2 shows that the use of past perfect tense is mostly found in academic follow by newspaper, fiction, magazine, and spoken register which has the least use of past perfect. Interestingly, academic is least found in simple past tense yet it is mostly used in past perfect. In addition, the use of simple past tense in fiction is more than three times the frequency of fiction in past perfect tense. The corpus result also indicates the use of past perfect has decreased slightly in its overall frequency over time; e.g., had + PP went from 20,990.95 per million words in 1995-1999 to 20,863.30 in 2010-2015.

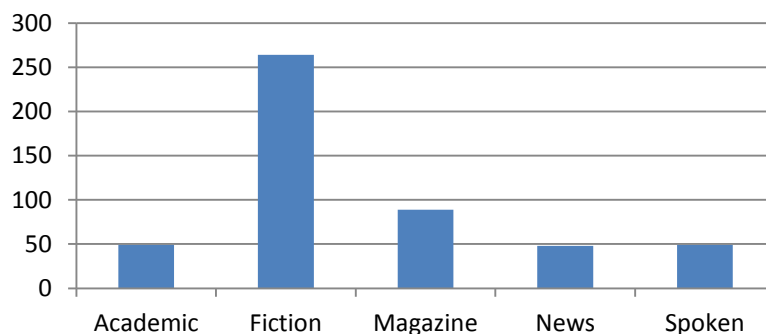
4.2 Corpus Analysis of Past Perfect (PP)

Figure 1 and Figure 2 show the patterns of past perfect (PP) from sets of examples taken from concordance lines (in COCA) for the string “had [v?n*].”

- i. A KWIC search in COCA for the string “had [v?n*]”
- ii. Findings:

Table 4.3 (below). The use of “had [v?n*]” across five different registers in random samples of 500 concordance lines, based on 250 million words of mixed written and spoken texts. Such written texts are: Academic (49), Fiction (264), Magazine (89), and News (48) and they are counted as **written** register; whereas, the spoken text (49) is counted as **spoken** register. Since the written register comprised 90% of the data, another search of #500 concordance lines in the spoken register has been performed to determine if there are more patterns. Figure 1 shows the patterns of PP across written registers; whereas, Figure 2 shows the patterns of PP in spoken register.

Table 4.3: *The Use of Past Perfect across Different Registers*



5. Findings

5.1 Overview of Functions from COCA

The data from both figure 1 and figure 2 (below) present the many different examples across registers which were coded into different functions. There is one rater: Surya Johan, who manually read through the concordance lines. The rater also looked at the contexts in paragraphs as provided by COCA.

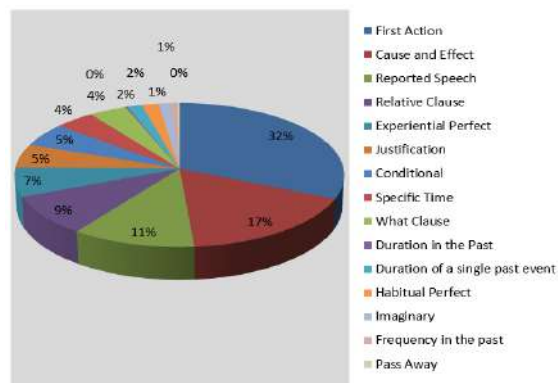


Figure 1: *Patterns of Past Perfect (written)*

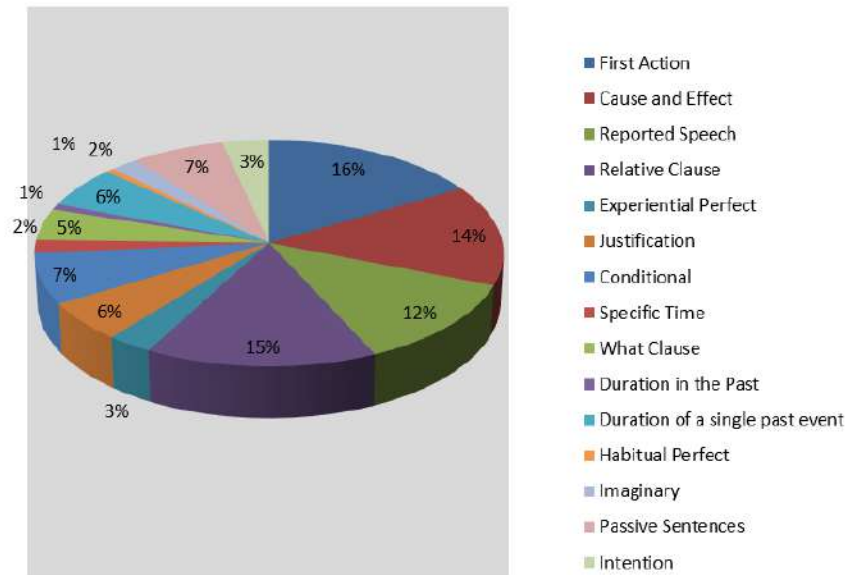


Figure 2: *Patterns of Past Perfect (spoken)*

Based on both figure 1 and 2 above, written and spoken register respectively, have the similar top patterns of PP: First Action, Relative Clause, Cause and Effect, and Reported Speech. The main difference is that PP is used much more frequently in written register than spoken register. For example, First Action in written register (32%) is used twice as often as spoken register (16%). Similarly, the pattern of Cause and Effect appeared more frequent in written register (17%) than spoken register (14%). However, both patterns of Reported Speech and Relative Clause are used more frequently in spoken register (27%) than in written register (20%). Interestingly, Relative Clause is found more frequent in spoken register (71 tokens) than in written register (40 tokens). Also, there are two patterns in spoken register: *Intention* and *Passive Sentences*, which were not found in the written register. Likewise, there are also two patterns: *Frequency in The Past* and *Pass away* in written register which were not found in spoken register.

Based on the corpus data (above), an in-depth focus of this research paper is on the top *two* functions of past perfect tense; namely, (1) first action – to set background information and (2) cause and effect – to provide reason/cause as they indicate the highest frequency of use in both written and spoken registers. Moreover, it is equally important to better understand how past perfect is being used to set background information in both written and spoken registers.

5.2 To Set Background Information

PP is used to show a completed action before something happened in the past. Moreover, past perfect helps to provide *background information*. This finding confirmed with McCarthy et al.'s 2006 finding on the use of past perfect to talk about things that happened before an event in the past to serve as background information. Furthermore, there are 7 (seven) sub-categories of the past perfect that are used to set the background: describing completed action before something in the past, describing a completed action at a specific time in the past, talking about someone who no longer lives, using experiences as background, describing the duration of a completed action as background, using the *what*-clauses as background, using *wh*-clauses as background, and describing unrealized intention or hope.

1). Describing completed action before something in the past (*written*)

(i) By the time World War I arrived, Blumenau **had inaugurated** motor boat service down the Itajai River and **had imported** a steam locomotive from Germany for its small but expanding railway system. A match factory, operated by Frederico Busch, the city's most important businessman of the day, symbolized Blumenau's deserved reputation as an emerging center of industry, while a new hospital opened its doors to serve local health needs and growing numbers of imported cars, trucks and buses plied the town's winding streets.

(ii) But on November 19th, just **after** Champion **had performed** at a football game in Orlando, his parents got a call from his sister with the worst news any parent can ever hear. ROBERT-CHAMPION-SR: They're saying that Robert had problems breathing. PINSKY: Champion's terrifying last moments preserved on a recorded 911 call made by a band member. 911 (via telephone): OK. Is he awake? UNIDENTIFIED-MALE-: He - he's not even - he wasn't responding. We thought he was breathing, he was making noises – 911

Describing completed action before something in the past (*spoken*)

(iii) **Before** our report, Lori **had linked** 43 cases to the neighborhood. on camera Since our report aired last Friday, we have received calls from hundreds of concerned families.

(iv) Shortly **after** [his arrival in Botswana], Mnyeie **had joined** the ANC and in 1983, he studied guerrilla tactics briefly at an ANC camp in Caxito, Angola. In June 1985, the exiles knew an invasion by South African forces was imminent and they were unprotected. Mnyeie waited too long to leave.

2). Describing a completed action at a specific time in the past (*written*)

(v) Denver homebuilder M.D.C. **Holdings had begun in 1984** to amass land and options in and around the area that would ultimately become the airport site.

(vi) Every night I'd watched, he **had gotten home between 12:15 and 12:30**, always with a different woman -- prostitutes, I assumed.

Describing a completed action at a specific time in the past (*spoken*)

(vii) DOWELL: In fact, William **Greaves had made about** a hundred films by 1968.

(viii) Jessica **had been** in the headlines for pregnancy in 2012.

3). Talking about someone who no longer lives (*written*)

(ix) And it wasn't just because he was the first of my childhood Yankees to go, or that **he had gone at the age** of fifty-one, which increasingly strikes me as very young.

Talking about someone who no longer lives (*spoken*)

(not found in the spoken corpus)

4). Talking about someone's experience as background (*spoken*)

(x) **I had taken a year off** between high school and college and I was alienated.

Talking about someone's experience as background (*written*)

(xi) **He had played football for** North Carolina, a starting guard, but the bulk that served him well on the offensive line was not all that advantageous in the confined spaces of a small combatant.

5). Describing the duration of a completed action as background (*spoken*)

(xii) Mr-TIMANUS: Yeah. They call you, they make sure you're going to be there and all that, if -- if you're on his list. And they do call you when your person makes the hot seat. So, **I had gotten a call about** 20 minutes earlier and said... GIBSON: Oh. So once... Mr-TIMANUS: Hey, Paul's in there. GIBSON: Right. So, you have advance warning that a call may come. Mr-TIMANUS: That -- that the next call, you know, might be Regis himself. And, of course, you know, I'm -- I'm there at work

Describing the duration of a completed action as background (*written*)

(xiii) Mirisch had a solid visual on the B-2, so he took the lead back from Milo and began his run. The **B-2 had begun** a series of S-turns, flying lower and lower until his shadow really

did seem to disappear, trying to break Mirisch's visual contact. In fact, it did take a lot of concentration to stay focused on the bomber as it slid around low hills and gullies, but the closer the F-23 got, the easier it was to stay on him.

6). Using *what*-clauses to set the background information (*written*)

(xiv) Asked **what had happened since he entered** history by shooting Booth that early morning in Virginia, Corbett said that despite his fame, he had nothing.

Using *what*-clauses to set the background information (*spoken*)

(xv) SMITH voice-over Weeks of appearing to stonewall had only made matters worse by raising questions in Washington about **what had happened 10 years ago** in Arkansas.

(xvi) Mr-WEST: **What we had discovered was** that young people were swapping cards in order to use the equipment.

(xvii) The story of **what the Greens had done** continued to grow long after they **had gone** home.

Using *which*-clauses, *who*-clauses, and *that*-clauses to set the background information

(xviii) Cincinnati, which **had gone** 4-11 a season earlier, came in with the league's highest-scoring offense that was led by quarterback Boomer Esiason and running back Ickey Woods. [written; non-defining *which*-clause]

(xix) Last April, the man who **had led** a double life without batting an eye, went on trial for attempted murder. [spoken; non-defining *who*-clause]

(xx) LAUREN WILSON: Well, he didn't have that drive that I **had seen** for so many years. [spoken; defining *that*-clause]

(xxi) But the Mad Mary's greatest defenders were the ones that **had known** and loved her the longest. [written; defining *that*-clause]

7). Expressing the plan that had not been fulfilled in the past. Generally used with states verbs like – planned, hoped, meant, intended, etc.

Intention (*spoken*)

(xxii) We haven't reached the utopia or the goal that we **had hoped** to reach many years ago, especially since 1964.

(xxiii) JEFFREY-BROWN# We **had intended** to bring you a profile of Pulitzer Prize-winning Poet.

Intention (written) - (not found in the *written* corpus)

Based on the corpus analysis, it seems that past perfect (PP) occurs most likely in both independent clause and dependent clause with accompanying adverbial phrase of time: *by*, *before* and *after*. This is because PP clause consists of subject and past participle verb that express a complete thought (as shown in the above examples of (i) and (iii)), thus an independent clause. Also, PP tends to occur in subordinate clause with *after* (as shown in both examples of (ii) and (iv)), hence a dependent clause. The words *before* and *after* are used as conjunctions in past perfect tense. The word *before* only has #1385 hits (0.65%); whereas, *after* has #5256 hits (2.40%) when they co-occur with PP. *By*, on the other hand, is used as a preposition which only has #2166 hits (1.6%). Therefore, PP seems to appear more frequent in dependent clauses than in independent clauses and this finding is further supported by (Reppen, Fitzmaurice, & Biber, 2002) who added that 70% of past perfect verb phrases occur in dependent clauses.

On the other hand, example (xviii) and (xix) from COCA corpus seem to suggest that the use of past perfect serves as an “additional background information” about the subject in the past (non-defining relative clause). In (xviii), the information about Cincinnati is not essential to interpret the utterance; in (xix), the information about the man is not necessary. Thus, the information about what happened to the team in the earlier season in (xviii), or the information about the man’s past in (xix) is in a sense, “extra.” This finding also confirmed with Hughes & McCarthy’s, 1998 findings on the use of PP to give or provide additional information. At the same time, example (xx) and (xxi) also show that the use of PP implies perspective changing because in (xx), the speaker has no longer seen the same drive and in (xxi), the subjects do no longer know and love Mary. Hence, perspective changing is to give background information.

In addition, PP occurs in both defining and non-defining relative clauses that use relative pronouns such as (*who*, *which*, *that*). PP seems to occur more often in defining relative clause (#40 hits out of #500 hits in spoken; #29 hits out of #500 hits in written) than in non-defining relative clause (#30 out of #500 hits in spoken; #11 hits out of #500 hits in written). Also, the use of PP in both defining and non-defining relative clauses occurs more often in spoken than written register. In COCA, the relative pronoun: *that* is used as a conjunction (rather than pronoun) with PP, which has #66942 hits (39.05%); whereas, the pronoun *who* only has #39811 hits (13%)

when used with PP. The pronoun *which* did not seem to appear as a conjunction or a pronoun with PP. So, another search was made for *which* (without the POS LIST), and it only has #7534 hits (2.3% out of the overall pronoun which is #326261). Overall, *that* seems to be more frequently used with PP than *who* and *which*, and it is often used as a conjunction (rather than a pronoun) with PP. To conclude, the main possible reason why PP occurs more frequent in defining relative clauses (rather than in non-defining clause) is because the speaker/writer might try to draw attention by emphasizing a little bit more about the information that s/he thinks is essential and thus, the use of PP is rather absolute.

5.3 To Provide Reason/Cause

Past Perfect is also used to explain the reason/cause of some action (effect/result) in the past. This finding confirms with one of the findings from Hughes and McCarthy (1998) on giving reason or justification. In addition, the examples below also confirm with Yoo's 2015 findings on emphasizing reality-changing.

- a. But no one was coming up the stair. For here he was now. Far away. Delivered. And that, anyhow, was something. The angels **had kept** their word. He remained crouching there for a long while. [written]
- b. It was twelve o'clock-lunchtime. and not a sound came from her stomach. Those crackers **had done** their job. Emily smiled contentedly and went back to work. Yet something was wrong. [written]
- c. MORIARTY: It was then, Deb realized that her daughter might have a gambling problem. Christie **had turned** to casino gambling, both to find emotional thrills and the money she needed. [spoken]
- d. PETER-GOTTI: The man was never coming home. I believed the day would never come where I would be able to hug my father again, you know. I **had trained** myself to believe that that's it. [spoken]
- e. Ms-GILMAN: Yeah. At the Peabody Museum, just a few months ago, they discovered a bear-claw necklace that they hadn't known they had. It **had gotten** miscataloged. And they had known that originally Lewis and Clark donated a bear-claw necklace, but they didn't know where it was. And then they found it in the Pacific Ocean Collection. [spoken]

If the conjunction “because” is used to combine the first sentence before past perfect and the next sentence using past perfect together in (a), (b), (c), (d), and (e), (Hughes & McCarthy, 1998) suggested that the use of past perfect might seem to give a reason or justification for the main events of the narrative. In that case, PP would not be the main events themselves but; they are rather something the speaker/narrator feels to be an essential background to what happened (Hughes & McCarthy, 1998).

From the above examples from (a) to (e), all the verbs (in past perfect form) require contextual clues to make the distinction. In the absence of these clues, it would be difficult for students to determine the use of past perfect tense over simple past tense and/or any other past tenses. Hence, when learners use the conjunction *because*, it is hoped that they could make aspectual distinctions in the use of past perfect tense to explain the reason/cause of some action in the past.

6. Conclusion & Recommendation

According to the data found in COCA, the top four functions of past perfect in both written and spoken register are providing background information (48%), explaining the cause-effect relationship (31%), making reported speech (23%), and giving additional information using relative clauses (24%). The other remaining functions – for example, describing completed action before something in the past, describing a completed action at a specific time in the past, talking about someone who no longer lives, using experiences as background, describing the duration of a completed action as background, describing unrealized intention or hope, and using the *wh*-clauses as background, are further analyzed and grouped into the sub-categories of providing background information. Thus, there are seven sub-functions of setting background information in past perfect tense.

When past perfect (PP) is used to set background information, it seems to occur most likely in both independent clause and dependent clause with accompanying adverbial phrase of time: *by*, *before* and *after*. Based on the corpus data, PP seems to appear more frequently in dependent clauses than in independent clauses.

The word *before* only has #1385 hits (0.65%); whereas, *after* has #5256 hits (2.40%) when they co-occur with PP. *By*, on the other hand, is used as a preposition, which only has #2166 hits (1.6%). Examples (i) and (iii) show PP clause consisting of subject and past participle

verb that express a complete thought, thus an independent clause. Also, PP tends to occur in subordinate clause with *after* (as shown in both examples of (ii) and (iv)), hence a dependent clause.

In addition, PP also occurs in both defining and non-defining relative clauses that use relative pronouns such as (*who, which, that*). PP seems to occur more often in defining relative clause (#40 hits out of #500 hits in spoken; #29 hits out of #500 hits in written) than in non-defining relative clause (#30 out of #500 hits in spoken; #11 hits out of #500 hits in written). Example (xviii) and (xix) from COCA corpus seem to suggest that the use of past perfect serves as an “additional background information” about the subject in the past (non-defining relative clause). At the same time, example (xx) and (xxi) also show that the use of PP implies perspective changing to give background information (defining relative clause).

Interestingly, PP is also used to explain the reason/cause of some action (effect/result) in the past. However, as indicated by the above examples from (a) to (e), PP would not be the main events themselves, rather an essential background to what happened.

To implement the above corpus-informed functions of past perfect effectively, (Tran, 2013) suggested that instructors need to consider the following points in mind. Firstly, learners should be exposed to the way past perfect tense is used. Hence, an introduction of grammatical structures in which the different functions of past perfect frequently appear is useful. To avoid overwhelming learners with the different functions of past perfect tense, learners may wish to first, focus on the two main functions in past perfect tense: providing background information and explaining the cause-effect relationship. Once learners have mastered those two main functions, they may proceed with learning other functions. (Tran, 2013) also suggested that it is more effective when learners get involved in figuring out the structures themselves. Secondly, learners may need to get to know more about and use a corpus, such as COCA, as it will increase their curiosity and interest in exploring language patterns in use. Finally, when learners have learned about the structures and the functions, they can use them in real life situations through classroom conversation practice.

6.1 Scope of Future Research

So far, this research paper has intended to identify the various functions of past perfect tense in both written and spoken registers with more focus given to the top two most-commonly used functions, namely, providing background information and explaining the cause-effect

relationship. However, this paper only focuses on past perfect tense and its main functions and yet, the function of providing background information may also be found in simple past tense. Therefore, there may be a necessity to do a further research on the comparison between simple past and past perfect in providing background information.

6.2 Research Limitation

The limitation of this research is as follows, data from online corpus is limited from 1990 to 2015. Also, such data is derived from an online corpus named Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA) only and this means the findings are specific to American English.

References

- Bardovi-harlig, K. (2017). The effect of corpus-based instruction on pragmatic routines. *Language Learning & Technology*, 21(3), 76–103.
- Beloso, B. S. (2015). Designing, Describing and Compiling a Corpus of English for Architecture. *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 198(Cilc), 459–464. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2015.07.466>
- Celce-Murcia, M. (1991). *Teaching English as a Second Or Foreign Language*. (M. Celce-Murcia, Ed.). Heinle & Heinle Publishers. <https://doi.org/10.2307/3586980>
- Ella, J. R., & Mizunuma, Y. A. (2015). Development of Im Yunic for Sva Learning Device for Grammatical Proficiency. *PEOPLE: International Journal of Social Sciences*, 375–386.
- Esfandiari, M., & Rath, D. (2014). Teaching the Past Perfect: A Comparison of Two Approaches. *World Journal of English Language*, 4(4), 12–17. <https://doi.org/10.5430/wjel.v4n4p12>
- Garner, B. A. (2009). *Garner's Modern American Usage* (3rd Editio). Oxford University Press.
- Hoek, J., Zufferey, S., Evers-Vermeul, J., & Sanders, T. J. M. (2017). Cognitive complexity and the linguistic marking of coherence relations: A parallel corpus study. *Journal of Pragmatics*, 121, 113–131. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pragma.2017.10.010>

- Hughes, R., & McCarthy, M. (1998). From Sentence to Discourse: Discourse Grammar and English Language Teaching. *TESOL Quarterly*, 32(2), 263.
<https://doi.org/10.2307/3587584>
- McCarthy, M., McCarten, J., & Sandiford, H. (2006). *Touchstone Level 2 Student's Book* (2nd Edition). Cambridge University Press.
- O'Keeffe, A., O'Keeffe, A., & Carter, R. (2007). *From Corpus to Classroom: Language Use and Language Teaching* (1 edition). Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511497650>
- Ocampo, M. B., & City, F. (2017). JAPANESE STUDENTS ' Mindset And Motivation In Studying English Grammar And Reading. *PEOPLE: International Journal of Social Sciences*, 3(2), 1192–1208. <https://doi.org/10.20319/pijss.2017.32.11921208>
- Reppen, R., Fitzmaurice, S., & Biber, D. (2002). *Using Corpora to Explore Linguistic Variation*. (R. Reppen, S. M. Fitzmaurice, & D. Biber, Eds.) (Vol. 9). Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company. <https://doi.org/10.1075/scl.9>
- Richards, J. C. (2004). *New Interchange Resource Book 1*. Cambridge University Press.
- Sedlatschek, A. (2009). *Contemporary Indian English* (Vol. G38). Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company. <https://doi.org/10.1075/veaw.g38>
- Tran, L. A. (2013). *A Corpus-based Analysis of the Evaluative Adjectives Interesting and Nice in Written and Spoken English* Linh Ai Tran *Evaluative Adjectives in Language Use*. Hawaii Pacific University TESOL Working Paper. Retrieved from <http://www.jbe-platform.com/content/books/9789027296160>
- Yoo, I. W. (2015). The Non-Deictic Use of Previous and Last : A Corpus-Based Study. *English Studies*, 96(3), 337–357. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0013838X.2014.996387>
- Zhang, X. (2016). A Corpus-based Study on Chinese EFL Learners' Acquisition of English Existential Construction. *Journal of Language Teaching and Research*, 7(4), 709. <https://doi.org/10.17507/jltr.0704.10>