

L2 Acquisition of the English Present Perfect

A Study on the Existential– Resultative Interpretation

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Outline

- Introduction
- Grammaticality judgement test
(usage of existential vs. resultative
Present Perfect and Past Simple)
- Discussion of the results
- Conclusions

Introduction

- Second Language Acquisition (SLA)
[L2-English, L1-Cypriot Greek]
- Possible transfer from L1 into L2
- Focus on Present Perfect
[existential vs. resultative]

The role of Universal Grammar in SLA

- **UG fully accessed (direct access to UG):** *L2 grammars are constrained by UG principles same way as in L1*
(Mazurkewich 1984; White 1989; Schwartz 1993; Schwartz & Sprouse 1996; Eubank 1993)
- **UG partially accessed (indirect access to UG):** *UG principles can be available in L2 only through L1, transfer from L1 of a parameterized principle can take place or parameter resetting constrained by UG*
(White 1985a; Schwartz 1987)
- **UG not accessed at all (no access to UG):** *UG principles are not available to L2 learners, instead general problem solving procedures are used*
(Clahsen & Muysken 1986; Schachter 1990; Epstein, Flynn & Martohardjono 1996)

Application of transfer strategy depends on:

- **Age of a learner** (White 1989; Schwartz 1993; Schwartz & Sprouse 1996; Eubank 1993).
- **Level of learner's knowledge** (Zobl 1979a; Kellerman 1977; Meisel 1983; Andersen 1978)
- **Stage of language acquisition**
- **The choice of learning strategies by a learner**
(transfer → transfer + overgeneralization and simplification → only overgeneralization and simplification)
- **Typological distance between L1 and L2 and markedness** (Zobl 1979b; Wode 1977; Jordens 1977; Kellerman 1977, 1979, 1980)

Hypotheses of the research

- Greek-Cypriot pupils can transfer from mother-tongue (Cypriot Greek) to English
- English acquisition not influenced by L1
- Transfer from L1 into L2 can be partial
- Transfer from L1 into L2 can take place only at some language acquisition stages

Past Simple	Present Perfect
1. Reference time/Event time/Speech time (Reichenbach 1947; Hornstein 1990)	
reference time precedes speech time (R_S)	event time precedes reference time (E_R)
2. Compatibility with adverbs (McCoard 1978; Klein 1992; Giorgi & Pianesi 1998)	
past-oriented adverbs, e.g. <i>yesterday</i>	perfect-oriented adverbs, e.g. <i>since</i>
3. Aspectual differences (Parsons 1990; Vlach 1993; Giorgi & Pianesi 1998)	
aspect properties: statives and non-statives (accomplishment, achievement or activities).	focuses on the state that follows from a prior eventuality

Perfect of Result vs. Existential Perfect

Perfect time span:

(Iatridou, Anagnostopoulou & Izvorski 2001; Agouraki 2006)

- **Left Boundary (LB)** is introduced by time-adverbial (e.g. *since*)
- **Right Boundary (RB)** is the utterance time which is set by the perfect auxiliary
- **Existential Perfect** presupposes at least one interval in which an (un)bounded eventuality occurs
- **Perfect of the Result** requires telic predicates and presupposes the existence of the underlying eventuality

English Present Perfect

- a **category** of tense or a specific category of aspect (Comrie 1976)
- **auxiliary** verb *have* + past participle of a **lexical** verb
- a **compound** tense, as it combines past and present
- it is not compatible with **past time adjuncts**
- four major **uses** of the Present Perfect:
 - the *continuative*
 - the *experiential* (existential)
 - the *resultative*
 - the perfect of *recent past* (Huddleston & Pullum 2002)

Present Perfect vs. Past tense in Standard Modern Greek (SMG)

Present Perfect A (<i>eho</i> 'have' + perfective participle)	ambiguous between existential and resultative reading
Present Perfect B (<i>eho</i> 'have' + adjectival participle — for transitive verbs)	can only have result reading
Present Perfect B (<i>ime</i> 'be' + adjectival participle — for intransitive verbs)	can only have result reading
Past Tense (Agouraki 2006: 43)	can have “definite”, existential, and result reading

Present Perfect vs. Past Tense in Cypriot Greek (CG)

Present Perfect A	no
Present Perfect B	can have result reading only
Past Tense (Menardos 1969; Agouraki 2006: 43)	can have “definite”, existential, and result reading

Perfect of Result vs. Existential Perfect

Perfect in SMG and CG

Perfect of Result	Existential Perfect
Present Perfect B in SMG and CG	Present Perfect A in SMG
Present Perfect A in SMG	Past tense in SMG and CG
Past Tense in CG and in SMG	
<p>semantics and eventuality-level adverbials can help to reveal the difference between the usage of Resultative Perfect, Existential Perfect, and Past Simple (Agouraki 2006)</p>	

Study

Aim

- Investigation of the possible transfer from L1 (CG) into L2 (English) in acquisition of existential and resultative Present Perfect in English

Participants

- total number of pupils that took part in research: 398
 - *117 pupils from 7 different government schools in Cyprus* (primary – gymnasium – lyceum)
 - *111 pupils from 3 different private schools in Cyprus* (primary – gymnasium – lyceum)
 - *156 pupils from 6 different government schools in Greece* (primary – gymnasium – lyceum)
 - *14 pupils from a British private school in Cyprus* (control group)

Materials

- **questionnaire** (23 questions: multiple-choice, yes-no, open-ended questions)
- **test** (based on Agouraki 2006)
- ✓ **sentence-picture matching task (SPM):** 27 items (20 items to choose between Past Simple and Present Perfect, 7 items as distractors to choose between Present Simple, Present Continuous, Future Simple, Past Continuous)
- ✓ **cloze task:** 19 items (13 items to choose between Past Simple and Present Perfect and 6 items as distractors to choose between various tenses: Present Simple, Present Continuous, Future Simple, Past Continuous)

Test 1. Possible Vagueness with Respect to the Number of Events

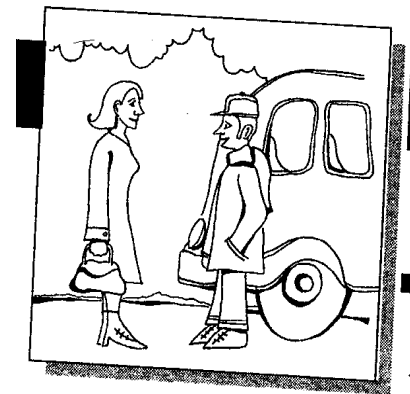
- **Existential Perfect** has the interpretation of at least once, more than one time (Iatridou, Anagnostopoulou & Izvorski 2001: 200, Agouraki 2006: 46).
- **Resultant perfect** involves only one eventuality and can be interpreted that something happens only once, only one time.
- The sentences with existential reading of perfect were taken, the pupils were offered to choose between Past Simple and Present Perfect, having in mind that Cypriot pupils might choose Past Simple (in case of transfer from CG as Simple Past expresses existential reading in CG). We had **3 cases of this diagnostic test**, e.g.:
 1. a. I have worked in this office for many years.
b. I worked in this office for many years.



Test 2. Temporal Placement of the Event

- The **eventuality** in the Perfect of Result is obligatorily placed at the left boundary (LB) of the perfect time span (Anagnostopoulou & Izvorski 2001; Agouraki 2006: 47).
- The **adverbials** were put in the right boundary (RB), having the existential reading of Perfect, to check for possible transfer from CG for Greek-Cypriot pupils — if they choose Past Simple; there were used **4 cases of this diagnostic test**, e.g.:

2. Do you know where Jane is? Yes.
 - a. I have just met her at the bus station.
 - b. I just met her at the bus station.



Test 3. The *how long*-Test

- The *how long*-question is possible with result reading of Present Perfect, but not with existential
- In the case of the result reading, pupils are **predicted to choose Perfect** (in case of transfer), as Present perfect B in CG is used to express result reading. We use this test just to see if pupils confuse between result and existential reading.
- There were **2 cases of this diagnostic test**, e.g.:

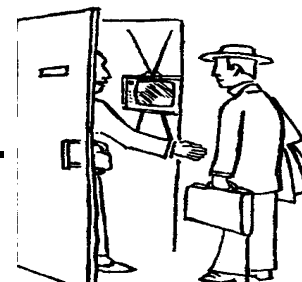
3. a. How long have you been married?
b. How long were you married?



Test 4. Interpretation of the *ksana*-Test

- According to Agouraki (2006), the use of the **Existential Perfect** with *ksana* 'again' presupposes that there has been at least one occurrence of the eventuality.
- In the **Result Perfect** it is interpreted as 'before'.
- There were used **5 cases of this diagnostic test**, sentences with the existential reading of Present Perfect were chosen to check if Greek-Cypriot pupils would choose mainly Past Simple (in case of possible transfer from CG), e.g.:

4. a. John has never seen this stranger again.
b. John never saw this stranger again.



Test 5. Markers of Existential Perfect: *up to now / today*

- According to Agouraki (2006), the adverbial modifier ***up to now*** (or *up to today*) is the marker of the existential reading in CG.
- **Present Perfect B in CG cannot express existential reading.** So if transfer from CG takes place, Greek-Cypriot pupils are predicted to choose Past Simple.
- There were **6 cases of this diagnostic test**, e.g.:

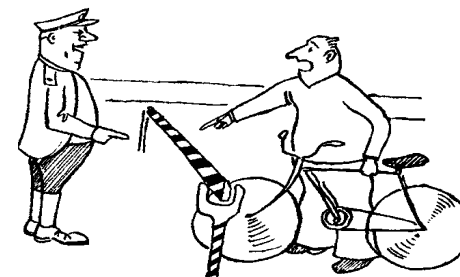
5. a. Up to now he has been in the bathroom for two hours.
b. Up to now he was in the bathroom for two hours.



Test 6. Additional Existential Markers: *potte, kamia fora, sti zoe mu, os tora*

- According to Agouraki (2006), there are certain markers for the existential reading, such as *potte* 'ever', *kamia fora* 'anytime', *sti zoe mu* 'in my life', *os tora* 'up to now'. Present Perfect B in CG can not express the existential reading. So if transfer from CG takes place, Greek-Cypriot pupils are predicted to choose Past Simple.
- There were **10 cases of this diagnostic test**, e.g.:

6. a. I have never seen this road closed in my life.
b. I never saw this road closed in my life.



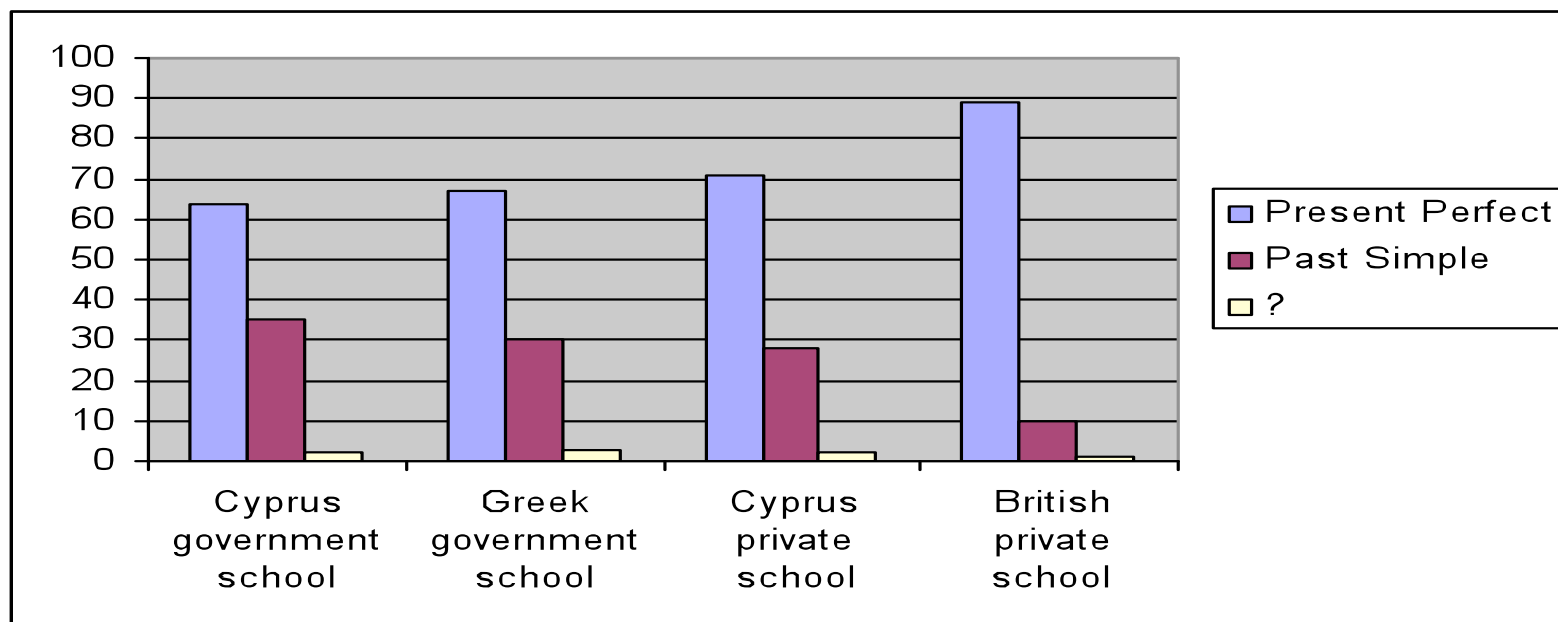
Discussion

– Comparison of the Test Types –

The “easiest” test (majority of correct answers Present Perfect)	
for all schools	2. temporal placement of event
The most difficult test (majority of wrong answers Past Simple)	
for Cyprus government school and Greek government school	1. “possible vagueness with respect to the number of events”
for Cyprus private school pupils	5. <i>up to now, up to today</i> , marker of the existential Perfect.
for the British pupils	6. interpretation of the prefix <i>ksana-</i> ‘again’

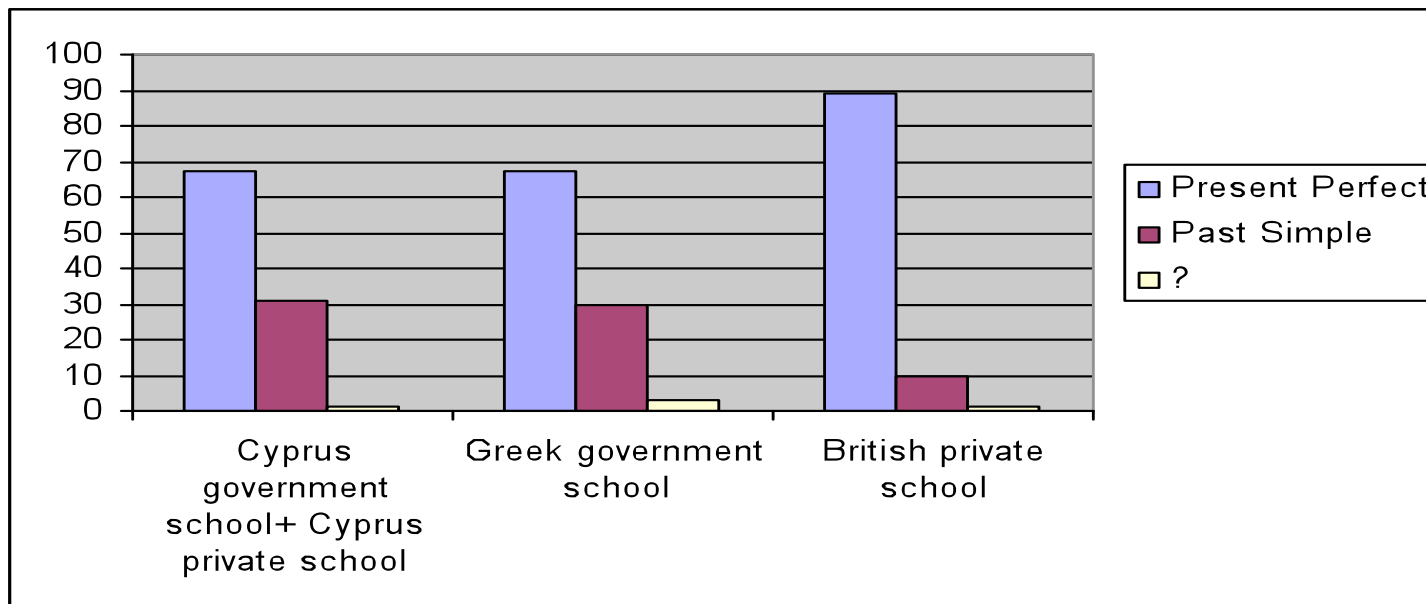
Comparison of Different Types of Schools' Performance (for all tests)

- **performance in all tests:** *Control group* (British private school: 89.26% of the correct answers) > *Cyprus private school* (70.56%) > *Greek government school* (67.19%) > *Cyprus government school* (64.14%)
- **statistically significant difference between all types of schools:** Cyprus government, Greek government, Cyprus private, and British private schools (two-sample t-test $p=.0000<.05^*$)



Comparison of Different Types of Schools

- *British private school* (89.26%) > *Greek government school* (67.19%) = [*Cyprus private school* + *Cyprus government school* (67.42%)]
- there is **no statistically significant difference** between Cyprus school and Greek government school ($p=.2503>.05$)



Different Types of Schools: Primary School – Gymnasium – Lyceum Division

Cyprus government schools:

- lyceum* (68.3%) ~ *gymnasium* (67.5%) > *primary school* (54.47%)
- there is a **statistically significant difference** between *primary school and gymnasium* (two sample t-test $p=.0000<.05^*$), *primary school and lyceum* ($p=.0000<.05^*$), but **no statistically significant difference** between *gymnasium and lyceum* ($p=.5939>.05$)

Greek government schools:

- lyceum* (74.63%) ~ *gymnasium* (70.8%) > *primary school* (54.1%)
- there is a **statistically significant difference** between *primary school and gymnasium* (two sample t-test $p=.0000<.05^*$), *primary school and lyceum* ($p=.0000<.05^*$), but **no statistically significant difference** between *lyceum and gymnasium* ($p=.0599>.05$)

Cyprus private school:

- gymnasium* (86.22%) > *lyceum* (76.55%) > *primary school* (59.7%)
- there is a **statistically significant difference** between *primary school, gymnasium and lyceum* ($p=.0000<.05^*$)

Conclusion (1)

This study yields at least **3 interesting results**:

- **strong case against the Transfer Hypothesis** regarding the acquisition of the English Present Perfect by Greek-Cypriot pupils
- **no significant difference between Greek-Cypriot and Mainland Greek pupils** in their acquisition of the Present Perfect in English
- **native-speaker test performance (British) better than non-NS** (Cyprus & Greek schools)

Conclusion (2)

- **Cyprus private school** showed the best test performance of all non-NS
- **Factors that influence SLA and usage of transfer** as a learning strategy (present study):
 - ✓ level of language exposure and language proficiency
 - ✓ input (language of teaching)
 - ✓ parents' education and socio-economic status of the family
 - ✓ learner's age (the older the learner the easier language learning is, more years of language experience, practice, language exposure, fewer mistakes, less transfer is needed or not at all)
 - ✓ motivation

Outlook

1. This investigation might be continued in the future from a **syntactic perspective** that could provide a better, more complete picture of the acquisition of the English Present Perfect by Greek-Cypriot pupils.
2. The Transfer Hypothesis could also be investigated in the future from the intuitive idea that **only morpho-lexical information may be transferred**, not semantic interface issues (as relevant for present perfect).

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