

Abstract (in English)

This thesis explores relationships among the tenses that express the past in the English language. Among these tenses are: past simple, past continuous, present perfect, present perfect continuous, past perfect, and past perfect continuous. The research focuses on the variation between the past simple (which also includes past continuous) and the present perfect (which also includes progressive constructions). The researched variation is the use of the past simple in the context of the present perfect in which the Present-Day English (PDE) would use the present perfect, and vice versa.

Three decades (1731–1740, 1791–1800, and 1861–1870) were chosen from the eighteenth and the nineteenth centuries. The findings were compared to the PDE situation. The material was collected from an online database called *The Proceeding of the Old Bailey*, which is believed to be one of the most reliable sources that are representative of the spoken language of the day. It was thought that the variation would be observed best in spontaneous spoken language. The aim was to study spoken language that was influenced by the grammatical prescriptivism of the age only marginally. There was an expectation that the occurrence of the past simple in the context of the present perfect would gradually decrease throughout the researched periods. Only a slight decrease was observed in the last decade, 1861–1870. Apart from that decrease, the most important findings include the fact that the past simple was used with certain adverbs in lexicalized phrases that have survived till PDE. The only change is that these lexicalized phrases are rarely used in standard written British English.

The second variation in which the present perfect is used in the context of the past simple is not as common in Present-Day (PDE) as it was in Late Modern English. The usage of the eighteenth and the nineteenth centuries is understandable: the divide between the temporal domains of the tenses was not clear. PDE considers such use erroneous. This research has found that the use of the present perfect increased in the middle of the nineteenth century. The increased use, together with other indicators, supports the view that the tense system of the researched period was stabilizing into the shape of the PDE system.