# Perception of the English Universal Present Perfect in Polish Learners of English and British Native Speakers

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## Abstract

*It is widely considered that Polish does not possess the Present Perfect, and that it represents a challenge to those teaching Polish learners of English. From a teaching perspective, the question arises of what a Polish learner of English perceives when they read/hear a Present Perfect sentence. The research presented here attempts to answer that question, but with a focus on the universal Present Perfect. A questionnaire was developed to measure the perception of the English universal present perfect's two defining features: its incompleteness and its continuability. The questionnaire was completed by Polish learners of English and a group of British native speakers. The hypotheses were: 1. Incompleteness/continuability would be perceived in the universal present perfect, 2. that lower proficiency learners would perceive incompleteness/continuability at a lower rate and perception would increase with proficiency, and 3. British native speakers would have the highest level of perception. The results show that the incompleteness/continuability of the universal present perfect are perceived. While perception decreases with lower proficiency learners, British native speakers did not have the highest levels of perception. The next step is to develop a pedagogy which focuses on perception-based teaching and carry out an experiment to analyse its efficacy.*

*Keywords: foreign language teaching, perception, Present Perfect, second language acquisition*

## Streszczenie

### Percepcja uniwersalnego czasu Present Perfect przez Polaków uczących się języka angielskiego oraz rodzimych brytyjskich użytkowników języka

*Powszechnie uważa się, że język polski nie posiada czasu Present Perfect, co stanowi wyzwanie dla osób uczących Polaków języka angielskiego. Z perspektywy dydaktycznej pojawia się pytanie, co postrzega polski uczący się języka angielskiego, gdy czyta/słyszy zdanie z Present Perfect. Przedstawione tu badania próbują odpowiedzieć na to pytanie, ale koncentrują się na uniwersalnym czasie Present Perfect. Opracowano kwestionariusz, aby zmierzyć percepcję dwóch cech definiujących angielski Universal Present Perfect: jego niekompletności i jego ciągłości. Ankietę wypełnili Polacy uczący się języka angielskiego oraz grupa brytyjskich native speakerów. Hipotezy były następujące: 1. Niekompletność/ciągłość jest postrzegana jako cecha*

*uniwersalnego czasu Present Perfect, 2. uczący się o niższych umiejętnościach postrzegają niekompletność/ciągłość w mniejszym stopniu, a percepcja wzrasta wraz z biegłością, oraz 3. brytyjscy rodzimi użytkownicy języka mają najwyższy poziom percepcji. Wyniki pokazują, że niekompletność/ciągłość uniwersalnego czasu Present Perfect jest postrzegana. Chociaż percepcja spada u uczniów o niższych umiejętnościach, brytyjscy rodzimi użytkownicy języka nie wykazują najwyższego poziomu percepcji. Następnym krokiem będzie opracowanie metody, która skupia się na nauczaniu opartym na percepcji i przeprowadzenie eksperymentu analizującego jej skuteczność.*

*Słowa kluczowe: nauka języka obcego, percepcja, czas Present Perfect, akwizycja drugiego języka*

## 1. Introduction

For Polish learners of English (PLEs), the English Present Perfect (PrP) is considered problematic to learn (Wróblewski 1986). My (unpublished) master's degree research, an error analysis on the written production of Polish middle and secondary school pupils, revealed that most pupils believed that most of their mistakes would be caused by using or not using the PrP, and that they believed the PrP was one of the most complicated areas of English grammar. One explanation for this difficulty encountered by PLEs is that the Polish language does not possess the PrP (Sadowska 2012), although Migdalski (2006) argues that it does exist in Polish. Irrespective of the existence of the PrP in Polish, when a PLE tries to translate/understand the PrP, a PLE must choose between past and present tense, perfective and imperfective aspect, depending on which use of the PrP they wish to translate, or relate to their first language. There is no one singular form in Polish which can convey all the different meanings of the PrP.

Another issue related to the PrP is that it is one of the last parts of the English tense-aspect system to be acquired. Bardovi-Harlig (2001) observed that Past Simple (PaS) needs to be acquired before the PrP can be acquired. She reported (2000) that the sequence of acquisition for Second Language (L2) learners of English was the past, the progressive, PrP, and lastly, the past perfect. For L2 learners, the PrP is only typically acquired after 15 years of learning (Davydova 2011). Given the non-existence of the PrP in Polish, and it being acquired late, it represents a certain challenge for English language teachers in Poland and PLEs. The challenge of teaching the PrP to PLEs led me to consider how PLEs make sense of the PrP, and how they try to understand it.

From a teaching perspective, a teacher has a few methods of observing the L2 acquisition of the PrP. A few examples would be the use or non-use of the PrP in written or spoken

production, or the various types of exercises contained in coursebooks, such as gap fills. An example of a typical gap fill exercise is:

Write the correct form of the verb [LIVE] in the sentence below:
I live in London and I ………………. there since 2008.

If a learner writes *I have lived*, we know to a certain degree that the learner understands that PrP is expected. Using the PrP is required as the speaker currently lives in London and started living in London in 2008. If a learner wrote *I lived* or *I am living*, we are aware that there is some type of issue, perhaps that the learner does not understand a context which requires the PrP, or the learner has not yet learnt or acquired the PrP. I argue that from this type of exercise, we can observe a specific type of learner knowledge. If a learner answers incorrectly, we only see that the answer was incorrect. We do not know why the learner answered incorrectly. In this respect, answering incorrectly in exercises and the incorrect use of the PrP in written and spoken production does not reveal why the learners made a mistake. From a teaching perspective, there may be value in gaining an understanding of what a learner perceives when they meet the PrP, or any other grammatical concept. The aim of this research was to develop a method of gaining an understanding of what a learner understands of the PrP. Here, this understanding is defined as *perception*.

Of the multiple meanings given for *perception*, the Oxford Dictionary of English has the following definition 'the way in which something is regarded, understood or interpreted' (Stevenson 2010). The working definition of perception used in this research is: how a participant understands and interprets the prototypical uses of the English present perfect. The different prototypical uses of the PrP are described in the next paragraph. A participant's perception is how they understand and interpret the various meanings conveyed by the different uses of the PrP. The Oxford Dictionary defines *understand* as 'perceive the intended meaning of (words, a language, or a speaker)' (Stevenson 2010). This research asks whether the participants perceive what is expressed by the prototypical uses of the PrP. Specifically, the aim was to develop a method which focuses on what it is a learner understands of the PrP and the various meanings it can express.

This research treats the PrP as having three prototypical uses: the Universal Present Perfect (UPrP), the Experiential Present Perfect (EPrP), and the Resultative Present Perfect (RPrP). The UPrP signifies a state which started in the past and continues to the moment of speaking, as in *I have lived in Poland since 2007*. The EPrP denotes that an event or state occurred at least once

before the moment of speaking, demonstrated in the sentence *I have been to Poland many times*. The RPrP indicates an event or state that occurred before the moment of speaking and that the result of this event/state still persists, as in *She has gone to Poland*. The result of this event still holds as the woman in question is still in Poland. The research presented here focuses on the UPrP, but the data is part of a larger project, which also includes research on the perception of the EPrP, the RPrP and their defining qualities. The UPrP is discussed in greater detail in section 2.

The main task was to develop a method that would provide an understanding of how PLEs perceive the PrP, and if the data produced was fruitful, to later use this method to research other grammatical concepts. This method is discussed in section 3, but briefly, perception is measured by presenting a bipolar scale of the characteristics of the PrP and participants rate their perception of these characteristics. The prevalent belief that the learning and teaching of the PrP are problematic provided an excellent opportunity to measure perception. If a teacher can gain an insight into how their students perceive grammar, then the teacher has a better understanding of what they need to improve and work on, and conversely, the opposite. The uniqueness of this research (if it is unique) is that as far as my review of the literature has taken me, there has been no research which focuses on the salient characteristics of a grammatical concept and how this concept is perceived. British Native Speaker (BNS) perception of the PrP is also studied in this research. The motivations for this are twofold. Firstly, without knowledge of how BNSs perceive the PrP, it is difficult to evaluate PLE perception of the PrP. To some degree, BNS perception provides a type of barometer for how to interpret the data produced by PLEs. Secondly, many linguists have described the PrP, but little is known about how BNSs perceive the PrP. This research attempts to discover if the features of the PrP, which have been described by linguists, are salient to non-linguist BNSs.

## 2. The universal present perfect

### 2.1. Defining the UPrP

Several terms and descriptions have been used within the literature for the UPrP. Comrie uses the term *perfect of persistent situation* and describes it as 'the use of the Perfect to describe a situation that started in the past but continues (persists) into the present, as in 'we've lived here for ten years' (1976: 60). McCawley (1971: 104) uses the term *universal* and describes it as being used 'to indicate that a state of affairs prevailed throughout some interval stretching from

the past into the present'. Leech (2004: 36) uses the term *state-up-to-the-present* for the UPrP and states that it is used to describe how a 'state extends over a period lasting up to the present moment'. Pancheva (2003: 277) describes the UPrP as making a claim 'about the temporal location of the underlying eventuality' and that it 'asserts that the underlying eventuality holds throughout an interval, delimited by the time of utterance and a certain time in the past'. All the above descriptions share the common feature of the UPrP that the state or event it denotes is one that started at some point in the past and continues at the moment of speaking.

## 2.2. How the UPrP is presented in this research

From the four descriptions in section 2.1., four verbs are used to express the qualities of the UPrP, respectively they are: *continue*, *persist*, *last*, and *hold*. The questionnaire was designed to be understandable for those with little-to-no metalinguistic knowledge. According to the Cambridge Dictionary, *continue* is at Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) level B1, *persist* is C2, *last* (as a verb) is B1, and *hold* (as a verb) is B2. In terms of familiarity for lower proficiency PLEs, *continue* and *last* are the most reasonable candidates. *Continue* was chosen over *last* as the latter is more commonly introduced as an adjective and adverb at A2. Additionally, many A1/A2 course books label the present progressive as present continuous, meaning that PLEs at lower levels may be familiar with the term *continuous*. On the perception questionnaire, the ability of the UPrP to describe a state that started in the past and continues to the present is represented as *continuable*. The polar term *non-continuable* is suitable for both the EPrP and RPrP. The EPrP expresses a non-continuable eventuality. In *I have been to Greece*, the eventuality had already terminated at speech time. This is also true for the RPrP, as in *I have done the shopping*.

The scale of incomplete/complete was chosen as a simplification of the idea of boundedness and unboundedness. The terms "bounded" and "unbounded" are linguistic terms and are not suitable for PLEs or BNSs without an understanding of aspect. Hence the necessity to find simplified terms that express the notion of boundedness and unboundedness. Iatridou et al. (2003) write that when described as bounded, an eventuality is said to have completed, or terminated. The EPrP and RPrP both denote eventualities which are complete, therefore, using a scale which measures the perception of *completeness* is justifiable. With the UPrP, the eventuality is unbounded. An eventuality described in a UPrP verb phrase is 'not asserted to have reached an endpoint - achievement of the goal, in the case of telics; termination for atelics' (Iatridou et al. 2003:155). The UPrP is represented in this research by the atelic verb *live*. Due

to there being no termination point for an eventuality described by the UPrP, it was decided that *incomplete* is a justifiable term to measure the non-termination of the described eventuality.

Pragmatically, it may be considered that there is no difference if an eventuality is viewed as incomplete or continuable. However, the two scales of continuable/non-continuable and complete/incomplete originate from two different starting points, or perspectives, for measuring the perception of the UPrP. The notion of the UPrP being continuable comes from the general linguistic description of the UPrP: that a UPrP predicate continues/persists at the moment of speaking. The notion that the UPrP expresses incompleteness relates to viewpoint aspect, and originates from the aspectual notion that the UPrP is unbounded. Another potential set of terms were perfective/dokonany and imperfective/niedokonany, and are suitable for PLEs as they are parts of the Polish aspect system, and these terms are taught in Polish public schools. However, these terms are not widely known to non-linguist BNSs, or those without a knowledge of the Polish language.

## 3. Methodology

### 3.1. Samples, sampling procedures, and data collection

The population this research is focused on are PLEs and BNSs. PLEs are divided into subgroups based on their language proficiency according to CEFR. The different groups can be viewed in Table 1 below. Convenience sampling was used for PLEs and volunteer response sampling was used for BNSs. The BNS group was composed of individual teenagers and adults from England. PriC1 was a group of Polish secondary school pupils learning English at a private language school in Częstochowa, Poland. All of them had completed their Cambridge B2 exam in the summer of 2021. This group carried out the questionnaire during their first week (October 2021) of a course which was to prepare them for the Cambridge C1 Advanced exam. UJD were a group of first year English philology students who had all successfully passed their extended maturity exam, which is at CEFR level B2, in May 2021. Both PriC1 and UJD comprised students who I taught. UW was a group of 24 English philology students near the end of the third semester in their second year of a master's programme at the University of Wrocław. They self-ascribed themselves as being at CEFR level C1. AcG were a group of academics who held the academic position of doctor or professor, predominantly in the field of linguistics, and ascribed themselves as being at CEFR level C2. The online questionnaire was created and administered using Microsoft Forms. A paper version was also created. Both versions featured

the same items, wording, etc. The questionnaire consisted of items which produced quantitative and qualitative data. The questionnaire produces primary data and descriptive data.

Table 1. Breakdown of samples and subgroups

| Group name | Description | CEFR | Number | Type |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| PriC1 | Private language school – C1 course | B2 | 20 | Paper |
| UJD | 1st year English philology students | B2 | 60 | Paper |
| UW | 2nd year English philology students | C1 | 24 | Online |
| AcG | Rank of doctor or professor in linguistics | C2 | 15 | Online |
| BNS | Range of teenagers and adults from England | Native | 20 | Online |

All participants were informed of the scope of the research (in Polish and English), their rights, how their personal data will be treated, and their right to be informed of the results. This information was stated clearly at the beginning of the online questionnaire and at the front of the paper version of the questionnaire. All participants were informed that their data would be anonymised when stored and if their responses would be published. All personal data was anonymised and stored locally on an encrypted hard drive. Parental consent was unnecessary for Polish teenagers as they were between the ages of 16 to 19, and the English teenagers from the age of 17 to 19. The research was conducted in a manner that respects the European Union GDPR, the United Kingdom (UK) GDPR, and the UK Digital Protection Act 2018.

### 3.2. Tasks on the questionnaire

### 3.2.1. Overview of questionnaire tasks

This section presents the different tasks featured on the questionnaire and they are presented in the order that they were completed by participants. The main task was the perception task, and it receives more attention and explanation that the other tasks. Table 2 shows the order and number of potential tasks participants completed. The *Elicitation of the PrP* was added after a preliminary analysis of data from UW and AcG responses to the perception items.

Table 2. The tasks featured on the questionnaire

| Task No. | Questionniare task | Groups |
|----------|-------------------|--------|
| 1 | Elicitation of the PrP | Not AcG/UW |
| 2 | Metalinguistic knowledge of the PrP | All |
| 3 | PrP perception questions | All |
| 4 | Translation of PrP sentences into Polish | Not BNS |

### 3.2.2. *The elicitation exercise*

This task was added to consider a possible relationship between the productive use of the PrP and the perception of the UPrP. PriC1, UJD and BNS were presented with nine different situations or questions, and they were asked to write a sentence in response. There were three situations/questions for each of the prototypical uses of the UPrP. The UPrP situations were focused on the use of three different verbs that allow a UPrP reading: *live*, *work*, and *know*. In all three situations, there is an event or state that started in the past that continues at the moment of speaking. The three UPrP situations present are:

1) You live in this house and started living in this house in 2008. You want to tell your friend about this situation. In one sentence, what do you say?

   Start your sentence with:

   I ………………………..

2) You currently work for Microsoft and started working for them in 2014. You want to tell your friend about this. In one sentence, what do you say?

   Start your sentence with:

   I …………………………

3) Tell me how long you [KNOW] your best friend.

   Start your sentence with:

   I ………………………….

Question 3) specifies which verb (know) should be used as it was not possible to think of a situation using the verb *know* which did not use the PrP in describing the situation. The challenge was to create a situation which would likely elicit the UPrP but not use the UPrP in the question text.

### 3.2.3. *The metalinguistic knowledge of the PrP task*

This task attempted to discover what a participant knows about the PrP. Metalinguistic knowledge of the PrP would then be compared to perception to evaluate any relationship. Participants were presented with four questions:

1. Do you know what the present perfect is? (Yes or No)
2. If you know what the present perfect is, please write below what it is.
3. What is the structure of the present perfect? How do we make the present perfect?
4. Why do we use the present perfect?

### 3.2.4. *The perception task*

Participants were presented with a bipolar scale that contained terms that reflect characteristics of the prototypical uses of the PrP. The UPrP was represented by two sets of bipolar scales: incompleteness/completeness (shown in Figure 1) and continuable/non-continuable. The UPrP, EPrP, RPrP and PaS are all represented by three sentences each. Three is the minimum number, which allows an average to be made and helps to ensure psychometric validity. For every bipolar characteristic, the participant rated their perception of the 12 sentences on a five-point scale. The decision was made to show all the prototypical uses for every semantic differential scale. This allows for a psychometrically valid questionnaire as it allows for the possibility that a prototypical use might be perceived in an unexpected manner. Questions and multi-scale items were presented in only English on the BNS version, and English and Polish on the PLE version of the questionnaire. The decision to have three PaS sentences was made because of the common use of the PaS in resultative contexts.

| | | Incomplete | | Neutral | Complete | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | Strong | Weak | | Weak | Strong |
| | | Nieukończone | | | Ukończone | |
| ComQ1 | I have lived there for a long time. | | | | | |
| ComQ2 | We have lived here for years. | | | | | |
| ComQ3 | We have lived there for a while. | | | | | |
| ComQ4 | I have been to France. | | | | | |
| ComQ5 | We have been to Greece. | | | | | |
| ComQ6 | I have been there before. | | | | | |
| ComQ7 | I have done my homework. | | | | | |
| ComQ8 | We have done the shopping. | | | | | |
| ComQ9 | I have done the cleaning. | | | | | |
| ComQ10 | We lived there for a long time. | | | | | |
| ComQ11 | I went to Greece. | | | | | |
| ComQ12 | I did my homework. | | | | | |

Figure 1. Perception of completeness/incompleteness task (non-randomised, paper version)

To measure perception of completeness/incompleteness, participants were presented with the question 'How complete are the events/states described by the sentences?' and a simplified rephrasing of the question 'In other words, do you feel that the events/states in the sentences are complete?' Participants were asked to mark their perception along a semantic differential scale composed of bipolar terms, starting with: (strong) incomplete, (weak) incomplete, neutral, (weak) complete, and (strong) complete. For measuring the perception of continuability and non-continuability, participants were presented with the question 'Do you feel that the events/states in the sentences continue into the moment of speaking?' and a simplified rephrasing 'In other words, do you feel that the event/states are not finished and can continue to the present moment?' The semantic differential scale was: (strong) non-continuable, (weak) non-continuable, neutral, (weak) continuable, and (strong) continuable.

The prototypical uses of the PrP were represented by one verb each (as shown in Figure 1) and the justification for choosing these three verbs will now be discussed. The UPrP was represented by the verb *live* and the three sentences were: *I have lived there for a long time*, *We have lived here for years*, *We have lived there for a while*. In order to ensure a universal reading, it was necessary to add an adverbial phrase which expresses a length of time. Without such an adverbial phrase, a sentence may be ambiguous and more likely to gain an experiential reading. The sentence *I have lived there* may refer to a state which persists to the present; however, the more natural reading would be an experiential one, i.e., the state occurred at least once before the moment of speaking. The verb *live* is frequently found in English course books to teach the meaning of the UPrP.

The EPrP was presented by the verb *be* and its three sentences were: *I have been to France*, *We have been to Greece*, and *I have been there before*. The verb *be* was chosen in part because of Comrie's description (1976) illustrating the difference in meaning between the EPrP and the RPrP. Contrasting *He has been to the shop* and *He has gone to the shop*, it is clear that in the latter sentence that the result of the eventuality still holds: *he* is still at the shop. While in the former sentence, *he* is no longer at the shop. The third sentence contains the adverb *before* and may have the effect of adding to a perception of a state/event preceding the moment of speaking. The verb *be* is frequently used to teach the use of the PrP to talk about experiences, i.e., the EPrP, where it is often presented with examples such as *I have been to China* and *I have never been to Mongolia*. The choice of preposition was important and *to* was chosen as it permits an experiential reading where other prepositions may not. To compare, *We have been to Greece* and *We have been in Greece*. The former has an experiential reading while the latter has a

resultative reading, for example, spoken in response to the question *Why do you have a suntan?* To which the speaker could reply *We have been in Greece* as an answer.

The RPrP was represented by the verb *do* in the following three sentences: *I have done my homework*, *We have done the shopping*, I *have done the cleaning*. The determiner *my* helps to ensure a resultative reading. Compare *I have done my homework* and *I have done homework*. Without a determiner, the *homework* in the latter sentence is not defined/determined. As such, it would be inferred that the speaker is referring to homework in general, and an experiential reading is most likely. Using the determiner *my* in the former sentence defines which homework the speaker is referring to and this denies an experiential reading. Similarly, the use of the definitive article in *We have done the shopping* and *I have done the cleaning* defines the scope of what *shopping* and *cleaning* is being referred to, and this helps to ensure a resultative reading. The verb *do* is often used in course books to present the RPrP, for example: *I have done the dishes*.

### 3.2.5. *The translation task*

The translation task was specifically given to the PLEs, and they were asked to translate the 12 sentences that were used throughout the perception questionnaire into Polish. The rationale for this task was to discover if there were any correlations between the perception a PLE had of one of the prototypical uses of the PrP, and their translation of that use into Polish. It is widely accepted that UPrP is translated into Polish using the present tense and imperfective aspect (Fisiak, Lipińska-Grzegorek, and Zabrocki 1978; Sadowska 2012; Wróblewski 1986).

## 4. Results and discussion

### 4.1. Perception of incompleteness

First, a note on how perception was calculated. The prototypical uses of the PrP and the PaS were all represented by three sentences. When two or three of the responses for the three sentences were marked as one characteristic, for example, being *incomplete*, the participant's perception was recorded as *incomplete*. When every response for a set of three sentences was different, for example, marking the three UPrP sentences as *complete*, *incomplete*, and *neutral*, the participant's perception was marked as *No average*. Having no average may suggest that the participant was marking sentences randomly, that the participant's perception was simply different for the three sentences in a set, or a combination of both factors. Table 3 shows the perception of incomplete (Incom), neutral (Neu), complete (Com), and no average (No) for the

UPrP, EPrP, RPrP and PaS in percentages. The three hypotheses for the UPrP and perception of incompleteness were:

1. The UPrP will be perceived as being more incomplete than the EPrP and RPrP.
2. Lower CEFR level PLEs will have a perception of incompleteness that is lower than higher proficiency PLEs.
3. BNSs will have the highest level of perception of incompleteness.

Table 3. Perception of incompleteness and completeness in percentages

| Group | UPrP | | | | EPrP | | | | RPrP | | | | PaS | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Incom | Neu | Com | No | Incom | Neu | Com | No | Incom | Neu | Com | No | Incom | Neu | Com | No |
| PriC1 | 40% | 0% | 60% | 0% | 10% | 5% | 80% | 5% | 0% | 5% | 95% | 0% | 10% | 5% | 85% | 0% |
| UJD | 38% | 5% | 52% | 5% | 18% | 10% | 72% | 0% | 7% | 2% | 92% | 0% | 3% | 3% | 88% | 5% |
| UW | 92% | 8% | 0% | 0% | 0% | 29% | 71% | 0% | 4% | 21% | 75% | 0% | 8% | 4% | 88% | 0% |
| AcG | 87% | 0% | 13% | 0% | 0% | 13% | 87% | 0% | 0% | 0% | 100% | 0% | 0% | 0% | 100% | 0% |
| BNS | 80% | 5% | 15% | 0% | 10% | 10% | 75% | 5% | 15% | 5% | 80% | 0% | 15% | 5% | 80% | 0% |
| PLEs | 55% | 4% | 38% | 3% | 11% | 13% | 75% | 1% | 4% | 6% | 90% | 0% | 5% | 3% | 89% | 3% |
| All | 59% | 4% | 35% | 2% | 11% | 13% | 75% | 1% | 6% | 6% | 88% | 0% | 6% | 4% | 88% | 2% |

UPrP hypothesis 1 was proven to be true, as can be observed in Table 3. Out of all the prototypical uses and the PaS, the UPrP was perceived as being the most incomplete. This suggests that the UPrP's incompleteness is salient and the other prototypical uses of the PrP do not possess, or are not perceived as possessing, the quality of incompleteness. Though, except for AcG, a few participants from every group perceived the EPrP, RPrP and PaS as being incomplete. For the EPrP, this result was highest with the two B2 groups, where 2 (PriC1) and 11 (UJD) participants perceived the EPrP as being incomplete. 15% of BNS perceived the RPrP and PaS as being incomplete. Only 4% of all participants had a neutral perception of the incompleteness and 2% had responses which produced no mode.

UPrP hypothesis 2 was shown to be partly true. It was hypothesised that perception would be lowest in the B2 groups, and then increase in the order of proficiency with C1 next, and then C2. The two B2 groups perceived incompleteness at a much lower rate than the higher proficiency groups, with 40% of PriC1 and 38% of UJD perceiving incompleteness. The C1 group, UW, was expected to be next, however, 92% of UW, 87% of AC perceived incompleteness. This goes against the hypothesis that perception amongst participants would be greater at higher proficiency levels. One possible reason is because of the small sample size of AC (n=15). UPrP hypothesis 3 was not proved true. BNS falls in the middle of the five groups with 80% perceiving the incompleteness of the UPrP. BNS also has a small sample size (n=20). Increasing the sample size of AcG and BNS may influence the distribution of results.

Table 4 shows a summary of participant perception in agreement with the hypothesised notion of incompleteness for the UPrP. This summary contains the distribution of participant responses for all groups. Participants who rated all three UPrP sentences as complete or neutral scored 0% and those who rated these sentences as incomplete scored 100%. The *Min* and *Max* columns indicate the minimum and maximum scores achieved by participants in each group. In all groups, there were participants who failed to perceive any of the UPrP sentences as incomplete. Conversely, there were participants who perceived all the UPrP sentences as incomplete. Q1 shows the first quartile of participants. 25% of the two B2 level groups failed to perceive the incompleteness of the UPrP while the lowest 25% of UW and BNS scored 66.67%. The lowest 25% of AcG scored 83.33%. Q3 shows the third quartile, where apart from UJD, 75% of participants perceived 100% of all UPrP sentences as incomplete. *SD* shows the standard deviation between participants within a group. The greatest variance was with the PriC1 group, and the variance between UJD was similar to AcG and BNS. Aside from arguments concerning the acquisition of the UPrP, it is not clear why some lower proficiency participants do not perceive incompleteness accurately.

Table 4. Summary of perception of the incompleteness of the UPrP

| Group | Min | Q1 | Median | Mean | Q3 | Max | SD |
|-------|-----|-----|--------|------|-----|-----|------|
| PriC1 | 0 | 0 | 16.67 | 40 | 100 | 100 | 45.37 |
| UJD | 0 | 0 | 33.33 | 40.56 | 66.67 | 100 | 36.86 |
| UW | 0 | 66.67 | 100 | 84.72 | 100 | 100 | 25.96 |
| AcG | 0 | 83.33 | 100 | 82.22 | 100 | 100 | 35.33 |
| BNS | 0 | 66.67 | 66.67 | 68.33 | 100 | 100 | 38.19 |
| PLE | 0 | 0 | 66.67 | 54.62 | 100 | 100 | 41.33 |
| ALL | 0 | 0 | 66.67 | 56.59 | 100 | 100 | 41.05 |

## 4.2. Perception of continuability

As a state in a UPrP predicate persists into the moment of speaking, it was hypothesised that the three UPrP sentences should be perceived as being continuable while the EPrP, RPrP, and PaS should be perceived as non-continuable. The RPrP may be ambiguous for some participants due to the result of the event persisting at the moment of speaking, and the results suggest that this may have been the case for some participants. Table 4 shows the perception of continuability and non-continuability. As with measuring incompleteness, when two or three of the sentences were marked as, for example, *continuable*, a participant's perception was recorded as continuable. The three hypotheses for the UPrP and continuability were:

1. The UPrP will be perceived as being more continuable than the EPrP and RPrP.
2. Lower CEFR level PLEs will have a perception of continuability that is lower than higher proficiency PLEs.
3. BNSs will have the highest level of perception of continuability.

Table 4. Perception of continuability and non-continuability in percentages

| Group | UPrP | | | | EPrP | | | | RPrP | | | | PaS | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | NonCont | Neu | Cont | No | NonCont | Neu | Cont | No | NonCont | Neu | Cont | No | NonCont | Neu | Cont | No |
| PriC1 | 40% | 0% | 60% | 0% | 90% | 5% | 5% | 0% | 85% | 5% | 10% | 0% | 80% | 0% | 15% | 5% |
| UJD | 42% | 3% | 52% | 3% | 75% | 7% | 17% | 2% | 75% | 0% | 22% | 3% | 73% | 3% | 20% | 3% |
| UW | 4% | 8% | 88% | 0% | 71% | 25% | 0% | 4% | 58% | 13% | 29% | 0% | 79% | 13% | 4% | 4% |
| AcG | 0% | 0% | 100% | 0% | 87% | 13% | 0% | 0% | 93% | 7% | 0% | 0% | 100% | 0% | 0% | 0% |
| BNS | 10% | 0% | 90% | 0% | 65% | 10% | 25% | 0% | 75% | 0% | 20% | 5% | 60% | 10% | 15% | 15% |
| PLEs | 29% | 3% | 66% | 2% | 78% | 11% | 9% | 2% | 76% | 4% | 18% | 2% | 79% | 4% | 13% | 3% |
| All | 26% | 3% | 70% | 1% | 76% | 11% | 12% | 1% | 76% | 4% | 19% | 2% | 76% | 5% | 14% | 5% |

Hypothesis 1 was proved to be true. The UPrP was perceived as the most continuable of the three prototypical uses of the PrP and the PaS. Except for AcG, a few participants perceived continuability in the other uses of the PrP and even the PaS. For the RPrP, this may be because of the result of the underlying eventuality holding to the moment of speaking, and a participant perceives this result as continuing. However, some participants perceived the EPrP and PaS as being continuable and this perception has no clear explanation. Hypothesis 2 was also shown to be true. 60% of PriC1 and 52% of UJD perceive the UPrP as being continuable compared to 88% of UJD and 100% of AcG. It appears that the continuability of the UPrP is more salient for B2 learners than incompleteness. Continuability of the UPrP was perceived at a much higher rate (70%) than incompleteness (59%) by all participants. Hypothesis 3 was shown to be false, with 90% of BNS perceiving continuability, while the most accurate perception was held by AcG (98%).

Table 5 shows a summary of participant perception in agreement with the hypothesised notion of continuability for the UPrP and follows the same format as Table 4. This summary contains the distribution of participant responses for all groups and shows the scores for all three UPrP sentences in percentages. Only the two B2 groups contained participants who failed to rate any of the three UPrP as being continuable. The standard deviation, seen in the SD column, between participant answers, is lower for continuability than incompleteness for all groups. For PLEs, higher proficiency groups have a lower deviation than lower proficiency groups, which the overall mean for all groups added together and their perception of continuability (71.22%) was 13% higher than perception of incompleteness (56.59%). Across all groups, perception of countability was higher than incompleteness. The data suggests that continuability is more

salient for all participants. Possibly, there is an implication that this quality of the UPrP has been fully acquired by more participants, while the quality of incompleteness has not. However, it may be the case that continuability is a less abstract concept for participants than incompleteness.

Table 5. Summary for perception of the continuability of the UPrP

| Group | Min | Q1 | Median | Mean | Q3 | Max | SD |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| PriC1 | 0 | 33.33 | 66.67 | 61.67 | 100 | 100 | 40.86 |
| UJD | 0 | 33.33 | 66.67 | 56.67 | 100 | 100 | 35.41 |
| UW | 33.33 | 66.67 | 100 | 88.11 | 100 | 100 | 23.9 |
| AcG | 66.67 | 100 | 100 | 97.78 | 100 | 100 | 8.6 |
| BNS | 33.33 | 100 | 100 | 86.67 | 100 | 100 | 22.68 |
| PLE | 0 | 33.33 | 66.67 | 68.63 | 100 | 100 | 35.59 |
| All | 0 | 33.33 | 100 | 71.22 | 100 | 100 | 34.56 |

### 4.3. Perception of the UPrP

As argued in section 2, the incompleteness and the continuability of the UPrP are distinct characteristics from the other prototypical uses of the PrP. The data in tables 2 and 4 clearly show that these two features are salient, and that they are not largely perceived in the other two uses of the PrP. Comparing the data (Table 6 below) highlights that accurate perception was higher for the continuability of the UPrP rather than its incompleteness. For each group apart from UW, there was a lower level perception of incompleteness. With UW, there was a 4% increase in the perception of incompleteness, and there does not appear to be an explanation for this small increase. It is arguable that the notion of boundedness/unboundedness on which the scale of complete/incomplete was derived is a more complicated linguistic concept. Table 7 shows the percentage of participants who perceived both the incompleteness and the continuability of the UPrP. The data strongly suggests that when a participant perceives incompleteness, they also perceive the continuability of the UPrP.

Table 6. Perception of incompleteness and continuability in percentages

| | Incom | Neu | Com | No mode | NonCont | Neu | Cont | No mode |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **PriC1** | 40% | 0% | 60% | 0% | 40% | 0% | 60% | 0% |
| **UJD** | 38% | 5% | 52% | 5% | 42% | 3% | 52% | 3% |
| **UW** | 92% | 8% | 0% | 0% | 4% | 8% | 88% | 0% |
| **AcG** | 87% | 0% | 13% | 0% | 0% | 0% | 100% | 0% |
| **BNS** | 80% | 5% | 15% | 0% | 10% | 0% | 90% | 0% |
| **PLEs** | 55% | 4% | 38% | 3% | 29% | 3% | 66% | 2% |
| **All** | 59% | 4% | 35% | 2% | 26% | 3% | 70% | 1% |

Table 7. Number and percentage of participants who perceive both the incompleteness and continuability of the UPrP

| Group | n | Incomplete & continuable | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | | No. | % |
| PriC1 | 20 | 8 | 40.00% |
| UJD | 60 | 23 | 38.33% |
| UW | 24 | 22 | 91.67% |
| AcG | 15 | 13 | 86.67% |
| BNS | 20 | 16 | 80.00% |
| PLEs | 119 | 66 | 55.46% |
| ALL | 139 | 82 | 58.99% |

### 4.4.  Explaining how the UPrP is perceived

This section and the following attempt to provide potential explanations for the perception or lack of perception of the incompleteness and continuability of the UPrP. First, perception is discussed in relation to factors that were not measured or tested with the tasks on the questionnaire, and then in relation to the non-perception tasks. One issue with the grouping of participants under CEFR levels is there is a considerable degree of variance in terms of English language skills and knowledge. Two PLEs at CEFR level B2 may have different levels of acquisition of the English tense/aspect system and different levels of knowledge and productive skills. Additionally, CEFR documentation does not directly treat grammatical forms. For example, there is no direct mention of the PrP and the expected level of acquisition at a certain CEFR level. Given that the UPrP is typically introduced at B1 level, it is possible that some PLEs at B2 level have not fully acquired the meaning of the UPrP: at least in terms of perceiving it. At least, the data suggests that perception of incompleteness and continuability is related to English language proficiency.

### 4.5.  Metalinguistic knowledge of the PrP

Task 2 of the questionnaire attempted to discover the metalinguistic knowledge of the PrP that participants had. The metalinguistic task was created to test the hypothesis that metalinguistic knowledge of the PrP would influence perception:

1) Metalinguistic knowledge of the PrP leads to a higher perception of the incompleteness and the continuability of the UPrP.

 Table 8 shows the correlation (phi coefficient) between knowing what the PrP is and the perception of the UPrP. *Knowledge of the PrP* contains participants' responses (yes or no) to

question 1 'Do you know what the present perfect is?' *UPrP perception* refers to a participant who perceived both the *incompleteness* and the *continuability* of the UPrP and *No UPrP perception* refers to participants who did not perceive incompleteness and continuability. For UW and AcG, there were no participants who did not have knowledge of what the PrP was. The lowest level of metalinguistic knowledge was in BNS where almost half of the group did not know what the PrP is. The data shows that there was no strong relationship between knowledge of what the PrP is and perception of the UPrP. Knowing what the PrP is does not correlate to perception of the qualities expressed by the UPrP. All participants who knew what the PrP is were also able to state the structure of the PrP, i.e. subject + verb + past participle. Although, there was variation between the terms used to describe the structure. Questions 2 and 4 ('If you know what the present perfect is, please write below what it is.' and 'Why do we use the present perfect?) are difficult to analyse in relation to perception as the answers provided are qualitative. Certainly, the AcG gave the most detailed and knowledgeable answers, therefore demonstrating a greater metalinguistic knowledge of the PrP.

Table 8. Number and percentage of participants who perceive both the incompleteness and continuability of the UPrP

| | | Knowledge of the PrP | | Phi |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | No | Yes | |
| PriC1 | No UPrP perception | 2 | 10 | 0.27 |
| | UPrP perception | 0 | 8 | |
| UJD | No UPrP perception | 3 | 34 | 0.07 |
| | UPrP perception | 1 | 22 | |
| UW | No UPrP perception | 0 | 2 | NaN |
| | UPrP perception | 0 | 22 | |
| AcG | No UPrP perception | 0 | 2 | NaN |
| | UPrP perception | 0 | 13 | |
| BNS | No UPrP perception | 3 | 1 | 0.3 |
| | UPrP perception | 6 | 10 | |
| PLE | No UPrP perception | 5 | 48 | 0.18 |
| | UPrP perception | 1 | 65 | |
| All | No UPrP perception | 8 | 49 | 0.09 |
| | UPrP perception | 7 | 75 | |

## 4.6. Elicitation of the UPrP

UW and AcG did not complete the elicitation exercise, therefore their productive skills for the PrP were not measured. Table 9 shows the number of participants and percentage of the various tenses/aspects used in the elicitation task. There were quite a few different ways to respond. With the verbs *live* and *work,* the PrP and the PrP progressive were acceptable answers. Using

the PrP progressive with *know* was not acceptable, and no participant used it. The situations were designed to allow a natural occasion for the UPrP to occur. The four native speakers who used PaS used the verb *move* instead of *live*. For example, two participants wrote *I moved to this house in 2008*. The decision to use *move* is interesting as it was not part of the situation. However, for those four native speakers, the illocutionary force of the situation appears to be one of *moving*. Grammatically, there is no issue with the PaS sentences created by BNS. Where UJD used the PaS, there were some grammatical issues. For example, *I lived in this house since 2008*, or *I lived in this house for 13 years*. In the former, the adverb *since* is incompatible as the speaker continues to live in the described house, and with the latter, it is grammatically correct but opposes the meaning of the speaker still living in the same house.

The verb *know* was consistently used in the nonprogressive by all participants. For participants, *know* is more clearly a stative verb than *live* and *work*. Table 10 shows the phi coefficient for the perception of the UPrP (both incompleteness and continuability) and the participants correctly responding with the PrP or PrP progressive in the elicitation task. As with table 8, *UPrP perception* refers to a participant who perceived *incompleteness* and the *continuability* of the UPrP and *No UPrP perception* refers to participants who did not. *Elicitation of UPrP* shows the number of participants who successfully answered with the PrP or PrP progressive (Yes) and those who did not (No). One interesting observation about the elicitation task is that PriC1 and UJD appear to prefer the PrP progressive (for *live* and *work*) while only one member of BNS used the progressive. It is not clear if this relates to perception. There appears to be no strong relationship between the ability to produce the UPrP and perception of it. Suggesting that perception of the UPrP is not related to being able to correctly respond with the UPrP to a situation which requires, or expects, the UPrP.

Table 9. The range of tenses/aspects produced in the elicitation of the UPrP task

| Tense | PriC1 1) live No. | % | PriC1 2) work No. | % | PriC1 3) know No. | % | UJD 1) live No. | % | UJD 2) work No. | % | UJD 3) know No. | % | BNS 1) live No. | % | BNS 2) work No. | % | BNS 3) know No. | % |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| PrP | 5 | 25% | 4 | 20% | 17 | 85% | 20 | 33% | 13 | 22% | 45 | 75% | 15 | 75% | 15 | 75% | 19 | 95% |
| PrP progressive | 14 | 70% | 13 | 65% | | | 26 | 43% | 32 | 53% | | | 1 | 5% | 1 | 5% | | |
| PaS | | | | | | | 5 | 8% | 4 | 7% | 3 | 5% | 4 | 20% | 3 | 15% | 1 | 5% |
| Past continuous | | | 1 | 5% | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Past perfect | | | | | | | | | 3 | 5% | 1 | 2% | | | | | | |
| Present simple | | | | | 3 | 15% | 5 | 8% | 4 | 7% | 11 | 18% | | | 1 | 5% | | |
| Present continuous | 1 | 5% | 2 | 10% | | | 4 | 7% | 4 | 7% | | | | | | | | |

Table 10. Phi coefficient for perception of the UPrP and elicitation of the UPrP

|  |  | Elicitation of UPrP | | Phi |
|---|---|---|---|---|
|  |  | No | Yes |  |
| PriC1 | No UPrP perception | 1 | 11 | 0.19 |
|  | UPrP perception | 0 | 8 |  |
| UJD | No UPrP perception | 11 | 26 | 0.14 |
|  | UPrP perception | 4 | 19 |  |
| BNS | No UPrP perception | 0 | 4 | -0.21 |
|  | UPrP perception | 3 | 13 |  |
| All | No UPrP perception | 12 | 41 | 0.1 |
|  | UPrP perception | 7 | 40 |  |

### 4.7. Translation of the UPrP into Polish

PLEs were asked to translate the three UPrP sentences into Polish. The UPrP should be translated into Polish using the present imperfective. As the perfective does not exist in the present tense in Polish, there was no opportunity for PLEs to use it. 85% of PLEs used the Polish verb *mieszka*ć, which means 'to have one's home somewhere', and 15% used the Polish verb żyć, which means 'to stay or live somewhere'. Both verbs are imperfective. The tense chosen by PLEs to translate the UPrP into Polish is shown in Table 11. What is clear from the data is that an overwhelming majority of B2 level PLEs translated the UPrP using the past tense. This raises some interesting questions in relation to the temporal location of the UPrP for PriC1 and UJD. The PrP is a combination of present tense and perfect aspect. However, when it is introduced in EFL coursebooks, it is often presented alongside the past simple. This may suggest that lower level PLEs associate the UPrP, or indeed the PrP in general, with the past. The choice of tense does not appear to have a relationship with the perception of the UPrP. Table 12 shows the phi coefficient for the perception of the UPrP and the decision to translate the UPrP using the past or present tense. Only for UJD was there a moderately strong positive relationship between perception and translation using the present tense. The data suggests that perceiving the qualities expressed by the UPrP is not related to how PLEs translate the UPrP into Polish. Particularly surprising is that in the two B2 level groups, 19 of the participants perceived the qualities of the UPrP yet they translated the UPrP sentences into the past tense. This raises the question of the relationship between perception and translation.

Table 11. The decision to use past or present tense for translating the UPrP into Polish

|  | Past tense | | Present tense | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
|  | **n** | **%** | **n** | **%** |
| **PriC1** | 18 | 90% | 2 | 10% |
| **UJD** | 46 | 77% | 14 | 23% |
| **UW** | 6 | 25% | 18 | 75% |
| **AcG** | 2 | 13% | 13 | 87% |
| **PLEs** | 72 | 61% | 47 | 39% |

Table 12. Phi coefficient for perception of the UPrP and translation into Polish present tense

|  |  | Translation tense | | Phi |
|---|---|---|---|---|
|  |  | **Past** | **Present** | |
| PriC1 | No UPrP perception | 11 | 1 | 0.07 |
| | UPrP perception | 7 | 1 | |
| UJD | No UPrP perception | 34 | 3 | 0.46 |
| | UPrP perception | 12 | 11 | |
| UW | No UPrP perception | 1 | 1 | 0.17 |
| | UPrP perception | 5 | 17 | |
| AcG | No UPrP perception | 0 | 2 | -0.15 |
| | UPrP perception | 2 | 11 | |
| PLE | No UPrP perception | 46 | 7 | 0.48 |
| | UPrP perception | 26 | 40 | |

## 5. Conclusion

The hypotheses that the UPrP would be perceived as being more incomplete and continuable than the EPrP and RPrP were proved to be true. The UPrP was perceived as being the most incomplete and continuable of the prototypical uses of the PrP. As linguistic concepts, describing the UPrP as presenting a state that is incomplete and continuable is supported by how the UPrP sentences were perceived by the participants. Additionally, it was discovered that the notion of continuability is more readily perceived than the notion of incompleteness. For PLEs, the hypotheses that 'correct' perception corresponds to English language proficiency were proved to be true. Generally, the data shows that the B2 groups had a lower perception of incompleteness and continuability than the C1 and C2 groups. However, the hypothesis that native speakers would have the highest rates of perception was proved to be false. BNS generally perceived the qualities of the UPrP at lower rates than UW and AcG. This might have been explained by the fact that UW and AcG had greater levels of metalinguistic knowledge than

BNS. However, no strong correlation was found between knowing what the PrP is and correct perception. Albeit participants in AcG wrote the most detailed descriptions of the UPrP, the native speakers who knew what the PrP is were often able to describe the PrP in ways which suggested some degree of knowledge of how the PrP can be used to talk about experiences, recently completed actions, and things that started in the past and continued to the moment of speaking.

A wider question to which this data leads is to consider what it means when a participant does not perceive the salient characteristics of the prototypical uses of the PrP yet can use PrP correctly. The majority of the B2 level students correctly used the UPrP in the elicitation exercise. Yet no correlation was found between being able to use the UPrP (as seen in the elicitation task) and how it was perceived. Presumably, if a BNS does not perceive, for example, the UPrP being incomplete or continuable, it is questionable to say that it is a matter of acquisition. Perhaps what is measured in the perception questionnaire is the acquisition of a type of metalinguistic knowledge. However, the metalinguistic knowledge here was of an explicit type, i.e. a participant could show that they knew what the PrP was, its structure and how it is used.

In terms of the psychometric validity of measuring perception, there is reason to believe that this method is robust. Although questions remain about what is being measured and its possible value to L2 English learners and teachers. Arguably, a weakness of the perception questionnaire is that it does not collect enough data to provide a full account of the relationship between perception and metalinguistic knowledge. To further investigate PLE perception and the use of perception as a pedagogic tool, it is my intention to create an experiment which utilises a pedagogy based on perception. This will be conducted with two groups. One control group will utilise the typical approach of a rule-based method, i.e. we use the PrP to express actions which started in the past and continue to the present. The second group will be based on a pedagogy which focuses on the perception of the PrP. Further study is also needed to establish the relationship between the productive skills of a participant and their perception of the PrP, as the elicitation exercise was limited in its scope and only allowed a participant to respond to the situation or question.

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