

Do English textbooks reflect the actual use of English?: the present perfect and temporal adverbials

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1. Introduction

Fujimoto (2003) states that Japanese university and high school students have a tendency to depend on temporal adverbials in their learning and using the present perfect and that they seem to have difficulty in using the present perfect without the help of typical temporal adverbials which textbooks and grammar books provide. According to Schlüter's (2006) comparison of major corpus-based studies, less than 50% (between 29% and 45%) of the present perfect instances are used with temporal adverbials (p. 143), and his findings were confirmed by Hundt & Smith (2009). In the latter study, less than 35% of the present perfect instances co-occur with temporal adverbials (ranging between 32% and 34%) (p. 63). McGrath's (2013) comment, "the textbook . . . influences what teachers teach and what and to some extent how learners learn" (p. xii), motivated my corpus-based analysis of textbooks. The aim of this study is to examine whether English textbooks published in Japan for high school students provide the real use of the present perfect and temporal adverbials, comparing a textbook corpus with native speakers' corpora.

2. Methodology

Three types of corpora were used in this study. The first is a longitudinal learners' corpus of about 100,000-word written English by 87 second-year Japanese university students who took an academic writing course in the department of the English language in 2009, 2010, and 2012 (Fujimoto Corpus [hereafter FC]). The students submitted their writing assignments every two weeks, eleven times in total per year. The average of the students' TOEIC-IP scores is 458.9 (Range: 210-755; Median: 457.5; SD: 125.4). The second is four sub-corpora in the Brown family of corpora: Fiction and General prose sub-corpora in FLOB (British English [BrE], 1991) and Frown (American English [AmE], 1992) (FLOB_Fiction, FLOB_GP, Frown_Fiction, and Frown_GP).¹ The size of these sub-corpora is about 300,000 words in FLOB_Fiction and Frown_Fiction and about 500,000 words in FLOB_GP and Frown_GP. The third is a textbook corpus of about 100,000 words, which is composed of written English data in passages, exercises, and other sections in six high school textbooks for the course English Communication I (English Communication I Corpus [ECIC]).² The

¹ Brown Family (C8 tags): *powered by CQPweb* was used. Available at <http://cqpweb.lancs.ac.uk/>.

² The occupancy rate of these six textbooks has been more than 40% in total from 2013 to 2015.

reason why the textbook corpus was compiled from these textbooks for English Communication I is that this course is the only one required English course (and the other English courses are elective), and in this course, all the grammatical items (including the present perfect) specified in the government curriculum guidelines are to be taught. The average readability score (Flesch-Kincaid Reading Ease) of the textbooks is 82.6.³ First, FC was analyzed to see the university students' use of the present perfect and temporal adverbials, and then ECIC and the four sub-corpora in FLOB and Frown were compared to examine the frequency of the present perfect and of the present perfect used with or without temporal adverbials. The data in FC and ECIC were analyzed with the computer software AntConc.⁴ The finite simple present perfect (SPP) was examined in this study (and the present perfect passive, the present perfect progressive, and the present perfect passive progressive were not included in the analysis). The instances of *have [has] got* whose meaning is "possess" and *have [has] got to*, and the present perfect forms containing modal idioms and semi-auxiliaries (e.g., *have [has] been to*, *have [has] been able to*) were manually excluded, based on Quirk et al. (1985, pp. 137-138, pp. 142-143).

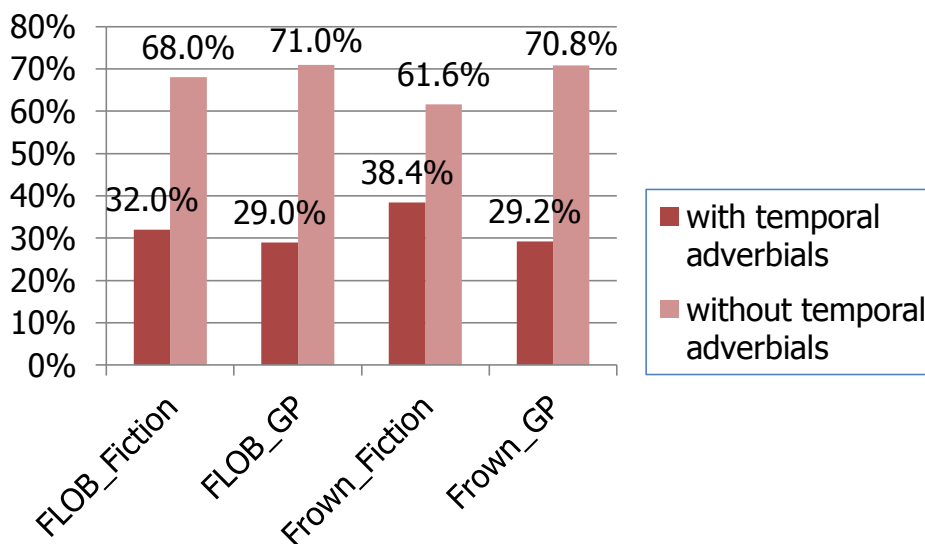
3. Results and discussion

In FC, the raw frequency of the SPP is 174, and 64.4% of all the instances (112 instances) are used with temporal adverbials. 64.4% is much higher than the rate shown in Schlüter (2006) and Hundt & Smith (2009). The results of the analysis of the four sub-corpora (FLOB_Fiction, FLOB_GP, Frown_Fiction, and Frown_GP) are presented in Figure 1. In all the sub-corpora, the SPP without temporal adverbials is more common than that with temporal adverbials. Less than 40% of the SPPs are used with temporal adverbials. My analysis of the four sub-corpora provides further evidence supporting the previous studies by Schlüter (2006) and Hundt & Smith (2009): the SPP without temporal adverbials is much more frequent.

³ READABLE.IO. © 2011 - 2017 Readable.io. Available at <https://readable.io/> (accessed March 11, 2017). The text with the score of 80.0 to 90.0 is considered to be easy to read.

⁴ Anthony, L. (2014). *AntConc* (Version 3.4.3) [Computer software]. Tokyo: Waseda University. Available online at <http://www.antlab.sci.waseda.ac.jp/>

Figure 1. SPPs with/without Temporal Adverbials



The comparison of the frequency of the SPP in ECIC and in the four sub-corpora indicates that the SPP is more often used in ECIC than in FLOB_Fiction, Frown_Fiction, and Frown_GP. Log-likelihood tests show that the difference between ECIC and FLOB_Fiction and between ECIC and Frown_Fiction is significant at $p < 0.0001$, and the difference between ECIC and Frown_GP, at $p < 0.001$. There is no significant difference between ECIC and FLOB_GP. However, when passages in the six textbooks are compared with the four sub-corpora, no significant difference is observed between ECIC and FLOB_GP or between ECIC and Frown_GP, though the difference of frequency is significant between ECIC and FLOB_Fiction ($p < 0.001$) and between ECIC and Frown_Fiction ($p < 0.0001$). The results from my analysis indicate that overall, the SPP is more used in the textbook corpus than in the native speakers' sub-corpora and that the textbook passages are closer to the BrE and AmE general prose than the BrE and AmE fiction in the use of the SPP. As for the frequency of the SSP co-occurring with temporal adverbials, 52.3% of all the SPPs in ECIC are used with temporal adverbials. Figure 2 shows the results of the analysis of each of the six textbooks. In the three textbooks *All Aboard!*, *COMET*, and *ELEMENT*, the frequency of the SPP with temporal adverbials is higher, while in the rest of the three textbooks *CROWN*, *VISTA*, and *Vivid*, the SPP without temporal adverbials is more common. In Table 1, the frequency of the SPP with temporal adverbials according to the sections in the textbooks (i.e., passages, exercises, and other) can be seen. In passages, the SPP with temporal adverbials is less used than that without temporal adverbials in all the textbooks but *VISTA* in which 50% of all the SPPs are used with temporal adverbials. It should also be noted that the SPP with temporal adverbials is most frequently used in exercises, which include grammar exercises, in all the textbooks except *VISTA*. It may be said that the SPP with temporal adverbials is likely to be overemphasized in grammar exercises in textbooks.

Figure 2. SPPs with/without Temporal Adverbials

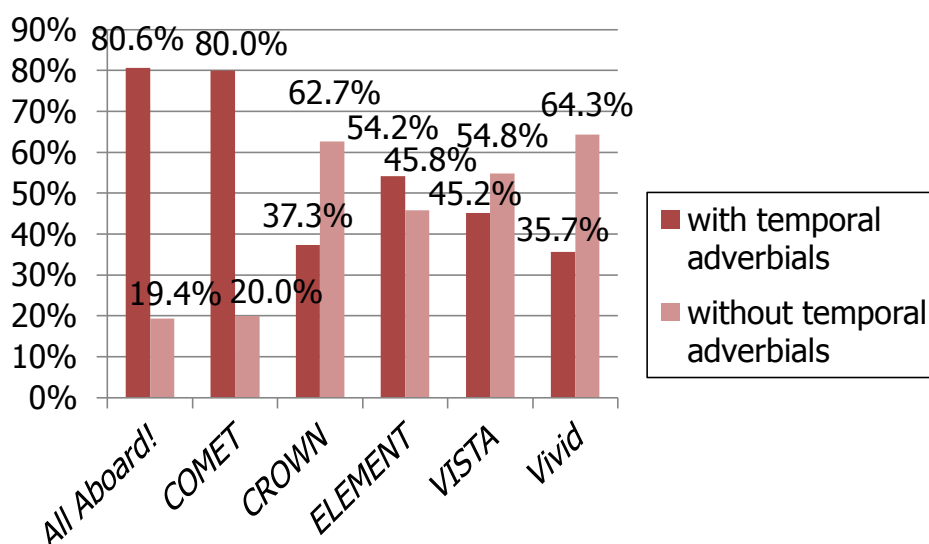


Table 1. SPPs Co-occurring with Temporal Adverbials

	<i>All Aboard!</i>	<i>COMET</i>	<i>CROWN</i>	<i>ELEMENT</i>	<i>VISTA</i>	<i>Vivid</i>
Passages	2 (8.0%)	2 (7.1%)	7 (22.6%)	8 (30.8%)	7 (50.0%)	2 (20.0%)
Exercises	22 (88.0%)	26 (92.9%)	22 (71.0%)	16 (61.5%)	7 (50.0%)	8 (80.0%)
Other	1 (4.0%)	0 (0.0%)	2 (6.5%)	2 (7.7%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)
Total	25	28	31	26	14	10

4. Conclusion

On the basis of my corpus analysis, the previous corpus research findings are not entirely reflected in Japanese English textbooks examined, and the grammar exercises in textbooks may have some influence on the students' use of the SPP with temporal adverbials. Tomlinson (2010, p. 89) explains gaps between what students are taught about English use and how English is actually used, pointing out the following as one of the main gaps: "Language use which has been captured by corpora but which is distorted for the sake of pedagogic simplification and convenience." One interpretation of my findings might be that the co-occurrence of the present perfect with temporal adverbials in textbooks is unhelpfully exaggerated. However, given the non-existence of a dedicated present perfect marker in Japanese, I would argue that emphasizing co-occurrence with temporal adverbials may be a useful tool in the teaching of the English present perfect to Japanese students, especially to

less proficient students. It would also be needless to say that as students' English proficiency increases, the actual usage of the present perfect with or without temporal markers should be more reflected in teaching materials.

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