

# Competition Between Past and Perfect

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## Study One

### Adverbials and the Present Perfect

- The present perfect (“I have jumped”) competes with the simple past (“I jumped”) in many uses.
- Previous work suggests that the simple past is being used more often where the perfect had been used.
- Adverbials seem to encourage use of the perfect for some people but not everyone.

*I've already eaten.*  
*I already ate.*

- However, while some speakers can use both tenses in sentences like the ones below, others cannot.

*She never lied before.*  
*She's never lied before.*

- There are three types of perfect with slightly different meanings and uses
  - Continuative: *We've been sitting in traffic for an hour.*
  - Experiential: *We've had this argument before.*
  - Resultative: *The persons responsible have been fired.*

### Research Question

- Can we affect speakers' production of the perfect experimentally?

## Study Two

### Perfect Comprehension

- Can people use the perfect to influence their interpretation of a verb they don't know?
- *Want*-type verbs can combine with a bare infinitive or a perfect infinitive
- *Believe*-type verbs can only combine with a perfect infinitive

Kate **wanted** Mary to break the sunglasses.  
\*Kate **believed** Mary to break the sunglasses.  
Dad **wanted** Mary to have broken the sunglasses.  
Dad **believed** Mary to have broken the sunglasses.

## Methods and Materials

### Lidz et al.'s Experiment

- Lidz, J., Dudley, R. & Hacquard, V. (2017) showed that both children and adults could use syntactic information to distinguish between the following sentences:

*Dad gorp'd that Fido ate the chicken.*  
*Dad gorp'd Fido to eat the chicken.*

### Nonsense Verbs Task

Kate and Mary are sisters, but Kate is very mean and she wants Mary to get in trouble. Mary's dad just bought new sunglasses and they are very expensive. Kate wants Mary to break the sunglasses so she'll get in trouble with dad. While dad was at work, Kate tricked Mary into breaking the sunglasses. Right after Mary dropped them, dad walked in and saw the pieces on the floor.

Discoverer: Dad

Enticer: Kate

*Kate gorp'd Mary to break the sunglasses.*  
*Kate gorp'd Mary to have broken the sunglasses.*  
*Dad gorp'd Mary to break the sunglasses.*  
*Dad gorp'd Mary to have broken the sunglasses.*

## Methods and Participants

### Listening and Retelling

- Will people use more perfect if they hear a story containing more perfects?
  - Each participant heard 2 stories - one told using historical present and present perfect, and one told using the past tense with pasts replacing the slots of the perfects in the corresponding perfect story
  - Participants had to retell the story in as much detail as possible

### Participants

- 25 adults, ages 19-26

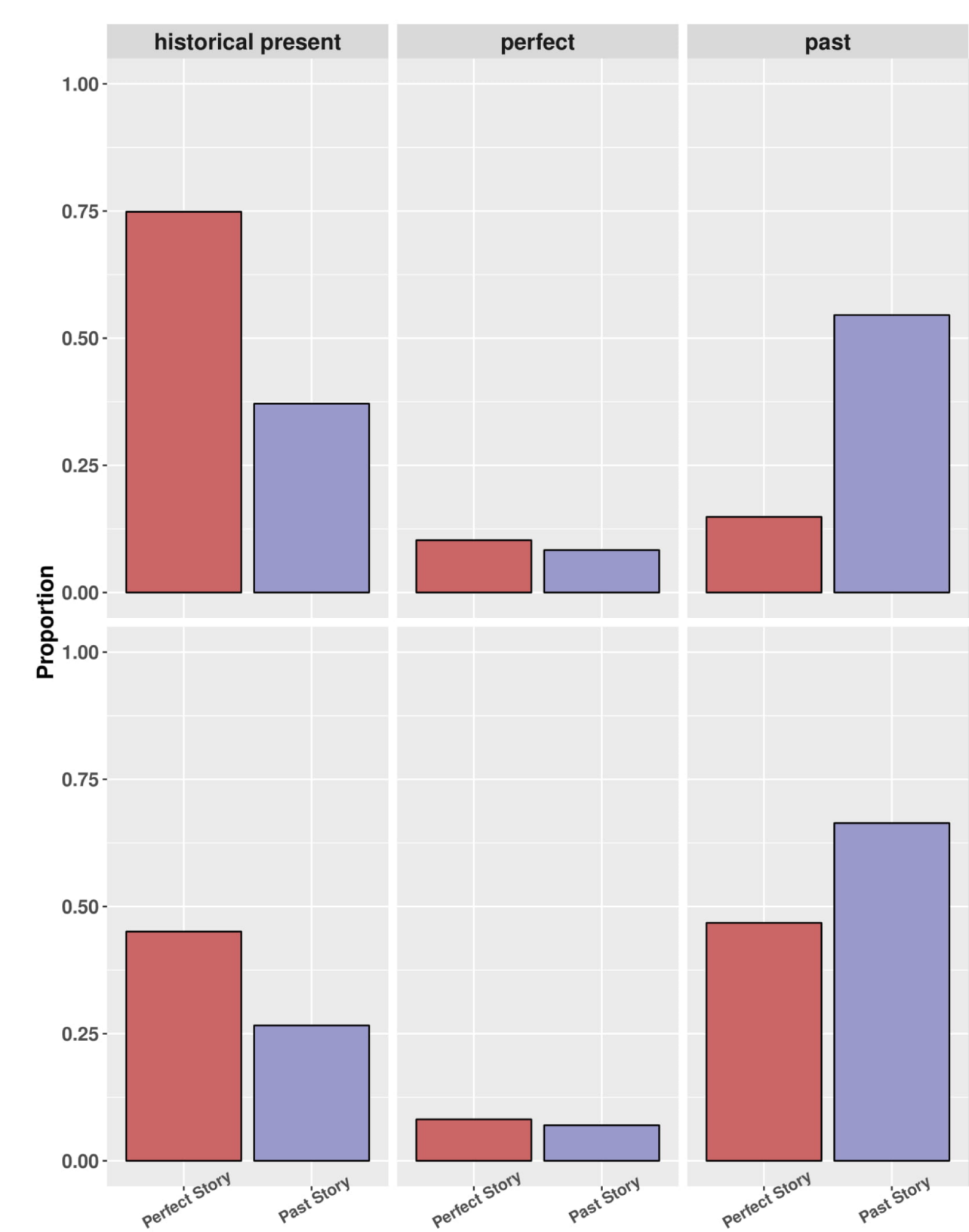
## Stories

### Story Examples

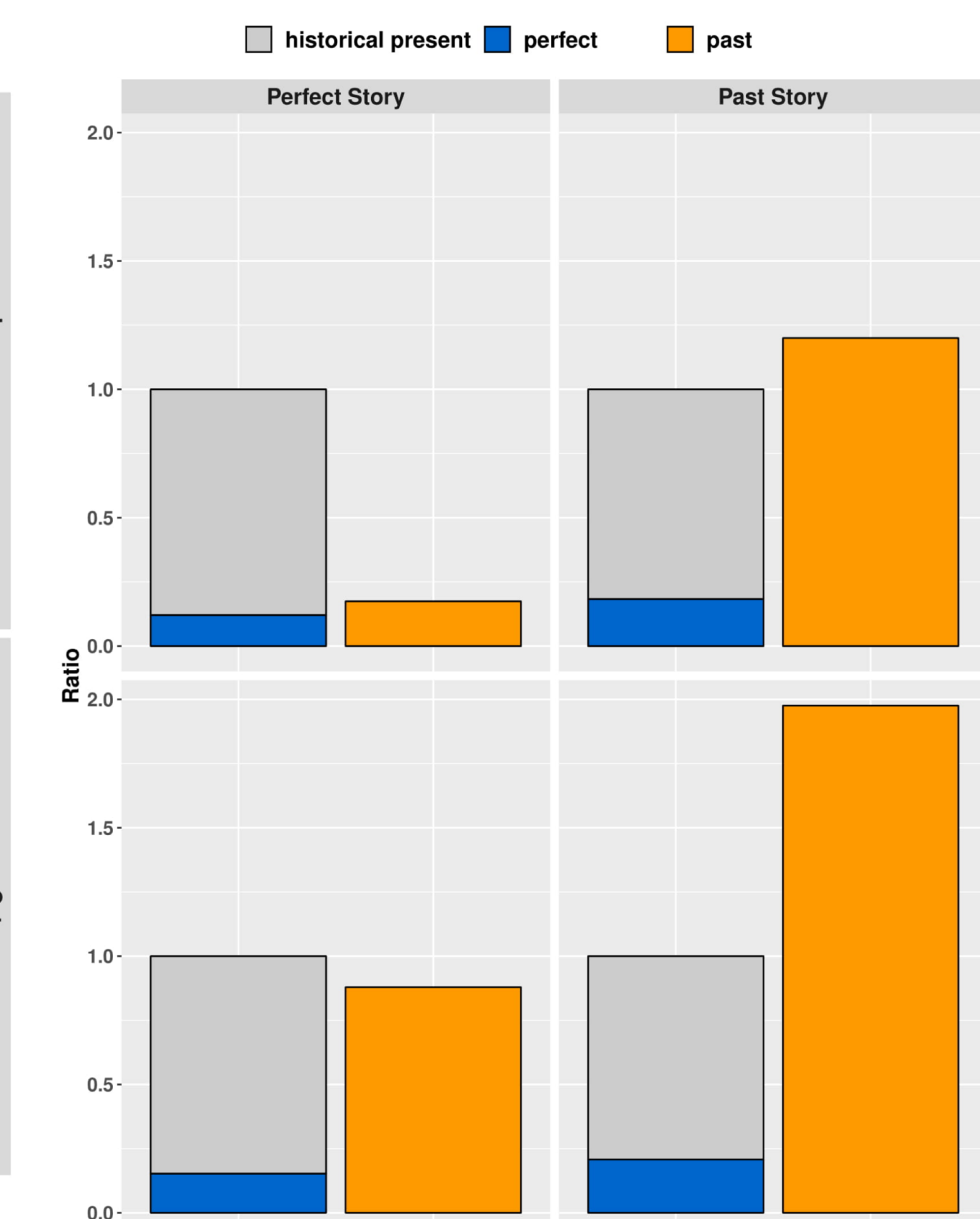
- Perfect tense:  
*This is a story about Lily and her cat, Smudge. **Lily has had Smudge since she was 4 years old** and she loves him very much. One day, she decides that she wants to bring him to school for show and tell because **none of her friends have ever met Smudge before.***
- Past tense:  
*This is a story about Lily and her cat, Smudge. **Lily had Smudge since she was 4 years old** and she loves him very much. One day, she decided that she wanted to bring him to school for show and tell because **none of her friends ever met her cat before.***

## Data, Results, and Analysis

### Proportion Graph



### Ratio Graph



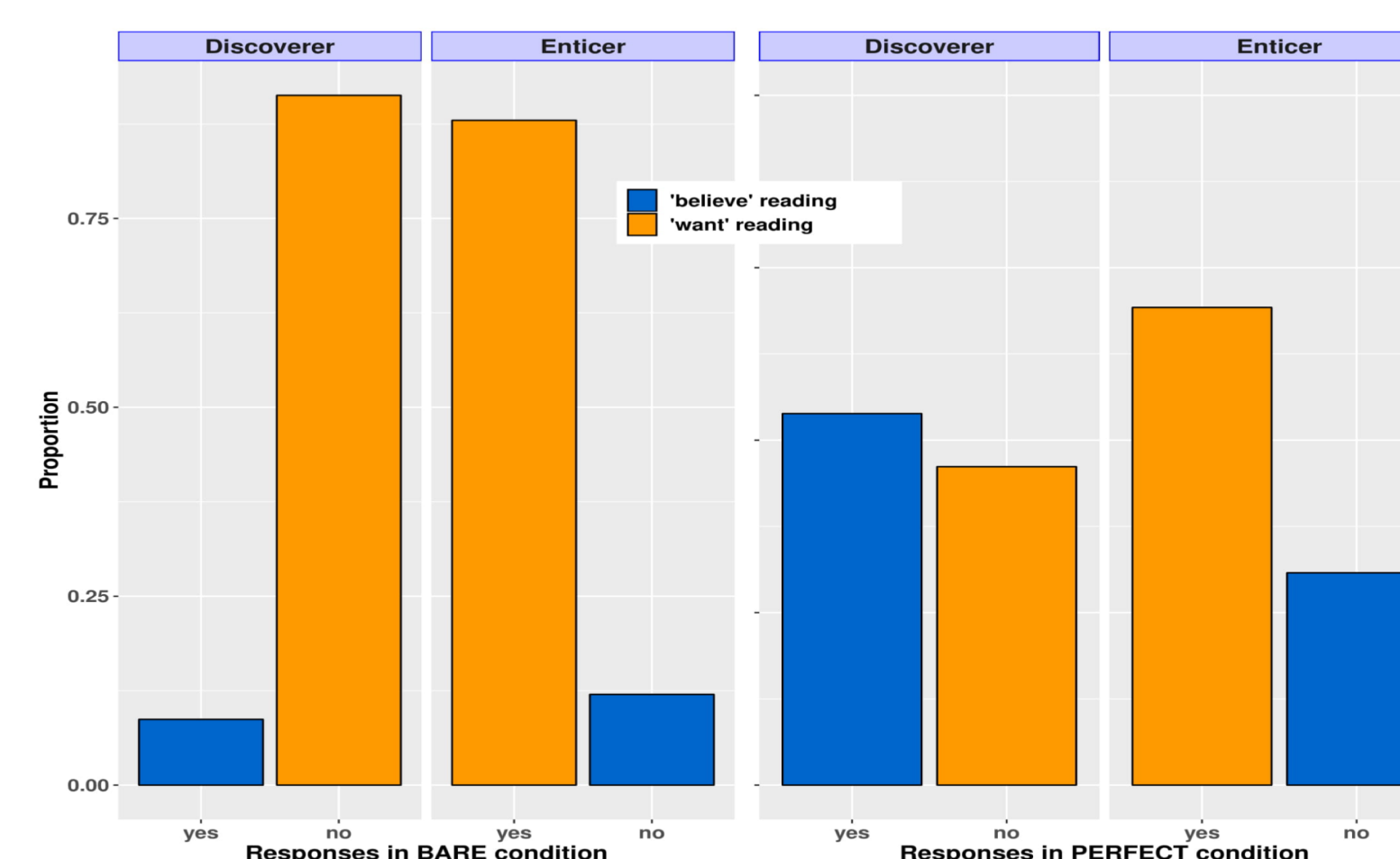
### Proportions

- Past tense stories used more past tense than perfect stories.
- Perfect stories used more historical present than past tense stories.
- There was no difference in the amount of perfects produced across story types.

### Ratios

- The ratio of the past to the perfect and the historical present combined increased in the past stories.
- The ratio of the historical present to the perfect did not change.

## Data, Results, and Analysis



- In the bare infinitive condition, participants rejected the *believe*-type interpretation and accepted the *want*-type interpretation
- In the perfect infinitive condition, the preference for the *want*-type interpretation disappeared
- Speakers can use the perfect to influence their interpretation of verbs they don't know

## Acknowledgements

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Lidz, J., Dudley, R. & Hacquard, V. (2017). Children use syntax of complements to determine meaning of novel attitude verbs. Paper presented at BUCLD 41.  
Michaelis, L. (1994). The Ambiguity of the English Present Perfect. *Journal of Linguistics*, 30(1), 111-157. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4176258>