This paper provides an explanation of why fourth- and fifth-form students of a secondary school in Tobago use, in their written narrative compositions, verb forms that look like Standard English (SE) simple past forms instead of SE past perfect forms. These student errors are one subset of a group of tense, aspect, and mood (TAM) errors which includes 10 other subsets or subtypes (cf. James, 1997). They are identified as PAST f(or) PASTPERF(ECT) and were the most prevalent subtype in the written narratives. The PAST f PASTPERF error subtype decomposed into Ved f had Ven, bePAST f had been (Ving~Ven), did f had Ven, and had f had had, with the great majority of the errors occurring in the Ved f had Ven component, and the next highest number in the bePAST f had Ving~Ven component. It is proposed that the students made the errors because of a combination of mainly the following factors: (a) insufficient exposure to PASTPERF’s complex role in narrative discourse; (b) unavailability, in their native TOB(agonian), of a form that is fully isomorphic with SE past perfect; and (c) interlingual selection of PAST from English because it is less complex than PASTPERF, but has within its semantics the values of past and remoteness that seem to lend themselves to PASTPERF’s backgrounding functions in SE.

**Introduction: PAST f PASTPERF Errors**

This paper seeks to explain a particular type of tense-aspect errors made in written narrative compositions by fourth- and fifth-form students of the Signal Hill Senior Comprehensive School in Tobago over the period 1990-1994. The students were required to write the non-dialogue parts of their narrative in Standard English (SE),¹ and they made errors like those highlighted in the following seven narrative discourses:

1. He became furious and went to the security booth to find out about his car. The security told him that his car was stolen a few days ago and has not been located yet.

2. It was just after the Christmas holidays and everyone came back to school on the first of January. For some of the children it was a chance to talk about Christmas.
3. Unbelievably, I agreed with the principal but gave reasons for the fight. Lystra, better known as the school’s Bull Frog, came up to me a lunch time ordering me to give her my lunch and I told her no...

4. When I reached the library, I saw Jestina waiting. She was a girl of her own way. Her father died some years ago (= before).

5. After the reception was over we left for our homes. Cheryl and Stalin left for their honeymoon. I was very disappointed because I hoped for something much more romantic to happen to me. But things doesn’t always work out your way. The wedding was wonderful. I can’t wait for mine.

6. I sat back on the sofa, stretched out my legs and before I knew it I went deep into a reverie.

7. It was now 1 pm. and Kara’s maid of honour arrived to help her get ready. First, she put on her dress and then a hair-stylist she had hired styled her hair in a very unusual but appropriate style for a wedding. An hour later she was ready and waiting for the limo to [take] her and her maid of honour to the church. Meanwhile Jean Claude just arrived in Miami and he realised he had only one hour before the wedding.

The highlighted verbs—was stolen, came back, came, told, died, was, went, and arrived—are all in the simple past tense, and they are used incorrectly in place of the SE past perfect (or pluperfect) forms had been stolen, had come back, had come, had told, had died, had been, had gone, and had arrived. These incorrect verbs were part of a total of 226 simple past forms that were used in place of past perfect forms in a sample of 130 narrative compositions. Since they are simple past forms, I shall call them by the generic name PAST and label their target counterparts PASTPERFECT, and I shall refer to the errors as PAST f(or) PASTPERF errors.

The PAST f PASTPERF errors formed one subtype of TAM errors that I investigated for my doctoral dissertation (James, 1997). It turned out to be the subtype that was made by most of the students (69.2% of the fourth formers and 76.9% of the fifth formers). Significantly, the error subtype seems to be difficult to eradicate since a greater percentage of fifth formers made it. There are therefore at least two good reasons why I am seeking to explain it: (a) the fact that it was made by more than two thirds of the students; and (b) the fact that it was made by more students studying at a higher proficiency level.
PAST f PASTPERF decomposed into (a) Ved f had Ven (e.g., arrived f had arrived), (b) bePAST f had been (Ving/Ven) (e.g., was f had been (stealing/stolen)), (c) did f had Ven (e.g., did f had spoken), and (d) had f had had, with the great majority of the errors occurring in the Ved f had Ven component, and the next highest number in the bePAST f had been (Ving/Ven) component.

**Detailing How PAST f PASTPERF Was Used**

Let us look at the errors more closely in their discourse contexts. The first thing that must be noted is that they all occur in narrative discourse. They denote events and states in a sequence of situations, ordered in relation to one another (usually sequentially) on an advancing timeline, with the events typically advancing the timeline and holding at, or being a part of, different states (sometimes), which can also advance the timeline. Take most of Discourse 7 as an example, repeated below as (8):

8. It was now 1 p.m. and Kara’s maid of honour arrived to help her get ready. First, she put on her dress and then a hair-stylist she had hired styled her hair in a very unusual but appropriate style for a wedding. An hour later she was ready and waiting for the limo to [take] her and her maid of honour to the church.

The stative verb was denotes the brief moment—a state—when it was one o’clock. The non-stative or eventive verb arrived denotes the event of arrival which holds at that brief moment. The complex verb put on denotes the next event, Kara’s dressing. But notice that the narrator then narrates an event, the hiring of a hair stylist, which does not succeed the previous event, Kara’s dressing and therefore does not advance timeline of the story. The hiring of the hair stylist takes place sometime before the last event narrated, Kara’s dressing, but we do not know precisely how long before. It therefore breaks the sequence of events by having occurred earlier, and the narrator marks the fact by the correct use of PASTPERF had hired. If she had not included the auxiliary had, we would have inferred that the hiring had taken place earlier. The event that succeeds Kara’s dressing is the styling of her hair, denoted by the verb styled. That event is followed by a state—her being ready and waiting—denoted by the stative verb was in combination with the adjective ready and the progressive waiting. The
narrator did not narrate any event that held at this state, but she could have. For example, while Kara waited, she might have been complaining, getting nervous, and the like, and the narrator could have chosen to narrate these events.

From the above, we can see that a story or narrative is being told and that it is composed critically of (a) events that succeed each other as the story’s timeline advances; (b) states that advance the story as well but that are also stretches of time of which events are a part; and (c) an event that breaks the sequence and takes the story backward.

All the other discourses are narrative in the way Discourse 8 is. Crucially, they contain events and/or states that break the sequence of situations. It is in this type of discourse that we usually find the PAST f PASTPERF errors. The students denote both the in-sequence and out-of-sequence situations with the same tense-aspect form, PAST, when in the target English they are learning there is a differentiation of denotation between PAST and PASTPERF, with PAST reserved for the in-sequence ones and PASTPERF reserved for the out-of-sequence ones. I aim to explain why.

In order to do so, it is not enough to know that the errors occur typically in narrative discourse. There is also a need to know, inter alia, the different linguistic contexts in which they occur and how PAST functions in those contexts. I shall therefore examine the representative discourses one by one to acquire this knowledge. I shall start with Discourse 1, repeated below as (9):

9. He became furious and went to the security booth to find out about his car. The security told him that his car was stolen a few days ago and has not been located yet.

Here, the four highlighted verbs denote situations in PAST. The first three denote events in sequence and they are correctly used. But the fourth denotes an event that is out of sequence and therefore should have been in PASTPERF rather than PAST. To be more explicit, the theft of the car is an event that doesn’t advance the timeline of the story but instead occurred sometime before the security guard’s report; indeed, the context (cf. e.g., a few days ago) shows that it had even taken place before the other two events as well (the owner becoming furious and his going to the security booth).
But notice that the theft is narrated in a subordinate clause—*that his car was stolen*. Since it occurred before the guard’s report and is contained in the subordinate clause, it is clear that the subordinate clause serves to carry a previously occurring event, while the main clause, *The security told him*, serves to introduce that event. The subordinate clause is therefore a depository for a *recalled* situation. The latter is backgrounded to the main-clause event—in this case, the guard’s reporting.

Recalled situations include facts, thoughts, feelings, reasons, and explanations, as the highlighted clauses in the following discourses show (and they do not have to be introduced only by reporting verbs such as *tell*):

10. He didn’t answer, just kept walking. The boys took him with them. Jay was very glad *that he finally got a chance to join them*. (fact, reason)

11. As we sat waiting for Jaime to bring our coffee, we were caught by the headlines news on television which read ‘Mass murderer and rapist escaped from prison . . . ‘ At first we thought *we did not see right . . .* (thought)

12. I combed my hair up in one because that was the style she chose. (fact)

13. Henry’s face on the left side from his eyes down were burnt so badly that it sometimes looked as though it was a burnt-out cedar tree which was left very hollow indeed. (explanation)

14. We tried to steer the wheels but we couldn’t get the driver off the bus because he fainted. (reason, explanation)

15. I did not like what my mother had done, seeing *she did not asked me any question*, although I would have lied. (reason, explanation)

All the situations in the italicized subordinated clauses of these narratives should have been in PASTPERF since they are recalled and backgrounded to events (usually in main clauses) that advance the timeline, just as in Discourse 9. But the students lumped both the timeline-advancing situations and the recalled ones in the same tense-aspect, PAST. Sometimes they use PASTPERF correctly, as *had done* in (15) and *had hired* in (8) show, but the more numerous instances of incorrect use of PAST clearly indicate imperfect acquisition of PASTPERF.
This student use of PAST to denote recalled information in subordinate clauses is the most frequent of the uses to which PAST was put (James, 1997, p. 165), and I label it here Function 1. The second most frequent use of student PAST was to denote background situations in the opening of narratives, in flash-back episodes, and in the main clause of episodes of narratives (Caenepeel, 1995; James, 1997, p. 168) (Function 2). Discourse 2, repeated below as (16), illustrates PAST in the opening of narratives:

16. It was just after the Christmas holidays and everyone came back to school on the first of January. For some of the children it was a chance to talk about Christmas.

All the verbs are in PAST, including came back which should have been in PASTPERF because its event must have occurred before the opportunity for conversations about Christmas, denoted in part by the verb was (clearly in the second sentence and vaguely in the first). Other examples of PAST in this use are (17-18), which occur in the opening of stories, but which also feature the difficult syntax of the ever since subordinate clause followed by a main clause:

17. Richard was a tailor and Charmaine was a waitress in one of those wild hang-out, gang-party bars, and sure as day his mother did not want that girl for him. Ever since the day she got a call that Richard and Charmaine were about to be married, her hatred for him grew.

18. Ever since I got into a car accident with a group of friends less than two months ago, each night I was bombarded with the near-fatal outcome of the dreaded mistake.

SE syntax requires that the verb in the ever since clause be in PAST, and the verb in the main clause be in PASTPERF, but the student puts both verbs in PAST. It might be questioned why the main clause verbs should be in PASTPERF if their situations occur after and not before the ever since situations. The answer has to do with the nature of the situations of growing and bombarding. Bombarding, for example, is composed of a beginning point, an end point, and a stretch of points in between. PASTPERF had bombarded in the bi-clausal syntax denotes the beginning point of the situation of bombarding, but it assumes the existence of the end point and middle points which are unreported by the narrator but, nonetheless, are there silently on the timeline. The PASTPERF-denoted beginning point serves as a backgrounded earlier
event to the middle- and end-point events of the bombarding, and not the event denoted by the ever since clause verb, which are unreported and which would have been denoted by PAST if they had been.

The second sentence in Discourse 3, repeated below as (19), shows student PAST denoting situations in a flashback episode:

19. Unbelievably, I agreed with the principal but gave reasons for the fight. Lystra, better known as the school's Bull Frog, came up to me a lunch time ordering me to give her my lunch and I told her no.

The episode is like the opening of a narrative in that it provides background information for situations (such as those in the first sentence) that will develop the narrative. Lystra's action of accosting the narrator (for her lunch) and the latter's refusal occurred (long) before the timeline-advancing events of the narrator's agreement with the principal and her provision of reasons.

Discourse 4, repeated below as (20), shows student PAST denoting background information in a sentence (the last one) composed only of a main clause:

20. When I reached the library, I saw Jestina waiting. She was a girl of her own way. Her father died some years ago (= before).

The verbs reached and saw denote events that advance the timeline; the verb was denotes a state of being in which at least these two events participate; but the verb died denotes an event that took place before those events, indeed, possibly also before the state of the girl at the time of those events.

Discourse 5, repeated below as (21), features the highlighted student PAST in its third most frequent role—looking back on or concluding a narrative (or one of its episodes) (James, 1997, p. 170), labelled Function 3:

21. After the reception was over we left for our homes. Cheryl and Stalin left for their honeymoon. I was very disappoint[ed] because I hoped for something much more romantic to happen

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to me. But things doesn’t always work out your way. The wedding was wonderful. I can’t wait for mine.

The episode is the last in the narrative, and was, in collocation with wonderful, denotes a reflection on the overall narrative situation, the wedding, which began many events and states before and which included the timeline-advancing ones of the reception, the couple leaving for their honeymoon, and the narrator’s disappointment in this episode. Because the reflection includes all the situations that precede it, PAST was should have been PASTPERF had been.

Discourse 6, repeated below as (22), features student PAST in its fourth most frequent role (Function 4): denotation of a background situation in a main clause in a particular kind of syntax—a temporal construction followed by a main clause that governs its tense-aspect (James, 1997, p. 171).

22. I sat back on the sofa, stretched out my legs and before I knew it I went deep into a reverie.

The temporal clause before I knew it constrains the use of PASTPERF in the accompanying main clause in SE. The event of the narrator’s going into a deep reverie obviously occurred after the event of her stretching out her legs (and in that sense shows that PASTPERF can untypically advance the timeline!), but PASTPERF is needed because its event is a background for the before-clause, which carries the event of (the beginning point of) knowing,7 correctly denoted by PAST, and thus advances the timeline. The going into the reverie is an event that actually advances the timeline, but it is organized in that particular syntax as an event that occurred before the event of the beginning point of knowing and, consequently, as a background to it.

Another discourse that illustrates the function is (23):

23. Now, Milli was determined to find her grandfather, but the only problem was that she had no money. She knew where her grandfather was living and she also knew the cost of getting there... A few weeks later, Milli saved enough money to pay for the train ticket to Maraval which costed ten dollars.
In SE, the temporal phrase, *A few weeks later*, in the last sentence constrains the use of PASTPERF in the following main clause. Milli’s saving of money is actually the next timeline-advancing situation in the discourse, coming after her determination to find her grandfather, but in SE it is denoted by PASTPERF instead of PAST. Since, as I have noted in the previous example, its beginning point serves as a background to events suggested by the temporal construction, what are the events in this case? They are the middle and end points of the situation of saving. These events are not actually reported by the temporal phrase or anything else, but they are there nonetheless, silent on the timeline, simply because the narrator chose to imply them rather than specify them. It is those silent, unreported events which the beginning point of Milli’s saving came before and backgrounded.

The situation of saving can, like the situations of bombarding and knowing, decompose into a beginning point, an end point, and a stretch of points in the middle. Though the narrative does not explicitly state that Milli took a few weeks to save the money, there seems to an implication (in the adverbial phrase *A few weeks later*) that she did, which would mean that she started at some point during the period, continued saving during the period at different subsequent points, and finished saving at the end of it. PASTPERF denotes the beginning-point event of the saving, which beginning point serves as a background for the middle and end points that are silent but inferable. The middle and end points would have advanced the narrative had they been actually reported. PASTPERF in this case tells us that there are silent events that advanced the narrative *after the beginning point did*.

Finally, Discourse 7, repeated below as (24), features student PAST in its least frequent function (Function 5): denotation of the introduction of an episode that is more or less parallel to the one just narrated (James, 1997, p. 173):

24. It was now 1 pm. and Kara’s maid of honour arrived to help her get ready. First, she put on her dress and then a hair-stylist she had hired styled her hair in a very unusual but appropriate style for a wedding. An hour later she was ready and waiting for the limo to [take] her and her maid of honour to the church. *Meanwhile* Jean Claude just *arrived* in Miami and he realized he had only one hour before the wedding.
The last sentence carries what I am calling a parallel episode, but it is not entirely clear that the episode runs in parallel with the previous one. There is a sense, however, that it occurs at roughly the same time as the previous one. But, interestingly, SE syntax treats the first event, Jean Claude’s arrival, as if it occurred before the previous one by coding the event’s verb with PASTPERF. The time word meanwhile constrains the use of PASTPERF and, in so doing, provides a background for events that will develop that particular episode. However, the student uses PAST, which in SE would give the impression that the arrival succeeded the last timeline-advancing event, Kara’s readiness to be taken to church, but which in the student’s use denotes a backgrounded situation.

I have presented the student use of PAST in narrative in the linguistic contexts the form favours, and I have also divided it into five discourse functions, but it should be clear that this use of PAST is reducible to a general student rule, as follows:

Use PAST to denote events and states in the background parts of a narrative.

It should be emphasized that the student PAST on which I am focused is the incorrect use of PAST. Of special interest, however, is the fact that the students also used PAST correctly. Indeed, in the discourses we have considered, PAST is used correctly to denote both events that advance the narrative timeline and states that contain these events, and it is used incorrectly to background states and events, including out-of-sequence ones.

Preliminaries to an Explanation

In preparation for an adequate explanation, there are at least two bodies of knowledge we need to have: (a) knowledge of how PASTPERF is used in naturalistic narrative discourse in English, and (b) knowledge of those forms in the TOB TAM system that are analogous to PASTPERF, particularly in their use in narrative discourse.
PASTPERF in Narrative Discourse in English

Much more research has been done on the temporal meaning of PAST and PASTPERF in sentences and short discourses (usually) than on its use in longer discourse, and there is a high measure of agreement among scholars. I shall first give the sentential meanings and then go on to the discourse use. I shall take Quirk, Greenbaum, Leech, & Svartvik (1985) as representative of the research.

Quirk et al. (1985) describes the meaning of PAST as follows:

As most commonly used, the past tense combines two features of meaning:

a. The event/state must have taken place in the past, with a gap between its completion and the present moment;

b. The speaker or writer must have in mind a definite time at which the event/state took place. (p. 183)

It gives the meaning of PASTPERF as follows:

The past perfective usually has the meaning of 'past-in-the-past', and can be regarded as an anterior version either of the present perfective or of the simple past. . . . More technically, the past perfective may be said to denote any event or state anterior to a time of orientation in the past. (pp 195-196)

From these descriptions, we can deduce that PAST and PASTPERF are semantically different, and that the difference lies in the former denoting situations that are separated from, but past in relation to, the discourse point or time of speaking, while the latter denotes situations that precede, and are related to, the PAST-denoted situations.

These meanings and their difference are captured in Table 1 in basically Reichenbachian notation by Hatav (1993, p. 232).
Table 1. PAST f PASTPERF in Reichbachian Terms, According to Hatav

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Aspect</th>
<th>Tense</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>R&lt;Rs</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E⊂R</td>
<td>simple past</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E&lt;R</td>
<td>past perfect</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

One can produce any number of texts in which PAST or PASTPERF will have the temporal/aspectual meanings attributed to them, as, for example, (25-26), both taken from Quirk et al. (1985):

25. Prices slumped last winter.
26. It was foolish to fire McCabe: in two seasons, he had scored more goals than any player.

But one can also produce texts in which: (a) PAST will have PASTPERF's meaning and be felicitous; (b) PAST will be odd with its own meaning; and (c) PASTPERF will be odd with its own meaning.

The following texts illustrate (with the ? denoting that the sentence following is not entirely acceptable):

28. Then everybody applauded. ?Keith announced his promotion (Caenepeel, 1995).
29. I got in early this morning. ?I had taken the bus. (Caenepeel, 1995).

(27) is felicitous even though the second PAST-marked event (John pushing) occurred before the first one (Max falling). In (28), the second PAST-marked verb seems anomalous even though there is a gap between its event and the discourse point. And (29) seems anomalous even though the event denoted by PASTPERF (the speaker taking the bus) occurred before the PAST-marked one (the speaker getting in early). An attempt will be made to justify these claims a little later on.

The point is, however, that the assigned meanings are insufficient guides to the use of the categories. What is needed, but what is scarce in
the literature, is an account of what motivates the use of the categories. It is when we go beyond meaning to the characteristics of the wider discourse context that we approach sufficiency of understanding of the use of PAST and PASTPERF; and it seems clear, as Caenepeel (1995) demonstrates, that discourse type is a crucial characteristic in this regard. Caenepeel treats issues that correspond to some of those analyzed for my PAST f PASTPERF error subtype and is, in fact, one of the very few treatments of PASTPERF in discourse available. The paper examines the structure of two discourse types, narrative fiction and news reports, focusing on the role of PASTPERF in particular, and makes a number of relevant proposals, including the following, some of which are reflected in my earlier discussion of how the students used PAST:

1. Narrative characteristically involves:
   (a) the temporal ordering of events with respect to each other;
   (b) a descriptive focus, which is concerned with enabling the reader to construct an appropriate interpretative referential framework for the events in the narrative; and
   (c) a perspectival focus, which is concerned with presenting situations as facts, or as the opinions, perceptions, and judgements of either an 1-narrator or characters in the story.

2. Narrative texts do not have a deictic centre that links them to the actual discourse point; that is, the discourse point is bracketed and a timeline within the narrative provides a system of temporal reference.

3. A relationship of consequentiality (a subsequent event triggered by, or responding to, a previous one) provides the principal source of event coherence in narrative.

4. Sequences of consequentially related events in a narrative are organized into episodic structures which are linear-event structures that are projected onto the narrative timeline but which are separated from each other by temporal gaps filled by descriptive, commentary passages of topical information.

5. Episodic structures may run in parallel on the timeline.

6. PAST-marked event verbs merely signal that the narrative context is maintained.

7. PASTPERF in narrative denotes either a perfect-in-the-past or a past-in-the-past.

8. The use of PASTPERF in narrative is subject to two general discourse constraints: the information status constraint, which states that each new main clause in a discourse must contain new
information, including new angles on old information; and the contextual relevance constraint, which states that the new information in a main clause must cohere significantly with its immediate context.

9. The construction of episodic structures interacts with the information status constraint in that it involves inferring the occurrence of events that have not been explicitly asserted, and assigning them the status of given information. It interacts with the contextual relevance constraint in that the contextual relevance of events depends on whether they can be incorporated within a current episodic structure, and that of states on how they cohere with this structure.

10. In a narrative, PASTPERF can do three things:
   (a) refer to anterior (or past-before-past) situations that belong to the evolving episodic structure;
   (b) refer to anterior situations that fall outside of the evolving structure, and
   (c) refer to a situation that took place while the current episodic structure was being developed.

11. In news reports, which are non-narrative, there is an immediate link between the deictic centre of the discourse point and the reported events, which allows the latter to be linked by topical rather than consequential relations. That is, the discourse point is not bracketed and tense resumes its primary function of establishing a relationship between a situation and its discourse point.

On the basis of these proposals, I will now fulfil my promise to explain the felicitousness of PAST in (27) and the anomalousness of PAST in (28) and PASTPERF in (29). (27)--Max fell. John pushed him--is a non-narrative text (in the sense of Proposal (11) above) for which the discourse point is the deictic centre. There is, therefore, no narrative timeline (in the sense of Proposal (2)) as there are no events to order. The discourse point, and not a timeline, assumes the role of evaluation point for the discourse and, therefore, PAST is invoked. PASTPERF serves no real purpose in the absence of a timeline.

(28)--Then everybody applauded. ?Keith announced his promotion--is a narrative text as is signalled by the subsequence adverbial Then, but announced is odd because there is no consequential relationship between it and the first-occurring applauded (in the sense of Proposal (3); it
should therefore be replaced by **had announced**, which would indicate that the event precedes the event of applauding on the timeline.

If we take (29)—*I got in early this morning. ? I had taken the bus*—as a complete discourse, then it is a non-narrative text evaluated at the discourse point. There is, therefore, no narrative timeline and, consequently, no need for PASTPERF to denote the event of taking the bus. Additionally, the discourse-point determiner **this** seems to bind PAST in the following event.

Caenepeel's (1995) analysis of PASTPERF does not subcategorize it as finely as my analysis does for the error subtype PAST f PASTPERF, whether in relation to form or function. Nonetheless, her contribution, particularly Proposal (10), will be used as a basis to support the need for PASTPERF in respect of some of the composition errors of the students.

The proposal that main-clause PASTPERF refers back to situations, whether explicit or implicit, within the current episode accounts for the need for PASTPERF in respect of the following student functions of narrative PAST given above: Functions 2-4.\(^9\) The proposal that main-clause PASTPERF refers back to situations outside the current episodic structure accounts for the need for the category in respect of student Function 1.\(^10\) Relatedly, the proposal of the *information status constraint* suggests, by analogy, that given/old information (or previously occurring situations) imported into a current episodic structure by way of subordinate clauses (other than temporal ones) must be denoted by PASTPERF. It accounts indirectly for Function 1 insofar as the latter relates to imported information. The proposal that PASTPERF refers to a situation that took place while the current episodic structure was being developed accounts for the need for the category in respect of student Function 5.

Caenepeel’s (1995) contribution on PASTPERF establishes that the category behaves differently in narrative and non-narrative discourses. It follows from this fact that the assignment of temporal meaning to PASTPERF is insufficient for understanding how to use it in discourse. Anteriority is clearly the semantic property that determines how it behaves in discourse, but from Caenepeel’s analysis, as well as mine, in respect of the error subtype, it is also clear that there are pragmatic factors that also determine its use in discourse. PASTPERF emerges from these analyses as quite a complex category to use—much more complex.
than analyses in terms of only anteriority and countersequentiality (cf. e.g., Diver, 1963; Givón, 1984, pp. 282-283) make it appear.

Analogues to PASTPERF in the TOB tense-aspect system

On the assumption that transfer of L1 characteristics might be responsible for parts of the imperfect student use of PAST, I present a description of analogues to PASTPERF in the speech of the students’ island community, Tobago. That speech is composed of essentially three varieties: a Creole basilect, a local variety of SE, and a Creole mesolect (James, 1997; James & Youssef, forthcoming; Youssef & James, 1999), and (parts of) the varieties are routinely mixed in speech. It is the basilect and the mesolect that we will be concerned with since they are more commonly used than the local SE, and I shall illustrate the behaviour of the PASTPERF analogues in sentences as well as in (longer) narrative discourses.

There is no PASTPERF in either basilect or mesolect; instead, there are the anterior or remote preverbal markers bin and did, respectively, which in certain syntactic structures of acrolectal speech are replaced by had. The following sentences illustrate:

30. She bin/did cook the food. She cooked/had cooked the food.
31. She bin/did know the answer.\(^{12}\) She knew/had known the answer.
32. She bin de de/was there. She was/had been there.
33. She bin/did sick.\(^{13}\) She was/had been sick.

If the sentences are treated as non-narratives and therefore as being evaluable at the discourse point, bin/did (and, in one case, was) are capable (from the SE translations) of one temporal meaning, past. But if they are treated as narratives and therefore as appearing on a narrative timeline, then the markers are capable of the meaning past, as well as the meaning past before past. Sentences (out of discourse context) are therefore inadequate bases for determining the meaning of the markers. Their use has to be contextualized for us to achieve a better sense of them.

**Bin/did in non-narrative discourse**

If I accosted my brother whom I lent a hammer with the question *Where mi hammer A did lend you last month?*, I would be using did to
simply mean past (in relation to the time I asked the question), as the SE Where is my hammer that I lent you last month? shows. And if I accosted him with the question Where mi hammer A lend you last month? (without the did), I would still mean past (also in relation to the time of speech/discourse) and my question would be translatable in the same way. But both my brother and I would recognize a difference in meaning between the two questions that is not brought out in the translation. The question with did would indicate a remote or anterior past while the one without would indicate an immediate past. In other words, did would denote a time of lending/borrowing that is psychologically distant from the point of speech, while its absence would mark a psychologically closer time.

Bin/did are essentially psychological markers of temporal remoteness (cf. James, 1997), and since past situations may be remote or non-remote they therefore share the semantic field of past and remoteness with SE PAST (see e.g., Comrie, 1985, p. 25: Kilby, 1984, p. 24; Lyons, 1977, pp. 689-690; Quirk et al., 1985, p. 196; Youssef, 1995, pp. 205-206 for the view that PAST encodes remoteness). But bin/did are clearly different from PAST.

They are also different from PASTPERF even though they can denote events that are psychologically remote. For example, a native SE speaker will not accost another native speaker with the question Where is my hammer that I had lent you? PASTPERF would be anomalous, because the question is non-narrative while PASTPERF is a situation-ordering narrative device.

Other examples of the psychological remoteness of the markers, represented by did/had, are as follows:

34. It depends on the level of education that you did/had attain.
35. A: I am checking on an SCT statement for JJ. B: Yes, JH did/had ask me to check to see if she did/had work here.
36. Akini, I did tell you to open your bedroom windows. You do it?

The markers cannot but be evaluated at the point of speaking. Interestingly, SE had is recruited, not to denote a past in the past meaning, but as a formal calque on bin/did with the latter's psychological remoteness intact.
Bin/did occur in past-time narrative where they function to denote situations in either a foregrounded past (i.e., a past within a time frame being focused on) or a backgrounded past (i.e., a past before such a frame), as in (37-39) (with my comments appended):

37. Longtime Charlottesville bin/did real nice. People bin/did get more unity and togetherness. (Situation of Charlottesville's niceness foregrounded in past time frame denoted by the time word longtime)

38. Mi mash the brakes. No brakes. Me start to get frighten. How come the brakes wasn't working? Mi bin/did check the brakes before leaving home. . . . (Situation of checking the brakes backgrounded to other situations, not denoted by bin/did, in focus)

39. When the girl die the other day, I did send and call him. I go for him. . . . (Situation of sending for the man in a frame denoted by the time phrase When the girl die the other day. Notice that did send and did-less go occur within the same frame. However, did send seems to be denoting a background for non-remote did-less go to advance the narrative)

For our purposes, it is important not only to show how bin/did are used in narrative discourse, but also how they are not used. They are usually not used in a foregrounded past to order events, as their use would detract from the vividness or immediacy of the narrative, which is achieved through the narrator's taking a non-remote perspective on the situations being reported (cf. James, 1997; Youssef & James, 1999). Texts (40-41) illustrate:

40. When aawi go down fu build the house, aawi meet some fella who, they no even know how for drive nail. Them manage fu get the work from the fella because them charge cheaper. . . .

41. Girl, he take a 2-litre and he carry it in school. He take one with ice, because they having party so they sharing up sharing up. Some friend now tell him for come go down in Real Valu supermarket for go buy ice cream or something. He gone with he friend. Well they lef the thing at school. When he come back they drink all. Me say, 'Kalan, what you do?' He say, "Mammy, I carry on."
The discourses feature only verbs unmarked by bin/did, and the effect is one of sustained immediacy of the events being narrated. But a few of those events would have been denoted (obligatorily) in SE by verbs in PASTPERF, namely, the bolded ones: manage and charge in (40) and left and drink in (41). In the TOB narratives, the verbs could (untypically) be modified by bin/did without a threat to narrative meaning, but at the expense of narrative vividness or psychological non-remoteness. Because they code remoteness and because there is a pressure for vividness in oral narrative, bin/did seldom appear in narrative.

Explanation

From the foregoing discussion, we can now pull together the factors that are significant to an explanation of PAST f PASTPERF. They seem to be the following:

1. The PAST f PASTPERF TAM error subtype was made by most of the Forms 4 & 5 students.
2. It persisted in greater frequency at the higher proficiency level (Form 5).
3. The students used PAST (incorrectly) to background situations to those (correctly denoted by PAST) that advanced the timeline of their narratives. They therefore used PAST to denote functions which are shared differentially by PAST and PASTPERF in SE.
4. They sometimes got the use of PASTPERF right.
5. They had not mastered the use of PASTPERF in narrative discourse, including the use of the category in certain complex sentences.
6. PASTPERF is a complex narrative device.
7. In their normal native speech, the students do not have the category PASTPERF but the (psychologically) remote marker bin/did instead. They did not use bin/did in their narrative compositions.
8. Bin/did is used differently from PASTPERF in narrative, especially when situations are focused on (or are moving the timeline forward) in a time frame.

In general, these factors show that the students created a narrative rule for PAST in the absence of PASTPERF in their routine community speech, and because they were not sufficiently exposed to the use of PASTPERF in SE oral and written narrative. This conclusion is
supported specifically by factors such as (1, 2, 5, 6, & 7) above. Factor (7) is particularly significant because it shows that the errors are not due to transfer of L1 characteristics. Factor (8) is therefore immaterial; indeed, if anything, it would have made matters worse for the students.

It must be noted that the students' imperfect acquisition is not surprising. They are not routine speakers of SE, and a great part of their difficulty lies in moving from basilectal and mesolectal systems where one measures pastness with one semantic/psychological marker (bin or did) to an acrolectal one where one has two markers, PAST and PASTPERF, to measure that past. Further, the discourse behaviour of the category is not specified, not even for the enlightenment of teachers, in English textbooks generally or in more erudite types of work. Indeed, even Caenepeel's (1995) detailed specifications and my own may have to be significantly adjusted for effective use in the secondary classroom. The students' resort to the simpler and more familiar remoteness-denoting PAST is therefore understandable.

But since the student PAST exists neither in SE nor in TOB, where did it come from? It appears that it is an interlanguage strategy devised by the students as they seek to develop competence in SE. The strategy clearly involves rejection of forms in TOB that are analogous to PASTPERF but not completely isomorphic with it. But, crucially, it also involves selection of a form from SE whose semantics--essentially past and some remoteness--allows deployment in a backgounding function.

I close this explanation with the observation made by Youssef and James (1999, pp. 616-620) that some students make a discourse differentiation between the unmarked verb and PAST in narrative. The unmarked verb is used to denote situations that are in the speaker's focus (and the unmarked verb's lack of tense facilitates this), while PAST (because it codes past) is used to denote situations that are not in focus but that serve instead as a background for those that are in focus.

Notes

1. SE is broadly conceived of here as the internationally accepted variety of English that is codified in grammars, dictionaries, and the like, and that is used in academic education (see e.g., Berk, 1999; Biber, Johansson, Leech, Conrad, & Finegan, 1999; Quirk, Greenbaum, Leech, & Svartvik, 1985).

3. Indeed, in combination with the time adverbial now, the state denoted by was moves the story forward from an event that is assumed but not reported.

4. It is recognized that PAST can be used acceptably in narrative subordinate clauses where it advances the timeline or has a frequentative reading, as in We couldn't save him because he refused our help when we got there and We wondered why he went there so often (frequentative). The point is, subordinate clauses typically carry recalled situations that they code in PASTPERF.

5. An episode is treated in this paper as a set of linear-event structures that are projected onto the narrative timeline, but which are separated from each other by temporal gaps filled by descriptive, commentary passages of topical information.

6. PAST was seems to be motivated by the writer's ability as a Creole speaker to, through the Tobagonian analogue bina, shift time reference from real to relative. Such an ability to shift allows for greater fluidity in the relationship between tense and aspect.

7. The situation of knowing is, like the situation of bombarding, decomposable into three kinds of points.

8. Hataw (1993) claims to be providing an improvement on Reichenbach (1948) by substituting the latter's notion of association with that of inclusion (symbolized by 'c')

9. The proposal about the backward reference of main-clause PASTPERF to situations inside the current episodic structure could be taken to imply that subordinate-clause PASTPERF also denotes backward reference inside the episodic structure and, if so, to account indirectly for Function 1.

10. I allow, however, that some of the events can also be interpreted to have occurred within the episode.

11. As spoken in (Trinidad and) Tobago, SE is flavoured by Creole pronunciation as well as by elements of Creole morpho-syntax. In respect of the latter, for example, the structure that is formally PAST PERFECT is used for PAST (as in, I had lent you my hammer last week. Where is it?).

12. had can replace bin/did with verbs, which in normal speech do not usually carry the past participle inflection: Shi had cook the food/ had know the answer.

13. had can't replace bin/did with adjectives or locatives: *Shi had there, *Shi had sick.

References


James, W., & Youssef, V. (forthcoming). *The language varieties of Tobago: Unity in diversity*.


