



*Tense use in discourse and dialogue:
prototypical and non-prototypical uses of
the PERFECT*

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Time in Translation project

- **Aim:** write a semantics of the PERFECT.
- **Constraint:** from form to meaning, taking into account cross-linguistic variation
- **FOCUS:** HAVE PERFECT
- **Methodology:** *Translation Mining*.
- Existing parallel corpora like *EuroParl*.
- Literary corpora based on novels and their translations.
- **Core languages:** English, French, Spanish, German, Dutch.
- Extensions to Italian, Greek, Catalan, Breton, ...



State of the art in the literature on the PERFECT

- Extensive research on the English *Present Perfect*.
- Proposals for the semantics and pragmatics of the English *Present Perfect*: Comrie (1976), McCawley (1981), Michaelis (1994), Portner (2003, 2012), Nishiyama & Koenig (2010), Kamp et al. (2015).
- Awareness of cross-linguistic variation: de Swart (2007), Rothstein (2008), Schaden (2009), Ritz (2012), Dahl & Velupillai (2013), Kamp et al. (2015), Dahl & Wälchli (2016).
- Language specific analyses: Bertinetto (1986) (Italian), Vet (1992) (French), Boogaart (1999) (Dutch), Löbner (2002) (German), Ritz & Engel (2008)
- Key insight: competition between PERFECT and (PERFECTIVE) PAST.



***Time in Translation* first parallel corpus:** A. Camus (1942). *L'Étranger* and its translations in Italian, Spanish, English, German, Dutch, Greek.

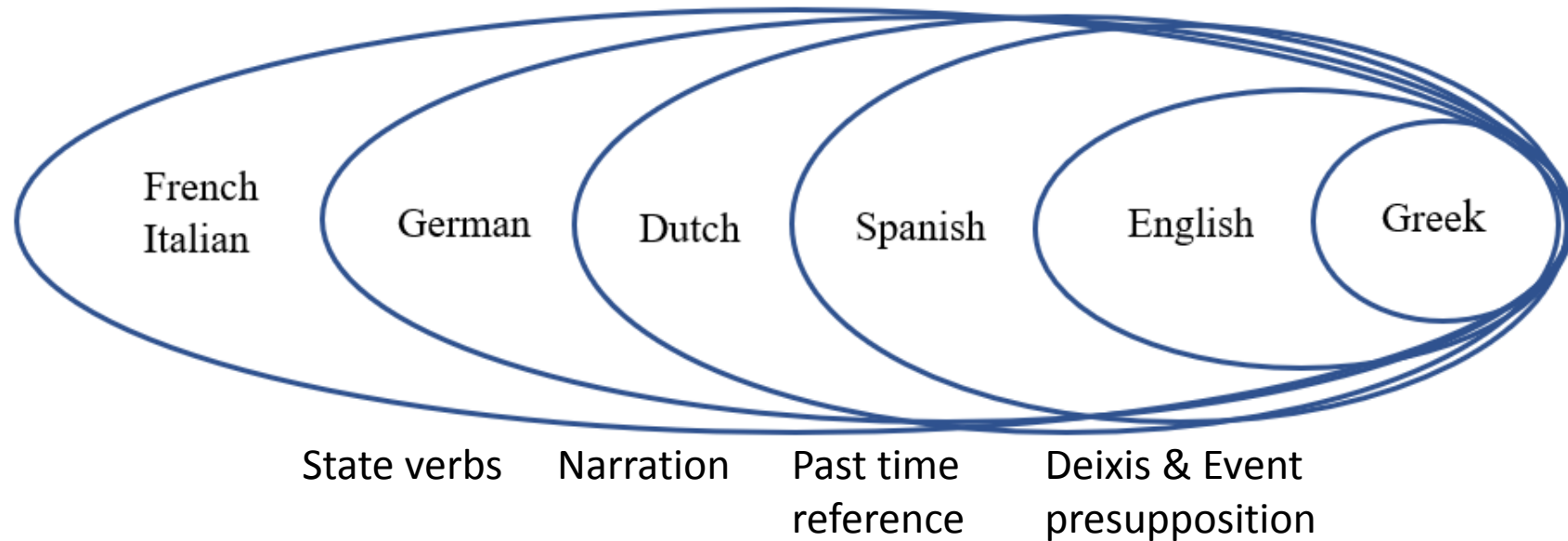
- Source language French: liberal use of the *Passé Composé*.
- Translation problem: other languages make a more restricted use of their PERFECT.
- *Translation Mining*: use translations to map out similarities and differences in distribution between languages.
- From language use to grammar: determine the criteria that PERFECT use is sensitive to in French, Italian, German, Dutch, Spanish, English.



Van der Klis et al. (2020a) (in press)
van der Klis et al. (2020b) (submitted)

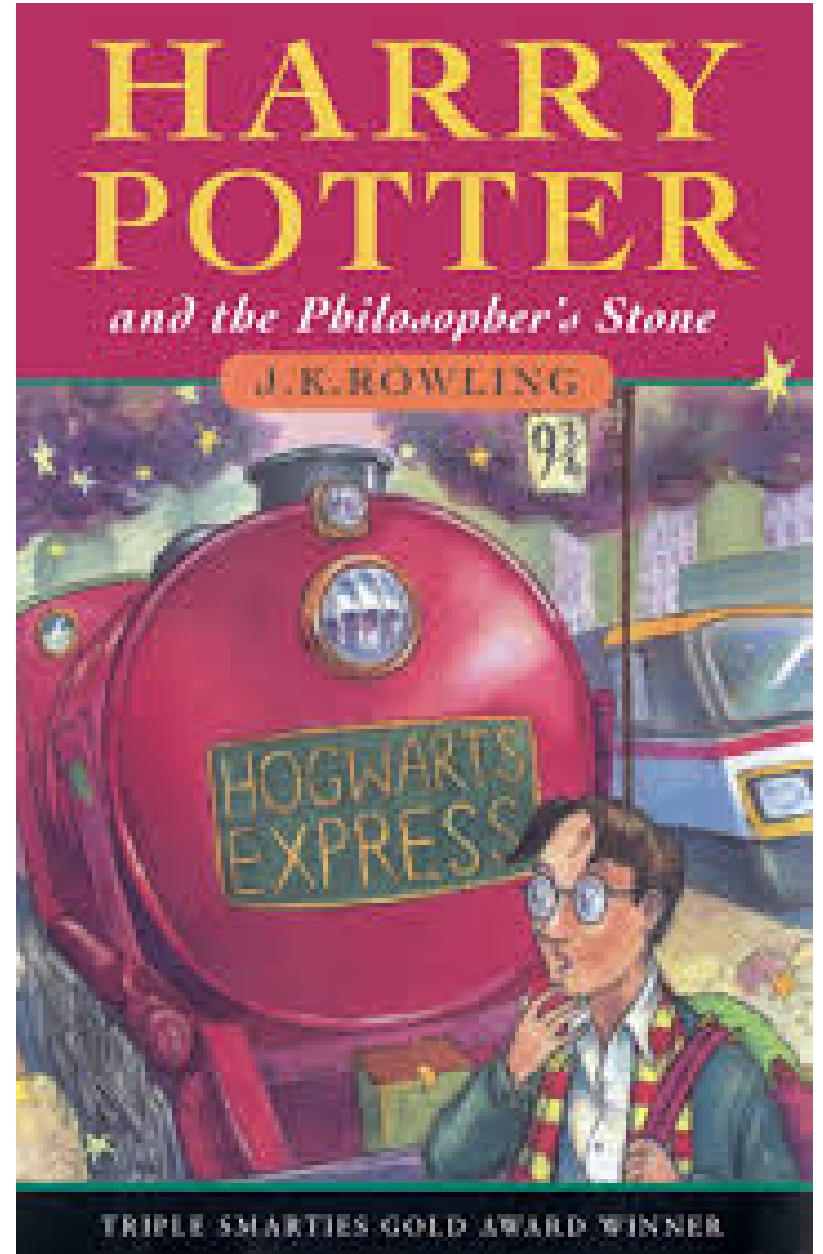
Subset relation over contexts

- Once a context switches from PERFECT to PAST in a particular language, the verb form remains a past tense in the next language.
- No dichotomy but a scale ranging from more liberal to more restricted PERFECT languages



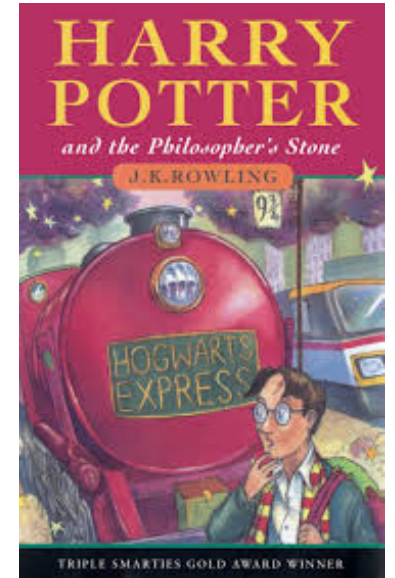
***Time in Translation* second parallel corpus:**

- J.K. Rowling (2012). *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* and its translations in French, Italian, Spanish, German and Dutch.
- Replicate the findings from Camus in a different corpus with a different source language to validate the *Translation Mining* methodology.
- Switch from a liberal PERFECT language (French) to a strict PERFECT language (English) to overcome a possible translation bias.



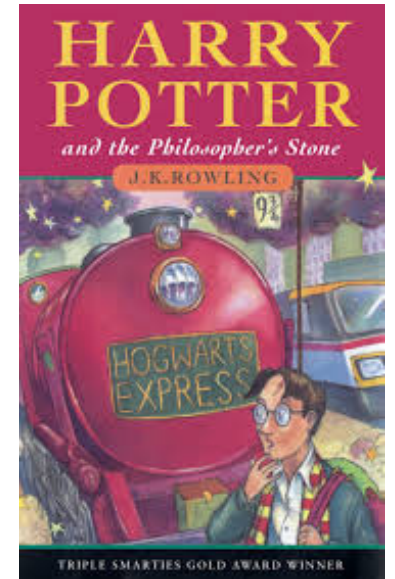
Discourse and dialogue

- 'Special' literary use of the *Passé Composé* in Camus vs. traditional story telling in Rowling.
- HP corpus consists of two parts:
 - i. narrative discourse in which the narrator tells the story, and
 - ii. dialogue in which the characters talk to each other.
- Empirical observation: the distribution of verb forms in discourse and dialogue is very different.



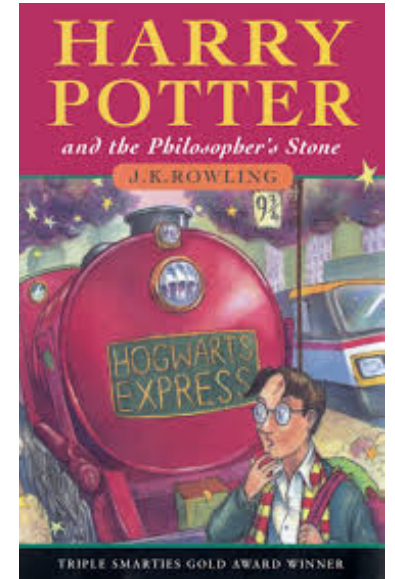
Summary of findings: prototypical tense use

- PERFECTIVE/IMPERFECTIVE/SIMPLE PAST tenses dominate in narrative discourse.
- The distribution of verb forms in narrative discourse confirms claims made about tense use in narration in the DRT/SDRT literature (Kamp & Rohrer (1983), Partee (1984), Hinrichs (1986), Lascarides & Asher (1993), etc.)
- The findings validate the *Translation Mining* methodology.
- No PERFECT use in narrative discourse in any language.
- Hypothesis: even though the PERFECT may appear in narrative sequences in some languages, it has not replaced the PERFECTIVE PAST in the written language.



Summary of findings: non-prototypical tense use

- PRESENT, PAST and FUTURE tenses appear in dialogue.
- The distribution of PERFECTS in dialogue replicates the subset relation we found in Camus.
- With the interactive *Time in Translation* interface, we can determine the grammatical features that the PERFECT is sensitive to in each language. These are also replicated.
- Taking the dialogues in HP as a proxy for spoken language, we conclude that a proper understanding of the PERFECT requires a more in-depth analysis of tense use in conversation.



Spelling out the details...

Data collection

- Convert the original and its translations into electronically readable documents.
- Select all sentences containing a finite verb form from chapters 1+17.
- Align the sentences with their translations in Dutch, German, Spanish, French and Italian (*TimeAlign*).



Split discourse and dialogue

- Algorithm that selects as dialogue text parts that appear between quotation marks. Remaining text is discourse.

dialogue	discourse	dialogue
'You can't blame them,'	said Dumbledore gently	'We've had precious little to celebrate for eleven years'

- Split the data: tense use in discourse and dialogue.

Time Align (manual annotation)

Annotation

English (original)

1.xml - s73.2

' After all he 's done ... all the people he 's killed ... he couldn 't kill a little boy ?

German (translated)

1.xml - s73.2

" Nach all dem , was er getan hat - nach all den Menschen , die er umgebracht hat -
, konnte er einen kleinen Jungen nicht töten ?

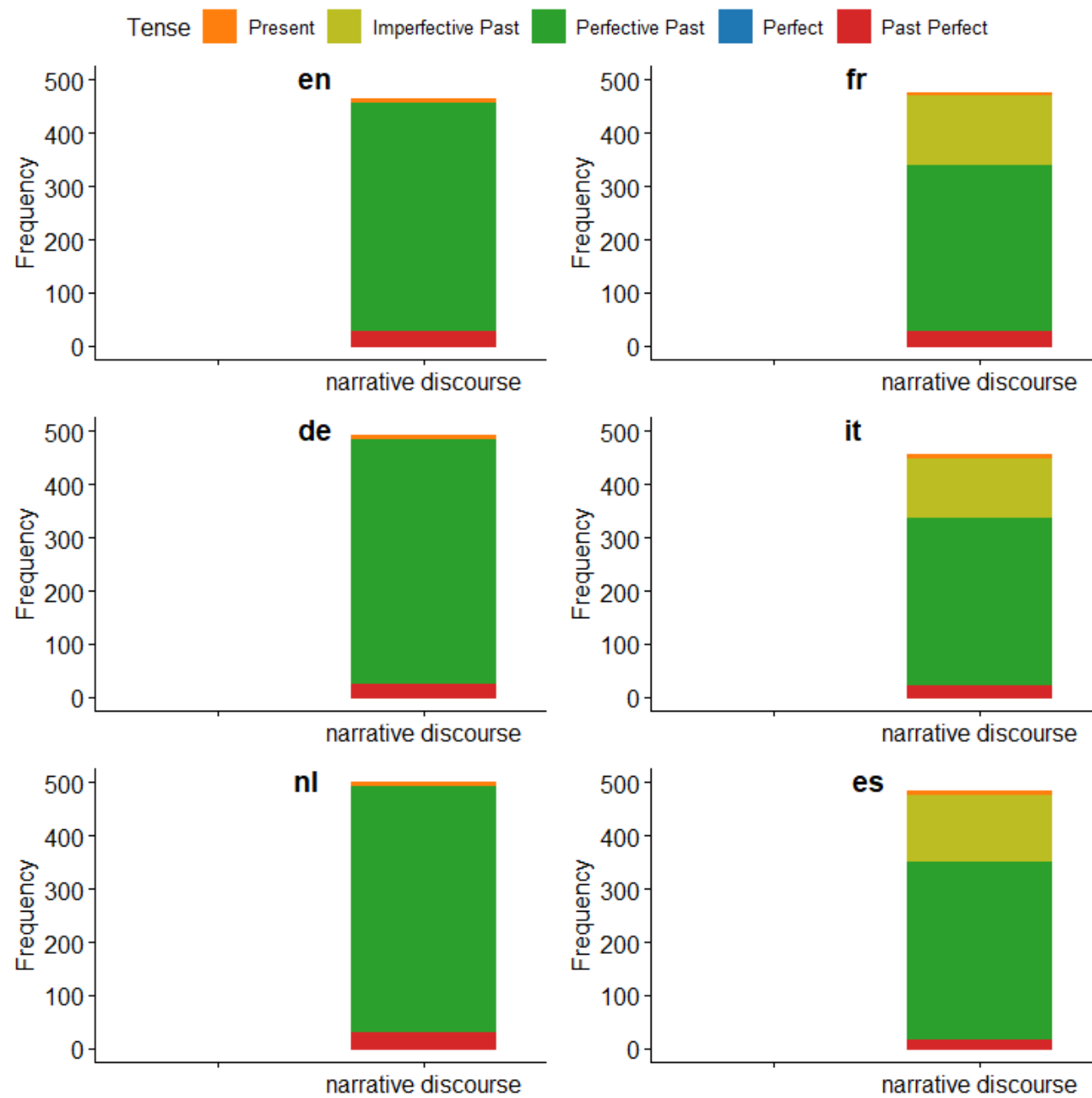
- ☐ The selected words in the original fragment do not form an instance of (a/an) *present perfect*
- ☒ This is a correct translation of the original fragment
- ☐ The selected words in the original fragment are incorrectly marked as *dialogue*
- ☐ The translated fragment is not in the same structure (dialogue/narrative) as the original fragment

Comments

Comments

✓ Submit

→ Go to another fragment

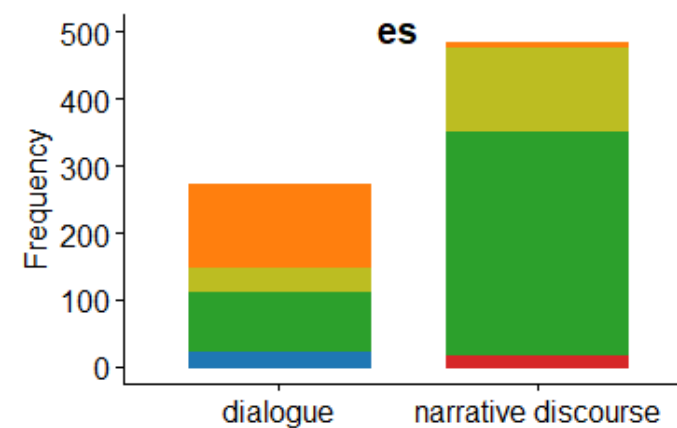
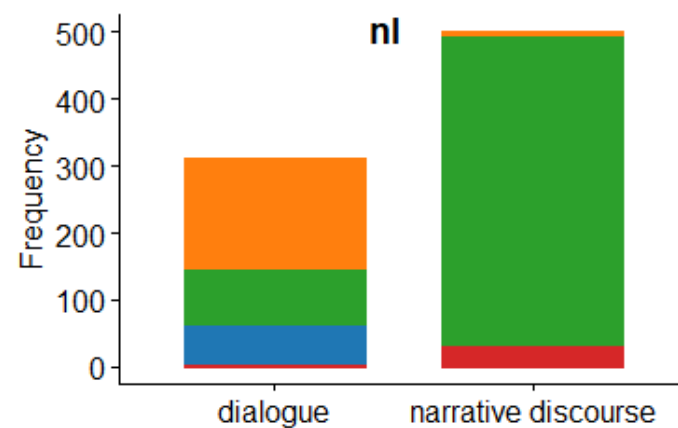
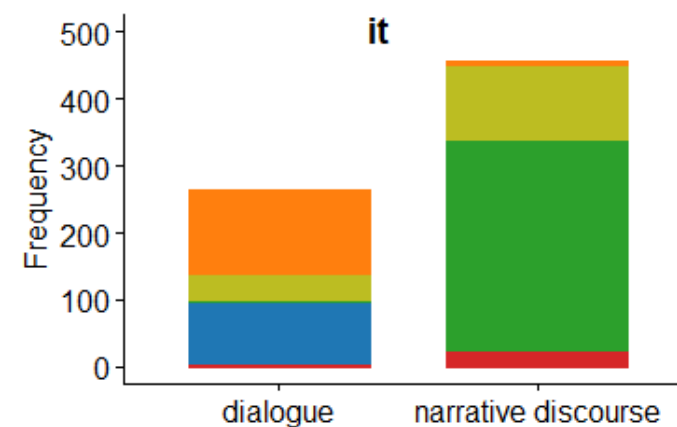
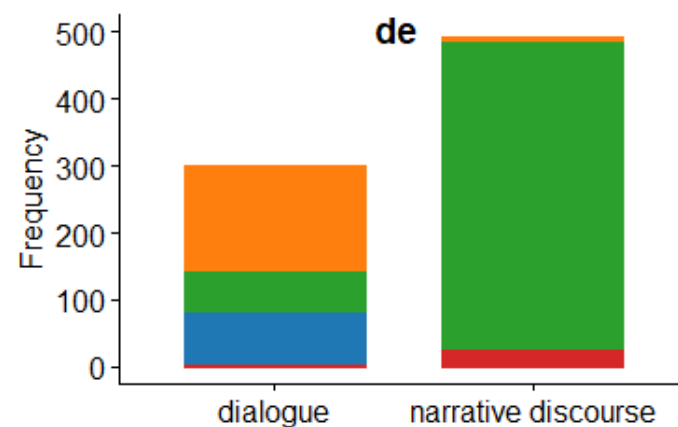
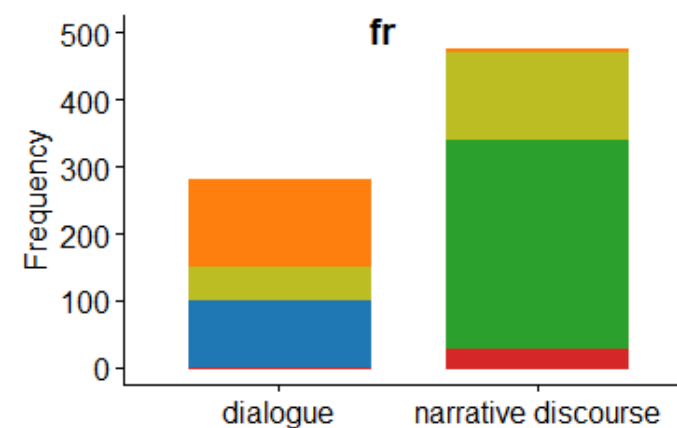
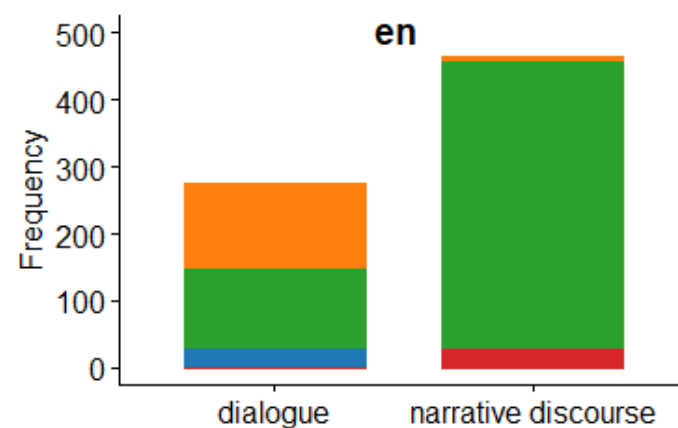


Reflections on tense use in narrative discourse

- Germanic languages (English, German, Dutch) predominantly use the SIMPLE PAST.
- Romance languages (French, Italian, Spanish) use an alternation between PERFECTIVE and IMPERFECTIVE PAST.
- No PERFECT use in any of the languages in our corpus.
- Tuple comparison reveals no noticeable cross-linguistic variation within the Germanic or Romance languages.
- Minor twist: contexts where English uses the CONTINUOUS PAST lead to an IMPERFECTIVE PAST in Romance.



Tense Present Imperfective Past Perfective Past Perfect Past Perfect



Tense use in dialogue: the numbers

- PERFECT use in Germanic languages: English << Dutch << German

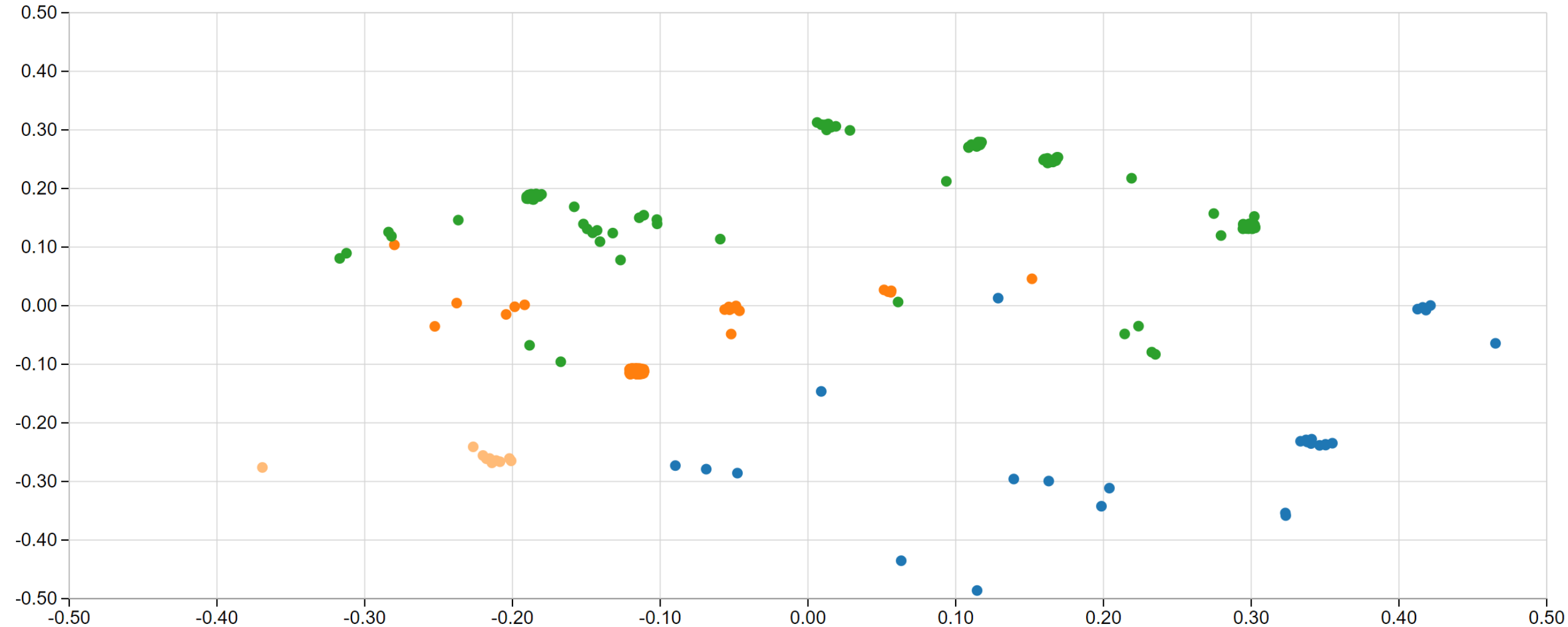
	PRESENT	SIMPLE PAST	PERFECT	PAST PERFECT
English	126	120	27	2
Dutch	164	83	59	6
German	156	62	79	4

- PERFECT use in Romance languages: Spanish << {Italian, French}

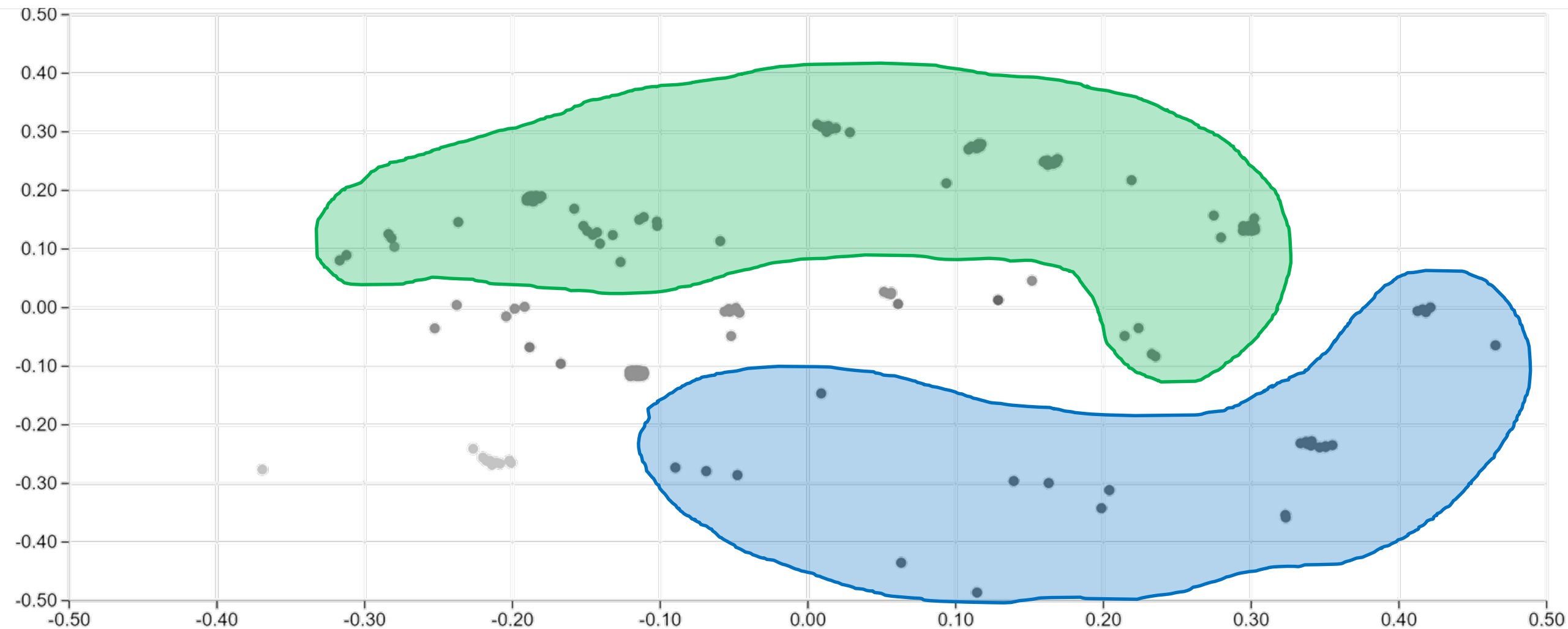
	PRESENT	PERFECTIVE PAST	IMPERFECTIVE PAST	PERFECT	PAST PERFECT
Spanish	122	89	38	23	1
Italian	124	2	39	94	4
French	130	0	50	99	3

MDS visualisation of tense use in English

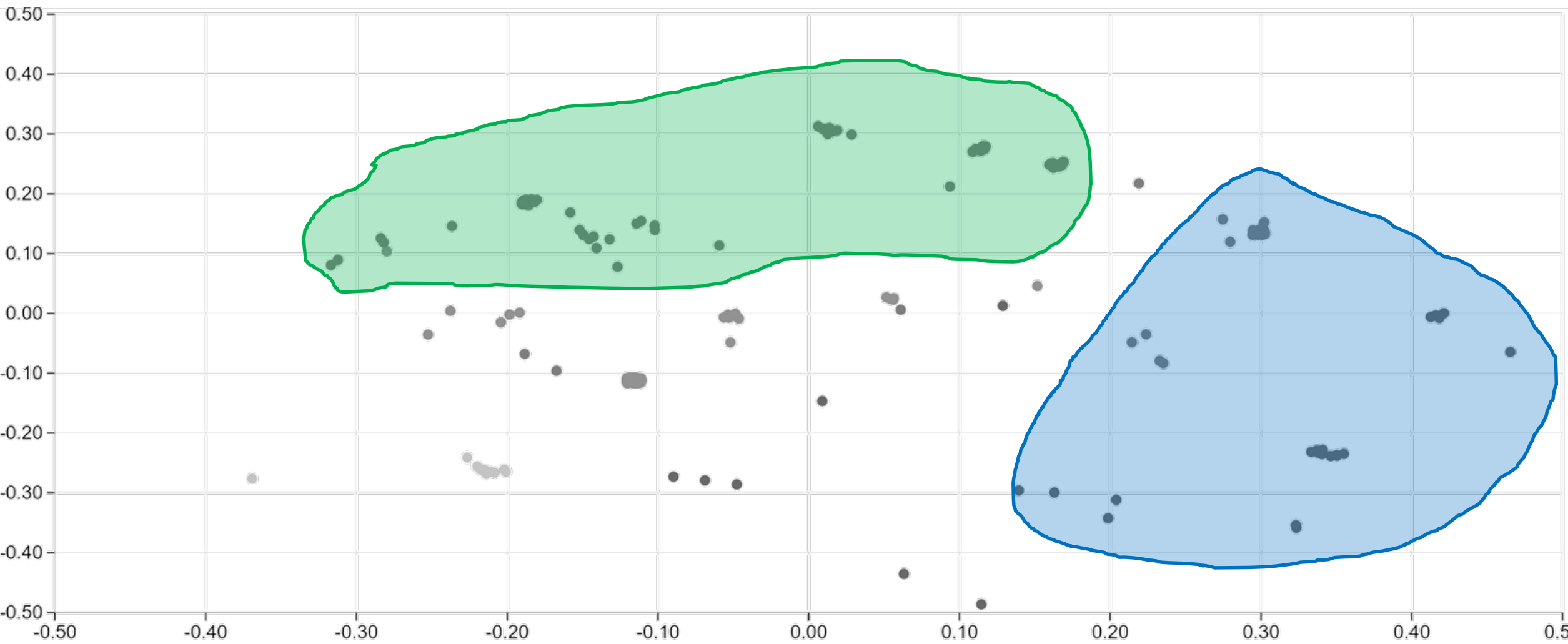
simple present simple past present continuous present perfect



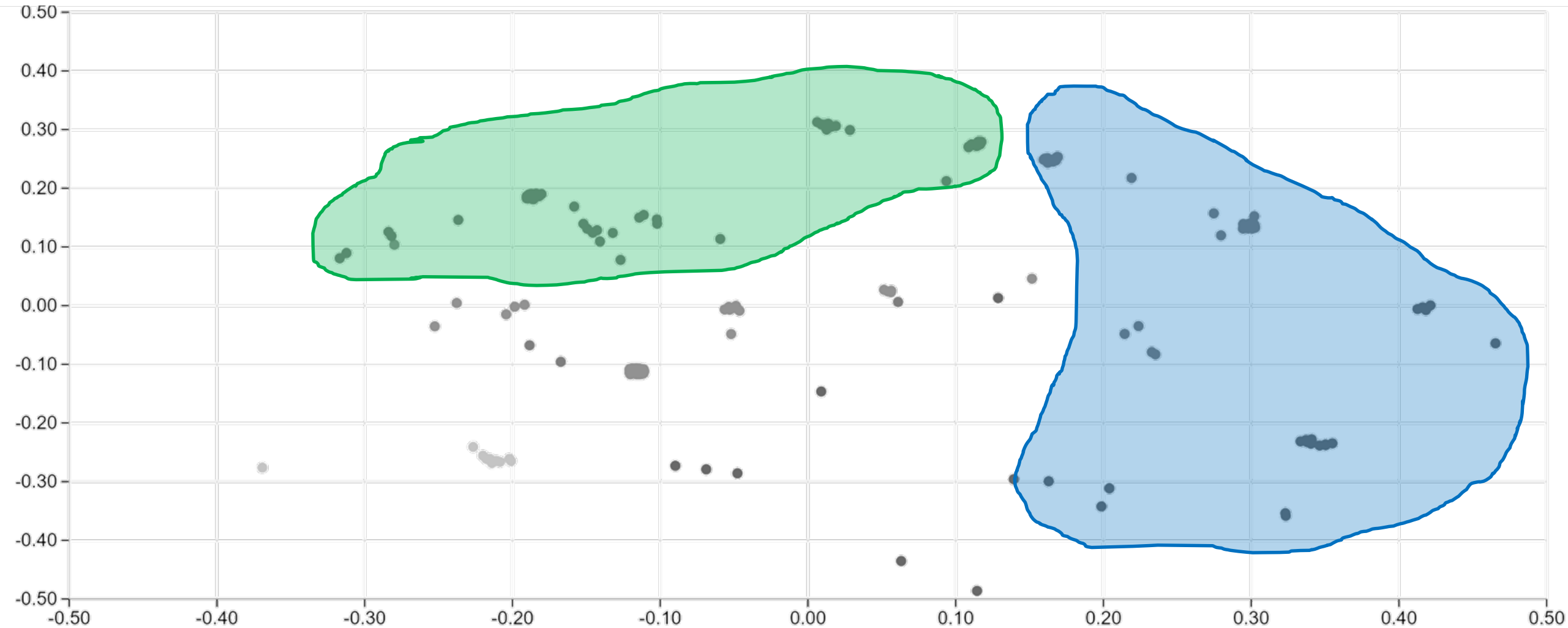
MDS English: *Present Perfect* and *Simple Past*



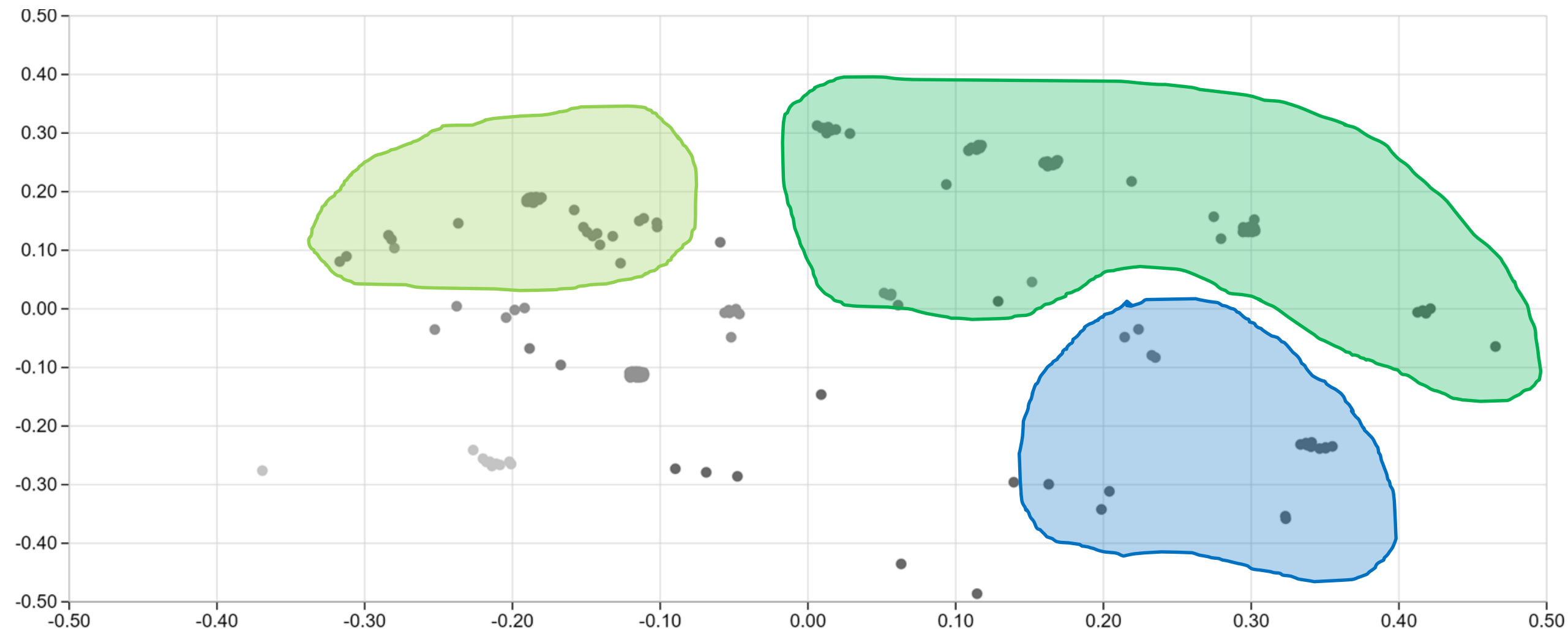
MDS Dutch: *Voltooid Tegenwoordige Tijd* and *Onvoltooid Verleden Tijd*



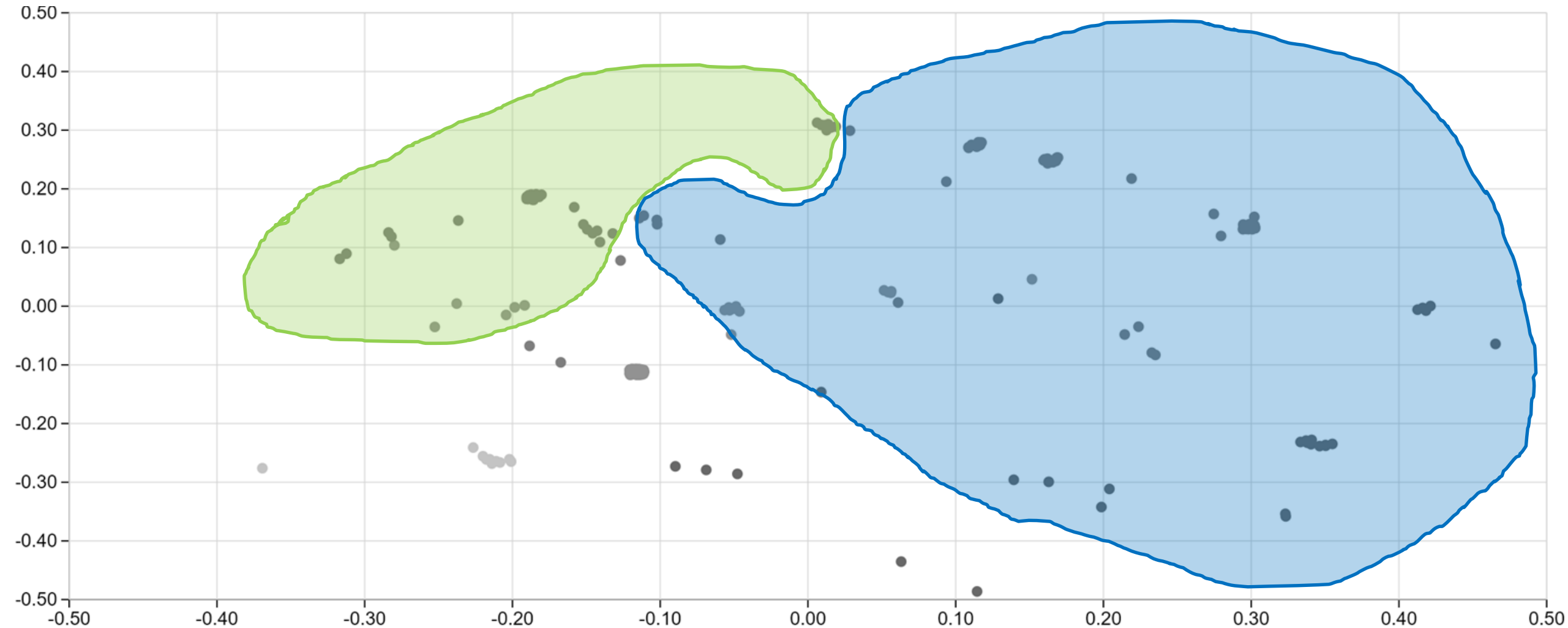
MDS German: *Perfekt* and *Präteritum*



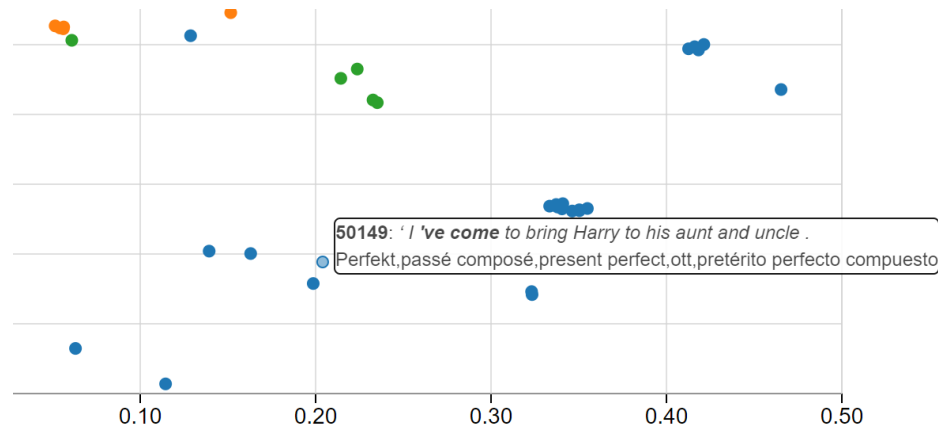
MDS Spanish: *Pretérito Perfecto Compuesto*, *Pretérito Indefinido*, and *Pretérito Imperfecto*



MDS French: *Passé Composé* and *Imparfait*



Dynamic Interface: back and forth between maps and data



← Point the mouse to a dot to see the example + tense labels in translations.

Click on a dot to get to the underlying data: sentence from source text + translation in other languages. →

Source

English

declarative dialogue present perfect 1.xml

' I've come to bring Harry to his aunt and uncle .

Translations

German

Perfekt

" Ich bin gekommen , um Harry zu seiner Tante und seinem Onkel zu bringen .

Spanish

pretérito perfecto compuesto

- He venido a entregar a Harry a su tía y su tío .

French

passé composé

" Je suis venu confier Harry à sa tante et à son oncle .

Italian

passato prossimo

' Sono venuto a portare Harry dai suoi zii .

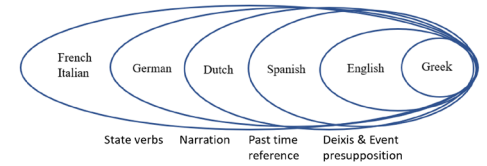
Dutch

ott

' Ik kom Harry afleveren bij zijn oom en tante .

Polish

- To proste .



‘Core’ PERFECT meaning: a state that has ended

- ‘Core’ PERFECT: all languages agree on auxiliary + past participle configuration.
- State that lasted for a while, and is now over:

‘You’ve *had* nearly fifteen minutes, now OUT’, she said.

[English]

“Jullie *hebben* bijna een kwartier de tijd *gehad*, wegwezen!” zei ze gedecideerd.

[Dutch]

“Ihr *habt* fast fünfzehn Minuten *gehabt*, nun aber RAUS” sagte sie bestimmt.

[German]

- Ya *habéis estado* quince minutos, ahora FUERA - dijo con severidad.

[Spanish]

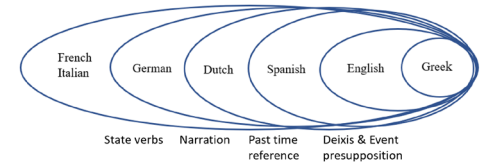
“Ça *fait* presque un quart d’heure, maintenant.”

[French]

‘*Sieti rimasti* quasi quindici minuti, e ora FUORI!’ disse in tono che non ammetteva replichi.

[Italian]





‘Core’ PERFECT meaning: event+result

- All languages use auxiliary + past participle with an event verb that entails a result state with current relevance.

‘See what I *have become*?’, the face said.

[English]

“Zie je wat er van me *geworden is*?”, zei het gezicht.

[Dutch]

“Siehst du was aus mir *geworden ist*?” sagte das Gesicht.

[German]

- ¿Ves en lo que me *he convertido*? - dijo la cara.

[Spanish]

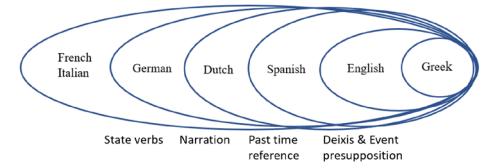
“Tu vois ce que je *suis devenu*?” dit le visage.

[French]

‘Lo vedi che cosi *sono diventato*?’ disse il volto.

[Italian]





'Core' PERFECT meaning: negative existential

- Negative existential PERFECT: absence of an event of the type that would have current relevance (*not, never*).

'Er - Petunia , dear - you *haven 't heard* from your sister lately, have you?'

[Engels]

Eh - Petunia , schat - je *hebt* de laatste tijd toch toevallig niet iets van je zus *gehoord*? '

[Dutch]

" Ahm - Petunia , Liebes - du *hast* in letzter Zeit nichts von deiner Schwester *gehört*, oder?"

[German]

Petunia , querida , ¿ *has sabido* últimamente algo sobre tu hermana?

[Spanish]

"Pétunia , ma chérie ", dit-il, " tu n'*as pas eu* de nouvelles de ta sœur récemment?"

[French]

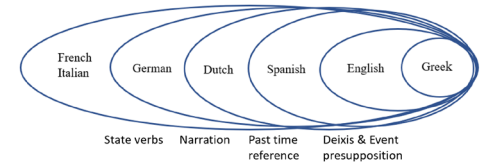
Ehm, Petunia, mia cara ... non è che per caso *hai sentito* tua sorella, ultimamente? '

[Italian]

- Conclusion: there is a range of core PERFECT meanings that are shared by all the languages in our dataset.



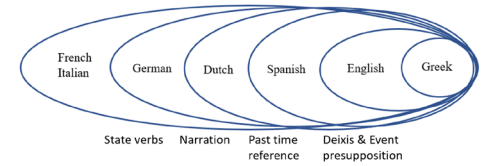
Cross-linguistic variation: event presupposition



Michaelis (1994): pragmatically presupposed events cannot be reported in the *Present Perfect*, but require the *Simple Past*. Only in English.

What <i>did</i> you just <i>see</i> ?	[English]
Wat <i>heb</i> je <i>gezien</i> ?	[Dutch]
Was <i>hast</i> du <i>gesehen</i> ?	[German]
¿Qué es lo que <i>has visto</i> ?	[Spanish]
Qu'est-ce que vous <i>avez vu</i> ?	[French]
Che cosa <i>hai visto</i> ?	[Italian]



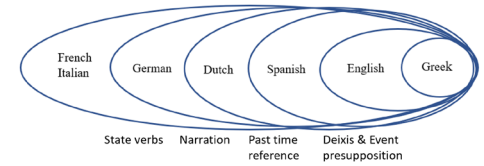


Cross-linguistic variation: reference to past events

German, Dutch, Italian, and French use the PERFECT to refer to an event located in the past. English uses a SIMPLE PAST to do so, and Spanish a PERFECTIVE PAST.

Dumbledore <i>gave</i> me the day off yesterday ter fix it.	Simple Past	[English]
Perkamentus <i>heb</i> me gisteren vrijaf <i>gegeven</i> om 't te regelen.	vtt	[Dutch]
Dumbledore <i>hat</i> mir gestern dafür <i>freigegeben</i> .	Perfekt	[German]
Dumbledore me <i>dio</i> libre el día de ayer para hacerlo.	Pretérito indefinido	[Spanish]
Dumbledore m' <i>a accordé</i> un jour de congé hier pour le préparer.	Passé Composé	[French]
Ieri Silente mi <i>ha dato</i> una giornata di libertà per fabbricarlo.	Passato Prossimo	[Italian]





Cross-linguistic variation: narrative sequences

German, Italian and French use the PERFECT in narrative sequences.
Dutch and English use a SIMPLE PAST, Spanish a PERFECTIVE PAST.

Your friend Miss Granger accidentally *knocked* me over as she *rushed* to set fire to Snape at that Quidditch match. She *broke* my eye contact with you. Simple Past [English]

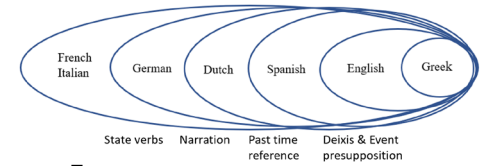
Juffrouw Griffel *liep* me per ongeluk omver toen ze Sneep in brand *wilde* steken tijdens die Zwerkbalwedstrijd en daardoor *verbrak* ze mijn oogcontact met jou. ovt [Dutch]

Ihre Freundin Miss Granger *hat* mich versehentlich *umgerempelt*, als sie beim Quidditch-Spiel zu Snape hinüberraunte, um ihn anzuzünden. Sie *hat* meinen Blickkontakt zu Ihnen *unterbrochen*. Perfekt [German]

Tu amiga, la señorita Granger, accidentalmente me *atropelló* cuando *corría* a prenderle fuego a Snape, en ese partido de Quidditch. Y *rompió* el contacto visual que yo tenía contigo. Pretér. Ind. [Spanish]

Votre amie, Miss Granger m'*a bousculé* par accident quand elle *s'est précipitée* pour mettre le feu aux vêtements de Rogue, pendant le match de Quidditch. A cause d'elle, j'*ai perdu* le contact visuel avec vous. Passé Comp. [French]

La tua amica Miss Granger mi *ha urtato* involontariamente quando è *corsa* ad appiccare fuoco a Piton, durante la partita a Quidditch. Con quello spintone *ha interrotto* il mio contatto visivo con te. Passato Prox. [Italian]



Cross-linguistic variation: the role of state verbs

French and Italian tolerate stative verbs in the PERFECT in narrative sequences, whereas the other languages do not, and switch to the PAST in such contexts.

[...] your father happened to leave it in my possession and I *thought* you might like it. [English]

[...] die had je vader toevallig bij mij in bewaring gegeven ik *dacht* dat jij hem misschien zou willen hebben. [Dutch]

[...] es traf sich, dass ihn dein Vater mir anvertraut hat, und ich *dachte*, dir gefiele er vielleicht. [German]

Resulta que tu padre me la había dejado y *pensé* que te gustaría tenerla. [Spanish]

[...] Il se trouve que ton père l'avait laissée en ma possession et j'*ai pensé* que tu aimerais peut-être l'avoir. [French]

[...] si dà il caso che tuo padre lo abbia lasciato a me, e lo *ho pensato* che avrebbe potuto farti piacere averlo. [Italian]

Competition PERFECT with the PRESENT:

event + result or just result

Resultative PERFECT (English, Spanish) or (current) result (Dutch, German, French).

I've got yeh a present.'

Present Perfect

[English]

Ik heb wat voor je."

Ott

[Dutch]

"Da fällt mir ein - ich hab ein Geschenk für dich."

Präsens

[German]

Te he traído un regalo.

Pretérito Perf. Comp.

[Spanish]

" Ah, au fait, ça me fait penser que j'ai un cadeau pour toi."

Présent

[French]

'Questo mi fa tornare in mente che ho un regalo per te.'

Presente

[Italian]



Competition PERFECT with PRESENT: state that started in the past

- Continuous PERFECT (English) or PRESENT (other languages):

'How long <i>have I been</i> in here?'	[English]
"Hoe lang <i>lig</i> ik hier al?"	[Dutch]
"Wie lange <i>bin</i> ich schon hier?"	[German]
- ¿Cuánto tiempo hace que <i>estoy</i> aquí?	[Spanish]
"Ça fait combien de temps que je <i>suis</i> là? "	[French]
' Da quanto tempo <i>sono</i> qui?'	[Italian]

- Not all readings ascribed to the English *Present Perfect* are available in all other languages.

Conclusions

- There is both cross-linguistic stability ('core' PERFECT) and cross-linguistic variation.
- Variation in PERFECT use relates to all levels of meaning: lexical semantics (states vs. events), compositional semantics (reference to the past), dynamic semantics (narration).
- The *Harry Potter* corpus has reproduced the subset relation we found in Camus, but only in the dialogue parts, so we take the PERFECT to be an ingredient of the grammar of spoken language.
- In order to determine the role of the tense use in conversation, we need to know more about the pragmatics of the PERFECT.





Thanks for your attention!

<https://time-in-translation.hum.uu.nl/>

The pragmatics of the PERFECT: answer to QUD

- Portner (2003): the PERFECT is used to answer the question under discussion.

Context: 'Yes,' said Professor McGonagall. 'And I don't suppose you're going to tell me *why* you're here, of all places?' (italics original)

' <i>I've come</i> to bring Harry to his aunt and uncle.	[English]
'Ik <i>kom</i> Harry afleveren bij zijn oom en tante.	[Dutch]
"Ich <i>bin gekommen</i> , um Harry zu seiner Tante und seinem Onkel zu bringen.	[German]
- <i>He venido</i> a entregar a Harry a su tía y su tío.	[Spanish]
"Je <i>suis venu</i> confier Harry à sa tante et à son oncle.	[French]
' <i>Sono venuto</i> a portare Harry dai suoi zii.	[Italian]



The pragmatics of the PERFECT: topic switch

- Nishiyama & Koenig (2010): *Present Perfect* may be used for topic negotiation.

Context: Mrs Dursley came into the living-room carrying two cups of tea. It was no good. He'd have to say something to her. He cleared his throat nervously.

'Er - Petunia, dear - you <i>haven</i> 't <i>heard</i> from your sister lately, have you?'	[Engels]
Eh - Petunia, schat - je <i>hebt</i> de laatste tijd toch toevallig niet iets van je zus <i>gehoord</i> ? '	[Dutch]
" Ahm - Petunia, Liebes - du <i>hast</i> in letzter Zeit nichts von deiner Schwester <i>gehört</i> , oder?"	[German]
Petunia , querida, ¿ <i>has sabido</i> últimamente algo sobre tu hermana?	[Spanish]
"Pétunia , ma chérie ", dit-il, " tu n' <i>as pas eu</i> de nouvelles de ta sœur récemment?"	[French]
Ehm, Petunia, mia cara ... non è che per caso <i>hai sentito</i> tua sorella, ultimamente? '	[Italian]

Dialogue acts

- Role of dialogue acts: questions and answers, beginnings and endings of a conversation.
- Cross-linguistic stability: in all languages the PERFECT plays a role in answering the QUD and topic negotiation.
- But: questions that raise a new topic and declaratives that answer the question under investigation imply a variety of tense forms in the corpus.
- What more specific dialogue features trigger PERFECT use?



Pragmatic variation across languages

Michaelis (1994): pragmatically presupposed events cannot be reported in the *Present Perfect*, but require the *Simple Past*. Only in English.



- a. Il a bégayé un peu : « On l'*a couverte*, mais je dois dévisser la bière pour que vous puissiez la voir. » [French]
- b. He stuttered a bit. 'We *covered* her up. But I was to unscrew the coffin to let you see her.' [English]
- c. Er hat ein bißchen herum gestottert: « Man *hat* sie *zugemacht*, aber ich muß den Sarg nur aufschraube, damit Sie sie sehen können. » [German]
- d. Hij stotterde een beetje: 'Ze *hebben* het deksel er op *gedaan*, maar ik moet het losschroeven om u in de gelegenheid te stellen uw moeder te zien.' [Dutch]
- e. Tartamudeó un poco : «La *hemos cubierto*. Pero desatornillaré el féretro para que pueda usted verla. » [Spanish]