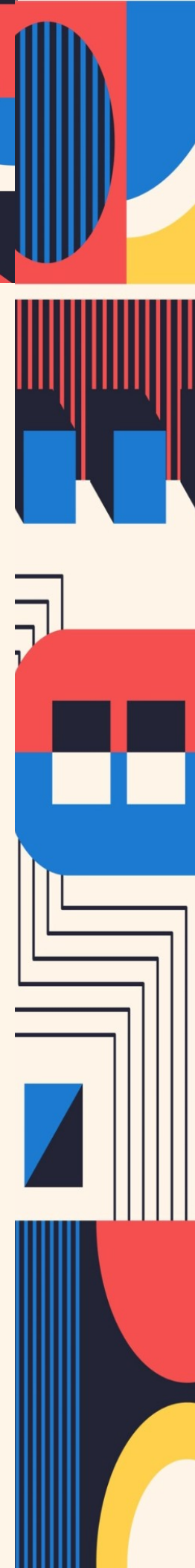


02

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**Matjaž Zgonc**

**“Standards Must Have Fell”:  
Analyzing Structural and  
Sociolinguistic Factors in  
Past Tense Spreading  
Normativity**



## Introduction

As is commonly known, Standard English (SE) stipulates the use of the past participle with perfect tenses. Consider, however, the following examples:

(1) There's a few problems I've came across.

(2) You may already have knew that.

In (1–2), the preterit form is used where the past participle would be expected. This paper is concerned with this phenomenon, termed past tense spreading (PTS) by Geeraert and Newman, in the American English speech community. More specifically, proceeding from Canguilhem's influential cline of bodily and cognitive activity from normative (superior, better suited for a given situation) via normal to aberrant (inferior, poorly suited for or even detrimental in a given situation), the methodological approach of perceptual normativity is taken to determine whether speakers find PTS to be more normative or aberrant with regard to three classical dimensions of perceptual research in normativity and prescriptivism studies, namely correctness, acceptability, and likelihood of usage in own discourse (see e.g. Kostadinova 117–122 and works cited there). "Normative" refers throughout to an essentially hermeneutic conception of linguistic norm which posits an acquired linguistic intuition in the mind of any speaker whether a given string of linguistic structures is grammatical or not, which influences the way they produce and perceive discourse (Auroux 222; Mäkilähde, Leppänen and Itkonen 2019), and "perceptual" to the conative dimension of speech acts concerned with lay opinions and understanding of language use perhaps most often associated with the work of Dennis Preston (e.g. Preston; Kristiansen).<sup>1</sup> To address the guiding RQ

*Which speakers of American English find PTS more normative or more aberrant in terms of correctness, acceptability and likelihood of own usage*, the paper works with a methodological hierarchy (see Pajunen and Itkonen) for researching linguistic normativity perceptually, which demands considering linguistic intuition first, followed by corpus research and a survey if the former steps do not provide a satisfactory answer. Given that PTS seems to be in conflict with SE, an initial assessment of linguistic intuition in a hermeneutic framework is that it is ungrammatical. Yet, a more fine-grained assessment may reveal nuance and complexity in terms of its grammaticality, for which reason, as extensively as space constraints allow, literature concerning PTS usage and perception is reviewed. Since prescriptions and proscriptions can sometimes be considered as windows into language use and attitudes of laypeople in a certain time period (Tieken-Boon van Ostade), the literature review also includes prescriptive work on English. This is followed by corpus research in American English corpora and a survey of 159 respondents. Rational explanation (Leppänen 204–205) of results — the end goal of perceptual normativity research — is given in the discussion. The final part summarizes the paper’s findings.

### **Literature review for PTS**

Reference grammars Quirk et al., Huddleston and Pullum, and Biber et al. do not mention PTS as a grammatical possibility. It is therefore reasonable to assume that PTS is not part of SE. Conversely, PTS is present in the HUGE corpus, a corpus of usage problems described in both American and British usage guides from the late 18<sup>th</sup> century up to the present day. PTS is coded under the problem term ‘have went’

because this is by far the most frequently cited example of PTS found in usage guides.

Of 77 usage guides in the HUGE database, 15 contain the problem term 'have went'.

No.	Year of publication	Place	Verbs considered
1	1770	UK	go
2 <sup>2</sup>	1779	UK	go
3	1847	USA	do, come, go, see
4	1851	USA	do, go, see
5	1856	USA	begin, break, choose, drink, freeze, go, know, ring, shake, swim
6	1856	USA	begin (3x), break, choose, drink (2x), fall, go, grow, ring, run, sing, sink, shake, spring, swim, take, tread, wear
7	1911	UK, USA	drink
8	1917	USA	drink
9	1920	USA	drink, go
10	1977	USA	? <sup>3</sup>
11	1989	USA	do, dive, drink, forget, go, ring, swim
12	1990	USA	?
13	1995	UK	eat, give, go, see, take
14	2003	USA	do, go, drink
15	2004	USA	do, drink, drive, sing, spring, swim

Table 1: PTS in the HUGE corpus, s. v. 'have went'.

Table 1 shows that most of the usage guides containing PTS were published in the USA and that the verbs *drink* and especially *go* are most frequently considered. Prescriptive works may be considered corroborating evidence given that they offer a window into language usage as well as language attitudes of the period in which they were written (Tieken-Boon van Ostade).

PTS is sometimes termed “an American usage problem” (Cheshire “Standardization” 126, Tieken-Boon van Ostade and Kostadinova) even though examples of it can be found in British (Cheshire “Variation” 46–49) and Australian (Eiskovits) English as well. One of the earliest (non-systematic) records of PTS in American English was discovered in the Salem Witch Trials court archives from 1692 (Pablé). Pablé finds that PTS was used in variation with the SE pattern by both the

defendants as well as the judges, which leads us to believe that class was not a factor in PTS usage. In 1784, prominent American lexicologist Webster proscribes PTS with *break, begin* and *choose*, but allows it in 1807 with *break, bid, choose, drink, forget, freeze, mistake, steal, take* and *write* as it was present in the use of “good writers” (see Finegan). Finegan claims that few Americans would consider PTS a usage problem at the time (39). H. L. Mencken, another prominent figure in the standardization of American English, rejects PTS as “confusion” (Mencken 205) in 1919, yet he documents actual usage of PTS with *beat, become, begin, bite, break, choose, come, do, draw, drink, drive, eat, fall, give, go, hide, know, ride, ring, see, shake, shave, show, sing, sink, spring, stink, swear, swim, take, throw, wear* and *write* (193–197). It therefore appears that PTS has been present in American English for over 300 years and sporadically treated by lexicographers as a usage problem.

The earliest systematic survey of verbs in American usage was carried out within the *Atlas of American English* project, namely *A Survey of Verb Forms in the Eastern United States* by E. Bagby Atwood [1953]. It is a meta-analysis of data from speaker interviews from the Eastern Seaboard, but subsequent research on verbal forms in the US confirmed that the variation recorded in the *Atlas* is similar in the Midwest, West and South dialect areas (Kortmann et al. (ed.), 223). Atwood documents PTS with *break, drink, drive, eat, grow, ride, shrink, swell, take, tear, wear* and *write* (12, 13, 19, 24–26, 43). In terms of frequency, PTS occurs everywhere from “rarely” in the case of *take* to 90% of the time in the case of *write* with rural uneducated respondents. Social data was collected inconsistently and varies from verb to verb, yet in general, PTS seems to be most frequent in older, rural and “uncultured” [sic]<sup>4</sup> respondents.

What most of Atwood's respondents have in common is geographic isolation, low social as well as geographical mobility, social marginalization and an identity based on where they live and work. The same is true for what Wolfram (157) calls "dialect enclaves": loosely associated parts of the Eastern US whose inhabitants share a "generalized core of structures" (146) in their speech. Dialect enclaves are typical of the Appalachian mountains ranging from Georgia to Pennsylvania. Members of different enclaves share a common history and Old Country origin, which is why there is a shared linguistic norm present in many enclaves (143). One of those is PTS which Wolfram calls irregular verb restructuring (150).

It appears that only a few research papers on PTS have considered not just frequency but also any pragmatic/sociolinguistic factor. For one, Geeraert and Newman demonstrate that PTS is used most frequently in the spoken genres of the COCA corpus, but that it is present in all of its subcorpora, even in academic writing (Geeraert and Newman 19). Next, Kemp et al. researched PTS use on Twitter using the statistical package *Twitter* and found that with the verb *go* specifically, the presence of a modal verb within the VP it heads<sup>5</sup> is the best structural predictor for PTS in the main verb (46.4%). Also significant were several combinations of person and number, namely 1pSG and 1pPL (39.7%) and 3pSg (10.3%), and localization in NYC or Atlanta (27.3 and 26.4% respectively) but not in Sacramento and Los Angeles (13.8%). Since the former are part of Atlantic and Southern dialect groups, and the latter belong to the West dialect group, one might assume PTS would be more acceptable to speakers of Atlantic and Southern dialects. Finally, Tieken-Boon van Ostade and Kostadinova surveyed 70 respondents and showed that the presence of a modal premodifier makes a sentence

containing PTS acceptable 84% of the time, yet unfortunately no sociolinguistic variables were collected in this study.

### Corpus data for PTS

The previous section indicated that PTS has been present in American English for some 300 years, mostly in rural populations, and that its acceptability might be contingent on a modal premodifier and dialectal factors, among which the shared norm of dialect enclaves and the discrepancy between the East and the West of the USA are worth mentioning. As a baseline, this distribution of factors was taken to be congruent with how linguistic intuitions of American English speakers were distributed throughout the speech community. To fine-tune the inquiry further, corpus research was conducted. This not only revealed how frequently PTS occurs with various irregular verbs, but it also enabled testing the structural parameters mentioned in the literature review: the combinations of person and number, and the presence of a modal premodifier.

Preliminary corpus research was concerned with procuring a manageable number of samples. Verbs in which PTS can be observed include irregular verbs with non-isomorphic past tense and past participle, excluding regular verbs as well as those irregular verbs with at least one isomorphic paradigm (e.g. *dream* and *get*) from further analysis. At this point, at least 37 verbs were eligible for further analysis: *be, beat, become, begin, bit, blow, break, choose, come, do, draw, eat, fall, fly, freeze, give, go, grow, hide, know, lie, rise, run, see, shake, sing, speak, steal, stink, swear, swim, take, throw, wake, wear* and *write*. Using the *SketchEngine* interface, corpora EnTenTen15 (13x10<sup>9</sup> words), EnTenTen18 (22x10<sup>9</sup>) and EnTenTen20 (36 x10<sup>9</sup>) were consulted to

count instances of the auxiliary *have* followed by either of the past tense forms of each of those verbs. If the frequency of PTS was lower than one in 100 million words in each of the corpora, the verb was excluded from further analysis on grounds of exceeding rarity of PTS. Fifteen verbs, namely *draw, eat, fly, freeze, grow, know, lie, shake, sing, steal, stink, swim, throw, wake* and *wear*, did not make the cut. Absolute frequency of the verbs was not taken into consideration — the goal was to obtain a relatively small sample of verbs with which PTS occurs relatively frequently because social and structural parameters were to be tested on attested examples fulfilling certain criteria (see section 4.1). Even though, for example, *swim* is proscribed against in usage guides more frequently than *give* (see Table 1), examples of PTS with *swim* were too few to allow constructing attested survey prompts.

Additional research was done using the highly representative COCA corpus. Frequency data for PTS was initially obtained through queries containing capitalized HAVE, which yields all forms of the auxiliary, and each of the verbs' past tense form. 'HAVE went' thus yields instances of *have went, had went, has went, 've went, 'd went*, and *having went*. On average, *has* + past tense yielded 22.2 hits, *had* + past tense 49.6 hits, *have* + past tense 94.4 hits and *'ve* + past tense 30.3 hits.

The threshold chosen for the final analysis was a sum total of at least 120 occurrences of PTS with a given verb. After removing noise, *be, bite, blow, choose, fall, give, see, speak, swear* and *write* were excluded from the final analysis, leaving 11 verbs, namely *beat, become, begin, break, come, do, drink, go, hide, run* and *take*.

Bare frequencies were amended by structural factors that came up during literature review (see above). The presence of a modal premodifier was operationalized



as a feature [+/-modal]. Combinations of person and number mentioned by Kemp et al. were also taken into consideration. Frequencies of verbs displaying PTS with different structural parameters are given in Table 2. For each verb, the occurrences of the auxiliary *had* in this form are subtracted from the rest and given as a separate figure. This is because *had* precludes [+modal], as in \*I could had become, and the figures with the <sub>present</sub> indicator should in general be higher than those with no constraints if [+/-modal] is a relevant parameter for PTS. This does appear to be the case (see Table 2):

Verb	1Sg (%)	2Sg (%)	3Sg (%)	1Pl (%)	2Pl (%)	3Pl (%)	[+modal] (%)
Beat	83 (18.4)	28 (6.2)	230 (51.1)	29 (6.4)	1 (0.2)	79 (17.6)	38
Beat <sub>present</sub>	76	27	141	26	1	59	52
Become	8 (4.3)	3 (1.6)	127 (68.3)	3 (1.6)	1 (0.5)	44 (23.7)	7
Become <sub>present</sub>	7	3	76	3	1	32	11
Begin	16 (12.2)	1 (0.8)	74 (56.5)	7 (5.3)	1 (0.8)	32 (24.4)	6
Begin <sub>present</sub>	12	1	34	5	1	23	10
Break	46 (27.9)	7 (4.2)	89 (53.9)	7 (4.2)	2 (1.2)	14 (8.5)	43
Break <sub>present</sub>	36	7	60	5	1	10	59
Come	55 (18.1)	21 (6.9)	160 (52.6)	13 (4.3)	3 (1.0)	52 (17.1)	41
Come <sub>present</sub>	48	17	109	13	3	42	55
Do	67 (33.5)	20 (10)	64 (32.0)	15 (7.5)	3 (1.5)	31 (15.5)	56
Do <sub>present</sub>	55	19	47	13	3	20	71
Drink	61 (52.1)	11 (9.4)	25 (21.4)	3 (2.6)	0 (0)	25 (14.5)	26
Drink <sub>present</sub>	52	11	11	2	0	13	35
Go	188 (30.2)	31 (5.0)	253 (40.7)	62 (10)	4 (0.6)	84 (13.5)	56
Go <sub>present</sub>	148	30	198	51	4	66	70
Hide	27 (22.1)	4 (3.6)	50 (44.6)	6 (5.4)	0 (0)	25 (22.3)	53
Hide <sub>present</sub>	22	4	50	6	0	25	76
Run	72 (30.5)	17 (7.2)	94 (39.8)	17 (7.2)	3 (1.3)	33 (14.0)	32
Run <sub>present</sub>	61	17	56	16	3	29	42
Take	71 (26.6)	34 (12.7)	108 (40.4)	11 (4.1)	1 (0.4)	42 (15.7)	56
Take <sub>present</sub>	62	31	81	9	1	36	68
AVG	25.1%	6.2%	45.6%	5.3%	0.7%	17.0%	37%
AVG <sub>present</sub>							50%

Table 2: Figures of PTS for selected verbs in COCA, given with parameters, noise removed.

Kemp et al. predicted 1pSG, 1pPL and 3pSG to be the best predictors of PTS in descending order. The present data instead demonstrates the following order: 3pSG, 1pSG, 3pPL with 1pPL being even lower than 2pSG. It appears that the combination of person and number does not predict PTS reliably. On the other hand, as was assumed, [+modal] attracts PTS much more readily, especially if auxiliary forms precluding it are removed. Still, as 50% is performance at chance, corpus research alone does not allow for a rational explanation of PTS. Following the hierarchy of methods which was presented in the introduction, a survey is needed.

### **Survey for PTS**

The first subsection presents the measuring instrument and gives reasons behind the choices made. The second subsection presents the results of the survey.

### **The measuring instrument**

The survey consisted of two parts. The first was designed to collect demographic data to be used as sociolinguistic variables while the second collected responses to sentence prompts. The data collected in the first part included age, gender, ethnicity, the area in which the respondent grew up (corresponding to their native dialect) and perceived social mobility. The first four were obtained through open-ended questions aimed at limiting the influence of the researcher on the respondents and at helping minimize problems of essentialism<sup>6</sup>. The final question was worded in terms of the respondents' perceived status in their family of procreation as opposed to their family of orientation, i.e. their status now or in the future as opposed to the one they had when they were growing up. The respondent could answer either

‘about the same’, indicating low perceived social mobility, or ‘(much) lower/higher’, indicating high upward or downward social mobility.

The second part contained a control question and 24 sentence prompts. Under each question, the respondents found three clickable scales with verbally labeled points. Each scale corresponds to one of the most frequently invoked dimensions of normativity in linguistics (see e.g. Kostadinova): correctness, acceptability and likelihood that the respondent would use the sentence themselves. The responses were operationalized as Likert scales (see Pajunen and Itkonen 232) with values from 0 to 6, given as verbal labels from “not at all” to “completely”.

This permitted the interpretation of an average score above 3 (true middle ground) as more normative than aberrant along the dimension in question, and an average score below 3 as more aberrant. If, for example, a sentence is judged on average to be 2.5 correct and 4 acceptable, the result shows that the sentence is probably not in line with the highest linguistic norm in the speech community, yet is frequent enough to be considered acceptable among speakers.

The control question contained the verb *leave*, whose past tense and past participle forms are both *left* and thus cannot undergo phonologically marked PTS. Out of the 24 prompts each combination of number, plural and [+/-modal] was represented at least twice. Authentic examples were found in COCA for each prompt and truncated when necessary. Other grammatical features such as tense, negation, illocutionary force, etc. are at least minimally represented in the prompts, but they were not tested for. The survey was hosted on Google Forms, which allowed for simple distribution and inter-operating system commutability.

## Results

Data collection was conducted in September and October 2022. The survey was completed by 159 respondents, mostly students at the University of Kentucky in Lexington, KY. Low representation precluded analysis on the basis of age and ethnicity; however, the rest of sociolinguistic factors were analyzable.

In terms of gender, three categories emerged from the given answers: 'male' (31.5%), 'female' (63.5%) and 'nonbinary' (5%).

In terms of the place where the respondent grew up, the answers were recategorized into dialect groups based on the latest data from the *Atlas of American English* (Labov, Ash and Boberg). For the sake of operability, less well represented dialect subgroups were grouped together if possible. The following categories emerged: 'South' (67.5%), 'North' (9.9%), 'Midland' (9.2%), 'Atlantic with New England' (9.2%) and 'West' (3.9%). Few respondents came from the American West, but it is not possible to recategorize them to larger dialect groups in good faith. Seven respondents could not be assigned a dialect group and were not included in the analysis.

Finally, in terms of social mobility, most respondents described their perceived social status as stable (52.2%), and the rest (47.8%) reported seeing themselves as highly mobile either downwardly (12.0%) or upwardly (35.8%).

A summary of averages for all variables together with standard deviations is given in Table 3. Deviations from the sum total are given for each variable.

	[+modal]			[-modal]		
	correctness	acceptability	lik. of use	correctness	acceptability	lik. of use
<b>SUM TOTAL (N=159)</b>	3.18	3.84	3.02	2.73	3.43	2.32
<b>GENDER (N=159)</b>						
Male (50)	3.22 (+0.04)	3.91 (+0.07)	3.12 (+0.10)	2.93 (+0.20)	3.54 (+0.11)	2.49 (+0.17)
Female (101)	3.22 (+0.04)	3.75 (-0.09)	3.00 (-0.02)	2.71 (-0.02)	3.34 (-0.09)	2.28 (-0.04)
Nonbinary (8)	2.45 (-0.73)	4.38 (+0.54)	2.68 (-0.34)	1.79 (-0.94)	3.80 (+0.37)	1.70 (-0.62)
<b>DIALECT (N=151)</b>						
<i>Atlantic+NE</i> (14)	3.19 (+0.01)	3.81 (-0.03)	2.80 (-0.22)	2.68 (-0.05)	3.42 (-0.01)	1.97 (-0.35)
<i>Midland</i> (14)	3.09 (-0.09)	3.82 (-0.02)	2.88 (-0.14)	2.67 (-0.06)	3.36 (-0.07)	2.08 (-0.24)
<i>North</i> (15)	4.03 (+0.85)	4.33 (+0.49)	4.02 (+1.00)	3.23 (+0.50)	3.56 (+0.13)	3.08 (+0.76)
<i>South</i> (102)	3.13 (-0.05)	3.79 (-0.05)	3.01 (-0.01)	2.72 (-0.01)	3.43 (+0.00)	2.35 (+0.03)
<i>West</i> (6)	2.89 (-0.29)	4.06 (+0.22)	3.12 (+0.10)	2.33 (-0.40)	3.43 (+0.00)	2.32 (+0.00)
<b>PER. MOBILITY (N=159)</b>						
Low (85)	3.16 (-0.02)	3.72 (-0.12)	3.00 (-0.02)	2.69 (-0.04)	3.28 (-0.15)	2.33 (+0.01)
Cumulative high (74)	3.21 (+0.03)	3.96 (+0.12)	3.04 (+0.02)	2.78 (+0.05)	3.60 (+0.17)	2.30 (-0.02)
High downward (19)	2.86 (-0.32)	4.53 (+0.69)	2.80 (-0.22)	2.35 (-0.38)	4.03 (+0.60)	1.92 (-0.40)
High upward (57)	3.33 (+0.15)	3.76 (-0.08)	3.13 (+0.11)	2.93 (+0.20)	3.44 (+0.01)	2.44 (+0.12)

Table 3: results of the PTS survey

## Discussion

The structural parameter that appeared most in the literature concerning PTS was [+/-modal]. Its relevance was also indicated by the COCA-corpus survey (see Table 3). The sociolinguistic parameters were taken from the set of those used in American dialectological and sociolinguistic research (see e.g. the aforementioned Labov, Ash

and Boberg) with the more usual category of class replaced by perceived social mobility.

In terms of dialect, the *South* dialect group was assumed to be more receptive towards PTS. Lexington lies within the *South* dialect area, about an hour and a half's drive from the Ohio river, which is taken to be the 'border' between the *South* and *Midwest* dialect groups (Labov, Ash and Boberg), and relatively close to the Appalachian mountains, home to several dialect enclaves. Cheshire ("Standardization", 125) mentions how proximity to Appalachia (i.e. Appalachian dialect enclaves) is the common denominator in research on the origins of PTS in contemporary American English. Because the speech commonly associated with PTS is also the local norm, it was not unreasonable to assume that living in Lexington might make one more accustomed to PTS and thereby less inclined to judge it as aberrant.

According to the data from Table 3, not only did the respondents who grew up in the *South* dialectal area not demonstrate higher normativity of PTS, it was actually the *North* dialect speakers who were most approving of it (by 0.62 of a Likert scale grade on average). The literature reviewed gave no indication that *North* dialects were a source of PTS spreading, so this result comes as a bit of a surprise. Still, the absolute distance of a *South* speaker's judgment from the average remarkably low (the mean of all six combinations is 0.03 of a Likert scale grade) and the average rating along all three dimensions with [+modal] as well as acceptability with [-modal] are also over 3. This indicates that *South* speakers find PTS more normative (correct, acceptable, and likely) than not when [+modal] is present, and more acceptable than not even when the [-modal] parameter is active. While the present results do not suggest the *South*-group

dialect is a good predictor of PTS normativity, this means that they are at least not in conflict with existing research on PTS.

In terms of gender, respondents identifying as women found PTS to be less normative than those identifying as men across the board. This finding is in line with previous research on gendered speech that found women tend to talk more in line with the standard than men for reasons such as covert prestige (Labov), although the absolute distance between genders is notably small. Interestingly, respondents identifying as nonbinary tend to be more accepting of PTS but less likely to find it correct or use it themselves regardless of [+/-modal]. Given the small sample size, strong points should probably not be deduced from this data.

For the present sample, perceived social mobility represents the connection between status anxiety and SE as the preferred code of traditional élites better than Labovian class (measured in revenue) since access to college in the USA tends to be less available to those less well-off. Thus, respondents who indicated lower perceived social mobility were hypothesized to be more receptive to PTS given that they would be less inclined to conform to SE in their speech. At first glance the data marginally refutes this hypothesis. However, there is a difference between upward and downward high perceived social mobility. While those who believe themselves to be upwardly mobile demonstrate higher normativity of PTS, those who perceive themselves to be downwardly mobile find PTS to be less correct and themselves less likely to use it (a third of a Likert scale grade), while once again reporting much higher acceptability (0.65 of a Likert scale grade) regardless of [+/-modal]. Similarly to respondents identifying as nonbinary, but in much larger numbers, those who deem themselves as downwardly

mobile score lower on self-oriented dimensions and higher on community-oriented dimensions.

By far the most significant result, however, was that [+modal] prompts scored higher for all dimensions than [–modal] ones. Not only that, the absolute distance between the two measured up to 0.52 of a Likert scale grade on average, among the highest in the entire dataset. The present results thus corroborate those in Tieken-Boon van Ostade and Kostadinova, and Kemp et al.

Why does [+modal] result in higher normativity? Huddleston and Pullum (78) claim that “[t]he central idea in the traditional concept of participle is that it is a word formed from a verb base which functions as or like an adjective”. However, not all uses of the past participle are equally adjectival in English. Consider the following:

(3) John went home. John broke the vase.

(4) John was gone/angry. The vase was broken/new.

(5) John has went home. John has broke the vase.

(6) ??John was went. ??The vase was broke.

(3–4) represent the SE, normative ways of using the past tense and past participle respectively. Note that the past tenses in (3) head their respective predicators and that the past participles in (4) are replaceable with non-deverbal adjectives while no such substitution is possible in (5): there, as in (3), the underlined verbs occupy a function which is much more verbal (as opposed to adjectival) in nature than that in (4) or (6). The verbal nature of the position occupied by the past tense verb in (5) is emphasized by the presence of a prototypically verbal element, the auxiliary *have*. In (6), it would be unusual for such prototypically<sup>7</sup> verbal element to occur. Over 1000 (5)-type



examples found in COCA indicate not only a quantitative but also a qualitative difference between the prototypes. [+modal] ties into this because it designates another prototypically verbal element which cannot be attached to an adjective: \*John was could angry. Following Huddleston and Pullum's description of participles stated above, this may be interpreted in the way where attaching a second prototypically verbal element, namely [+modal] verb, places the head is in so intensely a verbal function that a clash between it and a prototypically adjectival form of the past participle occurs, or at least a counterfactual force emerges which resists standardization demanding the adjectival form in a prototypically verbal function. In other words, [+modal] is a good predictor of PTS because it adds force to the prototypically verbal construal of the syntactic role occupied by a verb, meaning that there is less systemic pressure for said verb to take on the prototypically more adjectival form of the past participle stipulated by SE.

### Conclusion

It seems the presence of a modal premodifier renders PTS significantly more likely to be normative, which is probably due to the fact that PTS occurs when the verb is in a prototypically verbal function but required to take on a prototypically adjectival form. Sociolinguistic variables proved to be much less significant, yet it was shown that gender plays a small role in establishing PTS normativity, likely due to its usual function of covert prestige. High perceived downward, but not upward, social mobility also resulted in higher-than-average acceptability ratings and lower ratings for both correctness and likelihood of the respondent's own usage. This may indicate that

linguistic insecurity plays a somewhat significant role in status maintenance when it comes to social slump, but less so otherwise.

A sample of 159 respondents, while not classifiable as a *very* large sample, warrants reasonably high confidence in the present set of data. However, as it is likely that the sample consisted of largely homogenous respondents (young college students), it may well be that a more balanced sample would yield more salient social variables. Still, proceeding from the data this paper disposes with, it is possible to conclude that PTS is not a recent anomaly about to disappear, but rather a moderately predictable feature of American speech.

## End Notes

<sup>1</sup> NB this approach differs significantly from the prescriptive notion of normativity concerned exclusively with correctness and typical of the structuralist tradition, and instead places this multi-dimensional, speaker-oriented normativity into the center of discourse production and perception. The perceptual approach to it is undertaken to remedy some of the most relevant methodological and definitional shortcomings of a purely hermeneutic approach. See Zgonc, 43–103 for a contextualized full discussion.

<sup>2</sup> 2 is the second edition of 1.

<sup>3</sup> '?' indicates that information was not obtainable because of copyright.

<sup>4</sup> This term is consistently used throughout in Bagby, yet it is never defined. Contemporary sociolinguistic research would probably use the label "poorly educated" or "uneducated".

<sup>5</sup> E.g. *might* in *She might have gone fishing* or *may* in (2) *You may already have knew that*.

<sup>6</sup> Essentialism in sociolinguistic research refers to the practice of using predetermined categories of social reality as independent variables. This may be problematic because using fixed variables to statistically prove the correlation between that variable and a dependent speech variable often imposes upon the speakers a social reality that they themselves may not be experiencing at all (as in e.g. the "emasculated speech" of speakers who never felt emasculated in the first place). See Pablé and Hass for details.

<sup>7</sup> "Prototypical" is used here in the well-established cognitive linguistic sense indicating gradation in category membership. Word class membership has been analyzed in this framework multiple times; perhaps the most accessible is Lakoff's (Lakoff, 63–64) recapitulation or Ross's research as a distinction between the "nounier" and less "nouny nouns" (ibid.) If the reader is struggling with the greater/lesser prototypicality of verbal elements, then, by analogy, one may also speak of 'verbier' and less 'verby' verbs. According to Huddleson and Pullum, then, participles are less verby verbs than VP-heading verbs because they are slightly more adjectivly, which, as the present research has demonstrated, may well influence the perceptual normativity of PTS within a phrase where they occur.

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