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# SOME NOTES ON THE PRESENT PERFECT

*Bořivoj Herzlk*

## 1. THE PROBLEMS

The Present Perfect is a tense that has always been the most difficult for foreign learners of English to learn and understand. The aim of this article is to survey it on the basis of some statistical data and to draw conclusions for its special function and position.

In regard to the system of English tenses there are basically two possibilities of how to interpret the Present Perfect. Some grammarians consider it an independent tense and speak of it as such, although the name may vary (e.g., the Pre-Present, the Perfect); others consider it a peculiar aspect category. B. Ilyish (1965:96—104) goes even further and in his grammar gives yet one more view, viz., that the Present Perfect is usually classified as 1. a peculiar tense category, 2. a peculiar aspect category or, 3. that the category of the Present Perfect is neither one of tense nor one of aspect but a specific category different from both, namely that of "time relation". Another interesting approach is that offered by W. Diver (1963), who uses the term "Past Indefinite".

But it is not our aim to take part in the discussion on what the Present Perfect is or what it might or might not be, but to show what it expresses and how it functions.

## 2. THE MATERIAL AND ITS PROCESSING

The material for this investigation was selected according to the following criteria:

- a) books by British authors to represent British English;
- b) books published after 1950 to obtain a comparatively recent and living usage of the Present Perfect.

The following books were excerpted: C. P. Snow: *The Masters*, Graham Greene: *The Quiet American*, Kingsley Amis: *Lucky Jim*, John Osborne: *The Entertainer*, Robert Blackburn: *New Horizon Book of Flying*.

The first three books are novels, the fourth a drama, the fifth a popular

technical book. I wished to include at least one technical book for the following reason. In fiction the Present Perfect is mostly found to occur in direct speech. In Blackburn's book direct speech is practically non-existent and it shows the use of the Present Perfect in technical language.

In the present study the following abbreviations were used to indicate the individual books:

- Sn — Snow, *The Masters*
- Gr — Greene, *The Quiet American*
- Am — Amis, *Lucky Jim*
- Os — Osborne, *The Entertainer*
- Bl — Blackburn, *New Horizon Book of Flying*<sup>1</sup>

The references accompanying the quoted excerpts are to the page of the English original of the edition I used.

The books mentioned above were read and each case was recorded. Then, for the purpose of stating the frequency in relation to the total number of words from each author, the words on every tenth page of the first three books were counted, the average number of words per page calculated and the total number of words estimated. In *The Entertainer* and *New Horizon Book of Flying*, a more detailed calculation had to be made owing to songs occasionally occurring in the former and the number of words varying practically from page to page in the latter. In these two books the lines had to be counted on every page and, by counting the number of words on "full" pages, the full-page average was established and in this way the total number of words arrived at.

In putting down the first instances of the Present Perfect another problem cropped up immediately, viz. whether all the Present Perfect cases really constituted one group, quite homogeneous, or not. One might, of course, divide them into several groups, but the existence of two basic groups is evident beyond any doubt, viz. the one constituted by the "regular" cases (e.g., I have seen, he has come, we've been talking about him), and the "formal" group, constituted by the "*I've got*" type (e.g., I've got to go there, they've got a book to read). Each group was calculated separately; only to obtain a survey of total occurrence were they counted together. The groups are respectively marked "R" (regular) and "F" (formal) in this study. "T" stands for total.

From practically all the grammars available it is evident that the *I've got* form does not, in present-day English, constitute an integral part of the Present Perfect and, though formally of the same type as *I've read*, *I've seen*, etc., it certainly expresses something different. The approach of individual grammarians varies, the two extreme points of view being taken up by Curme ("with... get, the present perfect form is often still a present tense, as originally with all the verbs", 1965.255) on the one hand, and by Ganšina-Vasilevskaja on the other hand ("the frequent use of the verb to have may have led to the weakening of its meaning", 1951.131—2). How it came about that *to have got*

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<sup>1</sup> Amis, Kingsley: *Lucky Jim*. Harmondsworth 1962.  
Blackburn, Robert: *New Horizon Book of Flying*. London 1963.  
Greene, Graham: *The Quiet American*. Harmondsworth 1962.  
Osborne, John: *The Entertainer*. London 1961.  
Snow, C. P.: *The Masters*. Harmondsworth 1963.

has maintained a special position in the system is not decisive; we are interested in the present synchronic situation, in which it constitutes a separate group.

*Table I*  
Total Number of Present Perfect Occurrences

Author	No.	of occurrences	Percentage
Sn	R	522	83.2
	F	105	16.8
	T	627	100.0
Gr	R	199	85.8
	F	33	14.2
	T	232	100.0
Am	R	244	70.5
	F	102	29.5
	T	346	100.0
Os	R	208	78.2
	F	58	21.8
	T	266	100.0
Bl	R	159	100.0
	F	—	—
	T	159	100.0
All Books	R	1,332	81.8
	F	298	18.2
	T	1,630	100.0

The relative frequency of the Present Perfect used by the individual authors is expressed in the table below showing the approximate number of words contained in each book and the total number of Present Perfect occurrences. From these data the "per thousand words frequency" was calculated for each book. Again the total number was taken into consideration as well as the number of regular Present Perfect occurrences.

*Table II*  
The "Per Thousand Words" Frequency of Present Perfect Occurrences

Book	No. of Words	R	F	T	Per thousand words frequency	
					R	T
Sn	109,000	522	105	627	4.79	5.75
Gr	60,000	199	33	232	3.31	3.87
Am	90,000	244	102	346	2.71	3.84
Os	23,000	208	58	266	9.04	11.57
Bl	46,000	159	—	159	3.46	3.46
Total	328,000	1,332	298	1,630	4.06	4.97

To generalize, we may say that for approximately each 1,000 words (about 3 pages of a paperback edition, such as a Penguin Book) 5 cases of the Present Perfect were registered out of which there were 4 cases of regular Present Perfect and 1 case of the *I've got* type (formal). An extraordinarily high frequency was found in *The Entertainer* by Osborne. This is easy to understand, as this is a play and the bulk of the text is direct speech (conversation), the only exceptions being the stage directions and the description of the setting.

The relation of the Present Perfect occurrence to direct speech and indirect speech is reflected in Table III. It could be but a subjective impression on the part of the author that the Present Perfect is a form used above all in direct speech. The figures, however, prove beyond any doubt that it really is so. In making out the table a problem was encountered, namely that of what direct speech really is. It is clear that it is any utterance addressed by one person to another, or exceptionally by the speaker to himself (in monologous situations). It is clear that even letters, telegrams, and the author's introductory words to a book show a feature that is also typical of direct speech: the forthrightness of appeal to the listener/hearer.

To save controversy, the table keeps separate "pure" direct speech, introduction passages, letters and telegrams, and "pure" indirect speech.

Table III

Present Perfect Occurrences in Direct Speech and in Indirect Speech

Book	Pure direct speech		Introd. passages		Letters, telegr.		Pure indirect speech		
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	
Sn	R	507	97.1	6	1.1	8	1.6	1	0.2
	F	105	100.0	—	—	—	—	—	—
	T	612	97.5	6	1.0	8	1.3	1	0.2
Gr	R	166	83.5	6	3.0	21	10.5	6	3.0
	F	33	100.0	—	—	—	—	—	—
	T	199	85.8	6	2.6	21	9.0	6	2.6
Am	R	243	99.6	—	—	—	—	1	0.4
	F	101	99.0	—	—	1	1.0	—	—
	T	344	99.4	—	—	1	0.3	1	0.3
Os	R	201	96.6	2	1.0	—	—	5	2.4
	F	58	100.0	—	—	—	—	—	—
	T	259	97.4	2	0.7	—	—	5	1.9
Bl	RT	5	3.1	—	—	—	—	154	96.9
Total	R	1,122	84.3	14	1.0	29	2.2	167	12.5
	F	297	99.7	—	—	1	0.3	—	—
	T	1,419	87.1	14	0.9	30	1.8	167	10.2

The table reveals a sharp contrast between fiction on the one hand and technical literature on the other. This may well be understood as Blackburn's book is almost purely descriptive, the only exception being a short passage giving a report of a pilot during flight.

It will be interesting to see "pure" indirect speech occurrences in the first four books to get an idea of how the Present Perfect is used in a novel or in a drama.

In none of the examples to be given below have I used quotation marks for direct speech. Introduction sentences have been put in brackets.

Sn, 293: He ate with extreme hunger, with the same concentration that a man shows when he has been starved for days.

Gr, 59: Perhaps that's why men have invented God—a being capable of understanding—

Gr, 120: Ordinary life goes on—that has saved many a man's reason.

Gr, 157: He wanted to sell it lock, stock and barrel. I have often wondered what the barrels contain.

Note: Though formally a case of indirect speech—no quotation marks as in a case of direct speech—this is in fact "direct thought".

Os, 11: Now trolley buses hum past the front drive, full of workers from the small factories that have grown up round about.

Note: Description of setting.

Os, 15: She is what most people would call plain, but already humour and tenderness have begun to take their small claims around her nose and eyes.

Os, 16: The fact that his evening has been disturbed is established.

Os, 89: Archie Rice has gone.

Note: Examples Os, 15, 16, 89 are stage directions.

As for the *have got* form, the occurrence of practically 100 per cent in direct speech confirms a commonplace that it is used merely in colloquial speech. The only exception found is one case in a letter in Amis's *Lucky Jim*, and even there it occurs in a letter imitating the writing of an uneducated person who has no idea of grammar or spelling. This serves to underline its sole occurrence in the written language. For illustration:

Am, 153: Marleen is a desent girl and has got no time for your sort, I no your sort.

Let us now look at the excerpted cases of the Present Perfect from several formal points of view. In listing them I concentrated on several phenomena: Above all, on whether the verb occurred in the simple form (abbreviated as S) or continuous or expanded form (abbreviated as E) and whether the full or the contracted form was used (abbreviations: F, C respectively). Before the table is introduced, some examples are given for illustration:

S: *I have been; he has come.*

E: *He's been learning; we have been doing that a long time.*

F: *I have not asked; she has never said it.*

C: *I've asked; we haven't been there; he's done it now.*

The most varied category is the contracted form, as the contraction concerns the personal pronoun and the auxiliary on the one hand, and the auxiliary and the negative particle on the other.

Table IV consists of two parts. The first part observes the S, E, F, C division and gives the percentages. The second part is a combination of these two aspects and contains the categories SF, SC, EF, and EC.

From the table it is evident that the Present Perfect Expanded is poorly represented. Of course, there is no continuous form in the *I've got* type, but even so, the percentage is surprisingly low. Out of all "regular" Present Perfect occurrences, the Present Perfect Expanded represents only 6.3 per cent. So far, this is only by way of mention; the problem will be dealt with in more detail below.

Table IV

Division of the Present Perfect Occurrences into Simple and Expanded (S + E = 100 %) and Full and Contracted Forms (F + C = 100 %)

Book	Total	S	%	E	%	F	%	C	%
Sn	R 522	494	94.7	28	5.3	162	31.0	360	69.0
	F 105	105	100.0	—	—	6	5.7	99	94.3
	T 627	599	95.5	28	4.5	168	26.8	459	73.2
Gr	R 199	192	96.5	7	3.5	85	42.7	114	57.3
	F 33	33	100.0	—	—	4	12.1	29	87.9
	T 232	225	97.0	7	3.0	89	38.3	143	61.7
Am	R 244	216	88.5	28	11.5	47	19.3	197	80.7
	F 102	102	100.0	—	—	19	18.6	83	81.4
	T 346	318	91.9	28	8.1	66	19.0	280	81.0
Os	R 208	193	92.8	15	7.2	55	26.4	153	73.6
	F 58	58	100.0	—	—	10	17.3	48	82.7
	T 266	251	94.4	15	6.7	65	24.3	201	75.7
Bl	RT 159	151	95.0	8	5.0	159	100.0	—	—
Total	R 1 332	1,246	93.6	86	6.4	508	38.1	824	61.9
	F 298	298	100.0	—	—	39	13.1	259	86.9
	T 1,630	1 544	94.7	86	5.3	547	33.5	1,083	66.5

Table IV — continued

(SF + SC = 100 %, EF + EC = 100 %)

Book	SF	%	SC	%	EF	%	EC	%
Sn	R 154	31.2	340	68.8	8	28.6	20	71.4
	F 6	5.7	99	94.3				
	T 160	26.7	439	73.3				
Gr	R 85	44.3	107	55.7	1	14.3	6	85.7
	F 4	12.1	29	87.9				
	T 89	39.6	136	60.4				
Am	R 45	20.8	171	79.2	2	7.1	26	92.9
	F 19	18.6	83	81.4				
	T 64	20.1	254	79.9				
Os	R 52	26.9	141	73.1	4	26.6	11	73.7
	F 10	17.2	48	82.8				
	T 62	24.7	189	75.3				
Bl	RT 151	100.0	—	—	8	100.0	—	—
Total	R 487	39.2	759	60.8	23	26.8	63	73.2
	F 39	13.1	259	86.9				
	T 526	34.1	1,018	65.9				

The higher representation of contracted forms than of full forms in the table is quite in accordance with our expectations and does not, therefore, elicit surprise. The only exception is Blackburn's *Book of Flying* in which there is not a single case of the contracted form. This is natural and any use of contracted forms would be against the style of the book. The percentage of contracted forms of the "regular" group in the novels and the drama varies from 57.3 to 80.7, the drama forming neither the upper nor the lower limit. Theoretically one would expect the drama to be within the upper limit. As to the "formal" cases, the contracted form may be said to be the usual form and its percentage varies from 81.4 to 94.3, the drama with its 82.6 per cent approaching the lower limit this time. The low percentage of contracted forms in Amis's book can be explained by another phenomenon, viz. the comparatively high number of positive questions whose contraction is not possible (cf. Table V).

It is also interesting to observe the frequency of the Present Perfect in regard to the indicative or interrogative, positive or negative.

Table V

Distribution of the Present Perfect Occurrences according to Mood

Book		+	%	-	%	+?	%	-?	%
Sn	R	359	68.8	39	7.5	116	22.2	8	1.5
	F	95	90.4	1	1.0	9	8.6	—	—
	T	454	72.4	40	6.4	125	19.9	8	1.3
Gr	R	126	63.3	27	13.6	40	20.1	6	3.0
	F	29	87.8	—	—	2	6.1	2	6.1
	T	155	66.8	27	11.6	42	18.1	8	3.5
Am	R	168	68.7	27	11.1	34	13.9	15	6.3
	F	77	75.5	13	12.7	5	4.9	7	6.9
	T	245	70.9	40	11.5	39	11.2	22	6.4
Os	R	141	67.8	24	11.5	36	17.3	7	3.4
	F	43	74.1	4	6.9	11	19.0	—	—
	T	184	69.2	28	10.5	47	17.7	7	2.6
Bl	RT	155	97.5	—	—	4	2.5	—	—
Total	R	949	71.3	117	8.8	230	17.2	36	2.7
	F	244	81.8	18	6.1	27	9.1	9	3.0
	T	1,193	72.7	135	8.2	267	16.3	45	2.8

There are four situations in which a verb can occur, viz. the positive indicative (+), negative indicative (-), positive interrogative (+?), and negative interrogative (-?). The figures are again accompanied by the percentage, all four possibilities making up 100 per cent.



This table shows interesting results, valid not only for the Present Perfect, but also for other tenses in English, viz. the extremely low percentage of negative questions. It is especially important for teachers of English to make the learner realise the difference between Czech and English in the approach towards the objective reality. Whereas Czech tends to be rather negative in various inquiries, the corresponding inquiries in English will definitely be more often positive. I have observed the negative trend in Czech in the everyday talk of my colleagues as well as in my own. We are apt to ask: *Nebyl tady Karel?* (*Hasn't Charles been here?*) *Nemáš cigaretu?* (*Haven't you a cigarette?*) etc. In similar situations an Englishman would prefer saying, *Has Charles been here?* *Have you got a cigarette?*, etc. Learners of English are often surprised to realise this and it is difficult for them to understand that the sentence *Haven't you got a cigarette?* would be best rendered in Czech by *Copak ty nemáš cigaretu?* (*How is it possible that you haven't got a cigarette?*) It is evident that the negative question is a marked phenomenon in English, performing various emotive functions.

What is stated in Table V is still not the true picture of the actual situation. The number of negative questions will still decrease if we realise that many of them are so-called tag questions, i.e. short questions of the type: *Has he?*, *Haven't they?*. H. V. George (1963) uses the term "Vicarious DO" for cases like *Do you learn English? — Yes, I do*. I have adopted the term for the types *You have been there, haven't you?* or *Have you met him? — Yes, I have* and have called it "Vicarious HAVE". This might seem questionable, as these cases do not comprise the complete forms of the Present Perfect. On the other hand, there can be no doubt that this construction is a part of the Present Perfect occurrences, which are as such included in the table. In any case, their percentage is low, though not negligible, as will be seen from Table VI.

Another feature included in Table VI is the number of passive voice cases in the Present Perfect. It is surprisingly low in the novels and in the drama. On the other hand, in the technical text, it is very high.

Table VI further includes another phenomenon, namely the grammatical use of the Present Perfect, i.e. its use in temporal clauses where it replaces the Future Perfect in the same way as the Present replaces the Future. This phenomenon is stated and accepted by all grammarians and will not be discussed here.

Some examples to illustrate Table VI. First, examples of the „vicarious have“:

- Sn, 37: You haven't seen a Master elected, **have** you, Eliot?  
 Sn, 165: I have been wanting a word with you, Lewis.—**Have** you?  
 Gr, 114: She has found a post with the Americans.—She has, **has** she?  
 Am, 44: Wonderful figure she's got, **hasn't** she?  
 Am, 150: But she's got no real claim on me, you know?—**Hasn't** she? She seems to think she **has**.  
 Os, 23: I like listening to you. I always **have**.  
 Bl, 102: Defence against submarines—which have developed almost as radically in the last decade as **have** military aircraft—has called for more specialisation of what started as a simple bombing job.

Table VI

Vicarious Have, Passive Voice, and Temporal Clauses  
 V — Vicarious Have, P — Passive Voice, T — Temporal Clauses  
 The numbers show the actual frequency, the percentage is calculated  
 from the total number of cases

Book		V	%	P	%	T	%
Sn	R	21	4.1	25	4.8	6	1.1
	F	—	—			—	—
	T	21	3.5			6	1.0
Gr	R	6	3.0	8	4.0	2	1.0
	F	—	—			—	—
	T	6	2.6			2	0.9
Am	R	17	7.0	4	1.6	4	1.6
	F	10	9.8			1	1.0
	T	27	7.8			5	1.4
Os	R	24	11.6	4	1.9	4	1.9
	F	2	3.5			—	—
	T	26	9.7			4	1.5
Bl	RT	1	0.6	45	23.3	5	3.1
Total	R	69	5.2	86	6.5	21	1.6
	F	12	4.1			1	0.3
	T	81	5.0			22	1.3

Examples of passive voice from individual books:

- Sn, 8: The people have been composed from many sources.  
 Sn, 126: Poor dear, she's always been puzzled by his jokes.  
 Gr, 26: Or he might have been killed by the Vietnamese *Sûreté*—it's been known.  
 Am, 212: I mean it's a subject that's been fairly well worked over, isn't it?  
 Os, 16: The fact that his evening has been disturbed is established.  
 Bl, 33: Off the Californian coast helicopters have been used to find and kill man-eating sharks.  
 Bl, 39: It has been said that man has been on the Earth for about 500,000 years.

Examples of temporal clauses with the Present Perfect:

- Sn, 43: It will be time enough for us to talk when we've done as much.  
 Sn, 276: I shall have to go. As soon as I've told him.  
 Gr, 146: We want to keep the Viets head-down in their holes until we have recaptured the post.  
 Am, 162: I'm perfectly all right now. At least I will be when I've had another go at nice Mr Atkinson's whisky.  
 Os, 48: But you're not to have any, till you've had something to eat first, you've had nothing but tea and cigarettes for days.  
 Bl, 18: None of this is really 100 per cent certain, however, until the aircraft has been flown.  
 Bl, 146: Their first hops were short, but by the time this book has been printed considerably longer flights may have been made.

From what has been said so far it is evident that to analyse what the Present Perfect can express we shall have to eliminate a) *have got* type, b) the temporal clauses, and c) the "vicarious have". Thus only "pure" Present Perfect cases will be the object of further analysis.

But before leaving the "formal" Present Perfect, which has a clearly present significance in contemporary English, it may be interesting to summarise its meaning in a table. According to which of the two verbs (*to have* = *to possess* and *to have to* = *must*) this construction represents, the cases have been divided as follows:

Table VII

The Distribution of the *have got* Occurrences  
 Explanation: T — the total number of occurrences  
 H — the meaning of possession  
 M — the meaning of obligation  
 V — vicarious have

Book	T	H	%	M	%	V	%
Sn	105	78	74.3	27	25.7	—	—
Gr	33	21	63.7	12	36.3	—	—
Am	102	75	73.5	17	16.7	10	9.8
Os	58	43	74.1	13	22.4	2	3.5
Bl	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Total	298	217	72.8	69	23.1	12	4.1

Some examples to illustrate the "formal" Present Perfect.

Equivalents of the verb *to have* (*possess*):

- Sn, 43: I've got a respect for him.  
 Gr, 72: Pyle has got—associations.  
 Am, 45: I should say they've got a lot in common.  
 Os, 49: And that's more than any of us have got, my dear.

Equivalents of the verb *to have to* (*must*):

- Sn, 26: We've got to get used to it.  
 Gr, 107: You've got to make an effort.  
 Am, 80: I'm afraid I've got to be off now.  
 Os, 22: You've got to watch them.

Examples of vicarious have in the „Formal“ Present Perfect:

- Am, 139: Have you got anything planned for the future?—Well, I *haven't*, but I think he may.  
 Os, 57: Archie, you haven't got anybody coming tonight, *have* you?

The most important problem of the whole investigation is to find out what the Present Perfect can and does express. It is evident from any grammar that the rules determining the use of the Present Perfect have been worked out in detail; it only depends on how detailed this or that grammar is. In my opinion the Present Perfect is a tense — and here I should like to differ from Ilyish who says that "If the Present Perfect were also a tense category,

the Present Perfect would be a union of two different tenses, the Present and the Perfect... This is clearly impossible. If a form already belongs to a tense category (say, the Present), it cannot simultaneously belong to another tense category, since two tense categories in one form would, as it were, collide and destroy each other." (1965.97—8). The very fact that the Present Perfect has not destroyed another or other tense categories, is in itself proof that it has its place and function among other tenses. On the contrary, the fact that the Present Perfect has arisen, besides the traditional categories of the Present and the Past, gives evidence that there was some gap that had to be filled so as to enable greater accuracy in expression. On the other hand, I do agree with Ilyish in one respect, namely that we cannot consider the relations between the Present and the Present Perfect the same as those between the Past and the Past Perfect and the Future and the Future Perfect respectively. The cardinal and basic tense is the Present and thus the tenses neighbouring on the Present have broader functions than those situated on the outskirts of the tense system. We may say that there is a precise distribution of functions between the Present, the Past, and the Present Perfect. It is a mistake to try to transfer the categories and the concepts from one language to another mechanically. What was good for Latin cannot be arbitrarily applied to say, English, Czech, German or French, to remain within the sphere of the Indo-European languages. Since our main interest is in the Present Perfect we might attempt to define it in a negative way as follows:

The Present Perfect cannot be used for expressing such actions where a definite time in the past is stated, either by mentioning it in the sentence a) by means of some time indicator (adverbial), such as: *in July, in 1946, last year, last week, etc.; five minutes | hours | days | weeks | etc. ago; before Christmas, etc.* b) by means of another action that is considered on the same level as a time indicator (e.g., *When he came, I was sitting and reading.*) c) when it is understood from the context. (e.g., *Yesterday I got up at seven. I washed, shaved, had breakfast, and went to work.* In the second sentence no time indicator is stated, yet it is understood that the action took place yesterday.)

Further, the Present Perfect cannot be used for actions that are timeless (e.g., *The Danube flows into the Black Sea.* Here the Present, though stating the present state of affairs, really comprises both the past and the future). Nor can the Present Perfect be used for expressing an action that is taking place at period NOW (Close 1962.82—6) and in consequence covers not only the point NOW, but also the past and the future. (It is the Present that is used here.) Nor can it be used for expressing the progress of an action at point NOW. (This is mostly expressed by the expanded form, or in some verbs, by the simple form, of the Present Tense.)

Needless to say, the Present Perfect cannot express actions taking place in the future (with one exception, viz. in temporal clauses, where its use is grammatical), or actions taking place before other actions in the past or in the future, or actions that might, should, would or could happen. To express these phenomena we use other tenses or moods.

Having thus eliminated the use of the Present Perfect in the cases mentioned above, we might simply say that the Present Perfect is used everywhere else, but that approach would be too simplifying. Nevertheless, to make it more

probable, we may say that, the three tenses (the Present, the Past, the Present Perfect) taken together, the Present Perfect is used for expressing time-relations that cannot be expressed by either of the remaining tenses. Under the circumstances, they would distort the idea to be expressed, failing to convey the exact time relations as they exist in the native Englishman's mind. Of course, in grammar we have no strict borderlines or pigeonholes. There are always some borderline cases, in which one and the same extra-linguistic phenomenon can be expressed in more than one way. Let us recall the many ways of expressing futurity in English. A particular group of cases is also reflected in the use of the Past and the Present Perfect, especially in connection with such time indicators as *today*, *this week*, *this year*, etc. Events taking place in these periods of time can either be expressed by the Past if the action or series of actions are considered finished, or by the Present Perfect if the idea of continuation or possibility of continuation or some relation (result, experience) to the present state of affairs prevails.

On this occasion let us mention one of the best and most lapidary definitions of the Present Perfect, viz. that given by Prof. Trnka: "The English perfect is used to express that past action or state which is closely associated with the present time. It denotes (1) an action or state which began in the past, continues to the present moment and will probably continue after this time, (2) the past event which was finished immediately before the present moment, (3) the past action the consequences of which continue into the present, (4) the past action which is not felt to be distinctly separated by another from the present time-sphere.

The perfect is often accompanied by adverbial adjuncts denoting the duration of the action, or pointing out a definite point in the past from which the action has continued till the present moment. The present time-sphere is expressed by such adverbial adjuncts as *this year*, *today*, *now* etc." (1930.26)

If we have a look at the "regular" cases of the Present Perfect, we can see that they fall into two main groups, viz. the Present Perfect simple and the Present Perfect expanded. Either group can be further divided according to one important factor, namely cases with or without any time indicator.<sup>2</sup> This division will be the main line to follow in investigating what the Present Perfect really expresses.

The percentual frequencies of the simple form are surprisingly similar in all books; the percentual distribution of the expanded forms shows a great variation, as the actual figures are comparatively low, thus preventing the law of large numbers coming into play.

Further I have come to the following conclusions as to what the Present Perfect simple and the Present Perfect expanded can mean, both without and with a time indicator. I intentionally say what they can mean, as no strict limits can be drawn between the individual sub-classes. There is always something from all sub-classes contained in each case, or, to be more exact, it is often difficult to rank a case into this or that sub-class. It may depend on the personal approach and understanding. When two or more meanings were

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<sup>2</sup> The term 'time indicator' is borrowed from Akira Ota, who uses it in his book *Tense and Aspect*.

Table VIII

Distribution of "Regular" Present Perfect Occurrences:

S Simple Present Perfect without a Time Indicator

ST Simple Present Perfect with a Time Indicator

E Expanded Present Perfect without a Time Indicator

ET - Expanded Present Perfect with a Time Indicator

S + ST = 100 per cent. E + ET = 100 per cent.

Book	S	%	ST	%	E	%	ET	%
Sn	306	65.3	162	34.7	23	85.1	4	14.9
Gr	136	73.9	48	26.1	7	100.0	—	—
Am	139	71.3	56	28.7	22	78.6	6	21.4
Os	96	58.2	69	41.8	9	80.0	6	40.0
Bl	101	69.7	44	30.3	2	25.0	6	75.0
Total	778	67.3	379	32.7	63	74.2	22	25.8

contained in the case I decided to rank it into that sub-class which I considered the most suitable according to the meaning I found predominating.

According to the individual characteristics, the Present Perfect occurrences have been distributed into the following classes and sub-classes:

Class S — Present Perfect simple — no time indicator

Sub-classes:

- S — 1 Action finished in past indefinite, result now
- S — 2 Action finished in past indefinite, experience now
- S — 3 Action just finished
- S — 4 *So far* implied, though not expressed; action (also negative) may still be going on

Class ST — Present Perfect simple with a time indicator

Sub-classes:

- ST — 5 Action finished in a period of time that is still persisting (*this year, today, ever, never, never, so far, etc.*)
- ST — 6 Action just finished (*just, etc.*)
- ST — 7 Action (also negative) still going on (*since, for*)
- ST — 8 Action finished before in past indefinite (*before, etc.*)

Class E — Present Perfect expanded — no time indicator

Sub-classes:

- E — 9 Action just finished or finished a short time ago
- E — 10 Action going on from the past to the present
- E — 11 Repeated action or a series of actions in the past (indefinite)
- E — 12 Irritation, astonishment, dismay (action finished, result now)

Class ET — Present Perfect expanded with a time indicator

Sub-classes:

- ET — 13 Action continuing from the past (*since, for*)
- ET — 14 A series of actions, repeated action
- ET — 15 Action just finished or finished before.

Table IX

Distribution of Sub-classes.

Class S — sub-classes S 1, S 2, S 3, S 4:

Book	S 1	%	S 2	%	S 3	%	S 4	%
Sn	254	83.0	16	5.2	11	3.6	25	8.2
Gr	108	79.5	9	6.6	1	0.7	18	13.2
Am	123	88.5	7	5.0	6	4.3	3	2.2
Os	78	81.3	9	9.4	6	6.2	3	13.1
Bl	80	79.2	8	7.9	—	—	13	12.9
Total	643	82.6	49	6.3	24	3.1	62	8.0

Class ST — sub-classes ST 5, ST 6, ST 7, ST 8:

Book	ST 5	%	ST 6	%	ST 7	%	ST 8	%
Sn	117	72.2	12	7.4	16	9.9	17	10.5
Gr	27	56.3	5	10.4	12	25.0	4	8.3
Am	37	66.1	5	8.9	11	19.6	3	5.4
Os	45	65.2	11	15.9	7	10.2	6	8.7
Bl	32	72.7	—	—	11	25.0	1	2.3
Total	258	68.0	33	8.7	57	15.1	31	8.2

Class E — sub-classes E 9, E 10, E 11, E 12:

Book	E 9	%	E 10	%	E 11	%	E 12	%
Sn	14	60.9	8	34.8	1	4.3	—	—
Gr	6	85.7	—	—	1	14.3	—	—
Am	21	95.5	—	—	1	4.5	—	—
Os	7	77.8	1	11.1	—	—	1	11.1
Bl	2	100.0	—	—	—	—	—	—
Total	50	79.3	9	14.3	3	4.8	1	1.6

Class ET — sub-classes ET 13, ET 14, ET 15:

Book	ET 13	%	ET 14	%	ET 15	%
Sn	—	—	3	66.7	1	33.3
Gr	—	—	—	—	—	—
Am	3	50.0	1	16.7	2	33.3
Os	5	83.3	—	—	1	16.7
Bl	6	100.0	—	—	—	—
Total	14	63.6	4	18.2	4	18.2

The sub-classes have largely been made up according to Hais's division of the Present Perfect, which he calls the Pre-Present (1957.90-5).

In the following table the distribution of sub-classes in the individual classes is given. The percentage has been calculated separately for each class. Only "pure" cases of regular Present Perfect frequency are included, i.e. those without "vicarious have" and temporal clauses.

The frequency distribution can again be said to be valid for the Present Perfect simple only, the representation of the Present Perfect expanded being too low to draw absolute conclusions from.

In the following table the individual sub-classes are ranked according to their frequency, irrespective of the class they belong to. I consider the table particularly useful from the methodological point of view for teaching the Present Perfect in English. The work of the teacher could be much easier if, at the initial stage, only the most frequent functions were taught and the less frequent ones added gradually in the course of time.

Table X

The Distribution of Occurrences with the Individual Sub-Classes from the Highest to the Lowest (of the Total) with Percentages from the Total Number of Occurrences:

Sub-class:	Sn	Gr	Am	Os	Bl	Total	%
1	254	108	123	78	80	643	51.8
5	117	27	37	45	32	258	20.8
4	25	18	3	3	13	62	5.0
7	16	12	11	7	11	57	4.6
9	14	6	21	7	2	50	4.0
2	16	9	7	9	8	49	4.0
6	12	5	5	11	—	33	2.7
8	17	4	3	6	1	31	2.5
3	11	1	6	6	—	24	1.9
13	—	—	3	5	6	14	1.1
10	8	—	—	1	—	9	0.7
14	3	—	1	—	—	4	0.3
15	1	—	2	1	—	4	0.3
11	1	1	1	—	—	3	0.2
12	—	—	—	1	—	1	0.1
	495	191	223	180	153	1,242	100.0

After this theoretical and numerical processing of all the Present Perfect occurrences let us have some illustrations to the individual sub-classes:

Sub-class S — 1:

Sn, 14: For some reason... the doctors have not told him.

Sn, 95: I can tell you we've had a satisfactory meeting.

Cr, 5: Even the historical events have been rearranged.

Gr, 59: And, my God, she has told it all right.

Am, 168: He's bought himself a pair of hair-clippers.

Am, 204: Can anything be done to halt the process I have described?



- Os, 19: He's bitten off more than he can chew.  
 Os, 46: Frank's gone with him.  
 Bl, 7: Condensation of moisture in the air has made the shock waves clearly visible.  
 Bl, 81: Although we have spoken of "the designer", the days have passed when one man could design every major part of a new aircraft.

### Sub-class S — 2:

- Sn, 160: They're remembering the times you've snubbed them.  
 Sn, 231: I suppose you've heard about Pilbrow.  
 Gr, 93: Why, even a platoon have been known to hand over their officers.  
 Gr, 94: I've been in India, Pyle, and I know the harm liberals do.  
 Am, 96: I haven't been to many dances.  
 Am, 167: Are you sure you haven't had a bit of bad news?  
 Os, 31: I've played in front of them all!  
 Os, 57: I suppose he has had more than any of us, and he's enjoyed it.  
 Bl, 33: Off the Californian coast helicopters have been used to find and kill man-eating sharks.  
 Bl, 112: On modern sailplanes a lift force 60 times greater than the drag force has been obtained.

### Sub-class S — 3:

- Sn, 74: I congratulate you for the remarkably fine tea you've given us.  
 Sn, 198: I've been for a walk, (I said).  
 Gr, 39: Where have you been? (she asked him).  
 Am, 22: It has been good of you.  
 Am, 57: Thank you very much for putting me up, Mrs Welch; I've enjoyed myself very much.  
 Os, 89: You've been a good audience.  
 Os, 56: You've been at that cake. You've been at my cake.  
 You've been at my cake, haven't you?

### Sub-class S — 4:

- Sn, 74: Have you had any of these lemon curd tarts?  
 Sn, 104: I've known cases where it wasn't followed.  
 Gr, 26: They have murdered plenty of people in Saigon.  
 Gr, 100: Have you had a lot of women, Fowler?  
 Am, 83: You haven't had a reply to your letter asking for something definite about when he's publishing your thing?  
 Am, 197: I wish I'd left all this till later, but it's been rather on my mind.  
 Os, 41: No thank you. I have had sufficient.  
 Os, 80: You know, I've only slept with one passionate woman.  
 Bl, 18: This is Joe Walker of NASA who, piloting the X-15 rocket research aircraft, has flown higher and faster than almost any other human being.  
 Bl, 61: Remarkably few really new steps have been taken in design and construction

### Sub-class ST — 5:

- Sn, 8: I have never liked geographical inventions and have avoided them.  
 Sn, 252: I've seen things in him lately that I like.  
 Gr, 49: I don't suppose you've ever had much to regret.  
 Gr, 126: Thank you, I have had three cups already.  
 Am, 42: So I've always understood, anyway.  
 Am, 104: I've never seen anything so abominable rude in my life.  
 Os, 17: Haven't done it lately, not for a long time.  
 Os, 86: I've made a few tumblers in my life. I have, honest.  
 Bl, 12: Very few completely new steps in flying have been taken since the Wright Brothers first took to the air.  
 Bl, 36: Structural testing has been developed considerably during the past few years.

### Sub-class ST — 6:

- Sn, 148: They've just presented us with a stalemate.  
Sn, 152: What's Nightingale done now?  
Gr, 79: I've just written to my wife and have asked her to divorce me.  
Gr, 95: Why have we only just discovered it? (I said)  
Am, 311: No, nothing direct, I've just had a bit of good news.  
Am, 134: I couldn't help feeling guilty rather, at first, about walking out on them all, but that's worn off now.  
Os, 24: I've taken his drill away from him now.  
Os, 43: Haven't had a cigar like that for years.

### Sub-class ST — 7:

- Sn, 60: But since it did seem to become a possibility I've thought over it until I'm tired.  
Sn, 152: I'm beginning to think that I've been quiet in this college for almost long enough.  
Gr, 123: God help Congress, (I said), he hasn't been in the country six months.  
Gr, 186: You haven't bought a scarf for a long time.  
Am, 43: I've had nothing since the one I had down the road yesterday evening.  
Am, 193: I've had a thing of his at the printers for weeks now.  
Os, 22: I haven't been able to go there since, somehow.  
Os, 26: I haven't seen a decent picture for ages.  
Bl, 39: Man has been awed by distance since the beginning of history.  
Bl, 39: It has been said that man has been on the Earth for about 500,000 years.

### Sub-class ST — 8:

- Sn, 16: ... before tonight I have scarcely thought of it for a single moment.  
Sn, 278: It's lasted us all these months until tonight.  
Am, 24: But he's exposed you to culture before now, surely.  
Am, 124: I've heard that one before, but it's a good one.  
Os, 28: I've heard some things in my time.  
Os, 71: Oh, I've heard whispers of it on a Saturday night somewhere.  
Bl, 65: Handley Page, one of the few outside the major British groups, has been responsible for a number of civil aircraft in the interwar years.

### Sub-class E — 9:

- Sn, 40: Haven't you been deserting us?  
Sn, 166: If you'd watched Jago take care of her, you might understand what I've been telling you about him.  
Gr, 34: Then we have a Press Conference and a colonel explains to us what we've been looking at.  
Gr, 120: Dear Pyle, I have been meaning to write from the hospital to say thank you for the other night.  
Am, 22: Oh, just the way you've been keeping it in the background.  
Am, 144: Why, that's exactly what I've been saying, in different words.  
Os, 22: Have you been drinking? I always know when a woman's been drinking.  
Os, 35: I've been sitting here talking to Jean.  
Bl, 12: We have been considering very briefly how man learned to fly.  
Bl, 23: Observers on the ground have been plotting the X-15's position throughout each second of the flight, and they now guide the pilot by radio into the best of a number of precalculated glide paths.

### Sub-class E — 10:

- Sn, 96: I don't want to be a skeleton at the feast, because I've been feeling gratified myself, ...  
Sn, 161: So there is something in the stories that have been going round?  
Os, 76: I've been searching for a draught Bass...

Sub-class E — 11:

- Sn, 116: I've been turning that over in my mind.  
Gr, 109: You've been seeing war films.  
Am, 122: I suppose you've guessed that I've been sleeping with our friend the painter, haven't you?

Sub-class E — 12:

- Os, 36: You've been giving him that beastly gin.

Sub-class ET — 13:

- Am, 135: I've been feeling very depressed recently, and it seemed to get too much for me tonight.  
Am, 183: Now I've been wanting us to have a little get-together for quite some time, old boy.  
Os, 73: I've been expecting him for twenty years.  
Os, 86: She met him in a revolving door, and they've been going around together ever since.  
Bl, 65: It has recently made several proposals for both subsonic and supersonic types embodying the Boundary Layer Control, which it has been studying for several years.  
Bl, 65: De Havilland has been producing civil aircraft for many years.

Sub-class ET — 14:

- Sn, 112: Let me see, I've been coming to these feasts now for getting on for sixty years.  
Sn, 135: I've been meaning to ask you for some time.  
Am, 83: Well, I'm sure you appreciate, Professor, that I've been worrying rather about my position here, in the last few months.

Sub-class ET — 15:

- Sn, 122: But I've just been telling Nightingale that, ...  
Am, 33: I've just been wondering what led you to take up this racket in the first place.  
Am, 34: Don't get drunk and start telling Neddy what you've just been telling me, will you?  
Os, 35: I've just been talking to our coloured friend on the stair.

Although the majority of all cases belong to the S and E classes (i. e. classes without time indicators), it will be interesting to note which time indicators are used. There are altogether 112 various time indicators (adverbials). The ST class contains 379 and the ET class 22 cases of Present Perfect occurrences with time indicators. In the list below 385 adverbials are listed. To explain the discrepancy, I must add that in some cases one time indicator is used for more than one verb. In classifying the Present Perfect form of the verb it was necessary to include it in the ST or ET class, though the indicator is common for two or more verb forms, such as:

- Os, 84: Have you ever got on a railway train here, got on a train from Birmingham to West Hartlepool? Or gone from Manchester to Warrington or Widnes?  
Gr, 120: I broke apparently in just the right place and age hasn't yet reached my bones and made them brittle.  
Sn, 267: I've been pretty well living and feeding at the lab ever since.

The time indicators were listed in alphabetical order. Some problems were encountered when listing the time indicators *since*, *for*, and *in*. It would have been possible to list them under the headings *since*, *for*, and *in* respectively. But *since* is used in three meanings, viz. *since*-adverb, *since*-conjunction and *since*-preposition, so I decided to list *since* under 3 headings. There are 18

cases of various *in*-phrases and 20 cases of *for*-phrases. For the sake of clarity, however, I decided to treat the *in* and *for* phrases as separate time indicators. All time indicators were then listed according to their frequency in all five books and are given in Table XI.

*Table XI*  
Time Indicators according to Their Frequency

Frequency	Time indicator
67	never
43	always
29	ever
21	just
18	not yet
16	since (PREPOSITION)
11	now
10	since (CONJUNCTION)
9	already
7	ever since, yet
6	before, recently, so far
5	never before, often
3	for many years, for many years now, this week, tonight
2	all along, all my life, ever before, for a long time, in my time, in recent years, more recently, never in my life, occasionally, only just, over the years, since (ADVERB), this morning, this time
1	a long time, a long time ago, all day, all the evening, all the morning, all the time, all the week, all these months until tonight, all these weeks, all these years, all your life, any more, at last, before me, before now, during the past few years, during the past year, for a week or two, for a whole year, for about 500,000 years, for ages, for days, for half an hour, for many centuries, for nearly half an hour, for quite some time, for several years, for sixty years now, for some time, for the last week, for twenty years, for weeks now, from time to time, how long, how often, in a few months, in my life, in recent times, in recent World Gliding Championships, in 60 years, in the Company's rebirth after World War II, in the last decade, in the last few days, in the last few months, in the last few years, in the last 15 years, in the last half-century, the last three years, in the past ten years or so, in the post-War development of Canada, in the second half of the 20th Century, in the twentieth century, in 30 years, lately; lately, for a long time; long, most of the time, never even, never in your ten years, never since, never until now, no... yet, not the first time that, nowadays, often enough, on a Saturday night, over the last five years, over the past ten years, regularly during the last weeks, scarcely... before tonight, several times, so often, the whole evening, these last few years, this afternoon, today, up to now, usually

There were altogether 351 different verbs used in the Present Perfect in all five books. The following table contains a frequency list of all verbs.

### III. CONCLUSIONS

The system of English tenses includes the so-called perfect tenses. Of special interest among them is the Present Perfect, to which the present study has been devoted.

Table XII

List of Verbs Occurring in the Present Perfect according to Their Frequency

Frequency	Verb
143	be
89	have (possess)
68	see
47	do
38	hear
30	make, tell
24	come, go
22	get
21	know, think
18	give, try
10	find
15	lose
13	say
12	happen
11	ask, take
10	feel, have to (must)
9	become, learn, reach show, wonder
8	decide, finish, notice
7	build, develop, sell, start
6	live, mention
5	be able, begin, keep, leave, mean, meet, produce, put, read, sleep, talk, want, write
4	believe, bring, enjoy, forget, grow, hear from, manage, pay, turn, understand, use
3	buy, call, change, come up, concentrate, design, discuss, drink, fix, help, hold, kill, listen, make up, promise, sacrifice, save, suffer, take part in
2	adopt, advance, apply, arrive, behave, borrow, bother, break off, check up, choose, collect, declare oneself, dine, discover, dish, disturb, elect, establish, expect, explain, fail, fly, get hold of, get into, get on, get out (side), give up, improve, interrupt, invite, lack, lead, let, like, miss, murder, offer, open, play, present, realize, recapture, represent, run out of, search, set, sit, solve, speak, spend, stay away, stop, take place, teach, think over
1	accompany, accuse, achieve, addict, advance, allow, alter, amuse oneself, answer, apologize, arise, arrange, attack, attain, avoid, awe, bang, be in, be up for, bite, bite off, blow over, break into, bring off, bring together, bring up, burn, bury, cable, call for, capture, carry, carry out, chase out, catch, cheat, clear, coincide, combine, come down, come in, come into possession, compare, compose, conduct, consent, consider, convert, create, cross over, curse, out, deal, with, deceive, deny, describe, desert, destroy, devote, disagree, do well, dine, drive up, earn, engage, escape, estimate, evade, evolve, exist, explore, expose, fall in love, feed, fill in, flow, fob off, follow, form, generate, get back, get in, get sth. done, get doing, get through, get together, go on, go round grow up, guess, guide, have sth. done, hide, hold up, hook, identify, imagine, improve, include, increase, injure, instruct, invent, keep an eye on, keep away, knock out, last, launch, lay on, let down, let in, list, loathe, locate, look, look at, love, maintain, manufacture, need, neglect, obtain, order, overdo, pack in, pass, pick, pinch, plot, prevaricate, prevent, print, prove, provide, put on, puzzle, rearrange, receive, reduce, refer to, refresh, remind, remove, renew, replace, report, reproach, request, resign, run amok, send off, settle, shake, shave off, shoot, shout, sing, sit down, sketch, snub, spill, stand, strike oil, study, succeed, sum up, summon, switch, tackle, take away, take care of, take down, take off, take to the hills, tear up, test, throw, throw over, tire, touch, travel around, tread, turn out, turn up, unbelt, upset, wait, warn, waste, watch, wear off, win, wire, wobble, work, work over, worry.

The Present Perfect in English, though formally almost equal to similar tenses in other languages, especially those belonging to the Teutonic or Romance families, is today semantically quite different from them. In German or French the so-called Perfect (das Perfektum, passé composé) is only a variant of how to express the past and can be interchanged with the Past Tense (the Preterite) almost at will, without substantially changing the meaning of what the speaker wants to say. The German or French Perfect is a stylistic device or depends on local usage. In English, however, the use of the Present Perfect is not a matter of style; it is subject to strict rules, however vague they may appear. It is not easy to define exactly what the Present Perfect means. It is possible to attempt a negative definition by stating when the Present Perfect cannot be used. The Present Perfect is used for expressing actions or events that are, as it were, half-way between the Present and the Past, and belonging to neither of them. With the exception of such special uses as timeless actions and historic present, the Present expresses such actions as are in progress at point NOW or in period NOW (Close). The Past (Preterite) expresses such actions as took place (or were taking place) at a certain period of time belonging to the past and signalled by some time indicator, or by another action in the past, or understood from the context. It is necessary to point out that in this event a definite past is meant and/or expressed. The Present Perfect expresses the remaining cases that cannot be covered by either of the two.

In trying to give a positive definition of the Present Perfect we can say, with Diver, that the Present Perfect expresses events that happened in the indefinite past. That, of course, is only a very rough and general definition, although the indefinite past may be the common denominator, as it were, of all the sub-divisions. Basically, the Present Perfect is divided into two main groups, viz. the Present Perfect simple and the Present Perfect expanded (continuous, progressive). Drawing conclusions from the observations and figures offered by the present study, one may say that the Present Perfect expresses the following actions.

#### Present Perfect Simple:

1. An action that took place and was finished in the past, which, however, is not explicitly determined by any time-indicator, and which has led to some result or experience in the present (in period NOW). The distinction between result and experience depends on the lexical meaning of the verb. Thus, *I have bought a new hat* means that *I have a new hat NOW* (result), whereas *I have been there myself* or *I have seen him* means that *I know (NOW) what it is like there* or *I know what he looks like* (experience).

This meaning is conveyed by sub-classes 1 and 2 of Table X and is responsible for 55.8 per cent of all Present Perfect occurrences.

2. An action that took place in a period of time still persisting and explicitly determined by a time indicator. The time indicator can denote the period of time by naming it as a whole (e.g., *this week, this month, today*, etc.), or by being more general (*ever, never, recently, sometimes, often, occasionally, usually*, etc.), meaning "since some indefinite point of time in the past up to the present". In verbs that do not denote the duration up to now it can also be used with *since*, e.g., *I have seen him only once since he came here*.

This meaning is expressed by 20.8 per cent of all Present Perfect occurrences and in Table X they come under the heading of sub-class 5.

3. An action that practically equals the action under 2., the only difference being that the time indicator is not present. It is, however, implied (*so far, up to now*).

This meaning is expressed by only 5.0 per cent of all Present Perfect occurrences, represented by sub-class 4 of Table X.

4. An action that started in the past and is still in progress at *point NOW*. This goes above all for such verbs as *do not*, as a rule, have expanded forms. This is also the only representation of the duration of the action in the passive voice, the passive expanded form being only hypothetical. It is also typical of negative actions. One could hardly imagine "non-duration" being expressed by an expanded form. The time indicators most typical of this meaning are: *since, for*, combined with some period of time or the beginning of a period of time, or the period of time itself without any preposition (e.g., *I have known him two years / for two years / since 1971*).

This group, constituting sub-class 7, represents 4.6 per cent of all Present Perfect occurrences.

5. An action just finished or finished a short time ago ('short' being a subjective notion), the time indicator being mostly *just* or *now*.

In Table X it is represented by sub-class 6 and constitutes about 2.7 per cent of all Present Perfect occurrences.

6. An action finished some time ago in the past, the time indicators being *before, before now*. This is seemingly contradictory to the rules we have had about the Present Perfect, as apparently there is no connection between the action in the past and the present. But one connection there is, viz. that of experience. In fact, there is not much difference between *I have read the book* and *I have read the book before*. There is only one difference between groups 1 and 6. Whereas the latter has a time indicator, the former has none. The time indicator is indefinite, which makes group 6 fit in with Diver's conception.

This group, sub-class 8, represents 2.5 per cent of all Present Perfect occurrences.

7. An action finished some time ago in the past, though no time indicator is present. In dividing the occurrences into sub-classes I marked this sub-class "*so far implied*". Again, the cases forming it might have been ranked into group 1, but though not expressing the notion *so far* explicitly, they convey it with unequivocal clearness.

This group, constituted by sub-class 3, represents only 1.9 per cent of all Present Perfect occurrences.

So far we have had cases of the Present Perfect simple. The following groups show the various possibilities of the Present Perfect expanded. As for the percentage, the figures show it calculated from the total of Present Perfect expanded occurrences; in brackets is given the percentage of all Present Perfect occurrences.

The Present Perfect expanded expresses the following actions:

1. An action (more or less) just finished or finished a short time ago, with no time indicator employed, greater emphasis being laid on the action itself than on the result. This is the most typical function of the Present Perfect

expanded; in Table X it is represented by sub-class 9, the percentage being 58.8 (4.0).

2. An action started in the past and continuing at *point NOW*. Practically identical with group 4 of the Present Perfect simple but for the passive and non-duration. The time indicator is the same as in group 4 of the Present Perfect simple. The second most typical function of the Present Perfect expanded, represented by sub-class 13 of Table X, the percentage being 16.5 (1.1).

3. An action started in the past and continuing up to the present with no time indicator given. A modification of group 2 of the Present Perfect expanded, it corresponds to sub-class 10 of Table X. Its percentage is 10.6 (0.7).

4. A repeated action or a series of actions in the indefinite past with a time indicator, represented by sub-class 14 of Table X. Percentage: 4.7 (0.3).

5. An action just finished or finished a short time ago, with the time indicator *just* or *now*, corresponding to group 5 of the Present Perfect simple, and in Table X represented by sub-class 15. Its percentage is the same as that of the preceding group, viz. 4.7 (0.3).

6. A repeated action or a series of actions in the past (same as group 4 of the Present Perfect expanded but for the time indicator) with no time indicator, represented by sub-class 11 of Table X. Percentage: 3.5 (0.2).

7. An action expressing irritation, astonishment, dismay. No time indicator is employed; the action itself is finished; the result of the action persists in the present and is the cause of strong emotion. In Table X this group is represented by sub-class 12. Its percentage is 1.2 (0.1).

Note: The "vicarious have" and the grammatical use of the Present Perfect (in temporal clauses where it is used in the function of the Future Perfect) are not included in this final division of Present Perfect occurrences.

Before taking up some further points, I should like to adduce some cases that might be considered questionable or in opposition to the grammatical rules or which are interesting from some other point of view. I shall try to comment on each of them.

Sn, 88: I was telling the Dean – he said to me – that I haven't been entirely idle.

Here we have a combination of the Preterite and the Present Perfect, which seems incompatible at first sight. The first sentence refers to an action in the past, whereas the second sentence covers a period of time ending at *point NOW* at the moment of speech, i.e. indefinite past. We may say that each sentence is viewed from another point of view, which is not rare, especially in the spoken language.

Sn, 104: I've known cases where it wasn't followed.

Again a combination of the Present Perfect and the Preterite. The first sentence might well be in the present, the experience, however, would not be so strongly expressed. The sentence might be changed to, e.g., *In some cases I've known (I have come across) it wasn't followed*. In that form it would, perhaps, be more acceptable.

Sn, 212: My impression was, (said Brown), that everyone realizes you've done the best day's work for the college that anyone has ever done.

The same comment can be made here as with Sn, 88.

Sn, 218: Eliot, things are worse in Europe than they have been in my time.



The time indicator, in my time, could be replaced by *before* and then the sentence would not sound so unusual.

Gr, 183: Do you know what I've been doing in there while that bastard was singing?

This sentence seems quite inexplicable. Two parallel actions (conjunction *while*) are expressed by two different tenses, the Present Perfect and the Preterite. But an illustration of a similar usage is given by A. Lamprecht (1957.263—7) who gives examples of the expanded form of the Present Perfect expressing an action finished immediately or a short time before the moment of speech. Among other sentences he gives the following example: *What have you been doing while I was away?* And this is exactly what is expressed by the sentence mentioned above. If it is quite current to say *What have you been doing in my absence?* it must also be possible to say exactly the same by only slightly changing the sentence into *What have you been doing while I was absent* or, *What have you been doing while he was singing?* provided that the other action — expressed by the Preterite — finished a short time ago.

Os, 34: It is this which has prevented him from leaving her twenty years ago.

At first one might wonder why a Present Perfect is used here in combination with the time indicator *twenty years ago*. Of course, the time indicator is not related to the verb *prevent*, but to *leave*. A clear case would be a sentence like *It is this which has prevented him from leaving her*. In a sentence like that one could imply the expression *so far* or *ever*. Even if *before* were used, there would be nothing extraordinary with the sentence. But as it is, we cannot but draw the conclusion that *twenty years ago* was added as an afterthought. The speaker most probably intended to say: *It is this that has prevented him from leaving her*. While actually saying it he remembered that the leaving might have taken place as early as twenty years ago and simply added the indicator. Such unexpected time indicators do occur, though very rarely, and have been recorded. A. Ota (p. 22) records an *-ago* time indicator with the Present Perfect. He, of course, analysed the spoken language, where the control of the sentence by the speaker is not so accurate as in the written language. But Osborne might have imitated the spoken language to the minutest detail.

Os, 71: I've heard whispers of it on a Saturday night somewhere. Oh, he's heard it. Billy's heard it. He's heard them singing.

The passage is determined by the time indicator *on a Saturday night*. What is important here is the indefinite article. This is in perfect agreement with Diver's notion of indefinite past.

Os, 77: One thing I've discovered a long time ago.

This example is very similar to the preceding passage, the indefinite article ensuring compatibility with the Present Perfect. It would be impossible, according to Diver, to say *\*one thing I've discovered two years | months | hours ago*. The definite indicator would call for the Preterite. The indefiniteness allows the time indicator *a long time ago* to be connected with the Present Perfect. In most cases, however, *a long time ago* would be connected with the Preterite. The indefiniteness somehow wipes out the border between the present and the past. The primary function of *ago*, consisting in a clear division of

the present from the past does not usually yield to indefiniteness as it did in this case.

Bl, 65: Handley Page, one of the few outside the major British groups, has been responsible for a number of civil aircraft in the interwar years.

Again a contradictory sentence. *The interwar years* definitely belong to the past, and the past is quite definite. The time indicator, however, relates to the *number of civil aircraft* and not to the responsibility of the firm. *The firm is responsible* or *was responsible* would also do in the sentence. What the author most probably had in mind is the firm's persisting responsibility (extending up to now) for something that took place in the definite past.

And, to conclude with, an interesting feature from Osborne, which, it is true, is not a Present Perfect occurrence, but nicely illustrates how the form can be used instead of a long description:

Os, 49: He's just a has-been, I suppose. Still—it's better to be a has-been than a never-was.

#### IV. SOME PROBLEMS THAT WOULD REQUIRE FURTHER INVESTIGATION

I am fully aware of the fact that a satisfactory explanation of the use of the Present Perfect in contemporary British English would require a much broader investigation. Special problems might appear in and special rules apply to drama, novels, technical and scientific language, newspapers, poetical language, etc., as there is no "general language" as such. To get a sample of the "living language", however, one would have to adopt the method used by A. Ota in his *Tense and Aspect of Present-Day American English* viz. recording of unrehearsed speeches and talks. This in itself would enlarge the problem greatly, as one would have to analyse the language of various speakers according to various standards and social classes. That, however, would be a task exceeding the possibilities of one individual. It would require a great number of native speakers and would have to be carried out in Britain.

By way of conclusion, some problems requiring a more detailed study can be mentioned.

A much more voluminous study of the Present Perfect expanded, enabling to draw definite conclusions from a large number of cases and at the same time to avoid inaccuracies caused by a small number of samples.

A study of the "borderline" or seemingly inexplicable cases, rare as they are, to enable to draw new and more exact rules for the use of the Present Perfect.

A study of the Passive in the Present Perfect and perhaps the relation between the Passive and the expanded forms of the Present Perfect.

And, finally, there is one important problem, namely to endeavour the grammarians to explain the use of the Present Perfect in English in such a way as to stress the most frequent uses and then only pass on to the less represented groups. In this connection it is even more important to make teachers of English realise how to proceed correctly from the methodological point of view. The learner cannot be given or explained all the possible uses

of the Present Perfect at once, but he should study the most important phenomena first and only gradually become acquainted with those that take up a small percentage of the whole picture. It may mean some changes in the traditional order in which grammar is taught, but if it helps achieve a more practical understanding of this chapter of grammar it is worth trying.

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## RESUMÉ

### Několik poznámek o perfektu v angličtině

Autor excerpoval 5 anglických knih (3 romány, 1 drama, 1 populárně vědeckou knihu), publikovaných po r. 1950, ze kterých vybral všechny případy předpřítomného času. Jednalo se celkem o 1630 případů, které rozdělil na formální (typ I've got) a pravidelné. Formálních bylo 298. Těmito se dále nezabývá, protože tento typ má v současné angličtině charakter přítomného. Z pravidelných byly odečteny případy neúplné a tzv. gramatické (např. použití v časových větách apod). Z výsledného počtu 1242 případů bylo 1157 případů prostého perfekta a 85 případů průběhového perfekta. Tyto byly dále rozděleny na výskyt s časovým indikátorem a bez něho. V jednotlivých kategoriích byly určeny tyto skupiny:

- S — prosté perfektum bez časového indikátoru:
- 1 — Děj skončen v neurčité minulosti, výsledek nyní.
  - 2 — Děj skončen v neurčité minulosti, zkušenost nyní.
  - 3 — Děj právě skončen.
  - 4 — Implikován, nicméně nevyjádřen údaj "so far"; děj (i negativní) může pokračovat do přítomnosti.
- ST — prosté perfektum s časovým indikátorem:
- 5 — Děj skončen v období, které dosud trvá.
  - 6 — Děj právě skončen.
  - 7 — Děj (i negativní) ještě pokračuje.
  - 8 — Děj skončen dříve v neurčité minulosti.
- E — průběhové perfektum bez časového indikátoru:
- 9 — Děj právě skončen nebo skončen před krátkým časem.
  - 10 — Děj pokračuje z minulosti do přítomnosti.
  - 11 — Opakovaný děj nebo série dějů v minulosti (neurčité).
  - 12 — Nesouhlas, podráždění, údiv (děj skončen, výsledek nyní).
- ET — průběhové perfektum s časovým indikátorem:
- 13 — Děj pokračuje z minulosti.
  - 14 — Série dějů, děj opakovaný.
  - 15 — Děj právě skončen nebo skončen před krátkou dobou.

Frekvence jednotlivých skupin je tato:

Skupina	Počet	%
1	643	51,8
5	258	20,8
4	62	5,0
7	57	4,6
9	50	4,0
2	49	4,0
6	33	2,7
8	31	2,5
3	24	1,9
13	14	1,1
10	9	0,7
14	4	0,3
15	4	0,3
11	3	0,2
12	1	0,1
	1 242	100,0

Prekvapující je nízké procento průběhových tvarů perfekta. Z tak nízkého počtu se nedají dělat definitivní závěry. Zato prosté perfektum tvoří 93,2 % všech případů a závěry z tohoto počtu jsou dosti reprezentativní.

Každá skupina je ilustrována příklady. Autor rovněž uvádí seznam všech časových indikátorů a seznam sloves, která se vyskytla v perfektu.

