

The English Resultative Present Perfect: What is the Event Elaboration Constraint?

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Use conditions: Do we believe in idiosyncrasy?

[T]rue polysemy for the perfect has been claimed in two studies that I will be drawing on heavily here: Mittwoch 1988, in a model theoretic semantic analysis, and Michaelis 1994, who treats the resultative reading as a conventionalized construction, or “formal idiom”, whose properties cannot be derived from the semantics of the perfect. [Michaelis’s] solution [to the present perfect puzzle] is to place a construction-specific constraint on the [resultative] reading, [...] a conceptually undesirable step that we would like to avoid if possible. —Paul Kiparsky, “Event Structure and the Perfect” (2002)

The English Present Perfect has interesting use conditions

Sometimes my fellow native speakers don't use it when I would expect they would.

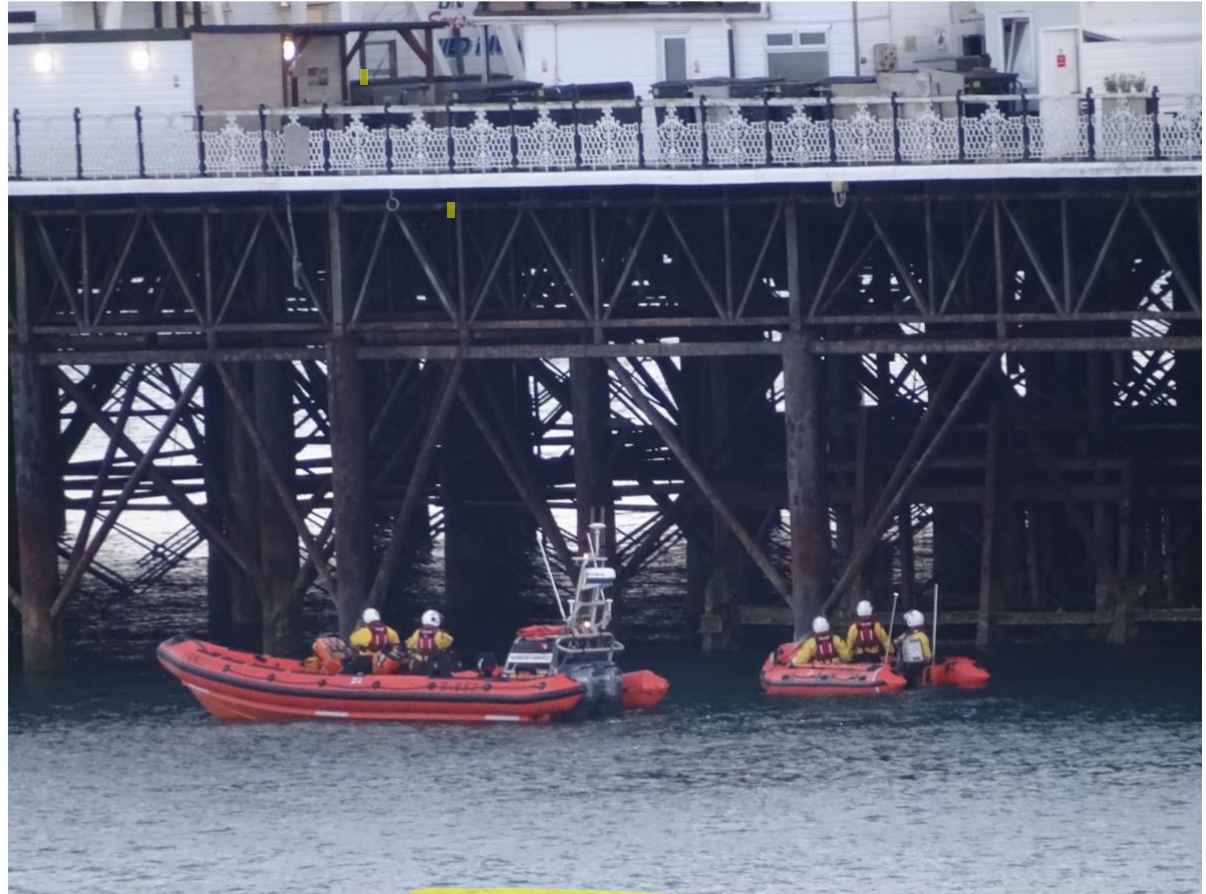


Police chase naked man round Palace Pier

Posted On 11 Jun 2019 at 9:38 pm By : Jo Wadsworth Comment: 1

The English
Present Perfect
has interesting
use conditions

Sometimes my fellow native
speakers use it where I would least
expect it.



A naked man has been chased by police and security around Brighton's Palace Pier this evening.

The Present Perfect has interesting use conditions



- Sometimes a usage looks like an amalgam.
- There are 165 tokens of *has been paid for by* in the 14-billion-word iWeb corpus, vs. 1411 *was paid for by* (e.g., *This brand page has been paid for by Big Blue Swim School*).
- But there must be more to the story, because the following token sounds fine:
 - *The city is providing the fencing and water. Everything else has been paid for by private donations.*

Eminem Twitter Statement on 'Music to be Murdered by' (2020)

This album was not made for the squeamish. If you are easily offended or unnerved at the screams of bloody murder, this may not be the collection for you. Certain selections have been designed to shock the conscience, which may cause positive action. Unfortunately, darkness has truly fallen upon us.

PrP

Affordances: Receding and Advancing

“From early origins in Old English, [the PrP] increased markedly in frequency through Middle English into early Modern English, coming into competition with the morphologically marked past tense; but there is some evidence that this advance has more recently been halted or even reversed, especially in American English (Elsness 1997; Fischer and van der Wurff 2006).” (Bowie et al. 2013)

Disclaimer 1: PrP lives on



We should be leery of corpus studies of PrP status that do not distinguish the various **functions** of the PrP.



Continuative and existential PrP usage are seemingly robust, while resultative usage has waned, at least in AmE (e.g., *I already ate*).



But it's hard to search for PrP tokens by sense, because the functions don't have very reliable formal cues (hand coding!).

Disclaimer 2: PrP has more than one competitor



Some constraints on the PrP are explicable according to its present reference-time: English PrP divides its labor with present tense in some semantic spheres (van der Klis, Le Bruyn & de Swart 2020).



Two PrP contexts in which English L2 speakers substitute present tense:

Existential with ordinal: ??? *This is the second time I hear this.*

Continuative: **I am waiting for several hours.*

PrP Affordances: Receding and Advancing

- “Because of its non-anaphoric nature, the *Present Perfect* is not suitable for the description of sequences of past events in narrative discourse” (van der Klis, Le Bruyn & de Swart 2020):
 - **I have washed the car and then it rained.*
- Michaelis (1994, 1998, 2004) proposes a markedness opposition in AmE, with the Preterit used for existential reports, e.g., *Did you get a flu shot?*

PrP Affordances: Receding and Advancing

- “[T]here are contrasting suggestions in the literature that the present perfect is expanding its territory in British English, at least in some varieties: there have been reports of narrative uses (e.g. Walker 2008), and observations of apparently increasing use with adverbials (adjuncts) indicating specific past time reference (e.g. Hughes et al. 2005: 12–13).” (Bowie et al. 2013)
- When it comes to describing use conditions on the PrP in English, I am no longer sure who my ‘fellow native speakers’ are.



Radio Perth 92.9 Morning Crew

- Engel & Ritz report narrative use of PrP in Australian English (2000):
 - Remember last year we were giving out [.] the 'I hate Redman' and 'I love Redman' stickers? [.] Well, there was a man, **he's used his initiative**. [.] **He's obviously got a handful of these stickers** and **he's cut them all up** [.] and **he's made a new sticker** and it says 'I tolerate Redman'. (96 FM radio Perth: breakfast show, 10 March 2000)

What does the Present Perfect Mean?

Is there a meaning common to its uses?

The Extended Now Analysis is still Strong

Lots of accounts see all PrP uses through the lens of time-span PrPs.

“[T]he present perfect presents a situation as occurring within (or even continuing through) a time span beginning in the past and leading up to the present. It also typically involves a focus on the present repercussions of the situation (often labelled ‘current relevance’), and generally resists co-occurrence with expressions indicating a specific past time reference (such as *last year*).”
(Bowie et al. 2013)

PrP as Relative Tense

- The PrP is often called a relative tense (because $R \neq S$) but it's a terrible example of a relative tense.
- The Past Perfect is 'the past in the past'.
- But what is the PrP, 'the past in the present'?
- This is essentially the relative tense analysis of Klein (1992): the present perfect consists of a tense part and an aspect part (it's just not clear how Klein's aspect part constitutes aspect).

	Tense part	Aspect part
John had been in York	$TT < TU$	TT in posttime of TSit
John has been in York	TU in TT	TT in posttime of TSit
John will have been in York	$TT > TU$	TT in posttime of TSit

PrP as Relative Tense: Klein 1992



So what is the Aspect Part?

- Bohnemeyer (2003): “[W]e [have] to expand Klein’s (1992) treatment of aspect, so that it allows us to talk, instead of the post**time** of TSit, of post**states** (result states) caused by events.”
- “[O]nce the first wedge has been driven into the aspect module –namely the resultative analysis of the perfect – the whole treatment of aspect in terms of ordering relations between TSit and TT unravels. It must be remodeled such that TT has access everywhere to the mereological structure of the causal chains that connect events with their pre- and post-states.” (ibid)

What's a Clearer way to Put that?

- The Perfect is a stativizer.
- A PrP predication denotes a state whose time of evaluation (R) follows one or more events of a given kind (De Swart 1998, 2003, Michaelis 1994, 1998, 2011).
- In its resultative function, the PrP describes the resultant state of a unique causal event (E).
- E may be the target state of a telic eventuality (1) or not (2) (Nishiyama & Koenig 2004):
 1. The Eagle has landed. (Entailed resultant state: Eagle is in contact with lunar surface)
 2. Dear Feel Like a Fool: Brother, **I have walked in your shoes**. (Inferred resultant state: speaker understands addressee's experience)

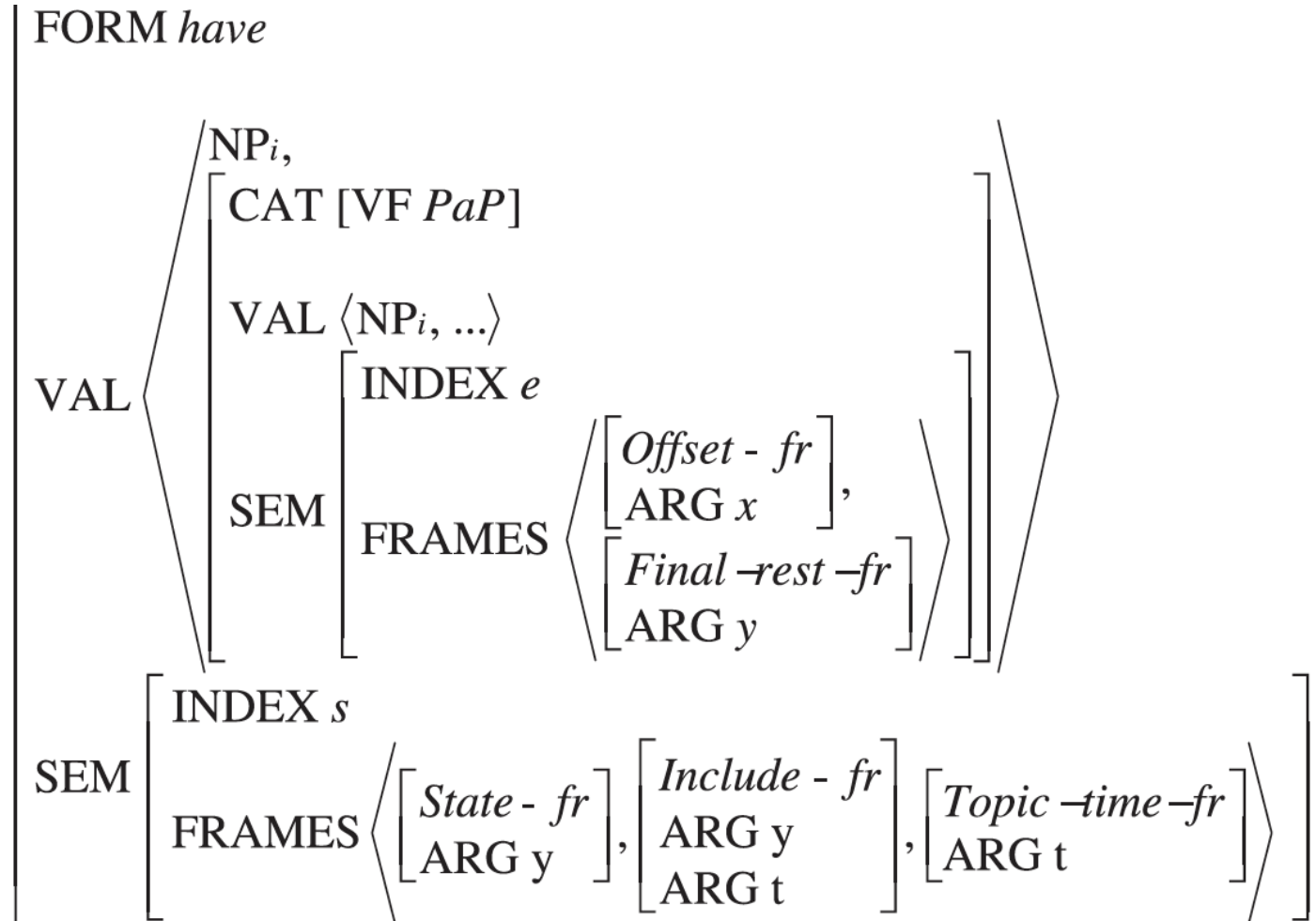
Stativity Tests Support this Analysis

The stative adverbial test

- Stative predication: As of now, I **am** on the fence.
- Dynamic predication: *As of now, I **got off** the fence.
- Perfect: As of now, we **have enrolled** 10 students.
- Perfect: For the time being, I ***(have) left** it open.

The complementation test (Katz 2000)

- Stative predication: I believe my senator to **favor** health care reform.
- Dynamic predication: *I believe my senator to **vote** against health care reform.
- Perfect: I believe my senator to **#vote/have voted** against health care reform.



The PrP
Construction
(or a piece of
it)

(a) to indicate that a state of affairs prevailed throughout some interval stretching from the past into the present ('Universal'):

I've known Max since 1960.

(b) to indicate the existence of past events ('Existential'):

I have read 'Principia Mathematica' five times.

(c) to indicate that the direct effect of a past event still continues ('Stative'):

I can't come to your party tonight – I've caught the flu.

(d) to report hot news ('Hot news'):

Malcolm X has just been assassinated.

Functions of the PrP

The broad meaning 'post-state of event' is compatible with a number of more specific functions (McCawley 1971, 1981):

Ambiguity of the PrP

- Most PrP literature has assumed monosemy/vagueness of the PrP.
- The various readings highlighted by McCawley (1971) are products of inferences based on participial Aktionsart and adverbial reference:
 - *[T[he fact that both distance and frequency of T] Sit [event time] are left open gives rise to different readings of the perfect—experiential [existential], resultative perfect, and others. But these readings do not arise from an inherent ambiguity of the perfect. They stem from contextual information. (Klein 1992: 539)*
- Michaelis (1994, 1998) argues that the PrP passes ambiguity tests, and typological patterns suggest ambiguity (not all perfects in all languages have all readings:
 - In Mee (Trans-New-Guinea, Indonesia) the perfect combines a resultative and a universal reading, excluding the experiential one (Bimpeh 2018).

PrP Ambiguity: The Identity Test

- I've had a perfectly wonderful evening, but this wasn't it. —Quote attributed to Groucho Marx in 1941 issue of *Reader's Digest*
 - The zeugma effect supports an analysis in which PrP is ambiguous with respect to its **existential** and **continuative** readings.



PrP Ambiguity: The Identity Test

- McCawley 1971 offers the following type of coordinate sentence as evidence of **resultative-existential** ambiguity:
- *Harry and Marge have been fired.*
 - This sentence cannot be used to assert both that Harry was fired at some point within his employment history (existential reading) and that Marge is currently out of work as a result of having been fired (resultative reading).

Why is Ambiguity Important to Use Conditions on the PrP?

- It's important because our ability to specify time, manner, etc. of the anterior event differentiates existential and resultative readings.
- Resultative is the only perfect in which could *conceivably allow* a specific past-time adverbial like *in 2015* or *yesterday*.
- Note that some PrP sentences that are unacceptable on a resultative reading are redeemable through existential interpretation:
 - #I have seen her on Friday. (OK if *on Friday* = *on a Friday*)
 - #Where have they arrested the suspect? (OK if multiple arrests within some interval)

The Event-time Specification Constraint



The constraint that blocks **I have lost my job in November* has gotten a great deal of attention in the PrP literature (Klein 1992, Giorgi & Piansesi 1997, Kiparsky 2002, Portner 2003, Rothstein 2008, Breul to appear)



Why?



Because there's typological variation, with some 'true' PrP constructions permitting specific E times.



Because it's not clearly a 'logical' constraint: it does not obviously follow from stativity of head verb or separation of E and R.



So it probably requires an explanation based on discourse pragmatics or Gricean inference.

Event-time Specification and Logical Necessity

It is not clear that the mutual exclusiveness of the perfect and specification of the time of a situation is a necessary state of affairs in a language. In Spanish, for instance, where the Perfect does have specifically perfect meaning, it is still possible to specify exactly the time of the past situation, as in *me he levantado a las cinco* 'I got up at five o'clock' (in reply to a question why I am looking so tired), *Gustavo Ferrán ha muerto ayer...se ha estrellado anoche en los montes de nieve* ('Gustavo Ferrán died yesterday...he crashed last night on the snow-covered mountains') where the Perfect would be impossible in the English glosses. —Comrie, *Aspect* (p. 54)

Apparent Typological Variation

Modern Greek allows both aorist and PrP in combination with definite time-specification in contexts of salient resultant states:

έχασα
(aorist)/έχω χάσει
(PrP) τη δουλειά
μου το Νοέμβρη
και τώρα είμαι
απελπισμένος.

- ‘I lost my job in November and now I’m desperate.’

The P-Definiteness Constraint

- So this is what makes the so-called Present-Perfect Puzzle a puzzle: why should a unique past event not allow a temporal anchor?
- An influential solution is Klein's (1992) P(osition)-Definiteness constraint: E and R times cannot be simultaneously fixed.
 - The PrP runs afoul of P-definiteness when:
 - The event denoted by the past participle is anchored to a mutually identifiable interval.
 - Because R is always fixed by identification with S.

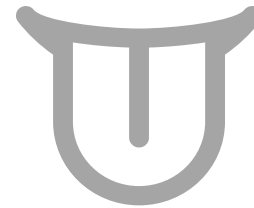
The P-Definiteness Constraint



Positives

P-Definiteness is a pragmatically motivated solution (anchored in Gricean second maxim of quantity).

It explains why the Past Perfect (E_R_S) permits definite past-time reference: *The Watergate scandal had severely damaged Ford's predecessor, Richard Nixon, who **had resigned in 1974** as a result.*



Negatives

It does not seem defeasible.

We might not expect it to vary from language to language.

Most crucially: it seems to be just one aspect of a broader constraint on 'saying things about E' in a RPrP sentence.

The Event Elaboration Constraint



Inspired by Dinsmore (1981), Michaelis (1994, 1998) proposes that the time-specification constraint is in fact an aspect of a broader constraint, attached exclusively to the Resultative PrP (RPrP).



Do not use the RPrP to identify values of E's event variables when E's occurrence is mutually known or must be taken for granted.

Event Variables



Event variables include:



Frame elements of the frame expressed by the verb of the past participle (agent, theme)



The manner, means of the event



The place of the event



The reason for the event



Etc.

The E-Elaboration constraint applies in the expected presuppositional contexts:

WH-interrogative

- #How have you fixed it? (cf. How did you fix it?)

Manner modification

- She has fixed it (#skillfully). (cf. She fixed it skillfully.)

Cleft

- #It's lawyers that have gotten seat belts in cars. (cf. ...that got seatbelts in cars)

Target States

- Mittwoch (2008) suggests a refinement of my proposal based on **target states** (result entailed by verbal Aktionsart).
- The RPrP can appropriately be used to identify/inquire about circumstances of/features of the target state.
- This might account for the following contrast:
 - Where have you hidden my glasses?
 - Target state: glasses are in an inaccessible location
 - Inquiry is about the identity of that (currently) inaccessible location, and thus about the target state.
 - #Where have you found my glasses?
 - Target state: glasses are in an accessible location
 - Inquiry is not about the accessible location but the (formerly) inaccessible one, and thus about the finding event.

Directionality, Verb Class and Current Access

- There are contexts that are not obviously presuppositional, but do involve identification of an event variable.
- These seem to relate to verb class, and in particular:
 - literal/metaphorical directionality
 - presence of an entity at the deictic center
- The classes:
 - Transfer/removal predication
 - Creation predication
 - Object-disposition predication



Transfer/removal Predication

Borrow

- I want to consult my Latin dictionary, but **it has been borrowed**.
- You can use this Latin dictionary, but be careful with it. #It **has been borrowed**.

Rent (bidirectional in AmE)

- Rental agent to customer: I'm sorry we can longer offer you the Tesla sedan. We **have rented it**.
- Restaurant customer to parking valet: Be careful with the Telsa sedan! #I **have rented it**.
 - The target state may be the presence of the transferred item at the deictic center, or the absence of that item.
 - When the item transferred is at the speaker/hearer's location, the transfer verb is interpreted as identifying the manner/means variable, thus preempting use of the RPrP.

Creation Predication

- My daughter has painted a landscape.
- [A: What a lovely landscape!] B: #My DAUGHTER has painted it.
- The target state is perceptual accessibility of the created item.
- When that item is mutually presupposed to exist (as by use of the definite article), the creation verb is interpreted as identifying the manner/means variable (the means of creation).
- This preempts use of the RPrP.

Object-disposition Predication

- Hide/find
 - I have **hidden** it outside.
 - #I have **found** it outside.
- If the item is mutually accessible, then transfer is presupposed.
- Specification of location in such contexts is seen as elaborating circumstances of E.
- The RPrP is foreclosed in such contexts.
- Buy/sell
 - ?I have **sold** the car for £80 and bought a Standard. (? for me as AmE speaker)
 - #I have **bought** the car for £80.
- If the object is owned, then transfer is presupposed.

Some Mysteries

- Fillmore puzzle
 - Why have they done it this way? [positive exception to constraint]
 - #How come they have done it this way?
- *Who* questions
 - Who has made this terrible mess? [positive exception]
 - #Who had done your hair?

Conclusions

The PrP is a stativizer.

The PrP is polysemous: Continuative and Existential PrP critically require reference to a time span, where Resultative PrP does not.

The Present Perfect Puzzle is really the Resultative Present Perfect Puzzle.

The puzzle concerns specification of event circumstances **beyond time**.

The Resultative PrP is in transition: its use conditions are at once highly restrictive and fluid.

Conclusions

- My fellow native speakers do some puzzling things with the RPrP:



Nicolle Wallace  @NicolleDWallace · 15h

7 hours before kickoff, Fox has released a clip they now know contains a blatant lie from Trump about a 2020 rival. What do Fox execs, the NFL and ad sponsors do with the hours until it's aired? Fact check? Offer equal time? There is no "live interview" excuse to hide behind. twitter.com/brianstelter/s...

Greek PrP

- που έχεις κρύψει τα γυαλιά μου
 - “Where have you hidden my glasses?”
- *που έχεις κρύψει τα γυαλιά μου (cf. aorist που βρήκες τα γυαλιά μου)
 - “Where have you found my glasses?”