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On the resultative character of present perfect sentences

Ilse Depraetere*

Katholieke Universiteit Brussel, Vrijheidslaan 17, B-1081 Brussels, Belgium

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Abstract

One of the features of meaning commonly attributed to present perfect is that of indicating results (I have had a bath. Result: I am clean. I have caught a cold. Result: I have a cold). This article is aimed at determining the status of the resultative propositions associated with present perfect sentences: are they the externalization of the semantics of the perfect or pragmatic effects? It is shown that the results arising from processing perfect sentences may be of different kinds, which calls for a partly semantic, partly pragmatic explanation of 'current relevance'.

1. Introduction

Whether they call the perfect a tense, an aspect, phase, status or inclusion, virtually all linguists dealing with the perfect have touched upon the resultative character of present perfect sentences: while some people believe that resultativeness or current relevance constitutes the semantic core of (some of the) present perfect sentences (cf. e.g. Brinton, 1988: 11, 14; Chafe, 1970: 172; Comrie, 1976: 52; Harris, 1982: 43; Huddleston, 1969: 783; Jespersen, 1961: 60; Kruisinga, 1925: 390; Meyer, 1992: 145; Poutsma, 1926: 256; Quirk et al., 1985; Sweet, 1891: 98; Twadell, 1965: 8), others believe that the indication of results is not an inherent part of the meaning of the perfect (cf. e.g. Bauer, 1970; Bryan, 1936: 369; Declerck, 1991a: 326, 1991b: 101; Dietrich, 1955: 180–182; Fenn, 1987: 214; Huddleston, 1984: 160–161; Inoue, 1979: 573; Joos, 1964: 142; Kaluza, 1976; Koziol, 1958: 498; McCoard, 1978: 32; Sørensen, 1964: 79–80, Tregidgo, 1974: 99, Zydatiss, 1978: 339). The question as to “how different [...] two uses of an item have to be for us to claim that the item has two different meanings, rather than one basic meaning with two different uses in different contexts” (Dahl, 1985 in Salkie, 1987: 81) is indeed particularly pertinent in connection with the perfect. The following is a survey of the labels that have been used to capture the different uses of the present perfect:

* Phone: +32 2 4124211; Fax: +32 2 4124200; E-mail: ilse.depraetere@kubrussel.ac.be

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(1) resultative perfect (stative, existential, retrospective present)
   I have had a bath.
(2) experiential perfect (existential)
   Have you ever been to Venice?
(3) hot news perfect (perfect of recent past)
   The Belgian government has fallen.
(4) indefinite perfect (resultative), i.e. the situation lies completely before the
   moment of speaking (subsumes (1), (2) and (3))
   I have met him before.
(5) iterative perfect (repetitive perfect)
   He has lied several times so far.
(6) continuative perfect (universal, perfect of persistent situation, inclusive present)
   I have lived here since 1982.
(7) declaratory perfect
   London has been repeatedly attacked by squadrons of German aeroplanes during
   the last few nights. (Kruisinga, 1925: 392)

The aim of this paper is twofold: first, we want to attain definitional accuracy for
the labels ‘resultativeness’ or ‘current relevance’. As pointed out by e.g. Brinton
Vermant (1983: 20-22), a clear definition of these concepts is lacking. Secondly, we
want to determine the status of the present time results indicated by present perfect
sentences: are they implicatures or do they form part of the semantics of the present
perfect? I will concentrate on present perfect sentences that have the time of the
utterance as time of orientation. The observations made equally apply to the past per-
fect and the present perfect form that is anchored to a future time of orientation (e.g.
has seen in They will ask him if he has already seen the exhibition may be tempo-
rally anchored to will ask).

I agree with Declerck (1991a,b) as far as the analysis of the present perfect is con-
cerned. He subsumes uses (1), (2) and (3) under the unitary label indefinite use of
the present perfect, which is set apart from the continuative use of the perfect. In the
former use, the situation referred to “is represented as wholly preceding to”
(Declerck, 1991a: 328). In the continuative use, the situation referred to “reaches

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1 It should be added that ‘hot news’ and ‘recent past’ are not completely synonymous. A hot news per-
fected does not necessarily refer to a recent event, but basically relates to something the hearer knows
about and presumes the hearer does not know about.
2 Kruisinga (1925: 392) is the only linguist who distinguishes this use: “The perfect can also express an
action or occurrence thought of in a time that is present but regarded as a whole, not in its result only, so that
the past is included. The perfect is used when we want to discuss the action or occurrence”. It is not fully
clear to me which examples Kruisinga is exactly thinking of (cf. Bryan (1936: 378) for a similar remark).
3 From now on, I will use the label indefinite perfect for what is in more accurate terms ‘a present perfect
which gets an indefinite interpretation in a particular context’.
4 \(t_0\) is the temporal zero-point, “the time which is the ultimate ‘origin’ of all the temporal relations
expressed in the sentence, i.e. the time to which all the situations referred to in the sentence are directly
or indirectly related, and which is not itself represented as dependent on any other (more basic) time”
(Declerck, 1991a: 14).
up to $t_0$. What the two uses have in common is the presence of an explicit or implicit TE [TE is a time established by the context or by a time adverbial. (Declerck, 1991a: 253)] which reaches up to $t_0$" (Declerck, 1991a: 328). In this paper, the focus will be on the indefinite perfect and the following hypothesis will be defended:

1. The speaker's decision to use a present perfect indicates that he wants to focus on a past time situation from a present point of view (E–R, S in Reichenbachian terms). Because of the temporal structure it has, a present perfect is taken as a signal by the hearer that some of the propositions he derives when processing a present perfect sentence should relate to NOW.

2. Certain types of clauses (i.e. certain combinations of the features progressive/non-progressive, telic/atelic and reversible/irreversible) have resultative entailments, but not solely when they are used in a present perfect sentence. The use of the present perfect in this specific type of clause implies that the entailments are present time entailments.

3. Some resultative propositions (when they are not entailments) derived from present perfect sentences are conversational implicatures i.e. they differ depending on the context in which a specific sentence is used. The present time character of the conversational implicatures should be ascribed to the semantics of the present perfect.

2. Current relevance and resultativeness: General remarks

Strange though it may seem, the linguists defending the view that the indication of current relevance constitutes the semantics of the present perfect often fail to define this property accurately. In some cases, an intuitive understanding of current relevance is taken for granted and accordingly, no attempt is made at defining this concept (e.g. Harris, 1982: 43; Huddleston, 1969: 783–784) or a rather vague characterization is given: "I believe that one can talk of results within the realm of experience, memory, or feeling. That is, the experiencer has been affected internally by some past situation and hence bears the results of that change" (Brinton, 1988: 10–11); "in some way or other (not necessarily in its results) the action is still relevant to something observable at the present" (Palmer, 1974: 50); "although the action of coming is completed, its result – namely ‘being here’ – is felt to belong to the present" (Sweet, 1891: 98); the present perfect "signals a significant persistence of results, a continued truth value, a valid present relevance of the effects of earlier events, the continued reliability of conclusions based on earlier behavior" (Twaddell, 1965: 8). Michaelis (1994) was the first to explicitly make a distinction between the fact that there is a ‘result state’ (which she considers to be a conven-

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5 It is a matter of debate whether present perfect sentences which get a repetitive reading should be considered to be indefinite or continuative: although all the situations lie before the moment of speaking (indefinite), the series of situations as such may be said to persist until the moment of speaking (continuative).
tional implicature of one type of indefinite perfect sentence) and the actual (kind of) results that arise when processing this type of perfect sentence (which depends on the situation type of the sentence). It is this observation we intend to analyze in detail. We need to add, though, that Michaelis' analysis differs from ours in that she claims that the difference between two subtypes of indefinite perfect (i.e. the existential perfect and the non-existential perfect) constitutes a semantic distinction. I do not believe that there being different implicatures associated with different readings of present perfect sentences (cf. section 3.1.1) can be taken as evidence for the claim that we have to do with two different semantic types of perfect.6 However, as it is not the aim of this article to argue for or against a semantic distinction between different types of indefinite perfect, but rather to determine the status of the resultative propositions typically associated with perfect sentences, I will not go into this issue in more detail.

Theoretically speaking, any situation which occurred in the past affects the present. As is clear from the examples in (8), the indication of results is indeed not exclusively restricted to present perfect sentences; the results of situations referred to in past tense sentences may also be ‘currently relevant’ (cf. e.g. Brinton, 1988: 12; Bryan, 1936: 370–371; Declerck, 1991a: 343; Dušková, 1974: 69; Fenn, 1987: 105; Huddleston, 1984: 161; Joos, 1964: 142; King, 1983: 120–122; Klein, 1992: 531; McCoard, 1978: 42, 56; Sørensen, 1964: 79; Tregidgo, 1984: 288–289):

(8) a. Did you take / Have you taken the meatloaf out of the oven? (King, 1983: 122)
   b. Did you see / Have you seen that movie? (King, 1983: 122)

The difference in contextual effects between the alternative forms in (8a) and (8b) is very small. All that can be said is that the use of a present perfect reveals the speaker’s subjective preference for a tense which links up a past time situation with a present point of view (E–R, S) rather than one which considers a past time situation from a past point of view (E, R–S).

6 As will be pointed out below, on the existential reading, ‘I have opened the door’ is not likely to have the resultative implicature ‘The door is open’, whereas on the non-existential reading it does. One referee points out that this proves that there is a semantic difference between the two types of indefinite perfect. In other words, the difference in pragmatic effect is taken to be evidence for the fact that we have to do with a semantic distinction. From this line of reasoning, it seems to follow that if two utterances do not differ in pragmatic effects this implies that there is no semantic difference between the utterances. If this were the case, the following two examples would prove why the difference between the existential and the non-existent perfect is pragmatic:
   (i) I’ve eaten lobster once. (existential)
   (ii) I’ve eaten lobster. (non-existent)
   Both these sentences could have the implicature ‘I know what lobster tastes like’. In other words, the line of reasoning suggested appears at the same time to be evidence for the fact that there is a/no semantic difference between the existential and the non-existent perfect.
Moreover, a comparison between the results indicated by present perfect sentences of the type in (1) to (3) shows that different kinds of results (of type (a) and type (b))\(^7\) may be involved:

(9) I have written them a letter. (resultative perfect)
    a. They have received a letter.
    b. You need not write to them as I have already done so.
       This explains why they are angry at you as I told them you were no longer interested in the project.
       There are no more stamps left.

(10) Susan has watered the plants. (resultative perfect)
    a. The plants have been watered.
    b. The plants do not need to be watered straightaway.
       Susan must be recovering as she has managed to water the plants.
       The plants are likely to die as Susan always gives them too much water.

(11) Have you ever spoken to a drug addict? (experiential perfect)
    b. Do you know how a drug addict behaves?
       Are you interested in problems relating to drug abuse?
       You do no qualify for the job unless you have spoken to a drug addict.

(12) Susan has slept with Ian. (experiential perfect)
    b. Susan has betrayed her husband.
       Ian does not really love his wife.
       Susan knows what the rooms in the Savoy Hotel are like.

(13) The conservative party has won the election. (hot news perfect)
    a. The Conservatives are in power.
    b. My dad will be angry.
       We will have to pay more taxes.
       My neighbour will be an MP.

(14) Mr Claes has tendered his resignation. (hot news perfect)\(^8\)
    a. Mr Claes has stepped down.
    b. There will be a lot of international journalists in Brussels.
       NATO will start looking for a new president.
       Mr Claes is a fool.

These examples show why an accurate definition of the notion ‘current relevance’ is necessary. ‘Current’ has to do with the time at which the results hold, whereas ‘relevance’ refers to the actual resultative propositions that are derived. As far as the former aspect is concerned, the examples in (9) to (14) are similar: the results all hold at present. This characteristic follows from the semantics of the present perfect (E-R, S in Reichenbachian terms). The choice to use a present perfect to refer to a past situation implies that the speaker considers there to be a link of some sort

\(^7\) The difference between the two types of results will be analysed below.

\(^8\) McCawley (1973: 268) observes that ‘hot news perfects’ may be considered as a kind of existential perfect (cf. McCoard (1978: 189) for the same observation).
between the past situation and the present. No matter which form this link (relevance) takes, the possible resultative propositions that are derived will be understood to hold at the present time (current).

The denotation of relevance depends on the different situation types referred to in the sentences. Before analyzing this observation in more detail in section 3, the following terminological points need to be made. A clause is telic if the situation is described as having a natural (15a,b) or an intended endpoint (15c) which has to be reached for the situation (as it is described in the sentence) to be complete and beyond which it cannot continue (Depraetere, 1995: 3). Otherwise it is atelic. Examples (15a–c) are telic, (15d–e) are atelic:

(15) a. The apple fell down.
b. Susan fainted.
c. Susan intentionally ran for half an hour.
d. Susan is working on a paper.
e. Susan is stupid.


(16) a. Punktuelle Veränderungen: He switched off the light.
b. Punktuelle Ereignisse: He knocked (once) on the door.
c. Quantifizierte gerichtete Prozesse: When the sun came out, the wet clothes soon dried.
d. Initial und final determinierte Prozesspredikate: He smiled.
e. Achievements: He reached the station at 5 o’clock.

In what follows, the term ‘telic’ will be used to refer to the subclasses Punktuelle Veränderungen, Quantifizierte gerichtete Prozesse and Achievements, since the other telic situation types (those illustrated in (16b) and (16d)) do not inherently bring about a change of state.

3. Current relevance

3.1. Resultative entailments

Having introduced the necessary concepts, we can now turn to the different nature of the resultative propositions associated with the sentences in (9) to (14). As will be shown below, the following distinctions are relevant because they determine the kind of result associated with the perfect sentence:

1. progressive telic sentences
2. non-progressive telic sentences
3. atelic sentences whose atelicity arises as the result of the use of a plural object NP
3.1.1. Non-progressive telic sentences

Bounded telic sentences (more accurately, the telic subgroups Punktuelle Veränderungen, Quantifizierte gerichtete Prozesse and Achievements) entail that a certain state is brought about. From this, it follows that no matter whether the simple past, the non-progressive past perfect or the non-progressive present perfect is used, there will be an entailment that a certain goal is reached, that a new situation comes into existence. The time at which the entailed state holds depends on the tense used: past time (past tense), past time (past perfect), present time (present perfect).

(17) a. I opened the door. (The door was open.)
   b. I had opened the door. (The door was open.)
   c. I have opened the door. (The door is open.)

(18) a. I caught a cold. (I had a cold.)
   b. I had caught a cold. (I had a cold.)
   c. I have caught a cold. (I have a cold.)

(19) a. He died. (He was dead.)
   b. He had died. (He was dead.)
   c. He has died. (He is dead.)

(20) a. He caught malaria. (He had malaria.)
   b. He had caught malaria. (He had malaria.)
   c. He has caught malaria. (He has malaria.)

The sentences in brackets, or rather the propositions [The door be open], [I have a cold], [He be dead], [He have malaria] are entailments because

(i) they are not cancellable (cf. Fenn, 1987: 102, Leech, 1969: 158, Quirk et al., 1985: 211):

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9 Brinton (1988: 238), Declerck (1991b: 102), Dillon (1973: 278), Leech (1971: 39), McCoard (1978: 143) and Quirk et al. (1985: 194) have observed that 'resultativeness' arises especially when a specific subtype of verb is used, but apart from Declerck, Fenn and Zydatiss, not many of these people mention explicitly whether the resultative propositions are entailments or implicatures. Zydatiss (1978: 358) claims that "the resultative reading occurs primarily but not solely with telic verbs"; "Only with telic propositions Leech's (1969: 157) entailment holds". Fenn (1987: 105) also uses the term entailment, but his definition of the verb type which has a resultative entailment is not at all too accurate: "Achievement propositions with a certain lexical character (which may be loosely termed 'concrete') entail states at S". Declerck (1991a) on the other hand, considers the resultative propositions to be implicatures: "The kind of resultative reading suggested by (46a) [I have learned to type] is only suggested by present perfect verb forms that are at the same time telic, indefinite (not continuable) and perfective (non-progressive). And even then, the resultative interpretation (i.e. the idea that the state produced by the situation still holds at $t_b$) arises only by way of an implicature, which may be cancelled by the context" (Declerck, 1991a: 344).
(21) ?? I have opened the door, but the door is not open.

(ii) they fall inside the scope of negation:

(22) A: He has opened the door. (entailment: [The door be open])
    B: He hasn’t.

Still, it is necessary to modify the observations just made, i.e. a distinction must be made between experiential/repetitive interpretations of non-progressive present perfect sentences and non-experiential/non-repetitive readings of present perfect sentences. The following example shows why:

(23) Susan has climbed the Matterhorn. (Inoue, 1978: 176)

If we assign an experiential/repetitive reading to the sentence, the entailment Susan is on top of the Matterhorn right now does not arise. As in the case of the examples in (11) and (12), the sentence may have conversational implicatures in this reading, e.g. She is a very good mountaineer, she is brave, .... If the sentence is said by a reporter who is proud to announce that Susan has finally reached her aim, the entailment Susan is on top of the Matterhorn will arise.\(^{10}\) The likelihood of a present perfect sentence being interpreted as a perfect of experience depends on the lapse of time there is between the situation and the moment of speaking. If someone says I have opened the door and it is clear from the context that this particular situation took place a month ago and was particularly difficult to achieve, the sentence will not be taken to mean The door is open, but rather I am strong or I am handy.\(^{11}\)

It is also necessary to make a distinction between non-progressive telic situations whose results are reversible, as in (17) and (18), and non-progressive telic situations whose results are irreversible, as in (19) and (20): unless someone believes that one has several lives (e.g. that one can die and afterwards live again or that one lives on eternally in heaven), i.e. unless one understands something else by the concept death, the result of this telic situation cannot be reversed: once one is dead, one cannot live again.\(^{12}\) The same can be said about catch malaria: once one has the disease,


\(^{11}\) Declerck points out (personal communication) that other factors may also affect the likelihood of an experiential interpretation: if, for instance, I have been taught for the last half hour how to open a particular door, I have opened the door! will also be interpreted as I have managed to do so rather than the door is open.

\(^{12}\) McCoard (1978) (and also Sørensen, 1964: 78) takes great pains to disprove that He has died means He is dead, a line of reasoning which he qualifies as “interesting but rather hazardous line of thought. In the world of our normal experience, the relationship between dying and being dead is indeed a firm one – but it is not without exceptions. We can easily imagine cases of the dead magically (or scientifically) resurrected and in fact there have been documented cases where persons certifiably dead have been restored. The point is not a quibble about whether a person has really died at all if we find that he is subsequently alive. It is that given an appropriate – and in these case, extraordinary – context, the message ‘he is dead’ is not there, and consequently cannot be a specific contribution of the perfect form” (1978: 37). I believe that the [+dead] quality is entailed by the verb, whereas the [+ present] characteristic follows from the semantics of the present perfect.
one will never get rid of it again, as one will occasionally suffer attacks (cf. Declerck, 1991a: 343). Irreversibility does not apply to the telic situations in (19) and (20): one can easily shut the door after it has been open, one recovers from the flu after a limited time. It is because of their reversible character that certain entailed states seem to allow cancellation, which is usually said to be typical of implicatures and utypical of entailments:

(24) We can get in through this door. I have unlocked it. – How strange. It is locked again now. (Declerck, 1991b: 102–103)

However, I believe it would be wrong to take examples of this kind as evidence for the claim that the result [the door open] is an implicature rather than an entailment. Neither should examples of this type be taken as evidence for the claim that the present time character of the resultant state (the door is open) is implicated. For one thing, the entailment cannot be immediately cancelled (cf. (21)). There must at least have been a minimal ‘present’ amount of time during which the entailed state held. For another, in the mind of the speaker, the door is open in (24), which explains why he starts his utterance by saying ‘we can get in through this door’. However, his world of thought is contradicted by the actual world. The cancellability of the situation in (24) follows from the general property of reversible states, which may be undone by an ensuing situation. The way in which the following examples have been analysed bear witness to a similar confusion between the (ir)reversibility of the present time entailments and the fact that present perfect sentences give rise to resultative propositions that hold at the time of speaking:

(25) Even though John has received millions for his last book, he is now a poor man. (Guenthner, 1977: 95)

Guenthner (1977) points out that it is especially “verbs whose meaning involves the notion of change in an essential way” (1977: 95–96) which establish an impression of resultativeness, but finally gives up the idea of ‘resultative implications’ altogether because (25) appears to be non-contradictory. As I see it, John has received millions for his last book entails [John have a lot of money]. The semantics of the present perfect are responsible for the present time character of this entailment: John has a lot of money. However, it follows from the semantics of even though that a contrast of some sort is intended between John’s receiving millions and another sit-

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13 Declerck (personal communication) points out the following (counter)example:

(i) I’m really tired now: I have dug up the garden, I’ve painted the door, I have opened the door which had been stuck since last year, and I have washed the car. Now, I’m going to have a nice rest.

In this case as well, the entailment [the door open] is less likely to be the case at the time of speaking. However, the sentence does not do damage to the hypothesis defended because ‘open’ in this context should probably be understood to mean ‘break open, loosen up’ rather than ‘open up to get some fresh air’ or ‘open up so that someone can enter’. In accordance with the hypothesis defended here, the entailment [be in a state that it can be opened] arises.
uation. The main clause situation forces the speaker to adjust his interpretation of the subclause. The situation the latter refers to can no longer be the case as it is not compatible with the main clause situation: accordingly, John is understood to have squandered his money.

The comment McCoard (1978) makes on the following sentences relates to the same problem:

(26) I have persuaded him once already, but he may have lost heart and need another talking to. (McCoard, 1978: 145)

This example leads McCoard to conclude that "it is difficult to see what purpose is served by calling the perfect the bearer of the meaning of completion" (McCoard, 1978: 145): the result (he is persuaded) no longer holds at the moment of speaking. As in the case of even though in Guenthner's example, but indicates that there is a contrast between the two clauses. More importantly, the perfect is of the experiential type, which explains why the resultant state following from the entailment does not hold at the moment of speaking (cf. examples in (11) and (12)). A similar example is given by Fenn (1987), who argues that sentence (27) is acceptable only when the perfect is interpreted as an experiential perfect. He believes that if the preceding context makes it clear that entailed result is wiped out at a later stage, the present perfect cannot be used, witness (28):

(27) I have lost 5 stones before now, but I put it all on again. (Fenn, 1987: 108)
(28) Cyril is a bit of a weight-watcher. He has just watched his weight soar to a record 28 stones. He tells me: 'I lost 5 stones, but I’ve put it on again'. (Fenn, 1987: 108)

If the entailment brings about a state that is reversible, the latter can be cancelled by the context. However, it will be clear that the speaker, guided by the maxim of Quality, is not very likely to use a present perfect if the entailed result is no longer the case. He is more likely to use a past tense in this case. This explains why it is indeed difficult to use the perfect tense in (28). However, I cannot follow Fenn (1987) when he claims that “the state at S entailed or implied by perfects, however, is part of the referential meaning of the perfect itself. If the resultant state following from the entailment is contradicted or negated by other factors of context, (such as evidence that the state no longer exists at S), the use of the perfect is ungrammatical” (1987: 108). As I see it, the fact that there are present time resultative propositions should be ascribed to the present perfect; the actual ('content' of the) result arising depends on the situation type of the sentence and the context. Palmer (1974) also observes that some present perfect examples are commonly explained as having results in the present. He qualifies this idea as "rather misleading unless we interpret results to include 'nil results' as is shown by

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14 For a similar line of reasoning cf. Sørensen (1964: 78).
[29] I've hit it twice, but it's still standing up.

[30] I've written, but they haven’t replied.” (Palmer, 1974: 50)

I believe that the acceptability of the but-clause in (29) follows from the fact that the action of hitting does not necessarily entail that something falls down; the entailment of to hit is rather that something has been hit. This means that it is only if one of the entries of the lexical item hit of a particular speaker is ‘x hits y: y falls down’ (i.e. if it is considered to be a punktuelle Veränderung, which brings about a change of state) that the sentence may be said to be contradictory. The entailment of the present perfect main clause in (30) is I have sent them a letter. A conversational implication may be They should reply soon, which, in this example, is cancelled by the but-clause.

The conclusion to be drawn so far is that non-progressive telic situations which do not get an experiential or repetitive reading entail a resultant state; depending on whether or not the situation brought about by the telic clause is reversible, the result can(not) be erased by a different action. The larger the time span between the situation referred to in the (non-experiential and non-repetitive) present perfect sentences and the moment of speaking, the easier it is to cancel the result referred to.

3.1.2. Progressive telic sentences and atelic sentences whose atelicity arises as the result of using a plural NP

Telic progressive sentences (cf. (31) and (32)) also have an entailment irrespective of the tense used, namely that a partially finished state resulting from the situation is brought about (cf. Poutsma, 1926: 210):

(31) I have been painting the house red.
(32) I have been burning my schoolbooks.

The entailment character is again clear from the following characteristics:

(33) ?? I have been painting the house red, but not a single part of the house is red.
(The result is not cancellable.)
(34) A: He has been painting the house red.
(entailment: [part of the house be red.])
B: No he hasn’t.
(The results fall in the scope of negation.)

This line of reasoning explains the (un)acceptability of B’s reply in the following examples:

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15 Fenn (1987: 119) wrongly assumes that progressive present perfect sentences never have resultative entailments. Mittwoch (1988), on the contrary, goes as far as saying that it is possible for a progressive perfect sentence to entail the completion of the accomplishment. She gives the following examples:

(i) What has the little bear been doing?
   He has been eating your porridge, it's all gone. (1988: 236)
(ii) I have been writing a difficult letter, thank goodness it's finished. (1988: 236)
(35) a. A: Have you cleaned the windows? (Quirk et al., 1985: 211)
   B: No, I haven’t finished them yet.
   * Yes, but I haven’t finished them yet.

b. A: Have you been cleaning the windows? (Quirk et al., 1985: 211)
   B: Yes, but I haven’t finished them yet.

In (35a), unlike in (35b), B cannot answer ‘Yes, but I haven’t finished them yet’. This proves that the resultative propositions are entailments. The example in (35a) has the entailment that at least one part of one window is more or less clean; it does not entail that the task has been fully completed.

In the case of atelic sentences, the question whether or not the atelicity arises as a result of the use of a plural NP is important. In the former case (cf. (36) and (37)), the sentence retains the entailment that a certain state is brought about, no matter which tense is used:

(36) I have killed ants.
(37) I have been making parcels.

This conclusion follows from the fact that
(i) the results are not cancellable:

(38) * I have killed ants but not a single ant is dead.

(ii) the results fall in the scope of negation:

(39) A: I have killed ants.
    (entailment: [some ants be dead])
    B: No, you haven’t.

3.1.3. Atelic sentences whose atelicity is not the result of a plural NP

If the atelicity does not arise as a result of a plural NP (cf. (40) and (41)), there is no entailment that a resultant state is brought about. However, the fact that sentences

16 The effect of NPs on (a)telicity is more intricate than this statement seems to suggest. The use of a plural NP will have the effect of turning a telic sentence into an atelic sentence only if there is reference to an unspecified number:

(i) The guest arrived. (telic)
    Cf. The guests arrived. (telic)
    Cf. Guests arrived. (atelic)

(ii) I killed an ant. (telic)
    I killed all the ants. (telic)
    I killed ants. (atelic)

In other words, we touch here upon the far more intricate question of the relation between NPs and situation types. The purpose of my observation is to show that whenever there is still an idea of physical boundary brought about by the use of a NP, there will still be partial results. The question as to when exactly this is the case will not be discussed here (cf. Depraetere (1995: 10); Verkuyl (1972); Zydatiss (1976: 67–69, 95–96, 131) for useful observations on this topic).
of this type do not have present time entailments does not imply that no resultative propositions arise at all as a result of processing them. It has been pointed out before that there is a logical link between the speaker’s choice to use a present perfect and the semantics (i.e. the temporal structure) of that form; there is likely to be a relation of some sort between the past time situation and the moment of speaking. However, the contextual effects will in this case be conversational implicatures, whose present time character is the result of the use of a present perfect (cf. b-part of the examples (9)–(14)):

(40) a. I have lived in London.
   b. That’s why I receive letters from Britain.
      I know how to get to the Tate gallery.

(41) a. I have known him well.
   b. I understand why he is angry.
      I know he does not love his girlfriend.

(42) a. I have studied a lot.
   b. I am clever.
      I feel exhausted.

3.2. Resultative conversational implicatures

It has been shown in section 3.1.3 that some of the resultative propositions associated with present perfect situations are conversationally implicated. They may co-occur with resultative entailments, as in the case of (43)–(45):

(43) a. He has caught malaria. (telic)
   b. He has malaria.
   c. That is why he looks pale.
      That is why he does not want to talk about his holiday in Africa.

(44) a. Susan has been watering the plants. (telic)
   b. Some of the plants have been watered.
   c. The plants do not need to be watered straightaway.
      Susan must be recovering, as she has managed to water the plants.
      The plants will surely die, as Susan always gives them too much water.

(45) a. I have been burning schoolbooks. (atelic)
   b. Some of the schoolbooks have gone up in flames.
   c. I feel rather sad.
      That is why I am coughing all the time.

However, the presence of resultative entailments is no prerequisite for (a) resultative conversational implicature(s) arising, as in clear from the example in (46), which has a conversational implicature but no entailment. A common feature of resultative propositions of this kind is that they are cancellable and depend on the context in which they occur:
(46) a. He has lived in London. (atelic)
   c. He knows the place very well.
       That is why he receives letters from England.

The claim that these are conversational implicatures seems justified by the fact that:
(i) they are cancellable:

(46) He has lived in London, but he does not know the place very well.

(ii) they do not fall in the scope of logical operators:

(47) A: Smith doesn’t seem to have a girlfriend these days.
    B: He’s been paying a lot of visits to New York lately. (Carston, 1988: 157)
        (implicature: He has a girlfriend in New York)
    A: No, he hasn’t. (Carston, 1988: 172)

"The question whether [A’s reply] could be taken to bear, not on the explicit content of [B’s utterance], but only on its implicature [...], leaving the truth of [B’s utterance] intact. Surely the answer is no" (Carston, 1988: 172).

All the examples given so far may have conversational implicatures: different kinds of resultative propositions may be associated with them depending on the context in which they are uttered (cf. (46c)). The following are some more examples in which perfect sentences have resultative conversational implicatures:

(48) a. I’ve had/taken a bath. (I’m now clean.) (Leech, 1971: 39)
    b. I’ve told you already. (You are stupid or I won’t tell you again.) (Palmer, 1978: 49)
    c. They’ve fallen into the river. (They need help or Their clothes are wet.) (Palmer, 1978: 49)
    d. I can’t come to your party tonight – I’ve caught the flu. (McCawley, 1973: 267)

4. Present time character of resultative entailments and implicatures (current relevance)

The fact that the speaker chooses to use a tense which relates a past situation to the moment of speaking implies that he considers the past and the present as being related in some way or other. I therefore agree to a large extent with Smith (1981), who claims that the perfect has "the conventional implicature [...] that the propositions relevant to the interpretation of the sentence include some present ones" (1981: 260) (cf. Michaelis, 1994: 123 for a similar view). In other words, it is the present time character of the resultative propositions (which are either entailments or conversational implicatures) that is inherent in the use of the present perfect. However,
I would prefer not call this an implicature, but rather a feature that can be ascribed to the semantics of the present perfect. Smith points out that the conventional implicature of the present perfect falls within the scope of logical operators:

(49) A: If the chairman resigns, Jackson will take over his duties.
    B: If Jackson takes over his duties, the company will go broke.
(50) The chairman has resigned.
(51) Jackson will take over.
(52) The company will go broke. (Smith, 1981: 260)

Smith claims that it would not be possible to draw conclusions (51) and (52) if the simple past was used in (50). However, if the time between the resignation and NOW is very short, the past tense sentence *The chairman resigned in this morning’s meeting* is likely to lead to the same conclusion. The question whether it is the semantics of the present perfect or a conventional implicature which explains why propositions relating to now arise whenever an indefinite present perfect sentence is processed is one that is not easy to answer. Carston (1988), for instance, convincingly argues that the difference between semantics and pragmatics does not always coincide with the difference between ‘what is said’ and ‘what is implicated’. Pragmatically derived information (e.g. generalized conversational implicatures) may be truth-conditional and may therefore be argued to belong to what is said. From that point of view the difference between treating the present time character of the resultative propositions of the present perfect sentences as a conventional implicature or as part of what is said may be very slight indeed. In any case, the combination of the temporal structure of the present perfect (which stipulates that the present perfect leads to propositions relating to NOW) and the entailments of (different types of atelic and) telic situations brings about present time entailments.

5. Conclusion

To summarize, the claim that the current relevance of a present perfect situation arises as a result of the interaction between the verb used and the context may be specified in the following way:

(a) It follows from the semantics of the present perfect tense that some propositions relate to present time.
(b) Any present perfect sentence may have resultative conversational implicatures.
(c) Non-progressive telic situations entail a (completed) resultant state.
(d) Progressive telic situations entail a (partially completed) resultant state.
(e) Atelic situations entail a (partially completed) resultant state if the atelicity results from the use of a plural NP.
(f) Atelic situations do not entail a (partially completed) resultant state if the atelicity does not result from the use of a plural NP.
(g) If the sentence refers to a situation that is irreversible (no matter whether it is atelic or telic), it will be difficult to cancel the effects of the situation having held.

The references given in the discussion show that a lot of useful points have already been made about the interaction resultativeness/current relevance—present perfect. In this paper, we have tried to provide a systematic survey in which the contribution of the present perfect as a tense (i.e. its semantic, temporal structure) is disentangled from the factors determining the kind of resultative propositions actually derived when processing a present perfect sentence.

References