

Emotional Connotations in the Present Perfect and the Present Perfect Progressive in English

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Abstract: This paper is concerned with semantic and functional differences between the Present Perfect and the Present Perfect Progressive in English. According to Leech (2004), the Present Perfect Progressive shows the features of the Progressive in combination with those of the Present Perfect. Both tenses of the Present Perfect and the Present Perfect Progressive can be used to denote the same situation. Nevertheless, as previous studies have indicated, Present Perfect Progressive is preferred in describing situations of temporariness. However, there is another usage of the Present Perfect Progressive, namely, “the present result,” in which the Present Perfect Progressive is used to describe indefinite past situations. The present result can express a speaker’s emotional attitudes. Considering this, we conducted a survey on English native speakers’ introspective judgment regarding the use of the Present Perfect and the Present Perfect Progressive. The results of the survey confirm that the Present Perfect Progressive is capable of denoting a speaker’s emotional tones.

Keywords: English; Present Perfect; Present Perfect Progressive; Emotional Attitudes; Resultant State

1. Introduction

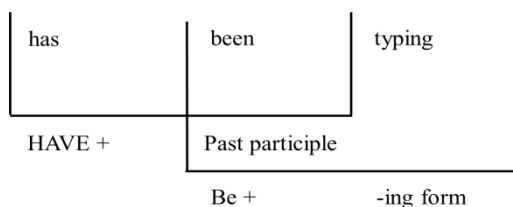
The Present Perfect in English is normally used to indicate a situation related to the present moment. It refers to a continuative situation, as shown in example (1a), and an experiential situation, as in example (1b):

- (1) a. We’ve known each other for years.
b. Have you ever been to Brazil?

(Leech, 2004: 36–37)

Regarding the Present Perfect Progressive, Leech (2004) notes that the features of the Present Perfect Progressive represent features of the Progressive in combination with those of the Present Perfect:

- (2) a. He has been typing all morning.
b.



- c. Perfect + Progressive

(Leech and Svartvik (2015: 414–415) with modifications)

In addition, several studies note that the Present Perfect Progressive contains emotional readings. The following example in (3) is pointed out by Kashino (1999) as an utterance with irritation at the smell of cigarettes in the room:

- (3) a. This room stinks. Someone's been smoking in here.
(Alexander (1988: 177) underline added)

To elaborate further on the emotional readings found in the use of the Present Perfect Progressive, we hypothesize that this tense can locate a situation with emotional colorings. Native informant consultations were carried out to verify this.

The organization of this paper is as follows. In section 2, we briefly review previous studies and address the semantic functions of both the Present Perfect and the Present Perfect Progressive. In section 3, the ways in which informant consultations were carried out are described. Section 4 presents our concluding remarks.

2. Previous Studies

In this section, we briefly look through the semantic functions of the Present Perfect and those of the Present Perfect Progressive by relying on previous studies.

2.1 Present Perfect

According to Declerck (1991) and Depraetere and Reed (2000), the Present Perfect is used to indicate two kinds of situations. One is a situation or a habit that starts in the past and continues into the present moment. This use is called the continuative perfect, as shown in (4).

- (4) a. I have lived here since 1965.
b. Mr. Whorf has been our sales representative for 21 years.
(Declerck, 1991: 100) underline added
c. We have looked forward to this holiday for months.
(Depraetere and Langford, 2012: 164) underline added

In the example (4a), as indicated by the adverbial *since 1965*, the speaker started living in the unmentioned location in 1965, and he/she still lives there. The use of continuative perfect normally co-occurs with temporal adverbials, such as *for 21 years* and *for months* in (4b) and (4c), respectively. In example (4b), Mr. Whorf becoming the speaker's sales representative began 21 years before the time of speaking; in example (4c), the speaker looking forward to the holiday continues over a period of time until the present.

The other use of Present Perfect indicates a situation in which an event takes place at least once in a period beginning in the past and continues into the present. This use is called the indefinite perfect:

- (5) a. I've written sixteen pages today. (Declerck, 1991: 100) underline added
b. I've painted the kitchen walls yellow.
(Depraetere and Langford, 2012: 166) underline added

The indefinite perfect implies that a resultant state of the event is operative until the moment of speaking. Example (5a) describes that the speaker wrote sixteen pages and implies the resultant state that he/she finished writing them. Example (5b) also shows the past event that a speaker painted the kitchen walls yellow, and the resultant state that the kitchen walls is yellow continues into the present time.

2.2 Present Perfect Progressive

In parallel with the semantic functions of Present Perfect, Declerck (1991) and Depaertere and Reed (2000) mention that two semantic functions are also found in the Present Perfect Progressive. One is the continuative perfect, which also denotes a situation that started in the past and continues into the present time or future. The difference between the Present Perfect and the Present Perfect Progressive is, however, in that the Present Perfect Progressive does not need to use temporal adverbials to denote continuative perfective.

- (6) a. I've been waiting for you.
 b. I have been working in the garden since 8 o'clock. (Declerck, 1991: 100) underline added
 c. I have been writing letters all afternoon. (Araki and Arai, 1992: 125) underline added
 d. I have written letters all afternoon.

Example (6a) describes a situation in which the speaker has been waiting for someone from the past to the present or the future. Note that Present Perfect Progressive without temporal adverbials are acceptable, while Present Perfect without temporal adverbials are not acceptable as the use of continuative perfect. In example (6b), the situation, *working in the garden*, is not completed, and it may continue into the future. In a similar vein, the example in (6c) denotes the uncompleted situation that the speaker does not finish writing letters. This is contrasted with the situation indicated by example (6d) where the use of the Present Perfect allows the interpretation that the writing is completed.

The other semantic function of the Present Perfect Progressive is the indefinite perfect, which denotes events that happened in the past and implies the resultant states of the events. Declerck (1991) mentions that the indefinite perfect is normally a simple perfect (the Present Perfect), because it is usually used to refer to complete situations. When a speaker uses the indefinite perfect of the Present Perfect Progressive, he/she wants to refer to the past situations as in progress.

- (7) Have you ever been working on a dissertation? (Declerck, 1991: 100) underline added

Example (7) represents indefinite perfect, due in particular to the word, *ever*. When utterance contains such words as *ever*, *never*, *always*, the indefinite interpretation is enforced. Araki and Yasui (1992) notes that when a speaker feels that the resultant state of an event remains at the moment of speaking, he/she refers to the event with the Present Perfect Progressive. The resultant state of an event is described in the preceding sentence:

- (8) Be careful! John has been painting the door. (Araki and Yasui, 1992: 1126)

Example (8) denotes the situation where an event, *painting the door*, is completed, but the paint is not dry yet.

2.3 Comparison with the Present Perfect and the Present Perfect Progressive

In this section, we will comparatively examine the functions of Present Perfect and Present Perfect Progressive, pointing out the differences between them.

It is worth noting that the same situation can be denoted by using both the Present Perfect and the Present Perfect Progressive. However, there are some implicational differences between the two:

- (9) a. I have been working all day.
 b. I have worked the whole day. (Radden and Dirven, 2007: 217) underline added

Examples (9a) and (9b) are utterances expressed by a speaker who finished working. According to Radden and Dirven (2007), the progressive form in (9a) underlines the duration of an activity, that is, the work, and has an inclination to evoke the idea that it was a long and hard one. Therefore, the example in (9a) may explain his/her present state of exhaustion as an indirect resultant state of the event. By contrast, the non-progressive form shown in (9b) focuses on the end-point of the event, and it may describe a direct resultant state of the event in the form of a report that he/she finished working at the end of the day.

Onions (1929) and Jespersen (1931) point out that the Present Perfect Progressive can represent emotional colorings, such as surprise, annoyance, discontent and irritation.

- (10) a. A: You look exhausted.
B: I have been jogging.
(Depraetere, 2000: 101) underline added)
- b. Someone has been tampering with this lock.
(Araki and Yasui, 1992: 1126) underline added)
- c. This room stinks. Someone 's been smoking in here.
(Alexander, 1988: 177) underline added)

2.4 Summary

The Present Perfect Progressive serves as two semantic functions as the Present Perfect does. It describes a situation starting in the past and continuing into the present, which is one function, or the continuative perfect. It also denotes a past situation whose resultant state is relevant to the moment of speaking, which is the other function, the indefinite Perfect. Compared with the Present Perfect, it is clear that the Present Perfect Progressive can refer to a situation with emotional colorings.

3. Data from the Native Informants

We have observed the previous findings regarding the Present Perfect Progressive in the above section. This section shows our empirical survey in which we asked native informants about the use of Present Perfect Progressive in an aim to further investigate some issues involving emotional connotations and the use of the tense. We will analyze the result of the investigations to clarify the semantic functions of the Present Perfect Progressive.

3.1 Research Questions

As noted in the previous section, some previous studies point out that the Present Perfect Progressive can represent situations with emotional colorings. We will address further issues related to this claim by referring the following questions:

- (a) In what ways does the situation denoted by the Present Perfect Progressive differ from that by the Present Perfect?
- (b) Whose emotional connotations are expressed by the use of the Present Perfect Progressive? The subject of the sentence or the speaker?

Baring these questions in mind, each separate question, as shown below, was provided with several English native speakers.

3.2 Emotional Connotations

Previous studies point out that emotional meaning is inferred in the utterances with the Present Perfect Progressive. In this regard, we asked native informants under what circumstances they would use the expressions in (B1) and (B2). The utterances in B1 and B2 are made to find out what kind of differences exist between the use of Present Perfect Progressive and the Present Perfect regarding emotional implicature:

- (11) A: You look exhausted.
B1: I have worked all day/the whole day.
B2: I have been working all day/the whole day.
(9) with modifications)

The result of native consultation indicates that the utterance in B2 expresses the situation with stronger emotion. One native speaker indicated that the hearer A could assume that the speaker B2 is exhausted because of his/her hard work by hearing the utterance of B2.

3.3 *Difference of the Situations*

The outcome of the native consultations suggests that the utterance using the Present Perfect Progressive includes more emotional tones than that with the Present Perfect. Next, we consider whether the assumption made for the utterances with different tenses would differ from each other regarding speaker's emotional connotations.

(12) Speaker B works from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m.

【Case A】 utterance: at 1 p.m. in the office

A: You look exhausted.

B: *I have worked all day. / I have been working all day.

【Case B】utterance: at 8 p.m.

A: You look exhausted.

B: I have worked all day. / I have been working all day.

【Case A】 depicts a situation in which the speaker B does not finish working, so we can recognize the situation as a continuative interpretation. While the use of Present Perfect is not grammatically acceptable because it places its focus on the end-point of the event, the Present Perfect Progressive is acceptable to express the situation and describe the situation with emotional colorings. Contrastively, 【Case B】 depicts a situation in which the speaker B finished working, so we can regard the situation as an indefinite interpretation. In this case, both present perfect can be used because the event is completed. In addition, the Present Perfect Progressive can express the situation with the speaker's emotional tone. In short, the both continuative perfect and the indefinite perfect with the Present Perfect Progressive can represent a situation with emotional connotations.

3.4 *Speaker's Emotional Connotations*

The above examples in (11) and (12) include the first-person singular pronoun in subject position. To clarify whose emotional connotations are expressed, i.e., the subject of the sentence or the speaker, we provided the native informants the following examples in (13) in which a proper noun name is used:

- (13) a. Tom has painted the ceiling.
b. Tom has been painting the ceiling.

(13b) is used emotionally in the context that the speaker could not sleep well because of the event, *painting the ceiling*. The Present Perfect Progressive is employed to explain the speaker's situation using emotional connotations.

3.5 *Difference in Emotional Connotations*

We have observed that the Present Perfect Progressive has the explanatory function with speaker's emotional state. Compared with the Present Perfect, it is clear that the Present Perfect Progressive can imply the speaker's present state:

- (14) a. Tom has been painting the ceiling, so I couldn't sleep well.
b. Tom has painted the ceiling, so I couldn't sleep well.

As we have seen, the Present Perfect implies the speaker's present state. In this regard, the example in (14a) refers to a situation in which the speaker feels irritated until the moment of speaking. By contrast,

the Present Perfect in (14b) can denote such a situation, for instance, where the speaker was irritated in the past, but now he/she feels good because he is drinking coffee. Therefore, the Present Perfect implies the speaker's past state.

3.6 Summary

Regarding the questions shown in 3.1, we have observed the followings:

- (15) (a) The Present Perfect Progressive can denote a speaker's emotional situation.
- (b) It does not matter whether the Present Perfect Progressive expresses a complete or an incomplete situation, while the Present Perfect can express only a complete situation.
- (c) The speaker's emotional state expressed by the Present Perfect Progressive continues into the moment of speaking, while the state expressed by the Present Perfect does not continue in to the present.

4. Concluding Remarks

We have observed the differences in the use of the Present Perfect and the Present Perfect Progressive. Through consulting with native speakers, we confirm that the Present Perfect Progressive can indicate a speaker's emotional tones.

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