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Author(s): Kathleen Carey

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**The Role of Conversational Implicature
in the Early Grammaticalization of the English Perfect¹**

Kathleen Carey
University of California, San Diego

1.0 Introduction

In recent years, many linguists have demonstrated that pragmatics plays a major role in language change. Traugott and König (in press) show how semantic change can be brought about by the conventionalization of conversational implicatures through pragmatic strengthening; they show how this process explains the change from the temporal to the concessive meaning of *while* in English. Traugott (1989) shows how this same process accounts for the shift from the deontic to the epistemic meaning for the English modals *shall*, *will* and *must*. Horn (1984) accounts for cases of lexical narrowing and broadening as a result of his R Principle (Say no more than you must) and his Q Principle (Say as much as you can). This paper will demonstrate that the early grammaticalization of the English perfect is yet another example of the role of conversational implicature in instigating semantic change.

Before turning to the English perfect, it will be useful to cite an example that demonstrates how the conventionalization of invited inferences can result in semantic change. One of the most discussed examples in the literature is the semantic shift in which temporal connectors take on the additional semantic function of causal connectors. Traugott and König show that Old English *sippan* 'after, since' was used as a temporal connector before it was used as a causal connector. However, during the period when it was primarily used as a temporal connector (850-1050), one can find examples such as (1), which include a causal implicature.

(1) Orosius 156.11

þa sippan he irre wæs & gewunded, he ofslog micel þæs folces.

'Then, after/since he was angry and wounded, he slaughtered much of that troop.'

Traugott and König note that the presence of the adjective *irre* 'angry' favors a causal rather than a temporal interpretation if the listener assumes that the speaker is obeying the Gricean maxim of relevance. Over time, the causal inference becomes conventionalized as one of the possible meanings of *since*. In Modern English, *since* can be used strictly as a causal connector with no temporal reference, as is demonstrated by the following example: *Since you are not coming with me, I will have to go alone.* (Traugott and König).

2.0 Synchronic Facts about the English Perfect

The purpose of the present paper is to show that conversational implicature is also involved in the early grammaticalization of the English perfect. Before examining the perfect diachronically, let's first briefly review what some linguists have said about the Modern English perfect from a synchronic perspective. Many linguists have commented on the seemingly schizophrenic nature of the English

perfect, dividing the perfect into different types. The types listed below and their corresponding examples are a summary taken from Brinton (1988).²

A. Resultant State Perfect: past action with present results.

I have eaten lunch. (and am therefore not hungry now)

He has caught a cold. (and cannot come to work)

B. Perfect of Experience: a situation that occurred once or more in the past within a span of time construed by the speaker as continuing up to the present.

I have been abroad several times.

I have read that novel.

C. Continuative Perfect: a situation which began in the past and persists until the present.

We have known him since he was a child.

He has sung in the choir for years.

From a strictly synchronic perspective, one would want to know whether these types represent different meanings of the perfect or can be captured by a single definition. Bauer (1970) argues that there is a single grammatical meaning for the perfect: 'What the perfect qua perfect does in fact express is simply this: the action is viewed, not as a past event, but as being an accomplished fact at the moment of speaking, having taken place, once or repeatedly, within a span of time that is not conceived as separated from the moment of speaking.' (p. 190). Bauer goes on to explain how all of the types of the perfect are consistent with this meaning and how lexical verb semantics interacts with this meaning. His observations are relevant for this paper because lexical verb semantics turns out to be significant for the perfect diachronically as well as synchronically.

In particular, he distinguishes between two kinds of verbs: those that imply that the action reaches a goal or conclusion (telic), e.g. *buy, sell, achieve, contrive, persuade*, and those that don't imply a goal or conclusion (atelic), e.g. *love, live, walk*. Telic verbs can form Resultant State Perfects, such as *I have persuaded him*, because there is a goal or resultant state inherent in the semantics of the verb. In contrast, atelic verbs do not participate in Resultant State Perfects. When used without an adverbial indication of time, perfects with atelic verbs are typically interpreted as Perfects of Experience, as in *I have lived in Spain*. When used with a time adverbial, atelic verbs typically form Continuative Perfects, such as *I have lived in Spain for three years*. Telic verbs can also participate in Perfects of Experience, such as *I have persuaded him many times in my life*, and in Continuative Perfects when time adverbials are present, such as *He has told that joke for many years*. Note, however, that Continuative Perfects with telic verbs are construed as a series of events leading up to the present rather than as a single, continuous event.

3.0 The Diachronic Development of the English Perfect

Linguists are in general agreement that the English perfect originated in constructions with transitive verbs in which the participle was adjectival. Mitchell

(1985, p. 292) states that '...we need, I think, have little hesitation in accepting the orthodox view that in the original form of the periphrasis the participle was inflected and adjectival.' In other words, the Old English precursors of the perfect were semantically equivalent to the Modern English stative construction, as in *I have the car washed*, in which the past participle *washed* serves as an adjectival complement. Unlike Modern English, the order of the participle and the object in Old English could not be relied upon to distinguish between the adjectival and the perfect interpretation. (Throughout the rest of this paper, I will use the term *have + participle* construction to refer to any clause with an inflected form of *habban* and a past participle, regardless of the order of the constituents.) In addition, the participles in *have + participle* constructions appeared both with and without inflection: in (2) below, *geswene* 'seen' is inflected but *gehyred* 'heard' is not.

- (2) ÆCHom I, 39 578.24 (Traugott, to appear)
Fela Godes wundra we habbað gehyred and eac geswene.
 'We have heard and also seen many of God's wonders.'

Given that the perfect had its origins in an adjectival construction, the next question is exactly how does the semantic change from the adjectival to the perfect construal come about? The next part of the paper will present a hypothesis of how this semantic shift occurred based on the conventionalization of invited inferences. In presenting this hypothesis, the following questions will be addressed: (i) of the three types of the perfect mentioned above, which was the first to appear? (ii) were the first uses of the perfect restricted to a particular semantic class of verbs? (iii) how did the perfect meaning become conventionalized? Unfortunately, the earliest stages of the development of the perfect predate the Old English texts; however, the discussion will include the extent to which the Old English data supports or does not support the hypotheses in regard to later stages of development.

3.1 Contextual Constraints on the First Perfects

When semantic change arises from the conventionalization of invited inferences, some aspect of the context in which the expression was used with its old meaning becomes indexed and over time becomes part of the new meaning of the expression itself. This type of account entails that the very first uses of the new meaning, i.e. with invited inferences to the new meaning, will arise from contexts in which the old meaning was used. In the case of *sibban* 'since', the first uses with a causal inference appeared in contexts where *sibban* was functioning as a temporal connector.

Likewise, an invited inference account would predict that the first uses with the perfect meaning emerged from contexts in which the adjectival construction was already being used. By examining the constraints on the context imposed by the adjectival construction, one can hypothesize which of the three types of the perfect discussed earlier was the first to appear. Consider the following ungrammatical sentence:

- (3)**I have my room cleaned, but you messed it up.*

(3) is ungrammatical because the adjectival construction is a statement about the present state of the object; the object must necessarily be in the state denoted by the past participle at the time of reference, in this case, the moment of speaking. The Resultant State Perfect (with transitive verbs) is the only type that must necessarily satisfy this constraint. Perfects of Experience need not and typically do not satisfy this constraint; the only relevant resultant state in a Perfect of Experience is in the subject rather than the object: in (4) below, Sheila, the subject, is construed by the speaker as being in the experiential state of having dyed her hair blonde once in her life.

(4) *Sheila has dyed her hair blonde.* (With Perfect of Experience reading)

Continuative Perfects need not and typically would not satisfy the resultant state constraint either: Continuative Perfects with atelic verbs never imply a resultant state in the object because of the inherent semantics of atelic verbs. Continuative Perfects with telic verbs, as in (5) below, cannot be ruled out; however, it is highly unlikely that the first uses of the perfect would refer to multiple rather than single resultant states.

(5) *Grandma has baked a pie every Saturday for the last 20 years.*
(Continuative)

From this analysis, we can hypothesize that the first perfects should be of the type Resultant State, and consequently with telic verbs. Atelic verbs are clearly incompatible with the adjectival construction, as is indicated by the ungrammaticality of **I have the Italian shoes wanted*. This hypothesis is supported by data from Old English prose; an analysis of a total of 167 *have + participle* examples from Alfred (c. 850) and Ælfric (c. 1050) reveals that 165 were with telic verbs.³

3.2 The Shift from the Adjectival to the First Perfect Construal

The next issue to be addressed is how the adjectival constructions developed into Resultant State Perfects. Before addressing this question, one must first understand how the two constructions are semantically different.

The primary semantic difference between the adjectival construction and the first uses of the Resultant State Perfect has to do with the syntagmatic relations of the elements. In the adjectival construction, *have* acts as a main verb, designating a relation between the object and the subject. The focus of attention in the adjectival construction is not on the relation of possession/control but rather on the state of the object. The past participle acts adjectivally by designating the present state of the object, which is the final state of a past process. In the first uses of the Resultant State Perfect, *have* designates a relation between the subject and the past process performed on the object. The past participle is verb-like in that it designates a past process.⁴ Importantly, these differences between the adjectival construction and the first Resultant State Perfect do not correspond to situations with different truth conditions but rather to different construals of the same situation.

A truth-conditional semantic difference between the adjectival and the perfect construction is that, in the perfect construction, the subject must necessarily be the agent of the process. Here, I am using the term agent in the broad sense to refer to consciously controlling participants. Example (6) demonstrates that the subject of an adjectival sentence need not be the agent of the process:

- (6) A: *John has Meow bathed and ready for the cat show.*
 B: *John bathed Meow?*
 A: *No. Mary did. Meow would never let him do that.*

However, agency of the subject is part of the meaning of the modern perfect construction, and not just an implicature: note that in example (7) the agency of the subject cannot be overruled without sounding contradictory.

- (7) A: *John has bathed Meow; she's ready for the cat show.*
 B: *John bathed Meow?*
 A: * *No. Mary did.*

In most contexts in which the adjectival construction would be uttered, the subject is the agent of the process, and consequently, these contexts satisfy the truth-conditional requirements for the perfect meaning. In a particular utterance, the additional necessary shift from the adjectival to the perfect construal could be brought about by implicature. In example (8) below, it is possible to interpret the construction as purely adjectival or as including an implicature to the perfect construal, as I have indicated with the two possible glosses.

- (8) ÆCHom I, 31 458.18 (Traugott, to appear)
 Ic hæbbe gebunden þone feond þe hi drehte.
 'I have [bound that enemy/that enemy bound] that afflicted them.'

However, the possibility of an implicature does not necessarily indicate that the implicature will be conventionalized as a new meaning for the construction. In the case of the *have* + *participle* construction, whenever the object is tangible and changed by the verbal process, i.e. an external object, it bears the resultant state designated by the participle; consequently, the purely adjectival meaning is always possible. Since the adjectival meaning is also the original meaning, it is difficult to see how examples such as (8) would consistently lead to an inference with the perfect construal and consequently bring about the conventionalization of the perfect meaning.

3.3 The Role of Mental State Verbs in the Conventionalization Process

However, the situation is much clearer with mental state verbs. Benveniste (1968) claims that verbs such as *understand*, *discover*, *realize*, *notice*, and *see* were the first to favor the rise of the perfect. He argues that sensory-intellect verbs such as these are specially suited for this task for the following reasons: (i) the subject must necessarily be the agent of the process, and (ii) although the participle still

grammatically modifies the object, the change in state brought about by the process involves the subject rather than the object.

Presuming the achievement rather than the stative use of a mental state verb, if an object stands in a *heard*, *understood*, *discovered*, or *seen* relation with a subject, the subject must be the agent of the process.⁵ Consequently, the *have* + *participle* constructions with mental state verbs entail the truth conditional requirements for the perfect. The development of the constraint that the subject must necessarily be the agent of the process is crucial for the development of the perfect; it permits the syntagmatic realignment in which the verb consists not just of *have* but of the *have* + *participle* complex.

Benveniste's second point (ii) explains how the uses with mental state verbs bring about the shift from the adjectival to the perfect construal. Consider the following Modern English sentence: *Now that I have that paper understood/figured out, I can start on the next one.* In this example, the participle grammatically functions as an adjectival complement, as is indicated by the stative syntax of the first clause. However, in a context in which this statement would be uttered, the listener would typically infer that what is relevant is not the *understood* state of the paper but rather the change of state of the subject, i.e. that the subject has completed the process of understanding. In the inference-based construal, the participle functions more like a verb by designating a past process. In this way, the particular semantics of mental state verbs leads to an inference that results in a shift from the adjectival to the perfect construal.

In several examples from the Alfred period of Old English (c. 850), the object of the mental state verb was a proposition rather than a tangible object such as a paper. When the object is a proposition, as in (9) below, and therefore an object only in the most abstract sense, the implicature to the perfect construal is even more apparent.

(9) Bo 36.107.32

ic hæbbe nu ongiten þæt þu eart gearo to ongitanne mina lara;

'I have now understood that you are ready to understand my teachings;'

Verbs of reporting such as *tell*, *explain*, and *say* also play a role in the conventionalization of the perfect meaning. As with mental state verbs, *have* + *participle* constructions with verbs of reporting typically include an implicature to the perfect construal. Consider the following example from Old English:

(10) Or 1 1.26.26

Nu hæbbe we ymb Affrica Landgemæro gesæd.

'Now we have talked about the African land.'

In (10), the listener infers that the speaker does not want him/her to focus attention on the *talked about* state the African land; to do so would be to violate the Gricean maxim of relevance. The listener infers instead that what is relevant is the state of the discourse situation, in particular, the fact that the subject has completed the process of talking about Africa. In this way, verbs of reporting are similar to

mental state verbs by typically including an implicature in which the participle has a verbal rather than an adjectival function.

3.4 Evidence from Old English

In order to test the hypothesis regarding the conventionalization process, 167 *have* + *participle* examples from Old English (Venezky and DiPaolo, 1980) were categorized by the semantics of the verb participle. 84 of the examples were taken from the prose of Alfred (c. 850) and 83 of the examples were taken from the prose of Ælfric (c. 1050). The data includes both past and present tense forms of *habban*; the majority of the examples were first and third person.

An analysis of these *have* + *participle* examples indicates that 54 (32%) of the examples were with mental state verbs, and 32 (19%) were with verbs of reporting; together, they comprise over 50% of the data. Of the remaining examples, 66 (40%) were with verbs that designated a change of state in the object, e.g. *belocen* 'locked', *gedon* 'done', and *gebunden* 'bound'. It is difficult to determine whether any particular example from this category had the perfect or the adjectival construal; my hypothesis is that the majority of them had the adjectival construal, particularly the examples from the earlier Alfred period.⁶

The remaining 15 examples (9% of the data) included verbs whose participles do not designate a change in state of the object, or at least a perceptually verifiable one, verbs such as *gebroht* 'brought' and *betæht* 'taught'. Examples in the last category seem to be instances in which the perfect construal is extending to new verbs, that is verbs that are neither mental state nor reporting. Interestingly, 12 of the 15 examples in this category are from the later Ælfric period; in fact, some of these verbs, such as *gebroht* 'brought', do not appear anywhere in my data sample from the earlier Alfred period. This data suggests that once the mental state and reporting verbs have conventionalized the perfect meaning as a legitimate meaning of the *have* + *participle* construction, it can start to extend to other verbs.

In order to validate the above hypothesis, one would need data from later periods to conclusively demonstrate the extension to other semantic classes of verbs. This paper represents the initial results of a work in progress, and I have not yet analyzed data from later periods. However, it is clear that by Middle English, the perfect had extended not only to atelic, but also to stative verbs, as example (11) below demonstrates. Also, by Middle English, examples of the Perfect of Experience, such as (12), had emerged:

- (11) Curs. M 7994 (Visser 1973, p. 755)

His hert has ever ben þe with.

- (12) Chaucer C.T. A3079 (Visser, p. 755)

Your owne knight, That serveth you with wille, herte and might, And ever hath doon.

4.0 Conclusion

Applying pragmatic principles to semantic change has led to the following hypotheses regarding the development of the English perfect: (i) The first perfects

should be Resultant State Perfects with telic verb participles. (ii) Verbs with external objects may involve an implicature to the perfect construal, but they will not play a significant role in conventionalizing the new meaning. (iii) Mental state verbs conventionalize the new meaning by entailing that the subject is the agent of the process. Both mental state verbs and verbs of reporting conventionalize the new meaning by typically including an implicature to the perfect rather than the adjectival construal. (iv) After the conventionalization process has occurred, the perfect meaning can be extended to other semantic classes of verbs, including verbs with external objects.

If the hypotheses presented in this paper are accurate, they indicate that the early grammaticalization of the English perfect is yet another example of the role of conversational implicature in semantic change. The hypothesis regarding the role of mental state verbs in conventionalizing the implicature suggests the following general principle: An implicature associated with a grammatical construction is more likely to be conventionalized if a subset of the uses of that construction entails some part of the new meaning; recall that in the case of the perfect, the uses with mental state verbs entailed that the subject was the agent of the process.

Notes

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²Brinton also includes a fourth type, the Perfect of Recent Past, which can be considered a subtype of the Resultant State Perfect. I have omitted it here.

³The two *have + participle* constructions with atelic verbs are nonstative and include a time adverbial. The specification of the time adverbial adds an implied goal not present in the verb itself, so that the entire construction can be construed as telic although the verb itself is atelic.

⁴It is still unclear to me exactly how the notion of relevance applies to the first uses with the perfect construal: in particular, whether the past event must be relevant to the subject or instead to some aspect of the speech situation or its participants. See Langacker (1990) for a discussion of related issues.

⁵Someone other than the subject can be the agent of a mental process only if explicitly specified in a causal construction such as *The king has the book understood by his scribe*.

⁶Errapel Mejiás-Bikandi has provided synchronic evidence from Modern Castilian Spanish that supports the hypothesis regarding the role of mental state and reporting verbs. In addition to the fully grammaticalized *haber* perfect, Castilian Spanish has what appears to be a partially grammaticalized perfect with *tener* as the auxiliary. Consider the following examples:

Tengo entendido que Vd. sabe la respuesta.

'I have it understood that you know the answer.'

Te tengo dicho que no uses el coche.

'I have it told to you not to use the car.'

Native speakers feel that these sentences with *tener* focus more attention on the state of the object than their *haber* counterparts. This difference is to be expected, since the perfect meaning has not yet been conventionalized with the *tener* perfect. The *tener* perfect is restricted to mental state verbs, verbs of reporting and verbs that denote final states, such as *preparado* 'ready' and *hecho* 'done'. Transitive verbs without objects and intransitive verbs cannot appear in this construction. Also, the participle obligatorily agrees with the object in gender and number (and in some cases, can appear in front of the object):

Tengo la película vista.

I have the movie seen-F

'I have [seen the movie/the movie seen].'

⁷Three of the examples were with intransitive verbs; in two of these, the verb was *farán* 'go', and in the other example, the verb was *restan* 'rest'. In understanding this somewhat puzzling fact, it is worthwhile to note that a *be* perfect was developing with mutative intransitive verbs such as *farán* and *cuman* 'come' throughout the same period that the *have* perfect was developing with transitive verbs. Perhaps, the influence of the *be* perfect partially explains the early appearance of the mutative intransitives in *have* + *participle* constructions. However, Mitchell (1985, p. 290) notes that this does not explain the early appearance of activity verbs such as *restan* and *settan*. I have no coherent explanation for these facts; however, it is significant to note that all of the early examples with activity verbs included a time adverbial. As was explained in endnote 3, the addition of a time adverbial provides an implied goal, so that the event is telic although the verb is inherently atelic.

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