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PRESENT PERFECT VERSUS PAST TENSE

AN ANALYSIS OF TENSE USAGE

The general rules governing the use of the Present Perfect and the Past Tense are described in all English grammars written by English or foreign authors, yet in essence they hardly ever go beyond the basic statements that

the Past Tense is used

(a) speaking of fully past events, and

(b) there is usually an indication of past time in the context, mostly in the form of an adverb of time, like yesterday, last year, etc., while

the Present Perfect is used

(c) speaking of past events, the result of which is present, or which in some way are associated with the present state of things;

(d) an adverb of present time (this week, now, etc.) may or may not be present in the context, but it is impossible to use it with an adverb of fully past time, the latter requiring the Past Tense.

Then some easy examples are given like *Yesterday I met John at the museum. Or: John has just (now) come back from France.*

Any teacher of English with some experience knows, how-

ever, that these explanations are far from satisfactory for the guidance of the foreign learner. In many cases some of the above-mentioned criteria are not evident; there are also borderline cases when in one and the same situation either tense is possible, depending solely on the speaker's viewpoint, feeling, or emphasis. Then there are also idiomatic and even wrong uses when native speakers of English do not use these tenses in accordance with these basic rules. At present the best explanations can be found in Millington-Ward's "The Use of Tenses in English" and E. M. Gordon and I. P. Krilova's "Tense and Voice in Modern English". For those students of English whose mother tongue possesses no Past and Present Perfect tenses, but only a Preterite to indicate anything that has happened before the present time, e.g. Hungarian, or whose tongue, at least in colloquial style, makes no similar distinction between the two tenses (e.g. French and German) the criteria requiring one or the other tense in English are not evident if there is no direct indication of time in the context. Few existing grammars provide adequate guidance in such cases. Even the best ones deal only with some of the problems. The rules laid down in grammar books are obviously incomplete and therefore imperfect. It is stated in the books that *the Present Perfect is to be used if the result of a past action is still present. Typically no adverb of completely past time can appear together with this tense.* What is generally omitted from the explanations is that *even if no adverb of time is expressed*

and the result of the past action is present, the time of the action or happening, such as a historic fact or a previous incident, may be DEFINITE in the speaker's mind, and then it is not the presentness of the result, but the definiteness of the time that wins out, and the speaker will use the Past Tense as he thinks of the event rather than of the result. Thus a man, after being attacked by the watch-dog in the garden, enters the house and says to the people there:

Look what your nasty dog DID to my trousers.

(Recorded from a novel. Source unknown.)

The speaker was evidently still thinking of the unpleasant incident with the dog in the garden. If he had wished to speak more emphatically of the result of the action, i.e. the damage, he could have used the Present Perfect, since no adverb of time is expressed: *Look what your nasty dog has done to my trousers.*

Somebody taking clothes out of a wardrobe might say:

Look what the moths HAVE DONE to my clothes.

(BBC)

In this example the speaker cannot possibly know when exactly the moths ate holes in the clothes, so he has no definite time in his mind, he can only see the result of the moths' action (activity). Consequently only the Present Perfect is correct here. Similar is the situation in the

following example:

Who has taught you those fine words, bairn?

(E. Bronte: *Wuthering Heights*)

Cook (J. L. Cook, A. Gethin, K. Mitchell: *A New Way to Proficiency in English*. Blackwell, Oxford, 1971) explains well the following examples,

Quote: *"The French Revolution LEFT an indelible mark on the political thinking of the whole world."*

The French Revolution HAS LEFT an indelible mark on the political thinking of the whole world.

The writer of the first sentence might be engaged on a historical work - he would be concerned with what happened THEN. The writer of the second sentence would be mainly concerned with effects of the revolution on our present-day society NOW. There is a similar difference between

Look what she GAVE me for Christmas!

(Emphasis on the action THEN - how nice of her!)

and

Look what she HAS GIVEN me for Christmas!

(Emphasis on the result NOW - how lucky I am!)"

- Unquote.

Further he says,

Quote: "Let us imagine a conversation between a mother and her daughter. It might run as follows:

What did he say? - Oh, he ASKED me to marry him, but I simply laughed.

(The proposal has purely historical significance; the girl is no longer interested in it.)

Or:

What did he say? - Oh, mama! He HAS ASKED me to marry him!

The girl is still, at the present moment, very excited; the action is still affecting her emotions.)"

- Unquote.

Another excellent grammar-book, Knud Schibbye's *A Modern English Grammar* (Oxford University Press, 1970), does not forget to mention the problematic adverbs *always*, *ever*, *never*. They are problematic to the foreign student because they may be used with either tense, though not indifferently. Schibbye says,

Quote: "Particular interest is attached to the use of the preterite (i. e. Past Tense) and perfect (i. e. Present Perfect) in combination with *always*, *ever*, *never*: With *always* we find the usual distribution of the two tenses: *it was always a part of the plan of the book that it should be furnished with illustrations, viz. 'when the book was being prepared'; I forgave him. I always loved him* (i. e. the feelings referred to are those of that time);"

- Unquote.

and

Quote: "*the community has always counted for more than the State in England, i. e. 'and this is still the case'; ...* However if *always* signifies circumstance rather than time, i. e. 'in any circumstance, anyhow', the preterite is used even if the moment of speaking is included: *just then, as if by*

a miracle, the floor of the money-box turned gently round in her hand, and the great secret was revealed ... Yes, I said, you were always lucky."

- Unquote.

The last example should be explained more amply, for it is not easy to see why *always* denotes here "circumstance rather than time". Perhaps because of a possible interpretation 'in any situation, under any circumstances'; but even this interpretation does not explain why the Past and not the Present Perfect is used in similar sentences. It would therefore be better to say that this is idiomatic usage, where idiom requires the use of the Past Tense to express a permanent characteristic, quality, or state that is not likely to change (soon), or when the speaker does not think of the possibility of a change in the future. Let us examine an example taken from *Friday Morning*, a radio drama by Val Gielgud,

Quote: M.: *Ay, I certainly am flying. You see, my wife's in Paris - ... - and she likes me to be punctual. She makes an awful song if I'm not punctual for my meals.*

S.: *Well, Andrew, you always were a perfect husband.*

- Unquote.

The last sentence may be said in praise, but it may also be a sarcastic comment. The speaker using the Past Tense (S.) considers only the past, M.'s behaviour in the past. If the

fact that the present is the time limit of the past or that the action or state continues or may continue in the future is prominent in the speaker's mind, he will use the Present Perfect.

Let us now return to Schibsbye's grammar. Referring to the use of tenses in connection with adverbs it says,

Quote: "When *ever* has a temporal value we find the usual distribution of the preterite and perfect; *were you ever married?*, namely 'in the earlier period of your life which I do not know about'; *did you ever meet my brother?*, namely 'when you had the chance'; *no one ever loved me*, i. e. 'when I was young', or something of the kind // *have you ever been up in an aeroplane?* / *have you ever met him?* / *the hall was more closely packed than I have ever seen it for a meeting.*

When *ever* is an intensive adverb (approaching the meaning of 'whatever' or 'at all') it takes the preterite: *no man ever impressed me quite so much as Mr Gladstone* / *I think it is one of the most delightful things that ever was written* / *the proudest man I ever met was a great naturalist ...*; thus also in rhetorical questions: *did you ever see anything to beat it?* / *did you ever hear of such a thing?* - When *ever* is used archaically in the sense of 'always', it takes the preterite: *I was ever of opinion that ...*"

- Unquote.

The deeper, psychological explanation of the last set of examples is that the speaker thinks of particular instances in the past when he met with something extraordinary rather than of all past time, which is a period reaching the present,

and does not think of the possibility of a change of his opinion in the future. The instances are only past once-possibilities for him, so that present and future possibilities are excluded from his consideration.

If the speaker is not talking emotionally as in the above examples and does not exclude the idea of a present or future possibility, he will use the Present Perfect)

A.: *Have you ever heard that such patients may recover without any medication?*

B.: *No, I haven't.*

A.: *But you may see such cases yet.* (Heard in a conversation)

The use of the Past Tense with *ever* occurs also without emphasis or emotion. This is due to analogy with the frequent emotive use of this adverb. E. g.:

HAVE you ever HAD this kind of headache before?
(Special English, Medicine, Book 3, p. 3)

Before means here 'before now'. This is normal usage without emphasis or emotion.

DID you ever HAVE an attack like this before?
(Ib.)

Past Tense by analogy with intensive use, although the doctor carrying out a routine examination is talking without emotional emphasis. This should be correctly: *Have you ever had ...*

Returning to Schibsbye we can read:

Quote: "With *never* the use of the two tenses is similar to that in sentences with: *ever*; of time: *I never spoke better*, namely than on that occasion // *I have never spoken better in my life*, namely than on this occasion/ the moderns do not realize modernity. They have never known anything else. Used intensively (= certainly not) *never* takes the preterite: *I never spoke to her in my life/ I was never one to write by the calendar.*"

- Unquote.

Other examples collected for this article are:

"What beautiful, glossy fur!" said Joe.

"I never SAW a black fox before."

(Zane Grey: The Spirit of the Border)

Without emphasis, the Present Perfect could be used in this sentence.

"Living backwards!" Alice repeated in great astonishment. "I never HEARD of such a thing!"

(Lewis Carroll: Through the Looking-Glass)

This is emotional. The speaker does not think of any (present or future) possibility.

"Aunt Izzie, may I ask Imogen Clark to spend the day here on Saturday?" cried Katy, bursting in one afternoon.

"Who on earth is Imogen Clark? I never HEARD the name before," replied her aunt.

(Susan Coolidge: What Katy Did)

Intensive or emphatic use.

"Look here! What do you know about this letter?"

*"I know no more about it than you do. I never
WROTE it. I never SAW it before."*

(Crofts: The Groote Park Murder)

Emphatic negation.

All grammars agree that the Past Tense is to be used when the time of the past action is defined, i.e. when the sentence puts or answers the question *when exactly*. The time is most often defined by some past-time adverb in the context, but even without definition of time the Past Tense is used when the speaker is concerned with the circumstances of the past action, such as place or manner.

The Past Tense could also be termed Definite Past Tense, and the Present Perfect Indefinite Past or Past-Present Tense. For similar reasons two tenses of French bear similar names: *passé défini* and *passé indéfini*, although in modern spoken French the *passé défini* is no longer used, but is replaced by the *passé indéfini*.

Let us now see the normal use of the two tenses referring to past or present situations, definite or indefinite time.

Gerard Vanneck (The Colloquial Preterite in Modern American English. Word, Vol. 14, pp. 237-242) says;

Quote: "In spoken British English the use of the preterite instead of the perfect clearly implies a different kind of context. Ex.:

You look worried. What's happened?

(I've no idea what my friend may have seen or heard.)

You look worried, what happened?

(I knew that my friend was to attend a meeting, which is now over. I want to know what happened at it.)"

- Unquote

In Vanneck's first example the time of the past event is not precise, not definite. In his second example the action is supposed to have taken place on a certain past occasion, which therefore defines the past time. The time is definite in the speaker's mind, though the definition of time is not explicit. Cases of this type are pitfalls for the foreign student of English.

Vanneck also says:

"Written British English, spoken British English and written American English agree closely in their choice between the preterite and the perfect. Spoken American English, however, uses the preterite in many cases where BE and written AE use the perfect."

Vanneck calls this misuse of the Past Tense the Colloquial Preterite. We quote here only two examples from him;

Quote: *I didn't pay for this book yet.*

That show's still on. I saw it twice.

- Unquote

In British English these would be: "I haven't paid..." and "I've seen it twice."

When the past time is undefined, the Present Perfect (Indefinite Past Tense) is normally used in British English. In American English, however, the Definite Past Tense is often used instead:

*There WERE times in our history when students
were even more restless than they are now.*

(Phi Delta Kappan, Sept. 1968)

This should be corrected to *There HAVE BEEN times ...*

Vanneck also says;

Quote: "A natural corollary is the hypercorrect use of the perfect in written AE in contexts where the preterite would be preferable and sometimes where it is obligatory. Ex.: ... *as I have predated to you two years ago ...*"

- Unquote

The following two examples are important:

- (1) *He's more confident than he HAS BEEN at any other time in the past three years.* (Source unrecorded.)

At any other time is no definite time, and *in the past three years* is a period reaching the present. These two circumstances require the Present Perfect (i.e. Indefinite Past Tense).

One rule is, that if the action itself or the period in which it takes place begins, goes on, and finishes in the past, the Past Tense must be used, but if the action or period in which the action takes place begins and goes on in

the past and reaches the present, the Present Perfect is the correct tense.

(2) *Meanwhile the servants were putting the supper on the table, and the Prince was much amused to hear the fairy. "Well!" he thought, as he ate his supper, "I'm very glad I CAME here.*

(The Blue Fairy Book, edited by Andrew Lang. London, Longmans 1889)

The Prince is here at table now, but his coming is already in the recent past. It is some time ago that he arrived, not just now. So his coming does not reach the present: it began and finished in the past.

If he came and saw the beautiful fairy and the richly laden table now, he could exclaim right on arriving: *Oh! I'm so glad I have come here* because his coming finishes or has finished just now, i.e. reaches the present.

Normal use is seen in the sentences:

...more important than what the nazi's have done in the past is what they are doing now - and will do.

(Morning Star, Nov. 28. 1966)

In the past is not definite, as the past is all the time before now and up to now. Consequently the Present Perfect is correct.

When a motive or purpose is expressed for the action which practically reaches the present, either the Present Perfect or (perhaps more commonly) the Past Tense is used.

Ex.:

- (1) *A clergyman received us in his study. Our telegram lay before him. "Well, gentlemen," he asked, "what can I do for you?" "We came," I explained, "in answer to your wire." "My wire? I sent no wire!"*
(A.C. Doyle: The Case-Book of Sherlock Holmes.)

- (2) *"And that," she said quietly, "is why I have come to you."*
(George Sava: They Come by Appointment.)

The difference between these uses is that the Present Perfect emphasizes present achievement, kindness, service, feeling, etc., while the Past Tense refers back to earlier motives, earlier feelings or other circumstances, and often sounds more modest or matter-of-fact than the Present Perfect. This difference can also be seen in the following examples:

(Buckingham, at the beginning of an interview with the Queen:)

*"I CAME in answer to this letter, Your Majesty!
It asks me to come to Paris secretly and urgently...
It is signed by you!"*

- (At the end of the interview:) *As the duke made to take his leave, the queen produced an intricately worked jewel box... "My lord, you HAVE COME to see me, even in the face of death. I admire such courage."*
(Film-Fun, 18th March, 1961, p.9)

- (3) *Why should I let you ride by when I HAVE COME out to seek you?* (Rider Haggard: Swallow.)
- (4) *I DIDN'T COME here to talk of sheep.* (Ib.)

- (5) *"Who are you, ohild?" asked Mrs. Spenser,
"I'm Dr. Carr's little girl," answered Katy, going
straight up to the bed. "I CAME to bring you some
flowers."*

And she laid the bouquet on the dirty sheet.

(Susan M. Coolidge: What Katy Did.)

- (6) *Good-morning, granny. Our stepmother HAS SENT us
to wait upon and serve you.*

(Andrew Lang: The Yellow Fairy Book)

The Present Perfect often has summarizing force, and as such is often used to introduce something to designate the whole of the subject in general. The details that follow are in the Past Tense, except when the present importance or validity of a past event has to be emphasized. Such an emphasis requires the use of the Present Perfect, provided that the time is not defined. Thus the Present Perfect provides a *framework* to a series of actions, while the individual actions referring to the *details* are in the Past Tense. We can find a similar statement in Quirk's University Grammar of English (Par. 3.31): "Through its ability to involve a span of time from earliest memory to the present, the perfective has an indefiniteness which makes it an appropriate verbal expression for introducing a topic of discourse. As the topic is narrowed down, the emerging definiteness is marked by the simple past as well as in the noun phrases.

For example:

He says that he *has seen* a meteor at some time
(between earliest memory and the present)

as compared with

He says that he *saw* the meteor last night that every-
one is so excited about

Compare also:

Did you know that John *has painted* a portrait of Mary?
Did you know that John *painted* this portrait of Mary?"

- Unquote.

Quirk's statement about the indefiniteness of the
Perfect ("perfective") and the definiteness of the Past
Tense ("simple past") supports the present author's view.
The definiteness or indefiniteness of the noun phrase, however,
does not depend on the definiteness or indefiniteness of the
time, for we can say: *We saw a horror film last night.*
In the case of the portrait, the choice of the tense (though
the time is undefined and indefinite because irrelevant)
depends on whether we focus our attention on the predicate or
on the subject, i.e. on where we put the emphasis.

Ex: *More than 1,000 Arabs and 56 British soldiers HAVE
BEEN KILLED in South Arabia in the past four years.
Many more WERE injured and maimed. Hundreds of Ar-
abs WERE detained and imprisoned without trial.
Some WERE horribly maltreated by British interro-
gators.*

(Morning Star, Sept. 13, 1967, p.2)

Logically all of the verbs in this passage could and should
stand in the Present Perfect because all of the actions oc-

current in the same period of *the past four years*. Yet the above-mentioned idiomatic framework-and-details arrangement is the cause why the introductory first sentence contains the Present Perfect, and all the following sentences the Past Tense. Also, the repetition of the Present Perfect Tenses instead of the short, nimble Past Tenses would be very clumsy. Let us not forget that *the past four years* denotes a period reaching the present. This is therefore a case where the strict logic governing the use of the tenses in English yields to stylistic requirements. Yet it would have been better to write this passage as one sentence, using only the Present Perfect Tense:

More than ... have been killed ... years, many more injured and maimed, hundreds of Arabs detained ... without trial, and some horribly maltreated ...

Let us analyze some more examples:

Iodinated hormones at high specific radioactivity HAVE BEEN USED (Indefinite Past) to study directly hormone-receptor interactions for several polypeptide hormones. These systems HAVE also BEEN APPLIED (Indefinite Past) successfully to the measurements of hormone concentrations in blood and to elucidation of early steps in hormone action.

To extend this approach to the study of oxytocin, we HAVE DEMONSTRATED (Result and present knowledge emphasized, time left undefined.) that the introduction of an I atom into a molecule as small and as highly structured as oxytocin does not abolish the

biological activity of the hormone in the toad bladder epithelium and in fat cells. We also DEMONSTRATED ... (Action considered as a detail or maybe a change of tense to relieve the monotony of Present Perfects in succession.)

(Endocrinology, Vol. 91, No. 5, 1972, p. 1187)

More recently the treatment of ringworm of the scalp with salicylanilide HAS BEEN investigated in Scotland by Kinnear and Rogers (1948). (Reference dates added in brackets are not part of the sentence; thus the time in the sentence is not definite, and a period between not long ago and now touches both the past and the present. This is the justification of the Present Perfect.) These workers USED an ointment containing salicylanilide 4.5%, cetrinide 1%, and carboway 1500 94.5%. (Details.)

(British Medical Journal, Sept. 17, 1949, p. 626)

The change to Past Tense after the first Present Perfect is far from obligatory, as illustrated by the following example:

Subsequent work with the Moloney virus HAS SHOWN that the onset of leukemia is greatly delayed in thymectomized mice. We HAVE also OBSERVED a curious granulomatous reaction in the thymus of mice infected with virus many weeks previously, and then irradiated or given some chemotherapeutic drug such as myleran or amethopterin, just when leukemia was beginning to develop.

(Texas Reports on Biology and Medicine, Vol. 19 No. 2, 1961, p. 224)

As stated in many grammar books, the verb of the adverbial clause of time must be in the Past Tense.

Questions beginning with *when* require the Past Tense if they refer to past time, because they ask for definition of the time, i.e. they are concerned with the past time or circumstance of the action. The only type of exception is the rhetorical question, as:

When HAVE I BEEN harsh, tell me?
(E. Brontë: *Wuthering Heights*)

Here the speaker evidently means "You cannot tell, i.e. define, the time or occasion, because I have never been harsh. This is therefore a case of indefiniteness, which - as we have already said - requires the Present Perfect.

We have seen that the speaker can use either tense if there is no adverb of definite past time or present time in the context. In this case he will use the Present Perfect when he is interested in the present result of the past action or happening, and the Past Tense when he is interested in something else than the present result of the action, for instance in the circumstances such as the time, place, or manner, or the subject of the action. Ex.:

"Who HAS TAUGHT you those fine words, bairn?" I inquired. The ourate?"
"Damn the ourate, and thee! Gie me that," he replied.
(E. Brontë: *Wuthering Heights*.)

The speaker cannot think of any definite time of the action of the verb *teach*. This is why he uses the Present Perfect.

But the text continues with:

"Tell us where you GOT your lessons, and you shall have it," said I.

Here the key word is *where*, which, referring to circumstance, requires the Past Tense. And here is an example where the subject is emphasized:

On another occasion I observed a group of girls playing together at making a garden in the sand of the path and brusquely throwing out any little boy who intruded. ("Boys aren't allowed in the garden. Only girls are allowed in, because we MADE it.")

(Childhood in Contemporary Cultures, edited by Margaret Mead and Martha Wolfenstein. The University of Chicago Press. P. 104.)

With indications of periods of time, which are partly past now, partly present (and/or future), both tenses are possible; in such a case the choice depends on several factors:

(a) when we are speaking of a past section of the period, the Past Tense is correct;

(b) when we are thinking of the present results or when we are speaking of a yet unfinished part of the period, the Present Perfect must be used. Adverbs like *today* belong in this category. This rule is well explained and illustrated in Millington-Ward's *The Use of Tenses*. For the sake of brevity we quote here only one interesting and very enlightening example. Millington-Ward says:

Quote: "If I say: *I had a very busy day at the office today*, I suggest that I am thinking of all the past things that made me busy at the office and my wife might ask what they were; but if I say: *I have had a very busy day at the office today*, I suggest that I am thinking of some result, in the present, of my having been so busy: perhaps I am feeling very tired - and my wife, if sufficiently sympathetic, might bring me a whisky and soda and my slippers before asking any questions."

- Unquote.

Adverbial questions beginning with *where*, *how*, etc. without a period of time require the Past Tense.

Who-questions depend for tense use on definiteness or indefiniteness of the time. To illustrate this, here is an example: Children playing with a ball accidentally break a window of a house. A man pops out and angrily asks: "*WHO BROKE the window?*" (Dandy.)

The time of the action is definite in the speaker's mind: "a moment ago". Consequently the Past Tense is used.

Another example is from Hornby: Somebody looking in the pantry may exclaim:

Who HAS EATEN all the cherries?

Here the time is indefinite. - Note that in the last three examples the result of the past action was present, which means that the presentness of the result is no sufficient criterion in itself: in such cases the definiteness or indefiniteness of the past time decides.

Interestingly, Close brings a similar example with the verb in the Past Tense and compares it with the same sentence whose verb is put in the Present Perfect. So let us quote Close now:

(a) *"Who broke the window?"*

(The speaker has registered the fact that now it is broken, but he is no longer interested in NOW. What he wants to know is how the accident happened *when* it happened.)

(b) *"Oh, who has broken the window?"*

(I don't want to know how it happened; the fact is that it is broken, and I'm asking who is responsible.)"

- Unquote.

It is difficult to see why Close says in example (a) "What he wants to know is *how* the accident happened *when* it happened," for the speaker does not ask either *how* or *when*, but *who*. This means, according to the present author, that the speaker is not interested either in the manner ("how") or in the time ("when"), but in the subject of the action. The speaker wants to find the culprit, i.e. the subject of the action.

In example (b), according to Close, the speaker is asking *who* is responsible, i.e. he is asking who the *subject* of the action was.

Thus in both (a) and (b) the speaker wants to find out the doer, i.e. the subject. What is the difference then? - Only that in (a) the time of the accident (or happening) is known to the speaker, and in (b) not, which supports our explanation based on definiteness or indefiniteness of the time of the action in the speaker's mind.

What-questions asking for the object also depend on definiteness or indefiniteness of the action and presentness or pastness of the situation.

The next example shows again the role of definiteness and indefiniteness, as well as the summarizing force of the Present Perfect:

Kagawa and Pappo initially FOUND (Historic fact, at some definite time not mentioned here.) only minor mineralocorticoid activity ... Birmingham et al. ... FOUND (Historic fact.) ... and Porter noted Some in vitro studies have shown (At different times not defined: summarizing.) De Nicola FOUND (Historic fact.) ... and Vecsei found (Historic fact.) Other workers HAVE FOUND (Summarizing. At different times. The time is indefinite.)

(Endocrinology, Vol. 91, No. 5, Nov. 1972, p.1170)

Historic facts, presented or regarded as such, are normally put in the Past Tense, as in the following example:

Lesions similar to this myocarditis HAVE BEEN REPORTED (Time undefined) in B₆ deficient Wistar rats (French, 1963), while Valora and Fidanza (1963 a) found (Historic fact) only minor histological changes in the Sprague Dawley strain.

(Cardiovascular Research, J. Brit. Med. Assoc. London, 1979, Vol. 13, No. 9, p. 506)

The summarizing force of the Perfect of Experience (for which see Millington-Ward's Use of Tenses) can be seen in:

Almost all the American children whom I HAVE SEEN in Paris were living in an American milieu and going to an American school; it is through them that I have received my impressions of the life-atmosphere of their age group in school and outside it.

(Childhood in Contemporary Cultures, p. 408.)

Similarly:

During World Wars I and II, studies correlating blood volume changes with the clinical signs of shock HAVE BEEN CARRIED OUT.

(The American Journal of the Medical Sciences, Vol. 215, p. 555; Lea and Febiger, Philadelphia 1948.)

Wrong. The Present Perfect should be corrected to Past Tense because the past time reference is definite, and the wars were finished long before the writing of the article text.

Also:

An analysis of the cases of carcinoma of the lung that HAVE COME to operation on the Chest Division of Bellevue Hospital between 1939 and February 1948 has, therefore, been made to help the physician evaluate this disease more correctly.

This series of 70 consecutive cases of carcinoma that HAVE BEEN EXPLORED surgically for removal composes 20% of all cases of carcinoma of the lung that were seen on the Chest Division during this time. ... The 70 cases that came to operation included all cases in which it was felt that a reasonable chance of success for resection of the carcinoma existed.

(Ib., p. 1)

In the above example *have come* should be changed to *came*, and *have been explored* to *were explored*.

The use of the second Present Perfect in the following example may be explained by analogical attraction of the first Present Perfect, which is used with summarizing force. The second refers to details, and therefore should be replaced by the Past Tense:

... the skulls are all those of different servants
I HAVE HAD who HAVE FAILED to do what I demanded.
(Andrew Lang: The Yellow Fairy Book)

It is highly instructive to observe the use of the two tenses in longer contexts. The sequence of the tenses is not always in agreement with the norms laid down in grammar books.
Ex.:

Variations in the effects of endotoxin on the circulation of different species WERE investigated by Kuida and co-workers^{28,29} (1958, 1961). They HAVE STUDIED the effect of *E. coli* endotoxin on ... (Pathophysiology of Endotoxin Shock by Fikri Alican etc. The Am. J. of the Medical Sciences, Vol. 244, No. 2, 1962, pp. 152, 157, 246)

Here *were investigated* is considered a historic fact; the Present Perfect *have studied* indicates that we stop here temporarily, as this problem has special interest for us at the present time. This is therefore the "framework Perfect". How the problem was investigated is a matter of details after this, and they are given in the Past Tense ("detail Past"):

The responses of these species WERE COMPARED with those previously observed in the dog. ... However, the early precipitous hypotention which characteristically occurs in the dog WAS OBSERVED only in the cat ... Pulmonary arterial pressure was also elevated in the monkey and rabbit ...

The following example shows normal sequence:

Barnett, from our laboratory, in a series of experiments on dogs, HAS SHOWN that peritoneal fluid which results from strangulation obstruction is toxic when injected into normal animals (a few ml.).
(Ib.)

Note has shown ... is. Normal sequence can be seen also in:

He SHOWED that when appropriate antibiotics WERE PLACED inside a loop of strangulated ileum, the resulting fluid was non-toxic.
(Ib.)

Note: showed ... was.

Deviation from normal sequence is seen in:

Davis and co-workers (1960) have noted that following intravenous injection of E. coli endotoxin in dogs, total serotonin levels in the serum FELL rapidly ...

(Ib.)

Note: have noted ... fell. The normal sequence of tenses would require either have noted ... fall or noted ... fell. Yet the type of deviation seen here is so frequent

that it seems to be accepted standard in scientific literature, and is no doubt due to the influence of the framework-and-details construction.

a/ *"Been playing golf?"*

"Yes." She flushed. "I suppose it seems rather heartless to you. But as a matter of fact it got me down rather, being here in this house. I felt I must go out and do something - tire myself - or I'd choke!" She spoke with intensity.

*Poirot said quickly: "I comprehend, Mademoiselle * It is most understandable - most natural. - To sit in this house and think - no, it would not be pleasant."*

"So long as you understand," said Jane shortly.

"You belong to a club?"

"Yes, I play at Wentworth."

"It HAS BEEN a pleasant day," said Poirot. "Alas, there are few leaves left on the trees now! A week ago the woods were magnificent."

"It WAS quite lovely today."

(Agatha Christie: Dead Man's Mirror.)

Poirot means 'the whole day up to now' when he says *"It has been a pleasant day."* Jane thinks only of the earlier, brighter part of the day when she was playing golf as she says: *"It was quite lovely today."* Also she thinks of the day as an attending circumstance (weather, not time) accompanying her games.

Defective verbs are used in the Past Tense in subordinate clauses instead of the Present Perfect:

b/ *The people I am staying with, Mr and Mrs Jackson and their son Peter, a young fellow of about my*

age, have been the essence of kindness. They have done everything they *COULD* to make my visit enjoyable.

(C. E. Eckersley: An Everyday English Course for Foreign Students.)

Different points of view explain the next example:

c/ On her way upstairs she met Aunt Izzie, with bonnet and shawl on. "Where *HAVE* you *BEEN*?" (up to now) she said. "I have been calling you for the last half-hour."

"I *DIDN'T* *HEAR* you, ma'am." (When you called me.)

"But where *WERE* you?" persisted Miss Izzie (when you couldn't hear me).

"In the library, reading," replied Katy.

(Susan M. Coolidge: What Katy Did.)

The most baffling examples are those borderline cases in which the choice of tenses depends on the point of view or whim of the speaker, or on stylistic considerations, such as the striving for variety, as in the following text:

d/ Hans took the knife, put it in his sleeve, and went home.

"Good-evening, mother."

"Good-evening, Hans. Where have you been?"

"To Grethel's."

"And what did you take to her?"

"I took nothing: she *HAS GIVEN* to me."

"And what *DID* she *GIVE* you?"

"A knife," said Hans.

"And where *HAVE* you *PUT* it?"

"In my sleeve."

"Then you have behaved foolishly again."

Hans goes out again to take a job and the same scene repeats itself when he comes home to his mother, but now the tenses are used differently:

Just as he reached home it (=the goat) was suffocated.

"Good-evening, mother."

"Good-evening, Hans. Where have you been?"

"To Grethel'."

"And what did you take to her?"

"I took nothing: she GAVE to me."

"And what did Grethel give you?"

"A goat."

"Where DID you (I) PUT it, Hans?"

"In my pocket."

"There you acted stupidly, Hans."

And the same kind of episode is repeated a third time in the tale, with a different distribution of the tenses again:

"Good-evening, mother."

"Good-evening, Hans. Where have you been?"

"To Grethel's."

"And what HAVE you GIVEN her?"

"Nothing: she has given me something."

"What HAS Grethel GIVEN (I) you?"

"A needle," said Hans.

"And where have you put it?"

"In the load of hay."

"Then you have behaved stupidly, Hans."

(Grimm's Fairy Tales, Library of Classics.)

Similar variation of the two tenses can be seen in the following example:

*The biosynthesis of ... has been studied intensively
by sucrose gradient centrifugation*

However, little attention has been paid to
The pathway for the intracellular transport of protein ... has been suggested mainly by radioautographic studies with the electron microscope. These studies HAVE SUGGESTED that nascent proteins ... are transferred to ... The vectorial discharge of newly-formed protein from attached ribosomes has been studied biochemically in the liver and pancreas. These studies SUGGESTED that the ... discharge of ... was directed toward ... The vectorial discharge mediated by puromycin has not been studied in thyroid microsomes. The present study was designed to document the transfer process ...

(Endocrinology, Vol. 91, Nov. 1972, No. 5, P. 1307)

or in this:

The formation of steroid sulfates in the adrenal cortex was shown by Wallace and Lieberman who found that ... Using cell free systems ... Migeon ... could show ... Lebeau and Baulieu DEMONSTRATED The existence of ... WAS INDICATED by the work of Calvin and Lieberman. They FOUND that ... Perez-Palacios et al. have reported that fetal adrenal homogenates can 17-hydroxylate pregnenolone sulfate... Injection of cholesterol-7 α -³H sulfate-³⁵S into the arterial supply of adrenal tumors in humans resulted in ... These results suggested that ... Similar experiments with normal subjects, however, resulted in ... Using mitochondrial preparations from bovine adrenal cortex Roberts et al. and Young and Hall HAVE FOUND that cholesterol sulfate is converted to pregnenolone sulfate.

(Endocrinology, Vol. 91, Oct. 1972, No. 4, p. 850)

It is easier to explain the tense usage in the following

example:

Rodney turned and saw Aline. "Barry HAS HAD an accident," he said. "Giles HAS GONE for a doctor. I TRIED to telephone Pargetter, but the exchange doesn't answer.

(Valentine Williams: Death Answers the Bell.)

Here the first two actions are not yet settled finally. Telephoning, however, is by now out of the question.

There are cases in which the time of the past action is not defined by words and the result of the action is still present. The time of the action may be definite in the speaker's mind, but it is not expressed. In such cases the nearness or recentness of the action decides for the Perfect, the remoteness of it for the Past Tense. Ex.:

*His finger pushed his sleeve clear of his wrist-watch.
"But it's nearly eleven o'clock. My old man will be
looking for me. I LEFT my hat in the hall."*

(Ib.)

In this example the time of leaving the hat in the hall is somewhat remote from the moment of speaking. Some time has passed between then and now. But if someone walked into the room now, the following conversation would be possible:

*"Hello, Fred. It's good you have come. But have
you no bag with you?"*

"Yes, I have. But I (HAVE) LEFT it in the hall."

In the sentence:

*Don't you want to see the Christmas cards that
CAME today?*

(Walt Disney's comics and stories, January, No.
208)

we have a case of remoteness: "earlier in the day", not just now.

With adverbs of partly past time such as *today, this morning*, etc. it is possible to use either the Present Perfect or the Past because part of today etc. is past, part of it present and future. In such cases usually the nearness or remoteness of the action or the consideration of present or future possibility decides. Examples:

*Criminal charges WERE ANNOUNCED today against the
West German manufacturers of thalidomide - the drug
blamed for the births of thousands of deformed ba-
bies in the early 1960s.*

(Morning Star, March 15, 1967, p. 5)

*Tens of thousands of slogan-chanting supporters of
Mao Tse-tung TOOK to the streets of Peking today.*

(Ib.)

*"I READ this week that Boris had flown to England
with the MI-10 helicopter," said Mr. Sofinsky, "so
I CAME DOWN from London to meet him."*

(Ib. p. 3)

When the completedness of an action has to be expressed without reference to any definite past time, the Present Perfect is correct, as in the sentence:

*That's a nice thing to do when your friend's BEEN
MURDERED only the day before.*

(Agatha Christie: Murder in the Mews.)

This is said in connection with a concrete case that is known to both the speaker and the hearer, which situation normally requires the Past Tense; but here the speaker generalizes the situation, i.e. he makes the time independent of the concrete case of murder. This is why he uses - correctly - the Present Perfect.

The sequence of tenses is not observed when a past action still has influence on the present state of things:

Almost as an aside, he ANNOUNCED that he HAS accepted an invitation to visit Moscow from February 21-24 next year.

(Daily Worker, Dec. 22, 1965, p. 1)

The invitation still stands, is still valid, the visit has not yet been carried out.

Just as negotiations were reaching a conclusion in the London bus dispute, Mr. Brown has jumped in and blown everything up again.

(Daily Worker, Feb. 26, 1966, p. 1)

The adverbial clause defines a past time here, so the Present Perfect tenses are wrong; they should be replaced by Past tenses. However, the present state of things as a result of Mr. Brown's actions is foremost in the speaker's (writer's) mind; this explains, though it does not justify, his choice of tense.

The Present Perfect is wrongly used in the next example also:

Whereas at the last two conferences this has been the central feature, this year the foreign policy and defence resolutions were ruthlessly pushed to the back of the queue.

(Daily Worker, Oct. 6, 1962, p. 1)

At the last two conferences is an adverbial phrase of definite past time; consequently Past Tense should be used with it. The Present Perfect would be all right if we made the time adverb indefinite by changing it to *at two conferences* with "so far" understood. Yet even with this indefinite adverb phrase (*at two conferences*) the speaker may not think of summarizing up to now ("so far"), but have two definite occasions and their circumstances in mind. In this latter case he may use the Past Tense correctly. Therefore the following versions are correct:

a/ *Whereas at the last two conferences this was*

b/ *Whereas at two conferences this has been*

c/ *Whereas at two conferences this was.*

More excusable is the following use:

"I can't make you such handsome presents, Joseph," continued his sister, "but while I was at school, I HAVE EMBROIDERED for you a very beautiful pair of braces."

(Thackeray: Vanity Fair.)

While I was at school is an adverbial clause of definite past time, so it requires the Past Tense also in the principal

clause. However, the speaker probably thinks of her time spent at school as a period lasting practically until now, finishing now. This is why she says *I have embroidered*. The adverbial clause of time, on the other hand, is, as a rule, in the Past Tense when the reference is to time before the present, i.e. past time.

Owing to analogy with constructions like *We have often seen him recently* (i.e. *recently* combined with the Present Perfect to denote the latest period of time till now) and *We haven't seen him since Christmas* or *Since then he has been with us* (i.e. *since* combined with the Present Perfect to denote a period lasting from a past point of time till now), *since* and *recently* are not infrequently combined with the Present Perfect even when they do not indicate a period reaching the present, but some past point of time, which should properly be expressed by the Past Tense. *Ago* also indicates a past point of time and should be used with the Past Tense, but as the speaker often thinks of the time elapsed since then till now, he may use - though incorrectly - the Present Perfect. The mistake is more excusable when the period is not only understood, but also expressed in words beside *ago*. This is illustrated by the following examples:

It's a long time since we'VE SEEN those men.

(Morning Star, Oct. 8, 1966, p. 5)

This should be corrected to: *It's a long time since (that occasion in the past when) we SAW those men.*

*I'm sure it's a month or more since the last time
I'VE SEEN him.*

(Crofts: The Groote Park Murder.)

This should be corrected to *since the last time I SAW
him*. Here are some more examples which belong in this
category:

He HAS RIDDEN forward an hour or more ago.
(Rider Haggard: Swallow)

*The author presents a series of researches which
HAVE BEEN INITIATED three years ago, and which
have been progressing since then in the field.*

(La Revue de Géographie de Montréal, Vol. XXIV -
No. 1 - 1970, p. 65)

*The extent of a "broad a" among the American dialects
is very restricted and, even then, quite inconsistent.
The struggle for its perpetuation HAS BEEN GIVEN UP
long ago, although it has not lost face in areas
where it was once original...*

(Carroll E. Reed: Dialects of American English.)

*Recently when I'VE SEEN him he seemed to have a
haunted look ...*

(The Sunday Times Magazine, Nov. 6, 1966, p. 29)

The adverbial clause of time indicates definite past
time; consequently its verb should be in the Past Tense.

Because of its summarizing force, the Present Perfect
is sometimes used in spite of the fact that the time indicated
is entirely in the past:

From 1954 up to 1965, approximately sixty apartment buildings, totaling some 1 500 dwelling units, HAVE BEEN COMPLETED.

(La Revue de Géographie de Montréal, Vol XXIV - No. 1 - 1970, p. 55)

Note that this was written in 1970 or 1969, but certainly later than 1965. This is clear from the whole of the article, therefore the Past Tense should have been used: *were completed.*

The same type of mistake is illustrated by the next example:

In the 20 years preceding September, 1945, there HAVE BEEN OBSERVED at the Mayo Clinic 38 patients who presented the syndrome of spontaneous hypoglycemia...

(Surgery, Gynecology and Obstetrics, Vol. 85, 1947, p. 495)

In the following example we can see a strange mixture of tenses and wrong use of the Present Perfect. The text is about a rescue operation in a cave. It is important to note that the report was not given immediately after the rescue.

We had to drag her through narrow passage-ways, and sometimes we had to hold her vertically to negotiate corners. At times she HAS BEEN almost completely SUBMERGED in water, but she HAS never COMPLAINED. She HAS BEEN JOKING with us - and even telling us to pull faster.

(Daily Worker, Nov. 15, 1965, p. 2)

All the Present Perfect tenses in the last example should be replaced by Past tenses.

On the other hand, sometimes a period reaching the present is indicated, but the verb is put in the Past Tense. The following text follows the reappearance of somebody thought dead:

Till now they WERE resigned. Now they will suffer.
(Agatha Christie: Ordeal by Innocence.)

correct this to: *have been*.

Now let us examine what influence adjectives and adverbs have on the use of the two tenses.

The use of the Present Perfect is correct in:

*In Mozambique long range rockets HAVE BEEN USED
against army positions in the last month.*
(The Guardian Weekly, June 9, 1973, p. 7)

This is correct.

In the last month is the last period of four weeks reaching the present. The phrase *last month* would denote the preceding calendar month which may have ended several days ago, i.e. not now, but in the past, and therefore would require the Past Tense.

Millington-Ward in *The Use of Tenses* writes: "*Recently, lately, etc.*, having a suggestion of proximity to the present, are not regarded as adverbs of completely past time and are therefore permitted with this use of the Present Perfect.

On the other hand, because they are (at least partly) past in meaning, they are also used with the Past Ordinary."

Recently can mean either (1) lately (in the period up to now), or (2) not long ago (in the past). Quite logically the first meaning requires the Present Perfect, the second the Past Tense. Here are examples with *recently*:

Recently, two similar substrates ... HAVE BEEN USED to determine amylase activity.

(Clinical Chemistry, Vol. 16, No. 1, 1970, p. 32)

Here the Present Perfect with *recently* may refer to a period: the last section of time up to now, i.e. reaching the present. The next example is different:

Exton et al. recently STUDIED ...

(Endocrinology, Vol. 91, No. 3, Sept. 1972, p. 687)

Here the meaning of *recently* is "at a certain point of time not long ago".

The last two examples follow the above-mentioned logical rule based on the two meanings of *recently*. This adverb, however, is not very definite in its reference; it is rather vague to the hearer or reader, but if the time referred to is definite and prominent in the speaker's mind, he will use the Past Tense, together with the second meaning of *recently*, and the Present Perfect if he feels that the time he is referring to is somewhat vague, or else if he wants to refer to the time only vaguely. Also, facts with merely historic interest or

mentioned as details, with no emphasis on importance, are expressed by the Past Tense, while emphasized importance for the present conditions requires the Present Perfect. Ex.:

A study of ... HAS BEEN REPORTED recently.
(Ib., p. 675)

Recently, we STUDIED a chronic alcoholic patient, who ...

(The J. of Clinical Investigation Apr. 1963, Vol. 42)

We recently REPORTED an example of the latter.
(Cellular Immunology, Vol. 45, No. 1, June 1979, p. 188)

We recently OBSERVED that ... (Ib.)
Recently, we HAVE SHOWN that ... (Ib., p. 199)

Although *until recently* is not *until now*, not *until the present*, it is found with both tenses. This is probably due to the dual tense usage with *recently*, as explained above. Ex.:

Until quite recently good design in lamps and lampshades MEANT astronomical prices.
(Morning Star, Aug. 6, 1969 or Aug. 23, 1967)

Until recently, we Finns WERE so busy producing the bare necessities that we could not afford to spend time on grace and artistry. Now we have the time, and we are not fettered by the past.

(National Geographic, May, 1968, Vol. 133, No. 5, p. 595)

Until recently most of this air travel HAS BEEN arranged through contracts with private air charter companies.

(Morning Star, March 15, 1967, p. 5.)

Until recently the prevailing view HAS BEEN that the initial change is a depression of bone marrow function ...

(Cecil and Loeb: A Textbook of Medicine, p. 1228)

Similarly, until this hour, referring to the present, occurs in Haggard's novel Swallow: combined with the Past Tense:

... but you have not seen us talking together, for until this hour we never MET.

(R. Haggard: Swallow)

This can only be explained, or excused, by the emphatic use of the adverb never, mentioned earlier in this paper.

It is of interest to quote an example using the adverb previously:

Portions of the results HAVE previously BEEN REPORTED in an abstract.

(Endocrinology, Vol. 91, 1972, No. 4, p. 891)

Evidence HAS BEEN PRESENTED previously that...

In the preceding paper, the authors HAVE DESCRIBED that there was a parallelism in the action of arginine and histidine.

(Endocrinology, Vol. 91, No. 3, 1972, p. 694)

Adjectives denoting nearness or remoteness in time or

space, such as *this*, *that*, *present*, *recent*, *previous*, *preceding*, do not exclude the use of either tense. Examples:

In this paper, we HAVE USED animals pretreated with...
(Cellular Immunology, Vol. 45, No. 1, 1979, p. 185)

In this study, we HAVE EXAMINED 22 different mouse strains for...
(Ib., p. 190)

In the present in vivo study we EXAMINED the ability of...
(Ib., p. 175)

The object of the present work WAS to investigate the effect of...
(Ib., p. 168)

In the present paper, we INVESTIGATED...
(Ib., p. 61)

In the present studies, we HAVE UTILIZED...
(Ib., p. 109)

In the present studies, we HAVE INVESTIGATED the role of...
(Ib., p. 117)

In a previous work we HAVE DEMONSTRATED that...
In the present work, we HAVE STUDIED the testicular effect of...
(Endocrinology, Vol. 91, 1972, No. 5, p. 1321)

In a previous paper, we DEMONSTRATED that...
(Cellular Immunology, Vol. 45, No. 1, 1979, p. 61)

*Recent studies ... HAVE SUGGESTED ... that ...
We HAVE ATTEMPTED to extend these studies by exploring...
(Ib., p. 143)*

*A previous report from our laboratory HAS DESCRIBED...
(Endocrinology, Vol. 91, No. 4, 1972, p. 1071)*

*Previous studies HAVE SUGGESTED that...
(Ib., p. 1067)*

In this last example we see (a) importance for the present, (b) summarizing, and (c) indefinite time. All these factors require the Present Perfect.

*In the present experiment we HAVE EXAMINED the sensitivity of... In addition, we HAVE ASSAYED serum FSH and LH.
The results demonstrated that diabetic animals had sufficient levels of circulating gonadotropins...
(Endocrinology, Vol. 91, No. 5, Nov. 1972, p. 1172)*

In the above example the Present Perfect Tenses have examined, have assayed have summarizing force, and as such, they constitute the "framework", whereas demonstrated and had refer to details.

The summarizing Present Perfect, often identical with the framework Perfect, can be seen in the following examples:

*Kagawa and Pappo initially found only minor alocorticoid activity ... Birmingham et al. ... found ... and Porter noted ... Some in vitro studies HAVE SHOWN ... De Nicola found ... and Vecsei found ... Other workers HAVE FOUND ... Brownie and Skelton noted reduced conversion to corticosterone...
(Ib., p. 1170)*

A normal ... response ... was observed by Shipley and Danelly ... However, other workers HAVE REPORTED that ovarian responses to gonadotropins were distinctly reduced in diabetic rats when compared to normal controls. In the present experiment we have examined the sensitivity of ... In addition, we have assayed serum FSH and LH. The results demonstrated that diabetic animals had sufficient levels of circulating gonadotropins ...

(Ib., p. 1172)

An important fact to note is, that though the action of the verbs in the main clause and the subordinate clause takes place in the same period of time, the verb of the main clause is put in the Present Perfect to denote a period reaching the present, but the verb of the subordinate clause is put in the Past Tense. E.g.:

I've always regarded bunk beds as a boon to most households for a number of reasons. ... Up to now, one of the drawbacks HAS BEEN that most of them WERE a bit on the short side, based on an average child's length, as well as being a bit narrower than the standard single 2 ft 6 in width.

(Morning Star, Jan. 20, 1968)

The people I am staying with, Mr and Mrs Jackson and their son, a young fellow of about my own age, have been the essence of kindness. They have done everything they could to make my visit enjoyable.

(C.E. Eckersley: An Everyday English Course for Foreign Students.)

Although a period connected with the present time or sit-

uation is normally expressed with the Present Perfect, the use of the Present Tense is also found. E.g.:

Since then it turns out that the Italian gent in question has actually lived in England for 15 years ...

(Morning Star, Aug. 26, 1967, p. 3)

I feel since then that I am in the know.

(Agatha Christie: Dead Man's Mirror)

- *What brings you to the clinic today?*

- *I'm just feeling real tired lately.*

(Special English, Medicine)

- *How is the patient doing?*

- *He's responding well to therapy since yesterday.*

(Ib., Book 2, p. 36)

- *Have you noticed that your vision is any worse lately?*

(Ib., Book 3, p. 3)

The explanation of this use of the Present is that the speaker emphasizes presentness of the situation, rather than the exact length of the period implied. Of course, in the latter case the Present Perfect would be used. Thus this is a question of the speaker's intention or feeling.

The Present Tense is idiomatic and normal with the phrase *it is ... (name of period) ... since*, though logically the Present Perfect ought to be applied. Ex.:

It IS nearly two months since J.Y. joined the

roll of Americans who have been murdered because...

(Morning Star, Oct. 26, 1967, p. 5)

It is evident that this means that *It has been two months since ...*, because *two months have passed since...*

The Present instead of the Present Perfect is used also in rhetorical questions. E.g.:

"Since when ... DO you ALLOW your reporters to say, ... Since when IS "that" rather than "who" permissible in referring to persons?"

(Theodore M. Bernstein: *Miss Thistlebottom's Hobgoblins*, Farrar, Straus and Giroux, New York.)

In spite of the real sequence of events, the earlier event, if the speaker wants to refer to the present situation or present importance of the event, is expressed in the Present Perfect (instead of the Past Perfect). Deviation from the rules of the sequence of tenses is common when reference is made to present situation or importance. In such a case the tense of the verb in the object clause is made independent of the tense of the main clause:

Hello, Dr. Black. I'm sure the nurse TOLD you what HAS HAPPENED.

(Special English, Medicine, Book 2, p. 53)

But it was not long before he discovered that the area of music information - its documentation, classification and cataloguing - HAS BEEN sadly NEGLECTED. He sees it as a problem that needs working on. And so he is working on it...

(Current Contents, Clinical Practice, Nov. 10.,

1975, Vol. 3, No. 45, p. 5) published by ISI
(Institute for Scientific Information, 325
Chestnut St., Philadelphia, Penn. 19106)

It is true that up to the time of the discovery of the neglect, music information had been neglected, - but that would mean that the neglect finished there - which is not true. The problem of neglect is not yet solved, as it is still "*a problem that needs working on.*" The continuation of the problem from the past into the present can be expressed only by the Present Perfect. This is thus an easily justifiable case. On the other hand, there is nothing to justify the use of the Present Perfect in the following example:

*Who was it who buried the Oak Island treasure?
What was the treasure? What signs or evidence
HAD LED him to dig where no one HAS ever DUG
before?*

(Esquire, 1973, p. 85)

This should be properly: *What ... led him ... had ever dug before.*

S U M M A R Y

The aim of the present paper is to point out some deficiencies in the explanations of grammar books, to throw more light upon the evident and the hidden criteria determining the use of the tenses in question, and to analyze and psychologically explain deviant uses, in which connection the suspicion may arise that the established rules are beginning to break down - unless these uses are occasional lapses. It is

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remarkable, however, that they occur *not only in US and Canadian, but also British English.*

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