

ON THE ENGLISH PERFECT TENSE AND CURRENT RELEVANCE IMPLICATURES

JOHN R. CANAVAN

University of Dortmund

BACKGROUND

In numerous descriptions¹ the English Perfect Tense is considered to denote a past situation² which has *current relevance*. What this term means is that the *results* or *effects* of a situation still hold at the moment of speaking, the present time. Thus, by uttering 1) or 2)

- 1) I have broken my arm
- 2) The taxi has arrived

I also imply that the effects of *breaking my arm* or *the taxi's arrival* still hold. According to such treatments of current relevance, it is the Perfect which triggers the implications in 3) and 4)

- 3) My arm is (still) broken
- 4) The taxi is now here (and waiting)

That implicatures obtain for many types of statement and that their messages can occasionally be fairly reliably predicted is not to be questioned. To do so would be to rob English – and other languages as well – of a device which makes it unnecessary to spell out every single bit of information which one chooses to communicate. Rather, as I have pointed out elsewhere (Canavan 1983:38–41) the problem lies in rooting the trigger for implications of current relevance in the choice of a tense, in particular for English, the Present Perfect. In this paper I hope to show that implicatures of current relevance depend on the notion of a *temporal gap*, a notion associated only partially and unequally with the Present Perfect Simple and Present Perfect Continuous. I shall claim that the entailment of a temporal gap notion – not morphological entities – is a condition for current relevance implicature.

¹ Sweet (1892, 1898:98); Twaddell (1968:8); Leech (1971:30–35); Comrie (1976:56–58; 1985:*et passim*.)

² Following recent practice I use the term *situation* to cover *event*, *act*, *activity*, etc.

Where no temporal gap notion obtains, implicatures of current relevance will be invited. Conversely, where such a notion obtains, implicatures of current relevance will be blocked. Finally, where the entailment of a gap notion is overridden by appropriate adverbials, implications of current relevance may also obtain for Imperfect as well as Perfect assertions. Supplementary to my earlier arguments (*loc. cit.*) I shall claim that predictable messages involving specific *effects* or *results* trace to the lexical verb. This will all be based on an outline of the basic meanings of inflections and compatible sets of adverbials.

MEANING OR IMPLICATURE

In *Tense* (1987:23) Bernard Comrie characterizes the recognition of the difference between the *meaning* of a linguistic term and implicatures which can be established "in a particular context" as "One of the major advances in recent semantic theory". He cites Grice (1975) and Lyons (1977:592-96), in particular the Gricean principles of conversational implicature. Following Grice he then illustrates this "major advance" with 5)

5) It's cold in here

where the (conversational) implicature is the speaker's desire to have the window closed. In other words 5) only implies, but does not state, the speaker's true communicative intent. Again following Grice, Comrie notes that implicatures can be cancelled, as in 6),

6) It's cold in here, but *please don't close the window*. I enjoy the cold.

but that meanings cannot be cancelled, as we see in the contradiction in 7).

7) It's cold in here, but please don't close the window, *it's hot in here*.

Armed with this distinction, Comrie then contrasts the Perfect and the Simple Past as follows: The Perfect carries an "element of meaning" (1985:25) called current relevance, while the Simple Past does not. Interestingly enough, Comrie also points out that 8)

8) John used to live in London

provokes the implication that "John no longer lives in London", though this can be cancelled by 9) or 10).

9) ... and he still does

10) ... and, as far as I am aware, he still does

What is interesting – within Comrie's approach, that is – is that he uses an Imperfect inflection to illustrate an implicature which is very similar to current relevance implicatures, for it involves the *results* or *effects* of a past situation. Taken together, Comrie's examples provoke the suspicion that current relevance is not an "element of meaning" of the Perfect but an implicature which obtains independently of particular inflections.

TESTS

For the moment let us set up the following hypothesis: If current relevance is an element of the meaning of the Perfect tense, it should hold for any assertion in this inflection.³ That is, for all assertive uses of the Perfect (Simple) there should be a corresponding present-tensed sentence which expresses the currently relevant message.

To avoid the risk of over-generalization from too small a corpus I shall test this hypothesis on the basis of the verb taxonomy in Quirk *et al.* (1985:201). This taxonomy (which is serviceable but not without its problems) is outlined here.

A. STATIVE

1. Quality

be tall, have two legs, be a mammal

2. State

be angry, be ill, love (t), resemble (t), think (that), own (t)

B. STANCE⁴

live, stand, lie, sit

C. DYNAMIC

1. Durative

a. Nonconclusive and durative

i. Nonagentive: GOINGS-ON.

rain, snow, boil, shine, glow

ii. Agentive: Activities

drink, sew, write, hunt, play (t), talk

b. Conclusive and durative

i. Nonagentive: PROCESSES

ripen, grow up, improve, separate, turn red

ii. Agentive: ACCOMPLISHMENTS

write (t), eat (t), drink (t), fill up (t), discover (t)

2. Punctual

a. Nonconclusive and punctual

i. Nonagentive: MOMENTARY EVENTS

sneeze, explode, blink, flash, bounce

ii. Agentive: MOMENTARY ACTS

tap (t), nod (t), fire (a gun), kick (t)

b. Conclusive and punctual

i. Nonagentive: TRANSITIONAL EVENTS

drop, receive (t), catch (t), take off, arrive, die

ii. Agentive: TRANSITIONAL ACTS

sit down, catch (a ball), shoot (t), begin (t), stop (t)

³ By analogy, "Pastness" is indisputably an element of the meaning of the Perfect and holds for assertions in Perfect inflections.

⁴ "Intermediary between the stative and dynamic categories" (Quirk *et al.* 1985:205).

Although Quirk *et al.* (1985:200) claim that verb meanings (more specifically their classifications, which they undertake here on a semantic basis) cannot always be established "*in vacuo*", most of the verbs make at least some sense within the minimal frame below. The point, of course, is to test potential implications, not the taxonomy.

The current relevance notion rests on the assumption of *effects* or *results*. It is therefore reasonable to assume that any implication deriving from a Perfect (Simple) assertion will have a close semantic relation to the Lexical Verb. Accordingly, the first significant test involves the minimal frame "He/It has VERBed" and an equally minimal explication of the possible effects or results which the verb provokes. (The references follow the outline of the Quirk taxonomy.)

	<i>It/He has...</i>	<i>RESULTS/EFFECTS</i>
A.1.	BEEN tall	situation past
	BEEN ill	situation past
	LOVED (Maggie)	situation past
	RESEMBLED (Rambo)	situation past
	THOUGHT (that...)	situation past
	OWNED (a fortune)	situation past
B.	LIVED (in Georgia)	situation past
	STOOD (in bed)	situation past
	LAIN (in bed)	situation past
	SAT (in the den)	situation past
C.1.a.i.	RAINED	wetness now
	SNOWED	snow now
	BOILED	heat past
	SHONE	brightness past
	GLOWED	brightness past
C.1.a.ii.	DRUNK	situation past
	SEWN	situation past
	WRITTEN	situation past
	HUNTED	situation past
	PLAYED (the piano)	situation past
	TALKED	situation past
C.1.b.i.	RIPENED	present degree of ripeness
	GROWN UP	present degree of maturity
	IMPROVED	present degree of improvement
	SEPARATED	present state of separation
	TURNED (red)	present state of (redness)
C.1.b.ii.	WRITTEN (s.th.)	script extant
	EATEN (his peas)	situation past/peas gone
	DRUNK (maté)	situation past/experience
	FILLED UP (his belly)	present fullness
	DISCOVERED (s.th.)	present state of knowledge

C.2.a.i.	SNEEZED	situation past
	EXPLODED	situation past/present state of destruction
	BLINKED	situation past
	FLASHED	situation past
	BOUNCED	situation past
C.2.a.ii.	TAPPED (a keg)	situation past/(keg) now open
	NODDED (his head)	situation past/present assent (in context)
	FIRED (a gun)	situation past
	KICKED (the dog)	situation past
C.2.b.i.	DROPPED	transition past
	RECEIVED (junk mail)	reception past
	CAUGHT (?the bus)	accomplishment past
	TAKEN OFF	departure past (now gone)
	ARRIVED	transition past (now here)
	DIED	transition past (now dead)
C.2.b.ii.	SAT DOWN	transition past (now sitting)
	CAUGHT (a ball)	situation past (accomplishment)
	SHOT (a duck)	dead duck
	BEGUN (a fight)	war again!
	STOPPED (a fight)	peace at last!

The most significant results of the test are that implicatures do not hold for all verbs, hence not uniformly for the Perfect Simple. There seem to be no reasonable, lexically motivated effects or results adducible for the State and the Stance classes of verbs. Here the only related message that makes sense is that the situation belongs to the past. This, of course, is merely the explication of the basic temporal message of the Perfect inflection, not the formulation of an implicature. With the other classes we either have the same nondescript "situation past" message or we have an implication involving a new, related state. In each case the implication is not inflection-rooted but derives directly from the semantics of the lexical verb.

Obviously the test above is highly artificial, for many of the verbs listed rarely if ever occur *in vacuo*. However, varying the context in which the verbs occur yields varying implications. One example is shown in 11):

- 11a) I have lived here
 → ?I still live here
- 11b) I have lived here *before*
 → ?I still live here
 → ?I am living here for a second time
- 11c) I have *never* lived here
 → I do not live here now
- 11d) I have *never* lived here *before*
 → I live here now

If a basic "element of meaning" in the inflection triggered the specific implication, such variations should not be possible. The fact that variations *are* possible suggests

that differing implications may also be dependent on factors which lie outside of the inflection.

Since the Perfect can be inflected for Continuous forms the test must be repeated for the frame "He has been VERBing" or "It has been VERBing" and the test "The results/effects are ...". To the extent that they take a Continuous inflection, all of the verbs in the outline admit implications for continuance or not into the present. From the point of view of *results* or *effects* of the particular situation we must again focus on the semantics of the Lexical Verb and test within as minimal a frame as possible. Some examples:

	<i>It/He has been...</i>	<i>RESULTS/EFFECTS</i>
B.	LIVing (in sin): STANDing (in the rain): SITTING (on the pot)	Sinfulness (up to now) Exposure (up to now) Indisposition (up to now)
C.1.a.i.	RAINing: SHINing:	Wetness (up to now) Situation (up to now)
C.1.a.ii.	DRINKing: TALKing:	Diminished thirst (up to now) Situation (up to now)
C.1.b.i.	RIPENing: IMPROVing:	Degree of ripeness (up to now) Transition (up to now)
C.1.b.ii.	WRITing (s.th.): DISCOVERing (s.th.):	Script (partially) extant now Transition, knowlegde (up to now)
C.2.a.i.	SNEEZing: BLINKing:	Iterative situation (up to now) Iterative situation (up to now)
C.2.a.ii.	FIRing a gun: KICKing it:	Iterative situation (up to now) Iterative situation (up to now)
C.2.b.i.	DROPPing: TAKing OFF:	Motion downward (up to now) Preparation for transition
C.2.b.ii.	SITTING DOWN: BEGINNING s.th.:	Preparation for transition Preparation for transition

All of the effects or results involve situations which are predictable from the Lexical Verb. The Durative verbs (C.1) denote continuation of the situation *up to now*; the nonconclusive punctual verbs (C.2.a.) denote situation iterativity *up to now*; and the conclusive punctual verbs (C.2.b.) denote preparation *up to now* of the situation which is to be concluded. In all cases the notions of incompleteness and pastness trace to the Continuous inflection but the implications of specific *results* or *effects* of the predication trace to the lexical verb.

The final test bases on Comrie's sentence 8), where the implications are claimed to be "...but he no longer lives there" or "...and he still does". This departs from the notion of *effects* or *results* to one of *continued activity*. Although this is not the usual claim of current relevance adherents, each verb can be tested within the frames "He/It has VERBed" and "He/It has been VERBing" to see if either or both of the implications "He/It is *still* VERBing" or "He/It is *no longer* VERBing" obtains. I shall not list the results here, but where the test assertion makes sense, all of the

verbs are ambivalent between the "still" and "no longer" implications. I take this to mean that any notion of continued activity which may obtain in a particular context is an implicature, not a meaning, for the test proves that they are cancellable.

Let us now look at some of the sentences used by current relevance advocates to prove their point.

- 12) John has broken his leg
→ *His leg is still broken* (Comrie 1985:24)
- 13) The taxi has arrived
→ *it's now here* (Leech/Svartvik 1975:66)
- 14) Her doll has been broken
→ *it's still not mended* (*loc. cit.*)
- 15) He has been given a camera
→ *he now has the camera* (Leech 1971:34)
- 16) I've recovered from my illness
→ *I'm now well again* (*loc. cit.*)
- 17) His sister *has been* an invalid all her life
→ *she is still alive* (Quirk *et al.* 1972:91)
- 18a) Peter *has injured* his ankle and it's still bad (*loc. cit.*)
- 18b) *Peter *has injured* his ankle but it's now better (*loc. cit.*)

Sentence 17) has nothing to do with current relevance in the sense of *effects* or *results*. Rather the putative implicature simply explicates the frequently observed (but infrequently explained) rule that the subject of a Perfect inflection must be alive. And it is at least questionable that 18b) is anomalous, as Quirk *et al.* claim, for "it is better now" could be interpreted as a cancellation of "and it's still bad" in 18a), which, presumably, expresses the implicature derived from the resultative verb *injure* in "Peter has *injured* his ankle".⁵ As for sentences 12)–16), each involves a resultative or conclusive verb, and each verb entails some *effects*: *to BREAK* → *be broken*; *ARRIVE* (*somewhere*) → *be there*; *to be GIVEN* something → *to have it*; *to RECOVER* → *be healthy*. Here it is not the tense but the lexical verb which triggers the specific implicature.

Since, as Grice points out, meanings cannot be cancelled, we would expect that inflection-based notions of *effects* or *results* could not be cancelled. Yet cancellation is the case with frequency modification as in sentences 20)–24):

- 20) John has broken his leg several times
→X *His leg is still broken*
- 21) The taxi has often arrived late
→X *it's now here*
- 22) Her doll has been broken several times
→X *it's still not mended*

⁵ In a private discussion Dr. Laurence Kane suggested that "... it's now better" may also be read as a correction of a performance infelicity, where the speaker realizes that he intended to say, "Peter injured his ankle...". In any event 18b) is inconclusive enough to warrant no further discussion.

- 23) He has been given several cameras
 →X He still has the cameras
 24) I've recovered from my illness several times
 →X I'm now well again

Apparently the implicatures which obtain lexically can be somehow "blocked" by modification of the verbal message.

Another problem: current relevance is generally considered to be a meaning of the *Perfect*, in either one or both of its inflections. Yet, whether meaning or implicature, currently relevant notions are by no means exclusively triggered by the *Perfect*, as the Imperfect (25–29) versions of 20)–24) illustrate.

- 25) John just broke his leg
 → *His leg is still broken*
 26) The taxi just arrived
 → *it's now here*
 27) Her doll broke a moment ago
 →? *it's still not mended*
 28) He was given a camera yesterday
 →? *he now has the camera*
 29) I recently recovered from my illness
 →? *I'm now well again*

(Later I shall claim that the notion of recent pastness, which is signalled by such items as *just*, *recently*, *of late*, *lately*, satisfies the condition which triggers implications of current relevance, perhaps providing semantic support for Grice's Relation maxim.)

Thus, taking both *Perfect* inflections into account, the conclusion is that the current relevance notion associated with the *Perfect* tense forms involves implicatures, not meanings.⁶ One question remains: If current relevance is not a meaning of the *Perfect*, but an inflection-triggered *implicature*, do such implications of results or effects *necessarily* obtain for the *Perfect*? That is, are there *Perfect* sentences where no implications can be naturally derived? Sentences 30)–33) seem to be reasonable examples.

- 30) I have seen the Statue of Liberty
 31) John has met several presidents
 32) George Bush has shaken hands with Gorby
 33) Have you (ever) been to Florence (Quirk *et al.* 1985:192)

The only implication which can be reasonably constructed for 30)–33) is roughly "The subject is now in possession of this experience". Yet this is so general as to be insignificant and can also hold for a sentence involving past experience which is inflected for the Imperfect, as we see in 34)–37).

⁶ Interestingly enough, Quirk *et al.* (1985:189–90) speak of Current Relevance as a "common implication of the present perfective", not as a meaning.

- 34) I saw the Statue of Liberty in 1965
 → I am now in possession of this experience
 35) John met several presidents at the conference
 → John is now in possession of this experience
 36) George Bush shook hands with Gorby behind closed doors
 → George is now in possession of this experience
 37) Were you (staying) in Florence during the flood?
 → Are you now in possession of this experience?

And for these Imperfect sentences the implicatures may be both explicated and cancelled, as we see in 38):

- 38) I saw the Statue of Liberty in 1965...
 ... and I still remember it well
 ... I'm still a-tingle with the experience
 ... but I was only two and don't remember a thing about it.

This seems to be sufficient evidence to prove that current relevance implicature is not an inflection-based phenomenon. The problems are thus: a) What are the basic meanings of the *Perfect* and Imperfect inflections; and b) Is there grammatical or semantic support for current relevance implicature, so that we can predict its occurrence in discourse independently of tense triggers?

CURRENT RELEVANCE: PRAGMATIC AND LEXICAL TRIGGERS

There have evolved two types of non-tense triggers of current relevance implicature: pragmatic (or conversational) and lexical. Both are independent of tense morphology. Thus, under proper discourse conditions, 39)

- 39) The taxi has arrived
 40) The taxi is here

can invite the implication that "The taxi is now here". And both 39) and 40) can imply "It is now time to leave" [whereby 40) again illustrates that implicatures are not confined to Present Perfect inflections]. Pragmatically triggered implicatures are of only marginal concern, for they are largely dependent on non-tense factors. Presumably, though, there is a lexical base even to certain kinds of pragmatic implications, one which holds across languages. For if anyone says in any language that he has broken his arm, it will be presumed that the arm is still broken: 41)–42).

- 41) Ich habe meinen Arm gebrochen
 → *Er ist gebrochen*
 42) Jag har brutit armen
 → *Armen är bruten*

And snow anywhere is likely to remain on the ground for a while: 43)–44).

- 43) Es hat (gerade) geschneit
 → *Es liegt jetzt Schnee auf dem Feld*

- 44) Det har (just) snöat
→ *Det liger snö på marken*

Lexical triggers can be at least partially systematized. Any conclusive (resultative) verb will provoke an implication involving its results. Thus 45) and 46) involve the interpretation of *set on fire* as *cause to burn*, so that the implication *be burning* obtains for Present Perfect, Past and even Past Perfect inflections.

- 45) John has (just) set the house on fire
→ *The house is burning*
46) John just set the house on fire
→ *The house is burning*
47) We suddenly realized that John had (just) set the house on fire
→ *The house was burning* (at the time of our realization)

Where Stance verbs involve an implication of continued results, this is certainly due less to Perfect inflections than to conversational conventions and such deictic elements as *here, now*, etc.

- 48) I've lived here for a long time
→ *I still live here*

This is a classic example of Grice's relevance maxim, for why would anyone mention a state of affairs if it were apropos of nothing in the conversation? Note, however, that implications need not necessarily hold for either type, as in 49) and 50).

- 49) I've lived in Michigan, Georgia and Germany
→X *I still live there*
→X *I still live in Germany*
50) John has set the house on fire three times
→X *The house is (still) burning*

THE TENSES AND UP-TO-NOWNESS

The definitional base of the subsequent discussion is as follows.⁷ The Perfect Simple denotes situation pastness, pure and simple. Leech (1971:32) reduces the "meaning of the Present Perfect ... [to] 'at-least-once-before-now'". This adequately describes the basic temporal message of the Perfect Simple, the key notion being "before now", a deictically motivated definition of pastness. The Perfect Continuous predicates a somewhat more complex view of a past situation as: a) a *process* which occurred b) *before NOW* and which was c) *concurrent* with the time before NOW, i.e., "up to NOW".

The Imperfect Simple denotes a situation which occurred a) *before NOW* and b) *at a discrete time*. The Imperfect Continuous denotes a situation as a) a *process* which occurred b) *before NOW* and did so c) *at a discrete time*. Both inflections thus signal notions of a particular location in past time.

⁷ Detailed accounts of each tense (form) and of adverbial adjunction are contained in Canavan (1983).

The contrastive relationships among these inflections are: The Perfect inflections involve unspecified Perfect Simple or NOW-Tangential (Perfect Continuous) past time. The past notion with the Perfect inflections is, as it were, indeterminate, though its extension backward in time can be specifically limited by such adverbials as "since X" or "for X amount of time". The common denominator in either Perfect tense is *before NOW*. They contrast, however, in the notion of *up-to-nowness*, which I call Tangency to the primary axis of temporal orientation NOW (Canavan:1983). There is nothing in Perfect Simple inflections which necessarily marks the situation as concurrent with the time "before now". The Perfect Continuous, however, specifically marks a situation as concurrent with the time before NOW, i.e. as NOW-Tangential. Wherever a notion of NOW-Tangency obtains for a Perfect Simple, it is traceable to the lexical verb, adverbials of duration, or to pragmatic factors.

Both Imperfect inflections involve a discrete (specified or specifiable) location in past time. Regardless of how recent it may have been, a situation in an Imperfect inflection entails a temporal gap⁸ between the time of its occurrence and NOW. By this is meant a situation-free time between the occurrence of a situation and NOW. That is, Imperfect inflections are basically incompatible with a notion of *up-to-NOWness*.

Assuming, as I claim, that the Perfect Continuous necessarily denotes a situation as an imperfective process continuing *up to now*, then sentence 51)

- 51) I have been living in Germany

can quite naturally invite the implication that I still live there. But this is certainly due to expectations associated with the phrase *live in Germany*. The Perfect Continuous does not necessarily invite implications of situation *continuation* in the present, however. For instance, if someone comes into my living room and finds me relaxing in an easy chair with a cold beer, I might easily utter 52).

- 52) I've been cleaning out my workshop

If my visitor correctly assesses the situation he will not infer that I am still engaged in the activity but that I have interrupted it. He may, but need not, infer that I intend to continue. Yet this could also be cancelled with the proper gesture or a remark such as, "But it's an absolutely hopeless task". Again, with the proper gesture or other signal he might also infer that I'm inviting him to have a beer too. The list of possible implications could continue.

- Continuing at the pragmatic level, sentence 53)

- 53) I've been living in Michigan, Georgia and Germany (for a long time)

is decidedly peculiar, for it is hard to imagine anyone living in three so widely separated geographical locations simultaneously, and 53) cannot be interpreted as denoting sequential situations. Yet, by the same token, 54)

- 54) I've been working in Michigan, Georgia and Germany (for a long time)

is pragmatically unobjectionable, for it can be interpreted as denoting "work in Michigan", "work in Georgia" and "work in Germany", i.e., sequential (if un-

⁸ Canavan (1983:29-30 *et passim*), Quirk *et al.* 1985:183-84).

ordered) situations. Apparently, then, conversational and pragmatic conventions as well as vagueness concerning the continuation of the situation in the present are factors in current relevance implicature. Such factors are unpredictable for many types of situation, but when present they may influence the specific message of an implicature. Since neither the Perfect forms nor the lexical verb force implicatures, contextual factors will remain unpredictable.

TEMPORAL GAP AND BLOCKING

The central point seems to involve the notion of a temporal *gap*. The entailment of a temporal gap between the time of the situation and NOW, specifically marked by Imperfect inflections, but entailed with certain Lexical Verbs in Perfect Simple inflections, thus blocks current relevance implicatures. The gap entailed in 34) is the time between 1965 and NOW. In 35)–37) temporal gaps are entailed between the (unspecified) time of the occurrence of each situation and NOW.

Since Perfect Continuous forms denote continuance of the situation up to NOW, no gap notion obtains and current relevance implicatures are invited. The sentences in the second test ("It/He has been VERBing") indicate, however, that the Lexical Verb triggers any notions of specific *results* or *effects*.

Perfect Simple forms mark only Pastness, any gap notion depending on the semantics of the lexical verb. Thus sentences 30)–33), none of which can be interpreted as having continued "up to NOW", all entail a gap notion between the times of their occurrence and NOW. Accordingly, current relevance implicatures are not invited. Where the Lexical Verb permits interpretation for up-to-NOWness, as in 45), 48) and 54), there is no notion of a gap and implicatures for current relevance are not blocked.

Adjunction to a Perfect Simple of a frequency adverbial blocks current relevance implicature through the entailment of a gap notion between *then* and *NOW*. With the exception of verbs which denote iterativity, Perfect Continuous inflections seem to be incompatible with frequency adverbials. This is probably due to the contradiction between the gap notion which frequency adverbials provoke and the notion of Tangency to Now which the inflection provokes. With iterativity the frequency adverbial quantifies individual occurrences of the situation, while the inflection predicates the whole situation as NOW-Tangential. In this case no real contradiction obtains.

There is a small set of adverbials (*just, recently, lately, of late*) which are compatible with both Imperfect and Perfect forms.⁹ They mark Past Tangency to NOW and denote recent past time. They thus resemble the adverbials *since X* and *X-time ago*, which also mark Pastness as Tangential to NOW. Needless to say, such marking is incompatible with a notion of a temporal gap. Where a Perfect Simple or an Imperfect is adjuncted by such an adverbial any notion of a temporal gap is overridden. (And where the adverbial is adjuncted to a Perfect Continuous, marking for NOW-Tangency is redundant.) These adverbials do not establish a temporal gap

between the occurrence of the situation and NOW. Rather they establish a NOW-Tangential time within which the situation occurs. Thus, it seems, since the time referred to is tangential to NOW implicatures are not blocked. They are also not forced, however, and are controlled or triggered by the lexical verb or by pragmatic factors.

What all of these types have in common is thus the absence of any notion of a temporal gap between NOW and either: the time of the situation itself or the time within which the situation occurred. That is, either the *situation itself* is interpretable as NOW-Tangential, as in 55) and 56)

55) I have lived in Germany (for a long time)

56) I have been living in Germany (for a long time)

or the *time referred to* is recent and NOW-Tangential, as in 57) through 60).

57) Tom has just let the dog out → The dog is now outside

58) Sue has been overexercizing lately → Sue is exhausted

59) Tom just let the dog out → The dog is now outside

60) Sue just overexercized → Sue is exhausted

For all these types, then, the condition is simply: Implicatures for current relevance are invited when Tangency to NOW is given. Wherever Non-Tangency to NOW obtains for a situation or the time within which it is located, implicatures are either not invited or they are expressly blocked.

SUMMARY

Current relevance is an implicature, not a meaning. The base of implicatures involving the current relevance of a situation is not the English Perfect Tense but the semantic notion of Tangency to NOW. This notion invites but does not force implications and obtains in English for Perfect Continuous predications and for those containing adverbials denoting NOW-tangential recent pastness. With Perfect Simple forms Tangency to NOW is dependent on an appropriate adverbial or on pragmatic or conversational conventions along the lines of Grice's Maxim: Be Relevant. Where Tangency to NOW obtains in Perfect Simple predications current relevance implications are also not blocked. The Lexical Verb triggers any notions of specific effects or results (i.e., the message of the implicature) but these are largely unpredictable except for resultative verbs. Under similar semantic conditions, current relevance implicature most probably obtains in any language.

REFERENCES

- Canavan, J.R. 1983. *The English tense system. A study of temporal meaning and reference*. Bonn: Bouvier Verlag Hubert Grundmann.
- Cole, P. and Morgan, J. (eds). 1975. *Speech acts*. New York: Academic Press.
- Comrie, B. 1976. *Aspect*. Cambridge: CUP.
- Comrie, B. 1985. *Tense*. Cambridge: CUP.
- Grice, H.P. 1975. "Logic and conversation". In Cole, P. and Morgan J. (eds). 1975. 41–58.

⁹A fuller treatment of temporal adverbials is contained in Canavan (1983:Chap. Four).

- Leech, G.N. 1969. *Towards a semantic description of English*. London: Longman.
- Leech, G.N. 1971. *Meaning and the English verb*. London: Longman.
- Leech, G.N. and Svartvik, J. 1975. *A communicative grammar of English*. London: Longman.
- Lyons, J. 1977. *Semantics*. Vol. 2. Cambridge: CUP.
- Quirk, R., Greenbaum, S., Leech, G.N. and Svartvik, J. 1972. *A grammar of contemporary English*. Beccles and London: Longman.
- Quirk, R., Greenbaum, S., Leech, G.N. and Svartvik, J. 1985. *A comprehensive grammar of the English language*. London and New York: Longman.
- Twaddell, W.F. 1968. *The English verb auxiliaries* [2]. Providence, R.I.: Brown University Press.