

# THE PERFECT AUXILIARIES IN THE LANGUAGE OF SHAKESPEARE

PIOTR KARIETEK

*University of Silesia, Katowice*

The auxiliaries referred to in the title of this paper are *be + PP* and *have + PP* (where PP stands for the past participle). The data that have been utilized in this study come from the following plays by Shakespeare:

Title	Abbreviation
Henry IV, Part I	1H4
Henry IV, Part II	2H4
Henry V	H5
Othello	Oth
King Lear	Lear
Measure for measure	Mes

Where it seemed conducive to the discussion, examples were drawn from plays not included in the above list. Throughout the paper the reader's attention is called to points that make for the greatest differences between Shakespeare's English and Contemporary English.

The present paper falls into two major parts: Part A is concerned with the formal (syntactic) aspect of the two auxiliaries, and Part B discusses them from the functional point of view.

## Part A

### The syntax of *be + PP*

The Perfect *be + PP* has been found to collocate with the following verbs, enumerated here according to their frequency of occurrence in the corpus: *go, come, arrive, turn, ride, steal away, set forth, meet, and retire*. Of these verbs

*go* and *come* are by far the most frequently used. All of these verbs, with the exception of *meet*, which is a non-mutative verb, are intransitive mutative verbs. As a transitive verb, *meet* always takes the auxiliary *have+PP*:

- (1) ... so many of his shadows thou hast met (1H4, V. 4. 29).

E. Closs-Traugott (1972:145) has stated that in sentences with certain types of adverbs, typically of manner and place, *have+PP* is favoured even in cases in which *be+PP* would normally be expected. But that it was anything but a rule never to be violated may be seen from the following examples, containing adverbials of manner, place, and time, respectively:

- (2) This is the point. The Duke is very strangely gone from hence (Mes. I. 4. 49).  
 (3) His lordship is walked forth into the orchard (2H4, I. 1. 4).  
 (4) Worcester is stolen away tonight (1H4, II. 4. 353).

The corpus contains many more instances of *be+PP* with various types of adverbials. However, there is not a single example found of this auxiliary with adverbials of duration. These adverbials appear to be distributionally restricted to *have+PP*, which fact, as will be made clear in the later sections of this paper, seems to be best explainable in terms of the specific functions of the two auxiliaries. *Be+PP* is never employed to denote a period of time, hence in Shakespeare's English something like the following would not be feasible:

- (5) ... Which is for long run by the hideous law as mice by lions.

The Perfect *be+PP* is not found in conjunction with the Passive *be+PP*, which is a natural consequence of restricting the auxiliary to intransitive verbs only.

Also the corpus lacks examples of the Perfect *be+PP* with the Progressive *be+Prt* (Prt=present participle).

In a number of contexts the Perfect *be+PP* is ambiguous with either the Passive *be+PP* or the Resultative Stative *be+PP*. Such, for instance, seems to be the case with:

- (6) ... this house is turn'd bawdy-house, they pick pockets (1H4, III 3. 69).

in which the auxiliary may be interpreted as either Perfect or Resultative Stative. Sometimes this sort of ambiguity is resolved by certain types of adverbs, as in (2) above, where the adverb of manner, *strangely*, precludes a 'resultative stative' interpretation for the construction *be+gone*. Adverbs of manner do not normally co-occur with statives. Of course, the interpretation

we suggested for (2) would be rendered invalid were it possible to treat *strangely* in the sentence as a sentence modifier.

It may be pointed out in passing that the type of ambiguity discussed above was a rare phenomenon in, for example, Old English, owing to the fact that in Old English most transitive and intransitive verbs were distinct in superficial form and that resultative statives were adjectival and thus usually inflected (cf. Closs-Traugott 1972:145).

Some of the verbs on our list combine with both the perfect auxiliaries:

- (7) And I hear, moreover, his Highness is fallen into this same whoreson apoplexy (2H4, I. 2. 106).  
 (8) I'll to my brother, though he hath fall'n by prompture of the blood, Yet he hath in him such a mind of honour... (Mes., II. IV. 177).  
 (9) I think he's gone to hunt at Windsor (2H4, IV. 4. 13).  
 (10) ... but this new governor Awakes me all the enrolled penalties which have, like unscour'd armour, hung by th' wall So long, that nineteen Zodiacs have gone round, and none of them been worn (Mes., I. 2. 156).  
 (11) ... and he esteems himself happy that he hath fall'n into the hands of one... (H5, IV. 4. 61).

(7) is a little doubtful since a 'resultative stative' interpretation for it is not altogether unthinkable.

There is ample evidence to indicate that *be+PP* is incompatible with adverbials of duration. It would then seem that it is only in terms of this restriction on *be+PP* that we can satisfactorily account for cases like, for example, (9) and (10). This restriction on *be+PP* could be formalized by means of a PS rule having the following shape:

$$\text{Aux} \rightarrow \left\{ \begin{array}{l} \text{(M) have+PP} \\ \text{be+PP/-V}_i \text{ mutative -Adv}_{\text{duration}} \end{array} \right\}$$

This rule also says that only *have+PP* may combine with modal auxiliaries (here symbolized as M). Here are some examples of *have+PP* with modal auxiliaries:

- (12) I warrant you, that man is not alive, Might so have tempted him, as you have done, Without the taste of danger and reproofe (1H4, III. 1. 167).  
 (13) He called her whore: a Begger in his drinke Could not have laid such terms upon his callat (Oth, IV. 2. 123).

It would seem *prima facie* that cases like (7), (8), (11), and similar examples, have no immediately apparent motivation. An interesting explanation of these seems to be that proposed by Closs-Traugott (1972:145): "Since non-mu-



tative verbs outnumbered mutative ones and *have+PP* was not heavily loaded with different functions, the generalization of *have+PP* is a very natural change".

#### The syntax of *have+PP*

With non-mutative verbs the auxiliary is *have+PP* (except for the cases discussed above). Earlier we have stated a restriction on *be+PP* which helped us account systematically for at least those instances of *have+PP* with a mutative verb that involve the use of an adverbial of duration.

Among the mutative verbs that seemed to favour *be+PP* in Middle English and Early New English Closs-Traugott mentions *come, become, arrive, enter, run, and grow*, as the most resistant to *have+PP*. But (14) would seem to indicate that this rule failed to apply to those cases which involved the use of an adverbial of duration:

- (14) He, to give fear to use and liberty, Which have for long run by the  
hideous law As mice by lions (Mes., I. 4. 64).

*Have+PP* is found to combine with adverbials of: place, time, manner, duration, and frequency. Consider examples (8), (10) as well as the following:

- (15) ... when all her chivalry hath been in France (H5, I. 2. 155).  
(16) ... and all the feats he hath done about Turbnall Street (2H4,  
III. 2. 298).  
(17) Three times hath Henry Bolingbroke made head Against my power  
(1H4, III. 1. 60).  
(18) For what offence have I this fortnight been a banished woman from  
my Harry's bed? (1H4, II. 3. 38).  
(19) contention like a horse Full of high feeding, madly hath broke, and  
bears down all before him. (2H, I. 1. 10).

As concerns the use of *have+PP* with the adverbs *yet* and *already*, Shakespeare's English appears to be essentially similar to Contemporary English. Consider:

- (20) The powers that you have already sent forth shall bring this prize  
in very easily (2H4, III. 1. 100).  
(21) Already he hath carried notice to Escalus and Angelo.  
(Mes., IV. 3. 129).

The rule in Contemporary English that governs the use of *already* states that the adverb is basically limited to affirmative statements and answers, and that we can use it in questions only if we want to show surprise (Osman 1967: 77), as, for example, in (22), which is semantically equivalent to some-

thing like: "Surely he has gone already". However, no instance of this latter use of the adverb has been found in the corpus.

- (22) Hasn't he gone already?

In Contemporary English *yet* does not as a rule occur in affirmative statements and answers (Osman 1967: 77). That Shakespeare did not invariably follow this rule may be shown by the following examples:

- (23) For this new-married man approaching here, Whose salt imagination  
yet hath wrong'd your well defended honour, you must pardon for  
Mariana's sake (Mes., V. 1. 399).  
(24) Sirrah, you boy, and Bardolph, no word to your master that I am  
yet come to town — there is for your silence (2H4, II. 2. 153).

In (24) *yet* appears with *be+PP*. In both the examples *yet* would nowadays be replaced by *already*.

#### Part B

In this section of the paper we discuss the uses (functions) of the two perfect auxiliaries under analysis (The term "use" is employed here in the sense in which it appears in Leech 1971).

*Have+PP* is found in the corpus in the following uses:

a) It signals a period of time beginning at some point in the past and stretching up to the time of speaking. In this use the auxiliary collocates with adverbials of duration indicating either a definite or indefinite period of time.

#### Examples:

- (25) I have not lived all this while to have swaggering now (2H4, II. 4. 75).  
(26) I have known thee these twenty years (2H4, II. 4. 329).  
(27) Since my young lady's going to France, sir, the fool hath much pined  
away (Mes., I. 4. 66).

b) *Have+PP* indicates that the action took place and was completed at some time in the past but says nothing to indicate when. In this use it combines with adverbs of indefinite time, and with adverbs of frequency and



manner:

- 28) I have so often blushed to acknowledge him that now I'm brazéd to't  
(Lear, I. 1. 7)
- (29) I have watched and travelled hard. (Lear, III. 2. 160).

See also examples (17) and (19).

In cases where the sentence contains adverbs like *ever*, *never*, and *always* the use of either *have+PP* or the Past Modification (V-ed) brings about no clear change of meaning. Compare, for instance, the sentences:

- (30) God's light, I was never called so in my house before (1H4, III. 3. 17).  
(31) Thou art the first knave that ever madest a duke (2H4, V. 1. 354).

Our observation concerning this particular aspect of Shakespeare's English seems to be supported by what we find in this connection in Georg Fridén (1948:30): "(...) with the adverbs *ever* and *never* the preterite is much more common than the perfect and seems almost to have been a rule in LME and EModE". A more or less similar situation in this regard obtains at least in some varieties of Contemporary Colloquial English. In his paper "Toward understanding the "perfect" constructions in spoken English" B. A. Peterson (1970: 6) arrives at the conclusion that "If the period of time is not over — that is, if the utterance occurs within the period of time in question — either the present perfect or the simple past is used, with little or no difference in meaning".

That the functional distinction between *have+PP* and the Past Modification was not so clear-cut in Shakespeare's English as it is in general in Contemporary English can be seen from the following examples, in some of which the definite past time reference is easily deducible from the context:

- (32) *Oth.* You have seen nothing, then?  
*Emil.* Nor ever heard, nor ever did suspect.  
*Oth.* Yes, and you have seen Cassio and she together?  
*Emil.* But then I saw no harm and then I heard each syllable that breath made up between 'em.  
*Oth.* What, did they never whisper?

Oth, IV. 2. 1 ff.

- (33) *Fal.* Well, thou hast called her to a reckoning many a time and oft.  
*Prince.* Did I ever call for thee to pay thy part?  
*Fal.* No, I'll give thee thy due, thou hast paid all there.  
*Prince.* Yea, and elsewhere, so far as my coin would stretch, and where it would not I have used my credit.

1H4, III. 2.49

In (32) Othello and Emilia are engaged in a conversation about what exactly happened between Desdemona and Cassio in a definite past time. In (34) the definite point in the past is overtly expressed:

- (34) *Shal.* Ha, cousin Silence, that thou hadst seen that that this knight and I have seen! Ha, Sir John, said I well?  
*Fal.* We have heard the chimes at midnight, Master Shallow.  
*Shal.* That we have, that we have, that we have; in faith, Sir John, we have.  
(2H4, III. 2.209)

The time of speaking in (34) is, of course, early in the morning, and so past midnight.

In (35) the adverbial of a past time, *yesternight*, appears in one of the sentences preceding the sentence containing *have+PP*:

- (35) *Lucio.* But yesternight, my lord, she and that friar, I saw them at the prison; a saucy friar, A very scurvy fellow.  
*Friar Peter.* Bless'd be your royal Grace! I have stood by my lord, and I have heard your royal ear abus'd. First hath this woman Most wrongfully accus'd your Substitute who is as free from touch as soil with her As she from one ungot.  
(Mes., V. 1.140)

Thus all (32) to (35) sin against the principle formulated by Jespersen (1963: 270) for Contemporary English: "English is more strict than most languages and does not allow the use of the perfect if a definite point in the past is meant, whether this be expressly mentioned or not".

Also Contemporary English does not allow for the use of *have+PP* with subjects that are specified as minus alive (with perhaps one exception, namely, when something is asserted as the present result of their activities, e.g. *Newton has explained the movements of the moon*). (36) shows that Shakespeare did not always abide by this rule:

- (36) This pitiful, but yet Iago knows That she with Cassio hath the act of shame A thousand times committed.  
(Oth, V. 2.210)

As the reader knows, (36) is uttered some time after Desdemona's death.

c) *have+PP* indicates that the past activity has immediate relevance at the time of utterance, the result of the activity being either expressly stated or implied (resultative past). Examples of this use of the auxiliary:

- (37) *Oth.* I am bound to thee for ever.  
*Iago.* I see this hath a little dash'd your spirits.



*Oth.* Not a jot, not a jot.

*Iago.* I'faith I fear it has.

(38) What the devil hast thou brought — applejohns? (2H4, II.4.1).

(39) No, thou arrant knave! I would to God that I might die, that I might have thee hanged. Thou hast drawn my shoulder out of joint.

*Be + PP* appears only in the (c) use, i.e., the 'resultative past' use mentioned above:

(40) He's gone to Smithfield to buy your worship a horse (2H4, II.4.13).

(41) I think he's gone to hunt at Windsor (2H4, II.2.50).

(42) He is walk'd up to the top of the hill; I'll go seek him (1H4, II.2.9).

Notice that (40) to (42) all serve as answers to questions that involve the Zero Modification. In the corpus these examples function as answers to the following questions:

(40a) Where's Bardolph?

(41a) Where is the Prince your brother?

(42a) Where is Poins, Hall?

Only in one case (example 4) *be + PP* is used with an adverbial of time, but even then the action is placed in a period of time that is still not finished at the time of the utterance (the effect of this action is expressly stated in the sentence directly following (4)).

#### Conclusions:

1. The results of the present analysis seem to show that the process of the generalization of *have + PP* to all contexts was well under way in Shakespeare's time. This observation finds support, among others, in the existence of examples of the auxiliary with intransitive mutatives for which no clear motivation is readily available.

2. A fairly large proportion of the examples with *have + PP* have been shown to be determined by the presence in the sentence of an adverb of duration. In the material there are no examples of *be + PP* with this type of adverb. This fact, we suggested, has to do with the function performed by the auxiliary (resultative past). We have seen that all the examples with *be + PP* involve momentary non-durative actions.

3. In the corpus *have + PP* appears in three uses: a. it indicates a period of time beginning at some point in the past and leading up to the time of utterance; b. it indicates that the action took place at some time in the past but says nothing to indicate when; c. it says that the past action has immediate

relevance at the time of utterance, the effect of the action being either explicitly stated or implied.

*Be + PP* has been found to occur in the (c) use only.

4. The evidence at hand shows that the functional distinction between *have + PP* and the Past Modification (V-ed) was not so clear-cut in Shakespeare's English as it is in some varieties of Contemporary English (recall especially those cases which involve the use of adverbs of time specifying a definite point in the past).

#### SOURCES

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