

A Note on the Present Perfect in Malory

M i n a m i K a n d a

1. One of the most important and interesting phenomena concerning the Present Perfect is its co-occurrence with temporal adverbials. It is a well-known fact that temporal or time specification is expressed not only by the morphological tense-form and lexical meaning of the main verb but also by temporal adverbials. Therefore the temporal adverbials have been given due attention in the recent studies of the Modern English tense-forms.

We believe that these studies will surely contribute to the investigation of problems related with the Present Perfect in Middle English. The purpose of this paper is to compare the temporal adverbials accompanying the Present Perfect in Middle English with those in Modern English. As our main line of research is late Middle English, the following discussion is based exclusively upon the works of Thomas Malory, which belong to the fifteenth century.

The Present Perfect in Middle English is defined as the verbal construction formed by means of the present form of the auxiliaries *have* or *be* and a past participle. We may reasonably suppose there is a semantic or functional difference between these two 'perfect constructions', that is to say, the '*have* + pp. perfect' and the '*be* + pp. perfect,' the latter being mostly used in connection with intransitive verbs denoting motion or a transition of state. Since this is not our concern in the present paper, we will exclude the '*be* + pp. perfect' construction from our data.

2. We would like to start with a simple observation of the factors involved in employing the temporal adverbials with the Present Perfect in Modern English.

The fact that a large number of temporal adverbials occur either with the Present Perfect or with the Simple Past has always seemed to defy a clear-cut and satisfactory definition of the Present Perfect:

- (1)
- | | | |
|---------------------------|---|-----------|
| I have seen him / saw him | { | today. |
| | | recently. |
| | | before. |
| | | once. |
| | | already. |

However, there are temporal adverbials that associate exclusively with one of the two tense-forms. Those which occur with the Present Perfect but not with the Simple Past are:

- (2)
- | | | |
|----------------------------|---|--------------|
| I have seen him / *saw him | { | so far. |
| | | now. |
| | | up till now. |

The adverbials shown in (2) indicate a period leading up to the present and therefore require the Present Perfect.

Some temporal adverbials are compatible with the Simple Past but not with the Present Perfect:

- (3)
- | | | |
|----------------------------|---|---|
| I *have seen him / saw him | } | yesterday.
a week ago.
last Monday.
in 1989.
long ago.
at six o'clock. |
|----------------------------|---|---|

These are the adverbials which designate a specific or definite time point in the past.

3. Now we will list the temporal adverbials which collocate with the Present Perfect in Malory.

1) Adverbials denoting frequency of occurrence

1a) oftyn / oftyn tyme / oftyntymes / full ofte

For *oftyn tyme* I have seyne the old preved knyghtes....

(09 04 0466 29 C B)

1b) many tymes / dyvers tymes / twyse / more than ten tymes ...

..., for *many tymes* he hath done full worshipfully.

(04 04 0131 12 C B)

1c) dayly

... he hath *dayly* layne a wayte wyth many a knyght with hym....

(04 07 0139 04 C B)

2) Adverbials denoting duration

2a) longe / so longe / thus longe / lenger / longe tyme ...

... we know all that sir Launcelot holdith youre quene,
and hath done *longe*;

(20 02 1163 07 C A)

2b) a grete while

I have norysshed in thys place *a grete whyle* a serpente....

(14 07 0913 35 C A)

2c) ever / evermore

'Syr, ye know well that honoure and worshyp hath *ever* folowyd
the Romaynes.

(05 08 0219 19 C B)

- 2d) for ever
 I wote well that we have loste hym *for ever!*
 (11 09 0806 34 C B)
- 2e) at all tymes
 And the shevalry hath ben *at all tymes* so hyshe
 (16 03 0946 10 C A)
- 2f) many a (longe) day / many (longe) dayes
 and in my soule I have had *many a day* a good beleve in Jesu
 Cryste (12 13 0842 05 C B)
- 3) Adverbials denoting restricted duration
- 3a) thes three dayes / within thys two dayes
 ...mervaylously as he hath done *thes three dayes.*
 (09 35 0535 10 C A)
- 3b) in my dayes / in youre dayes
 for so many hathe be slayne *in my dayes.* (03 01 0098 12 C A)
- 3c) all the dayes of my lyff / all thy dayes of thy lyff
 'the Grete love that I have had unto you *all the dayes of my
 lyff* makith me to such dolefull wordis! (13 08 0867 14 C A)
- 3d) thys twelve-monthe / this twelve-monthe
 'for I have folowed this queste *thys twelve-monthe,....*
 (01 19 0042 29 C A)
- 3e) all this seven wynters / many wynters ...
 ..., and they hath occupyed the empyreship *eyght score wyntyrs.*
 (05 01 0188 08 C B)
- 3f) eyght yere / this seven yere ...
 ..., and som of us hath layne here *eyght yere,....*
 (04 07 0138 20 C B)
- 4) Adverbials denoting restricted duration leading up to the present
- 4a) heretofore / hiddirto
 ...I have loved the *heretofore,....* (21 09 1252 23 C A)
- 4b) before / aforehonde / aforetyme / tofor(n)e / afore / toforehonde
 ..., as ye have herde *before.* (07 04 0298 12 B)
- 4c) by thys tyme
 And *by thys tyme* they have goten to them four kynges more
 and a myghty duke.... (01 10 0020 06 C C)

- 4d) or now / afore thys tyme ...
 ..., for *or now* I have seyne you. (12 06 0826 26 C B)
- 4e) nat yet / never yette
 ..., and men say that we of thys londe have *nat yet* loste
 that custom. (21 01 1229 12 A)
- 4f) sytthen / ever syns
 And *sytthen* he hath wonne wyth his hondys thirty knyghtes that
 were men of grete honoure. (10 07 0578 01 C B)
- 5) Adverbials denoting the present time sphere
- 5a) thys day / this day
 And I have done so muche *this day* (10 71 0739 33 C B)
- 5b) to-day
 ...there was never men dud more worshipfully in proues
 than ye have done *to-day*: (01 17 0037 02 C A)
- 5c) thys nyght / all this nyght
 What arte thou that I have layne bye *all this nyght*?
 (11 03 0795 27 C B)
- 5d) this monthe
 For I have bene in sir Trystrams felyshyp *this moneth and more*,
 and wyth La Beall Isolde togydys. (10 82 0770 13 C A)
- 5e) now
 And *now*, sir, ye have wonne me. (07 12 0314 22 C B)
- 5f) at this tyme
 ...for *at this tyme* he hath done overmuche for ony meane knyght
 lyvyng. (08 33 0428 07 C B)
- 5g) late / but late
 ..., but ye have done a thyng *late* that God ys displesed with
 you,.... (01 20 0044 16 C A)
- 6) Adverbials denoting the specific time point in the past
- 6a) many yerys agone
 ...for a vowe that I have made *many yerys agone*.
 (12 13 0842 04 C B)
- 6b) the firste day,...and the thirde day
 ..., and so hathe he done *the firste day, the secunde, and the
 thirde day!* (09 34 0534 02 C A)

4. The time adverbials listed above are surprisingly similar to those used with the Present Perfect in Modern English, except the last two quotations with *many yerys agone* and *the firste day, the secunde, and t he thirde day*, which will be examined in the following sections.

5. It has been pointed out by a number of scholars that in Modern English the temporal adverbials with the Present Perfect do not clearly indicate a definite point of time in the past. Allen (1966, pp. 156-7) states that the Present Perfect expresses 'non-identified time in the past' and the simple Past 'identified time in the past.' According to him, the distinction between these two tense-forms is parallel to the one between the indefinite article *a/an* and the definite article *the* :

1. (a) *A* man and a dog came up to me.
The man looked sick. (That is, the same man.)
- (b) *A* man and a dog came up to me.
A man ran between us. (That is, a different man.)
2. (a) "I' *ve* been to Carnegie Hall only once."
"Did you hear the New York Philharmonic?
(That is, on that same occasion.)
- (b) "I' *ve* been to Carnegie Hall only once."
"Have you heard the New York Philharmonic?
(That is, have you ever--but not necessarily on that occasion.)

We find the similar explanation of 'indefinite' Present Perfect in Diver (1963, pp. 156-7), who maintains that, with the Present Perfect, "the event indicated by the attached verb took place on an indefinite occasion in the past," and therefore "*He has played golf on Tuesday* cannot mean on a specific Tuesday."

6. Firstly, we will examine the sentence with *many yerys agone*. The adverb *ago* usually does not co-occur with the Present Perfect. However,

in Fridén (1948), we find the following example:

Pite that I have sought so yore ago. (Chaucer, *Compl. Pity 1*)
long agone I have forgot to court.

(Shakespeare, *Two Gent.* III, i, 85)

These quotations with the adverb *ago* cannot be explained by performance errors and they should not be seen as rare exceptions.

We believe that the adverbials with *ago* in these examples show a 'low degree of definiteness.' Adverbials such as *ten years ago*, *two days ago*, and *a week ago* are clearly definite, while *many years ago* or *long ago* cannot be as definite. We will now quote an instance from Visser (1974, p. 2197):

Indeed I have seen Blanche, six or seven years ago, when she was a girl of eighteen. (Ch. Brontë *Jane Eyre* XVI)

Concerning the example 6a) from Malory, there is another possibility. We may be allowed to quote it again with its contexts:

'I mervayle greatly of one thyng, that thou arte so good a knyght, that thou wolt nat be crystynde, and thy brothir, sir Saffir, hath bene crystynde many a day.'

'As for that,' seyde sir Palomydes, 'I may nat yet be crystyned for a vowe that I have made many yerys agone. Howbehyt in my harte and in my soule I have had many a day a good beleve in Jesu Cryste and hys mylde modir Mary, but I have but one batayle to do, and were that onys done I wolde be baptyzed.'

It is clear from the above quotations that 'a vow' was being kept at the moment of speech or the present time, therefore the Present Perfect is preferred over the Simple Past. This analysis is similar to that of a 'resultative' perfect sentence like *I have written a letter*, in which it is indicated that there now exists a letter of which the speaker is talking.

7. Now we turn to the second sentence in Malory with *the firste day, the secunde, and the thirde day*:

'Sir Trystram hath won the fylde, for he began firste, and lengyst hylde on, and so hathe he done the firste day, the secunde, and the thirde day!'

In Dinsmore (1981, p. 476), we find an example in which the Present Perfect occurs with the enumeration of the adverbials indicating the definite past:

Whereas *last month, Tuesday*, or *yesterday* cannot normally occur with PresPerf, in conjunction they may, and with *so far* they must:
George *proved/has proved difficult last month, Tuesday, and yesterday so far.

What follow are instances from Declerck (1991, p. 333):

- (1) I have tried to call him yesterday, last night, and today, but with no success.
- (2) Twice he has visited Japan, in 1898 and 1900.

8. We have tried, in the present paper, to show that there is no substantial difference between the restriction on the temporal adverbials with the Present Perfect in Malory and that in Modern English. But depending upon such a small amount of corpus, we are not able to say anything conclusive. A problem which remains to be discussed is how exactly the function of the Present Perfect was in Middle English and how temporal adverbials modify the other tense-forms as well.

REFERENCES

- Allen, R. R. 1966. *The Verb System of Present-day American English*.
The Hague: Mouton.
- Crystal, D. 1966. "Specification and English Tenses." *Journal of Linguistics* 2, pp. 1-34.
- Declerck, R. 1991. *Tense in English: Its Structure and Use in Discourse*.
London: Routledge.
- Dinsmore, J. 1981. "Tense Choice and Time Specification in English." *Linguistics* 19, pp. 475-94.
- Diver, W. 1963. "The Chronological System of the English Verb." *Word* 19,
pp. 141-81.
- Fridén, G. 1948. *Studies on the Tenses of the English Verb from Chaucer to Shakespeare with Special Reference to the Late Sixteenth Century*.
Uppsala: Almqvist & Wiksells.
- Kato, T. 1974. *A Concordance to the Works of Sir Thomas Malory*. Tokyo:
Tokyo University Press.
- McCoard, R. W. 1978. *The English Perfect: Tense-Choice and Pragmatic Inferences*. Amsterdam: North-Holland.
- Mustanoja, T. F. 1960. *A Middle English Syntax. Part I: Parts of Speech*.
Helsinki: Société Néophilologique.
- Quirk et al. 1985. *A Comprehensive Grammar of the English Language*.
London: Longman.
- Trnka, V. 1930. *On the Syntax of the English Verb from Caxton to Dryden*.
Travaux du Cercle Linguistique de Prague 3. Prague.
- Vinaver, E. 1990. *The Works of Sir Thomas Malory*. 3 vols. 3rd Ed.
London: Oxford University Press.
- Visser, F. Th. 1963-73. *An Historical Syntax of the English Language*. 4
vols. Leiden: E. J. Brill.