1 Introduction

(A) Research question: how do we pin down the nature of the 'current relevance' of the present perfect?

Our Intuition

“it is generally assumed that a present perfect sentence says something both about the past, and about the present” (Portner 2011: 1225; emphasis added).”

(B) Aims of this presentation:

(i) Empirical Contribution:

By looking at the preference or reluctance for the present perfect, this study reveals that there are, at least, three groups of verbs that are sensitive to the present perfect.

Observation

Corpus Research (quantitative)

How current relevance appears (qualitative)

(ii) Theoretical Contribution:

Findings are naturally explained in terms of:

A) Markedness Theory (Stump 1985; Schaden 2009)

B) Current Relevance (Portner 2003)

Not by the theories that only pay attention to the temporal relations of the events.

E.g.) Indefinite Past Theory

2 Corpus Study

(A) Design:

- The Corpus of Contemporary American English
- Find 100 most frequent verbs per each form
- Unions of such verbs (→ 266 verbs)
- Find informative verbs
  - (i) Scatterplot
  - (ii) Information Gains

(B) Data

Table 1. Distributions over nine temporal and aspectual categories

(iii) Informative Verbs

Verbs are characterized by their distribution in the corpus.

Some verbs show unexpected distribution patterns. For example, some show a strong preference for, or reluctance to, a particular grammatical form. These verbs are informative in the sense that, given the verb, we can predict the selection of the grammatical form (e.g., the present perfect over the past) with high certainty.

3 Discussion

Looking at the context of extreme verbs…

(1) scream A psychologist who believes that a depressed woman needs immediate hospitalization to prevent her from committing suicide must either call her to discuss treatment options or threaten her with forcible admission to the hospital if she does not do it herself by the end of the day. Police take a man to a psychiatric emergency room after he has screamed at and threatened his wife for several hours from the sidewalk in front of their apartment.

(2) smile a. when good things happen, we are certain fortune has smiled on us.

b. Though his expression is serious now, the crinkles at the corners of his eyes make me think he has smiled a lot. He looks kind.

4 Conclusions

Empirical contribution (Findings)

(i) The preference and the reluctance for the present perfect are highly predictable from the verb’s meaning; the distribution is not arbitrary, but verbs are grouped into several clusters (Group A, B and C), which are semantically well-motivated.

(ii) Even the verbs which show a strong reluctance to the present perfect can be used in this form, when the current relevance is provided by the discourse.

Theoretical Contribution

(i) The finding is compatible with the idea of the markedness of the present perfect (basically, the present perfect is not used unless there is a particular requirement (Current Relevance).

(ii) Since they are frequently used in the past, verbs falling in the Group B suggest that it is not the pastness that prevents them from having the form of the present perfect.

(iii) The current relevance is achieved by both the discourse structure (coherence) and the lexically implied (or, entailed) meaning.

References

