

**The Present Perfect Has Only Gone And Changed,  
Hasn't It? The Continuing Divergence of the Narrative  
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# **The present perfect has only gone and changed, hasn't it? The continuing divergence of the narrative perfect**

Jim WALKER

Université Lumière Lyon 2

## **1. Introduction**

This paper will take a fresh look at what appears at first blush to be an emergent use of the present perfect form in British English, henceforth the HAVE-perfect, namely its use for narrative purpose, and in so doing will be focusing on two aspects. The first is questioning whether we are right to assume that the *narrative present perfect (narrative PP)*, as I shall refer to it here, for reasons that will be made fully explicit, is indeed an emergent form, and secondly attempting to sketch the possible links between the narrative PP and a seemingly unrelated phenomenon, which I refer to as the *extraordinary ONLY*. In so doing, we will be examining, and indeed lending support, to a key insight in the literature, that of the mirativity of the narrative perfect first adumbrated by Ritz (2010).

The paper is organised as follows - first the narrative PP will be illustrated and a brief review of what has already been said about it in the literature will be given. The second section will take a diachronic perspective, with a nod to synchronic dialectal evidence, to reflect on the emergent nature of the phenomenon. The third will introduce the extraordinary ONLY and the fourth will attempt to bring the two parts of the puzzle together.

## **2. The narrative present perfect**

There is little need here to rehearse the observation that in contemporary standard English varieties, the world over, the present perfect form of the verb, hereinafter referred to generically as the HAVE-perfect, is incompatible with specific past time reference and therefore cannot be used as a tense for narrative accounts. It is a feature of English which has long puzzled many linguists and mistakes in the use of the HAVE-perfect are a staple of learners' English in L2 classrooms across the world.

However, it is now a more or less indisputable fact that some varieties of non-standard native English, most notably colloquial British English (Fryd 1998, Walker 2011) and certain registers of Australian English (Ritz 2010) do indeed occasionally use the HAVE-perfect with specific time reference

and as a narrative form<sup>1</sup>, with the result that declarations such as that of Caudal and Roussarie (2006 : 16) to the effect that “It is rather clear that English present perfect cannot really accept narrative uses [...] and it is a well-known fact that it rejects past time temporal modifiers”, are less than uniformly tenable, and perhaps increasingly so.

In addition to the ample illustrations of the phenomenon in the aforementioned articles, we add the following examples, many others of which are easily found:

- (1) What has become apparent from our enquiries with witnesses is that Sarah was going about her routine duties and was in the staff section of the enclosure building, which animals are not allowed access to, when a tiger *has entered* it from an adjacent pen and confronted her. The tiger *has then attacked* Sarah, taking her from the building into the open-air external enclosure area where Sarah was left and later attended by staff and paramedics<sup>2</sup>.
- (2) He told us he was in the process of reversing his vehicle when he felt some form of a bump or touch and that is when he immediately stopped and got out of the driver's seat. That is when *Olivia's mother has picked her up* from the roadside and then taken her straight into the hallway of her property<sup>3</sup>.
- (3) [The girls] drove into a dead-end road and the *victim has attempted* to block them in but they drove up on a nature strip and around," the Prosecutor said<sup>4</sup>.

What is particularly important to notice in these instances is the apparently unmotivated switch from a simple past form to a HAVE-perfect form, in the course of the narration, and the absence of accompanying past-time adverbial. The past reference of the HAVE-perfects here is derivable from context only. Instances such as these I refer to as the narrative perfect.

The previous literature has demonstrated a number of features of the narrative perfect, all of which would be worthy of much more extensive further exploration, particularly across dialects. One is that it seems to be, at least in part, a register or genre dependent feature. Not for nothing were the

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<sup>1</sup> 'Narrative' is to be understood in a relatively non-technical sense here, and throughout, namely the recounting by a speaker of a sequence of past-time events. Lowrey (2009) uses the same term in a very different way, so the terminology has yet to stabilize.

<sup>2</sup> Detective Chief Inspector Bob Qazi, describing the events surrounding a tiger attacking a small child in a British zoo:  
<http://www.guardian.co.uk/uk/2013/may/27/tiger-attack-zoo-worker-cumbria>

<sup>3</sup> Police officer explaining the death of a small girl in a traffic accident:  
<http://www.croydonadvertiser.co.uk/Inquest-hears-driver-s-account-Croydon-year-old/story-18546297-detail/story.html>

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.geelongadvertiser.com.au/news/crime-court/car-chase-driver-14-and-pregnant/story-fnjuhoxe-1226776752511>

three above examples taken from newspaper reports which reproduce, verbatim, police accounts of investigated incidents. This ties in with the work by Ritz 2010, based on Australian police reports. Walker 2008 also points to register dependency, demonstrating that it is a particularly common phenomenon in the speech of footballers.

It also seems clear (Ritz and Engel 2008) that the narrative perfect serves particular pragmatic purposes, be they mirativity, vividness or counter-expectation. In other words, the switches we observe between simple pasts and perfect narratives, which are in many ways reminiscent of similar tense shifting between past and present in colloquial narrative (see in particular Schiffrin 1981), and which seem on the face of it to be rather bewilderingly unmotivated, need to be addressed with careful pragmatic analyses.

The narrative perfect, it has also been shown, has a particular geographical spread, being present in Australian and New Zealand English, as well as across the whole of the British Isles (Walker 2012), and elsewhere due to learner effects (Werner 2013). This much is clear. What is less evident, however, is whether the narrative perfect is an emergent form, and it is to this question that this paper devotes much of its space.

There is considerable *prima facie* evidence for positing such a form of emergence. The clearest, but possibly least satisfactory indication is that it has only recently attracted the attention of linguists. Prior to the studies referred to above, the literature is almost silent. Certainly, there is the occasional aside, such as Hughes and Trudgill (1979 : 9), who talk briefly of:

the apparently increasing use of the "present perfect" in conjunction with expressions of definite past time reference. One hears such things as "and Roberts has played for us last season" (without any kind of break). Most native speakers, it must be admitted, would find this odd. They would claim that the speaker had made a mistake. But sentences like this are heard more and more often<sup>5</sup>.

However, such mentions are few and far between, and one conclusion has to be that this points to a new phenomenon.

A further pointer in the same direction comes from the grammaticalization literature relative to HAVE, cross-linguistically. The argument might be summarized as follows: if indeed the narrative perfect is emerging and spreading, this is readily explicable as analogous to the processes of grammaticalization that have affected other European languages, such as standard French and German, whereby pleonastic perfects have gradually come to take over from simple pasts, so much so that in the cases of standard French and German, the simple pasts have more or less been

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<sup>5</sup> Walker (2011 : 72) provides other examples of such asides in the literature.

eliminated from the colloquial forms of the languages and have taken up stylistic or genre-dependent niches. However, it goes without saying that we need proof, rather than encouraging hints, before we can close the case on whether the emergence of the narrative perfect in English is real, or a mirage.

### 3. Taking a diachronic perspective – evidence from folk songs

To temper the enthusiasm of those who hold that we are witnessing the further slide of the HAVE perfect down a grammaticalization cline towards a perfective past meaning, it is essential to turn to diachronic evidence. The hypothesis to be entertained here, then, is that the HAVE-perfect is not an emergent form, rather that it has always been available as a resource in English, perhaps primarily in non-standard varieties<sup>6</sup>. There is no need here to rehearse the caveats about the difficulties inherent in the use of historical corpora, particular with regard to what we posit to be a non-standard feature. Such caveats are taken here as read. However, the sense that such a search may be fruitful is bolstered by fleeting references in the literature on the history of English to exactly the kind of switch between past simple and present perfect which we observed in examples 1-3 above. Fischer (1992 : 257) for instance claims that “the perfect is not fully grammaticalized in Middle English: it freely alternates in almost all its functions with the preterit...Just like the non-past, the perfect is found in narrative past time contexts offered in conjunction with the preterit.” It should be noted, *en passant*, that Fischer's reference here to *grammaticalization* should be interpreted differently to that in the literature alluded to briefly above. Fischer's claim seems to be that in her examples, HAVE had not yet stabilized as a marker of a particular gram, in this case that of perfect aspect. In other words, Fischer is not using *grammaticalization* in the technical sense which it has come to adopt, but as a synonym of “settled on a particular pragmatico-syntactic usage”.

Another source of such evidence comes in the form of folk songs, which seem to abound in narrative perfects. Since this corpus is not the central focus of the current article, this evidence will only be mentioned in passing, but it is

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<sup>6</sup> The use of the term non-standard here is not without its problems, of course, particularly inasmuch as it is open to charges of anachronism. Much of the evidence to be adduced herein is taken from 18th and 19th century spoken English, precisely the period when English was undergoing its strongest standardization. It could be argued, therefore, that 'standard English', as a concept, has little to offer us when reflecting on that period, particular the early portion thereof. The arguments need not detain us here, but suffice to say that by non-standard English, we should perhaps understand forms of English which did not make it to the printed page, which have not been handed down to us to the same degree, which were less subject to standardizing pressure, or the like.

nothing less than intriguing. Of a random selection of fifty folk songs taken from the web-based repository *The Mudcat Café*<sup>7</sup>, seven contain some form of preterit <> narrative perfect commutation. Examples include:

And Thomas did salute her, bowing down upon his knee,  
And he said, "Well met enchanting one, you're the flower of this country."  
And as he gazed upon her, oh so blind of love was he,  
That he has kissed her rosey lips all 'neath the Eildon tree. (*Thomas the True* - earliest date: 1800)<sup>8</sup>

But up and rose the fifteenth knight  
And o, what an angry man was he  
He laid aside his buckler and sword  
Before he strode so manfully  
He's danced high and he's danced low  
And he has danced the livelong day  
He swore, My feet will be my death  
Before she gains the victory (*Bonny Lass of Anglesey* - earliest date 1776)

As I was a walking one morning last autumn  
I've overheard some nobles foxhunting  
Between some noblemen and the Duke of Wellington  
So early before the day was dawning.

Well the first fox being young and  
His trials just beginning  
He's made straight way for his cover  
He's run up yon highest hill  
And gone down yon lowest gill  
Thinking that he'd find his freedom there forever. (*Dido, Bendigo* – earliest date ca. 1650)

One particular intriguing aspect of these songs is that of the seven referred to above, four are of Scottish origin. As shown in Walker 2012, the narrative PP is certainly present in modern Scottish English, and it would certainly warrant further exploration to ascertain to what degree this feature may find its roots in Scottish English, or be the result of some form of language

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<sup>7</sup> <http://mudcat.org>. The direct links to the three songs used as examples here are <http://mudcat.org/@displaysong.cfm?SongID=7421>, <http://mudcat.org/@displaysong.cfm?SongID=818> and <http://mudcat.org/@displaysong.cfm?SongID=1570> respectively. The last one, *Dido Bendigo*, was famously sung by The Watsons.

<sup>8</sup> The earliest dates given here and for the other examples are provided by the Traditional Ballad Index, compiled by Robert Waltz and David Engle of California State University, Fresno (Waltz and Engle : 2011)

contact with Scots. However, this is perhaps equally likely to be attributable to the predominance of Scottish influence on folk ballads, rather than a linguistic issue.

However, in the absence of a more utilisable, or searchable corpus of folk songs, it has not thus far been possible to use this source of information other than as a pointer or a key to further exploration. In order to more fruitfully determine whether we are right to entertain the hypothesis that the narrative perfect is not an emergent form, we need to turn to more reliable and exploitable corpora of historical English, and in particular non-standard English. Recall that the hypothesis claims that the narrative perfect has remained a more-or-less regular feature of non-standard British Englishes over the centuries, and is only now coming to light more as a result of an increased focus among modern linguists on non-standard dialects in diachronic research, and an increased exposure, through the media, to such non-standard forms. It was naturally, then, that we turned to the Old Bailey Corpus.

#### **4. The narrative perfect in the Old Bailey Corpus**

The Proceedings of the Old Bailey is an astonishing resource of information for researchers of all stripes, containing the transcripts of some 200,000 trials stretching from 1674 to 1913. Its usefulness as a resource for linguistic data has been enhanced by the work undertaken by Magnus Huber, who created the Old Bailey Corpus<sup>9</sup>. This latter corpus, then, is a fully tagged searchable corpus of some 14 million words. Of particular interest is that there are speakers of all social classes in the corpus, and in particular a great many speakers of what Huber refers to as Lower Class<sup>10</sup>.

Trial transcripts are potential gold dust for the task at hand, since a considerable amount of what is given in evidence or under cross-examination is essentially narrative: witnesses are asked to provide blow-by-blow accounts of sequences of related events, as in the following example:

the Deceased had a Stick in his Hand, but one of them got hold of it, and would have pull'd it out of his Hand, upon which he assisted Orchard, to pull the Stick, and it broke, and then he ran away from the Prisoners; but they followed him, and Pritchard stopp'd him, and said he should not go, unless he

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<sup>9</sup> <http://www.uni-giessen.de/oldbaileycorpus/index.html>

<sup>10</sup> Huber uses the HISCLASS social class scheme, developed by Van Leeuwen, Maas and Miles (2002), which sets out an occupational classification system that claims to be both international and historical. A simplified version of this 13-point scale provides a binary classification for the speakers in the Old Bailey Corpus. In light of the paucity of results for in the following study, no breakdown into social categories is necessary here.



gave him a shilling. (Trial of John Darby William Pritchard, murder, October 1724)

The difficulty with this particular search is that while the POS tags make it possible to isolate the strings of “HAVE + PAST PARTICIPLE”, there is no way of automating a search that will distinguish between narrative and non-narrative perfects, and the number of occurrences makes it entirely inconceivable to pan for narrative nuggets by hand.

Consequently, it was decided to add to the search stings a variety of adverbials which typically signal some form of sequentiality, and which are thus not uncommon in narrative contexts, such as *then*, *suddenly* or *whereupon*. The results are as follows:

	<i>I</i>	<i>s/he</i>	<i>we</i>	<i>they</i>
<i>so</i>	8 / 0	7 / 1	0	0
<i>then</i>	34 / 0	15 / 1	0	0
<i>before</i>	0	1 / 0	5 <sup>11</sup> / 0	0
<i>suddenly</i>	2 / 0	0	0	0
<i>t/whereupon</i>	0	0	0	0
<i>upon which</i>	2	0	0	0
<i>after (that)</i>	17 / 2	14 / 1	4 / 0	7 / 0
<i>next</i>	0	0	0	0

Where there are two figures, the one on the left is the raw number of hits for the string in question, the number on the right the number of what is potentially, but only arguably so, a narrative perfect. Some of these arguable cases will form part of the discussion below, but before turning to them, we need note one obvious finding. Of narrative perfects are there practically none. This would seem to immediately and fatally weaken the hypothesis being held up for analysis.

Not only are the figures presented here extremely low, but the few cases that initially seem encouraging often reveal themselves to be ambiguous, at best. For instance, in the following brief extract from a cross-examination:

Addison. There has been a Bason of Water, and as they came in, they dipp'd their Hands in this Water, and *after that I have seen them kneel* down, and *they have taken* Beads out of their Pockets, and there was a Parcel of Images, and they seem'd to me to be made of Wax. Their Beads hung upon their Arms.

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<sup>11</sup> All of these are occurrences of the string *before we have done with you*, where 'we' refers to the court officials, which goes some way to explaining the slightly anomalous observation that there are more 'we' than any other pronoun, and equally why none can be deemed narrative.

(trial of Thomas Sockwell, indicted for unlawfully and willfully exercising Part of the Office and Function of a Popish, Priest, January 1746)

We do indeed observe a switch from Preterit to Perfect, and we might be inclined therefore to see this as an example of a narrative Perfect, until we note that this came as a response to the judge's question: "Pray what have you seen the Prisoner at the Bar do at any Time?", which is an almost perfect example of a perfect of experience<sup>12</sup>.

Similarly, the expectations are initially high when the following example appears:

She said to me, if your master finds out I have not been with Mr. Adair, or that Mr. Adair has not been here, he will never pardon me. After she has been talking with colonel Kinder, *she has rung for me and has shut herself* and me up in the parlour together; *then she has come* as if she was going to put her hand upon my shoulder, with a smile upon her face, *and has said*, that was well done of you, John, just now you have sav'd your master being angry with me, and there's half a crown for you. (Trial of Robert Perreau, forgery, May 1775)

Once again, however, the wider context points to an experiential reading, as this comes in response to a question posed, three conversational turns previous:

You seem to have been giving the particulars of something which passed upon some one particular occasion. I would ask you whether instances to the same effect have not happened many times?

Which is almost another textbook definition of the experiential perfect.

Indeed, there is perhaps only one instance in the entire corpus where a narrative perfect reading would seem to be possible:

About eight or nine days ago, Mrs. Symonds came to me crying, and said, Mrs. Taylor had borrowed her cloak and apron of her, to go to a relation, to get some money for her subsistence; but she got none, *so she has carried them to pawn*. I knew Mrs. Symonds had frequently lent her things before, and said she was very welcome to those things at any time.

Even here, however, another reading is conceivable, indeed, more likely. It may be that the speaker, who is reporting the speech of Mrs. Symonds, who is herself reporting the actions of Mrs. Taylor, switches from a past perfect

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<sup>12</sup> Briefly, by experiential perfect, we mean the reading of the HAVE perfect via which reference is made to some past event, or series of repeated events, without these events being anchored at any specific point in the past, such as 'I have broken a bone [at some point in my life]'.

*had borrowed* to a present perfect *has carried* as she moves from reported speech to directly quoted speech. In any event, it is by no means a clear-cut narrative perfect, and the Old Bailey Corpus therefore leaves us somewhat empty-handed.

There is of course a major doubt as to how faithful a representation of spoken language the proceedings actually are, and therefore to what degree we are simply indulging in 'the art of making the best use of bad data' (Labov 1994 : 11). First, of course, irrespective of the historical period under scrutiny, the courtroom is a place of formality, presumably representing a daunting experience for many of those whose accounts are recorded in the proceedings, and the standardizing pressure must have been intense. Certainly, there is a degree to which this concern is slightly anachronistic – many of the trial records come from a period often seen as epitomizing the onset of standardization proper, and it may well be that any standardizing pressure may have had results, in terms of linguistic production, different from what we might expect today. The fact nevertheless remains that all manner of accommodation phenomena must have been rife between witness and lawyer, thus rendering full reliance on the transcripts impossible. Second, the debates were taken down by clerk courts in shorthand and written up later, and so consequently there may well have been a significant amount of "standardizing correction" being applied. To what extent this is true is perhaps impossible to determine, but it certainly cannot be discounted. van Ostade (2009 : 17) makes a similar point, saying that the Old Bailey Corpus is a precious resource but reminding us that "the transcripts were made by clerks, not by linguists, and the purpose of the records was to preserve the contents of the proceedings, not the pronunciation of the speakers". On the other hand, Archer (2013 : 4) is at pains to point out that the Proceedings were written up very soon after the event, and had a reputation as constituting very authentic reports.

Even if we allow ourselves the consolation of the above comment to account for the paucity of examples, there is no doubt that the Old Bailey Corpus does not provide any degree of support for the hypothesis we set out to test. Any other evidence we can bring to bear is no more than frustratingly fleeting. And yet, just as we are about to reject the hypothesis as completely unfounded, we meet accounts of regional dialects published in the 19th century which contain occasional examples that perhaps merit detailed investigation. For instance, in his account of the daily lives of the London poor, Mayhew (1851, 192) recounts a dialogue which includes:

Anyhow I've seen one of them walk with a soldier and they've stopped a minute and she's taken something out of glove and given it to him. Then they've come up to me and he's said to her Mayn't I treat you with a little new milk my dear.

We are left, therefore, with a conundrum. One particular genre, that of folk songs, does seem to point towards the existence of a narrative perfect in the history of dialectal English. The Old Bailey Corpus seems to run counter to that. There is a similar almost complete lack of evidence from 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century literature. For instance, as far as I can ascertain, Charles Dickens, well renowned for his keen ear for dialectal variety and his skill in its transcription and integration into his literary work, provides not one single example of a narrative perfect. Likewise, work on the grammar books of the 18<sup>th</sup> century (Walker 2012) throws up very little in the way of such evidence. The same holds true of 19<sup>th</sup>-century grammatical tradition. Walker (in preparation) shows that only one British grammar book of the period, namely Lennie 1863 [1812], has anything to say on the matter of the “proper” usage of the present perfect, as opposed to the preterit, strongly suggesting that the stability of the form was not an issue.

Where does this leave us? Everything points to the narrative perfect indeed being a recently emergent phenomenon in some forms of English, particularly therefore in the United Kingdom and Oceania. By *recent*, on the basis of the above evidence, we mean no earlier than the mid-nineteenth century. Whether we are dealing with the same change or two unrelated developments must, for the moment, remain an open question, but there are pointers. The geographical extent of the phenomenon referred to previously, and its apparent absence in North American English<sup>13</sup>, may indicate a form of grammaticalization beginning in Britain subsequent to American colonization, but prior to the race to the Antipodes, which might equally go some way to explaining its absence from the Old Bailey data.

### **5. A final nail in the coffin? Hendiadys, extraordinary ONLY and the narrative perfect**

This final section makes no other pretension than to offer a reasoned speculation, with two objectives in mind. By exploring briefly the possibility that the narrative perfect has links with another potentially emergent, or at least growing, feature, we can reflect first on whether the British and Oceanic narrative perfects are the same phenomenon, or separate developments. The data presented below are, let us be clear, insufficient to be more than indicative, but ultimately if we are able to demonstrate separate developments within the two meta-varieties, this could be grist to a grammaticalization mill, inasmuch we would be positing two separate slides down a common cline. Second, if such links exist, they would I feel serve to

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<sup>13</sup> Indeed, if anything, the grammaticalization cline, if that is the metaphor we wish to adopt, would seem to be tilted in the opposite direction in the USA (Elsness 1997 : 104)

finally put paid to any notion that the HAVE-perfect has been stable over time in English thus finally dispensing with the hypothesis underlying all the foregoing speculation.

When looking at the HAVE-perfect, it is hard not to be struck by the number of hendiadic structures that crop up in the examples. By hendiads, following Hopper and Thompson (2002), we refer to situations in which two verbs are combined in a single clause which describes a single event, core examples of which are *go and V*, *come and V*, *turn round and V*, and the like. In the following, we will focus on the *go and V* structure, and first provide some illustration in combination with HAVE-perfects and with what I will be terming the extraordinary ONLY:

- (4) So we wait two whole excruciating weeks to see our new record signing in action and he's only gone and fallen ill a day before the match <sup>14</sup>
- (5) By George! He's only gone and cut price of a pint for a second time <sup>15</sup>
- (6) Great Scot. He's only gone and done it. Andy Murray is the Wimbledon champion! <sup>16</sup>

In each case, the hendiadic *go and V* is reinforced by ONLY. I refer to this as the extraordinary ONLY, by analogy with a similar phenomenon explored in French by Bres and Lebeau (2012). The claim to be made here is not (yet) that this ONLY correlates with the narrative perfect (of the three examples above, only the first can receive a perfective reading, it seems to me), nor that the hendiadic *go and V* correlates with the narrative perfect (see examples below). The claims put forward here, and which require considerable subsequent substantiation, are initially substantially more modest: first that the extraordinary ONLY shares some of the pragmatic force, particularly mirativity, with the narrative perfect, and second that it is a particularly British phenomenon. These claims foreshadow a subsequent hypothesis: if extraordinary ONLY is indeed mirative, uniquely British and emergent, and since the narrative perfect is mirative and not uniquely British, and if we are able to determine the degree of correlation between the two phenomena, we may be able to answer the vexed question of whether or not it is a recent form.

Regarding mirativity: as shown in the above examples, ONLY appears to be used frequently when the event described is counter-expectational (5), or particularly striking, be it because it is eagerly anticipated (6) or disappointing (4). In other words, ONLY seems to underscore some form of

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<sup>14</sup> <http://www.footballforums.net/forums/archive/index.php/t-301079.html>

<sup>15</sup> <http://www.burtonmail.co.uk/News/By-George-Hes-only-gone-and-cut-price-of-a-pint-for-a-second-time-20140320080000.htm>

<sup>16</sup> <http://www.theguardian.com/sport/2013/jul/07/andy-murray-novak-djokovic-live>

out-of-the-ordinariness about the event under consideration, and this is more than reminiscent of the use to which the HAVE-perfect is put in Australian English, as shown convincingly by Ritz (2010).

A second intriguing connection is that both the narrative perfect and the extraordinary ONLY are highly correlated with colloquial English. This is a constant of the previous work on the narrative perfect, already cited. It is equally apparent for extraordinary ONLY. In a little over 50 % of the corpus of examples constituted thus far for this and forthcoming research, with some 750 occurrences, there is some form of vulgarity, as in:

- (7) She's only fucking gone and done it again <sup>17</sup>  
 (8) We've only bloody gone and done it! 32hrs 48mins now will someone please open the champagne <sup>18</sup>

Regarding the geographical scope: extraordinary ONLY seems to have a similar diachronic and geographical distribution to the narrative HAVE-perfect with one important difference, as we shall see. It is, of course, impossible to automate a search for the extraordinary ONLY, because of the frequency with which ONLY appears in all of its other various adverbial uses in the corpora, but it is possible to take advantage of its association with the hendiadic *go and V* construction, in which it seems to bear the extraordinary interpretation almost systematically, in order to facilitate the search process.

Using the capacity of Google Advanced Search to indicate the national origin of a page, and armed with all the usual caveats about such a search, in particular caveats about the reports on the number of hits provided by the search engine, we obtain the following numbers

	I've only gone and	S/he's _____	we've _____	they've _____
AU	13	40	1	22
US	11	34	0	15
NZ	4	6	0	1
GB	11,000	27,340	20,800	8,110
CA	23	34	11	19

Pending further investigation using other corpora, the initial result is clear. The HAVE + GO + V construction is clearly overwhelmingly a British phenomenon. When it is taken into account that a considerable number of the

<sup>17</sup> <http://www.thetales.co.uk/index.php?showtopic=1086&st=325>

<sup>18</sup> <https://www.facebook.com/pages/C2C-for-Caitlyn-for-British-Heart-Foundation/196639853720457>

results obtained from US, AU, NZ and CA domains are clearly resyndicated articles from originally British newspapers, or repostings of blog entries originally written by British contributors, the figures become even more striking GO AND is panlectal, but considerably more in GB English.

It should be recalled that the foregoing is purely intended as a pointer for future research, and it can only claim to offer very circumstantial evidence for the main finding of this paper, which is that, occasional intriguing oddities aside, such as folk songs, which are deserving of greater attention, we are perhaps close to a point where we can definitively say that the narrative perfect is an emergent phenomenon in, at the very least, British English. This finding runs counter to this author's own attempts in previous work (Walker 2008, 2011, in press) to weaken the grammaticalization hypothesis, which continues, study after study, to receive confirmation. Further confirmation that the cline from periphrastic perfect to simple past is powerful, if not inescapable, comes in the form of asides in the literature on dialectal Englishes, such as Wolfram and Schilling-Estes (2004: 212) who note that in Lumbee English, "it [the perfect with BE auxiliary] has expanded with respect to tense and aspect so that it now applies to some simple past constructions (e.g. *I'm forgot the food yesterday*)". To continue bolstering this claim, the development of the British narrative perfect will be fascinating to trace in the coming years.

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