

Be after V-ing on the Past Grammaticalisation Path: How Far Is It after Coming?¹

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1. *Perfect to Preterite?*

The Irish English *be after V-ing* gram is undoubtedly a transfer from Irish Gaelic (e.g. Filppula 1999: 275; Heine and Kuteva 2003: 540).² This gram is based on a prepositional structure – ‘X is after Y’ – that has rarely been grammaticalised as a perfect in other languages or dialects (Heine and Kuteva 2005: 94). It is typically used to refer to situations in the recent or immediate past, and is often referred to as the ‘hot-news perfect’ (e.g. Harris 1984, 1991; Kallen 1989).³ An example of hot-news use is (1), where the addressee is informed about an event of which he was previously unaware:

- (1) “‘Patrick, Patrick, the cows **are after breakin’** into the turnips,’ I heard cried loudly.” (Kavanagh 1938: 198)

In other varieties of English, (1) might be rendered by *the cows have just broken into the turnips*, using a *have*-perfect and the adverb *just* to underscore the immediacy of the event. Occasional claims that there might be another source of this gram in the English dialects of England itself, or even that English might be the ultimate source of the Irish gram, introduce the intriguing possibility of long-term exchange of grammatical material to and fro between the two languages. However, to the best of my knowledge, these suggestions remain undocumented by empirical diachronic research on either Irish or IrE.

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² Henceforth ‘Irish English’ is abbreviated as IrE; ‘Irish Gaelic’ is referred to as Irish.

³ Other terms used in accounts of the *be after V-ing* gram include ‘immediate perfective’ (Hickey 1995) and ‘*after* perfect’ (Filppula 1999; Ronan 2005).

Some studies of present-day IrE observe *be after V-ing* to be extending its semantic range to cover other senses of the perfect, too (Kallen 1989, 1990, 1991; Harris 1993; Fieß 2000; Ronan 2005). This range is also present in the diachronic literary data used for the present study.⁴ For instance, (2) is a resultative perfect, focused on the present result of past actions; (3) is a continuative perfect, referring to a situation that persists up to, and possibly beyond, the discourse now; and (4) is an existential perfect, referring to an event that has occurred at some unspecified time prior to the discourse now.⁵

- (2) “‘No reflection on yourself,’ he said, ‘but this lad **is after becoming** a danger to people.’” (O’Connor 1998: 78)
- (3) “I mean, **I’m after bein’ cooped up** for an age, Homer.” (*ibid.*, 338)
- (4) “She’s heading back to America on Tuesday, where **she’s after getting born again.**” (Bolger 1997: 25)

In oral history interview data from Dublin, Ronan (2005) finds hot news the most frequent meaning, but only by a small margin, as Table 1 shows. In Ronan’s data, 32% (n = 12/37) of *be after V-ing* tokens express hot news exclusively. But there are almost as many resultative uses (n = 11/37, or 30%), and a further 19% of tokens combine these two meanings. The gram is also found in what Ronan calls ‘experiential’ meanings (referred to as ‘existential’ in the present study) and a single token (3%) combined the experiential sense with her ‘persistent’ (my ‘continuative’) category.

⁴ Literary representations of IrE dialect remain the richest source available for study of this gram. As a brief but exhaustive survey of studies to date indicates, only literary data permits any kind of diachronic survey, as well as providing sufficient material for study of the full semantic range of *be after V-ing*. While some 1347 literary tokens are used for the historical survey reported in McCafferty (2004), other studies to date are based on much smaller data sets. From more vernacular written sources, Filppula (1999: 100, 105) uses four examples from emigrant letters, and the present author has located eight tokens in the letters reproduced in Fitzpatrick (1994), which is also one of Filppula’s sources. Kallen’s study of spoken Dublin English (1989, 1990, 1991) is based on 114 or 140 tokens in its various versions. Filppula (1997, 1999) has 25 or 26 examples from four localities throughout the south of Ireland, and Ronan (2005) has 37 examples from Dublin and Wexford speakers. Other studies where the gram is mentioned use data sets containing only three to four occurrences (Harris 1984; Kirk 1992; Corrigan 1997; Fieß 2000). And finally, Hickey (2005: 120) cites a couple of examples from his Dublin corpus.

⁵ The distinctiveness of these four senses of the perfect is debated, and hot news, in particular, is often treated as a subcategory of one of the other meanings. Thus, McCawley (1971: 109, 1981) allows that the hot-news perfect might be a type of existential perfect. Brinton (1988: 10-12, 45) regards hot-news, existential and continuative senses as subcategories of the resultative perfect. While Michaelis (1998: 157-159) views hot news as a subtype of the resultative perfect, her analysis retains the other three senses. For Elsness (1997: 77), the perfect has just two uses: it refers either to situations not attached to a (definite) past-time anchor or to situations continuing up to the discourse now. For the moment, it is useful to bracket discussion of how many senses of the perfect there are and retain all four senses for the present discussion, because these have been a central part of accounts of *be after V-ing* since Harris (1984) at least.

<i>Meaning</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>%</i>
Hot news	12	32
Resultative	11	30
Resultative/Hot news	7	19
Experiential	6	16
Experiential/persistent	1	3
TOTAL	37	

Table 1 Meanings of *be after V-ing* (after Ronan 2005)

If such patterns were to emerge in other studies of present-day IrE, too, it would be necessary to reconsider the view that hot news is currently the core meaning of the *be after V-ing* gram. In a diachronic perspective, however, as the pilot survey reported below shows, hot news is indeed the core past-time semantics of the construction (Hickey 1995, 1997, 2000) until the twentieth century.

An important caveat as regards the findings reported by Kallen, Fieß and Ronan is that they are based on synchronic data and do not allow us to determine the direction of any past or ongoing changes. The view that *be after V-ing* is extending its semantic range to other senses of the perfect might imply that the construction was already a hot-news perfect when transferred from Irish. While there can be no doubt that it is a transfer from Irish, there is as yet no study of the full semantic range of the Irish construction either synchronically or diachronically (Ronan 2005). However, Ronan (*ibid.*) reports that the Early Modern Irish construction had resultative meaning; in present-day Gaeltacht Irish, it denotes recency or hot news (Greene 1979: 128), but in non-Gaeltacht Irish, i.e., largely among second-language users, it reportedly covers a wider range of perfect senses (*ibid.*, 129).

If, as Ronan (2005) notes, the Early Modern Irish gram on which it is calqued was a resultative perfect that later came to express hot news, and if a diachronic study of the semantics of *be after V-ing* with past-time reference shows it to have had a wide range of perfect functions in its earliest documented stages, then these wider perfect uses might be inherited from Irish, too. Continuity in the use of *be after V-ing* across the perfect senses in (1)-(4) would then be evidence of 'layering' or survival of older meanings (Hopper and Traugott 2003: 124-126), rather than change. It is important, therefore, to establish the time-depth of this range of uses, and this is the first aim of the present study, which examines a subset of past-time occurrences of *be after V-ing* in literary texts by writers born from the seventeenth century to the twentieth. The data, from a large collection of examples of the construction in literary representations of IrE, consists of 105 tokens that co-occur with past-time adverbials. This subset has been chosen for the pilot survey because the presence of temporal adverbials allows comparatively objective classification across semantic categories. The

result shows that all perfect senses are present in the earliest period (1601-1750), and continuity of this range can be documented to the present day.⁶

The second stage of the analysis is prompted by the presence of examples like (5), which raise the issue of whether *be after V-ing* might be grammaticalising further into a preterite:

- (5) The chairman of the East's Residents' Association and the mother of Tommy O'Rourke who has that pub in the village **are after both kicking the bucket** yesterday. (Bolger 1990: 87)

In (5), the deictic punctual adverb *yesterday* violates the constraint prohibiting adverbials with specific time reference in perfect contexts (Bybee, Perkins and Pagliuca 1994: 62; Klein 1992: 525). The adverb invites interpretation of (5) as referring simply to past events, without necessarily conveying any other sense associated with the perfect. This suggests that *be after V-ing* may be undergoing change from perfect to preterite for some users. The diachronic data shows this use to have appeared later than any of the perfect senses, occurring first in the language of writers born in the early nineteenth century. It remains relatively infrequent, but might nevertheless point to the possibility of further semantic change in this gram.

A perspective in grammaticalisation theory (Hopper and Traugott 2003), more specifically Bybee, et al.'s (1994) evolutionary approach to syntax, allows us to place the senses conveyed by this gram in a developmental relationship that points in the opposite direction to suggestions that *be after V-ing* is a hot-news perfect that is spreading into other semantic domains of the perfect. This offers an alternative account of the range of perfect uses since the seventeenth century and the emergence of apparently preterite uses: a perfect gram used in the hot-news sense has reached a late evolutionary stage – which for this gram might have happened before transfer from Irish to IrE – and might hence be a candidate for further evolution into a preterite, a development that has clearly happened for some IrE-speakers.

2. A Past Grammaticalisation Path for Be after V-ing

Change from perfect to preterite is far from unusual, although it has not, to my knowledge, been suggested before in connection with this gram. In many languages, constructions formerly used as perfects have grammaticalised into perfectives or preterites. Well-known examples are found in French and Dutch, as well as varieties of Spanish, Italian and German, including standard spoken German, where perfects formed with 'have' and/or 'be' plus a past participial verb have replaced preterites. Such change entails generalisation (Hopper and Traugott 2003: 104-106), or bleaching and eventually loss of core semantic characteristics, making a gram available for use in more general contexts.

⁶ Ronan (2005) offers resultative as a possible reading of all the examples in Bliss (1979).

A perfect that becomes a preterite loses the connotation of current relevance that is regarded by many as part of the semantic core of the perfect (Comrie 1976; Bybee, et al. 1994; Michaelis 1998). While the perfect views an anterior situation in relation to the ‘now’ of an ongoing discourse, referring simultaneously to past and present, and inviting implicatures concerning the relevance of the past situation to the present, the preterite simply locates a situation in time. Besides current relevance, the perfect, of course, typically conveys a set of further semantic nuances (cf. Leech 1971; McCawley 1971, 1973; Comrie 1976). Various labels have been used for these functions; for present purposes, they are referred to as the resultative, continuative, existential and hot-news senses discussed above in relation to examples (1)-(4). These additional senses are likewise lost, as a perfect becomes a preterite.

Bybee, et al.’s (1994: 51-124) crosslinguistic survey of syntactic evolution sees the perfect as a stage on a grammaticalisation path, the endpoint of which is the preterite, and places the various perfect senses in a broad diachronic relationship: the first perfect sense to emerge is the resultative, while hot news arises late. Elaborating on this model, Carey’s (1994, 1995, 1996) work on the Old and Middle English perfect shows hot news developing last, after the resultative, continuative and existential uses, in that order. Finally, looking at the perfect in English and Spanish, Schwenter (1994 a, 1994 b) makes the case for hot news as the end of the line for the perfect, a stepping-stone to the preterite, with hodiernal uses, referring to situations completed on the *today* of the discourse, as a further indication that perfect meanings are giving way to the preterite.

2.1. *Perfect Grams and Sources*

Be after V-ing is not an independent development in IrE, but a syntactic transfer from Irish (Harris 1984: 319; Filppula 1997: 233; Hickey 2000: 100).⁷ And the fact that the gram might already have covered much of the full range of perfect semantics when transferred implies that the Irish source construction might already have evolved far along the past grammaticalisation path prior to transfer.

The Irish construction on which *be after V-ing* is based may be regarded as deriving from a locational source proposition – ‘X is *after* Y’ – of a type that is often found underlying verbal aspects cross-linguistically (Heine, et al. 1991: 153). Such aspectual grams are common in Irish (Ó Corráin 1997 a, 1997 b).

Although the periphrasis with *tar éis* (> *tréis*) or *i ndiaidh* ‘after’ is not documented until Modern Irish, the Irish language has long had a perfect construc-

⁷ Discussing IrE, Heine and Kuteva (2003: 540) “... are not aware of any other language in the world that has undergone a similar process – a fact that may be taken as compelling evidence to consider this to be an instance of replica grammaticalization.” Similar grams are found in Scottish Gaelic, Welsh, Hebridean English and Newfoundland English. Welsh and Scottish Gaelic are related typologically and genetically to Irish, while the presence of this gram in Hebridean and Newfoundland English is clearly due to language contact in the former case and migration from Ireland in the latter.

tion formed using prepositions (*iar, air, ar*) or prepositional phrases (*tar éis, d'éis, i ndiaidh*, etc.) meaning 'after' (Ó Sé 2004: 186-198). The periphrasis *tá* + 'after' + Verbal Noun (VN) has been used as a perfect since the twelfth century (Dillon 1941; Thurneysen 1946; Gagnepain 1963; Greene 1979, 1980; Ó Corráin 1997 a, 1997 b; Ó Sé 2004), some 500 years before its appearance in representations of Irish English. Greene (1979) notes that the Irish gram had more general perfect semantics by the time large-scale British settlement of Ireland began in the late sixteenth century. In present-day Irish, the construction also carries wider perfect senses (*ibid.*; Ó Sé 2004; Ronan 2005).

The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines the original meaning as "farther off, at a greater distance from the front, or from a point in front," and hence "more to the rear, behind, later" (OED, s.v. *after*). But *after* may also denote movement in the sense of 'following,' which refers either to 'pursuit' (i.e. goalward movement) – from which derive the future senses discussed in McCafferty (2003, 2004) – or 'order,' with reference not only to locational or temporal, but also causal sequence. This range renders *be after V-ing*, and its Irish source, capable of grammaticalising into either a completive (via 'temporal sequence') or resultative (via 'causal sequence'), and thence into a perfect.

Perfect grams often derive from lexical sources that have earlier conveyed resultative or completive meanings. The GRAMCATS survey (Bybee, et al. 1994) proposes a past grammaticalisation path that places these senses, the perfect, preterite and related tense-aspect categories in an evolutionary relationship. The major sources of grams on this path are certain types of stative verbs, dynamic verbs, and directional adverbs (*ibid.*, 55). Grams from such sources may first acquire completive or resultative meanings, then become perfects, and might ultimately develop into preterites (*ibid.*, 51-105). The stative verbs are frequently copulas, but *have, remain* and *wait* are also common sources. Dynamic verbs include verbs of movement (especially 'movement from source;' cf. Bybee and Dahl 1989: 58) and verbs meaning *finish* or *be finished*. Adverbial sources tend to be directional, e.g. *away, up* or *into* (Bybee, et al. 1994: 55). Like its Irish source gram, *be after V-ing* overlaps with all three major source categories. It is a construction containing a copula verb *be* and a preposition *after* which in context is capable of conveying sequential ordering in the directional sense of movement away from a source. And the collocation *be after* is capable of interpretation as equivalent to *be finished (with)* in the sense of 'having something behind one.'

Figure 1, adapted from Bybee, et al. (1994), traces semantic change from the relevant lexical sources through perfect meanings to preterite. Grams with sources in stative verbs like *be* and *have* typically proceed through a resultative stage to the perfect, while those from dynamic verbal sources like *finish* signal completive meanings before becoming perfects, as do grams whose lexical sources are directional adverbs (*ibid.*, 51). Having reached the perfect stage, grams from these sources may then become preterites (*ibid.*). While the grams at all stages refer to situations completed prior to some temporal reference point,

they differ in their additional implications (*ibid.*, 52). In a study of *be after V-ing*, which was transferred from Irish in the seventeenth century with perfect meanings from the outset – albeit as a minority semantics, at least in the written record – the relevant segment of the grammaticalisation path stretches from perfect to preterite, so that the remainder of this study is concerned with shifts within this range.

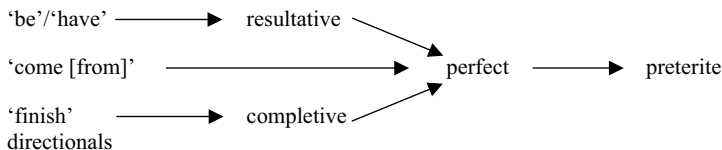


Fig. 1 Paths of development leading to preterite
(after Bybee, et al. 1994: 105, Fig. 3.1.)

2.2. Perfect Distinctions and Perfect-Preterite Evolution

The perfect denotes past action with current relevance, but within that broad characterisation, other semantic nuances are identified – the resultative, continuative, existential and hot-news uses discussed above. In the GRAMCATS survey, the additional sense most frequently associated with the perfect at early stages is resultative: a resultative perfect describes a present state as the result of a past action (*ibid.*, 62). In Bybee, et al.'s terms, a gram that only conveys current relevance and resultative meaning is a young perfect. As they develop into old perfects, grams add further nuances, expressing the continuative sense (*ibid.*, 78) as well as others like future perfect, past perfect and hot news (*ibid.*, 79f.). However, this model is based on reference material containing few mentions of these other senses (*ibid.*, 62), so that evolutionary relationships between them are not specified in detail. Nevertheless, hot-news use in this view indicates an old perfect, i.e. one that might be a candidate for development into a preterite.

Work on the perfect in English and Spanish (Carey 1994, 1995, 1996; Schwenter 1994 a, 1994 b) also suggests that next to arise after the resultative are continuative senses, while hot news evolves last. The English perfect with *have* plus a past participial verb was originally a resultative construction that became a true perfect in Old English (Traugott 1992: 190-193; Denison 1993: 346-348) and was fully grammaticalised in Middle English (Fischer 1992: 256-262). In its early stages, the Old English construction had resultative perfect meanings (Carey 1990: 374). Increasing use of this resultative perfect in iterative or durative contexts facilitated emergence of the up-to-the-present temporal sense that gave rise to the continuative sense (Carey 1996: 37-39; cf. also Schwenter 1994 a: 1008). As for hot news, Carey (1995: 94) cites an early example from Laya-

mon's *Brut* (c. 1225) that looks like incipient hot news,⁸ but this use is not conventionalised until Early Modern English (*ibid.*, 94f.), and even then, such uses are rare. Citing examples from the Early Modern part of the *Helsinki Corpus of English Texts* (Kytö 1991), Schwenter remarks on the dearth of hot-news examples in Early Modern and present-day English and suggests that hot-news remains rare because it is typical of media registers (Schwenter 1994 a: 1010f.).

In summary, a perfect gram might be expected to develop along the past grammaticalisation path towards the preterite. This is a process of grammaticalisation and subjectification (Traugott 1995; Hopper and Traugott 2003: 104-106): from its beginnings in the relatively objective resultative perfect of Old English, where the result of an event is present, the perfect proceeds through increasingly subjective uses to the maximally subjective hot-news sense, which encodes a speaker's construal of the immediacy and newness of an event rather than any aspect of the event itself (Carey 1995: 95-97; Schwenter 1994 a: 1007). A gram expressing such subjective meanings is more grammaticalised than one lacking this kind of subjectivity (Traugott 1989, 1995; Hopper and Traugott 2003: 92). Later, the semantic element of newness bleaches, permitting hodiernal and ultimately preterite meanings that are arguably more objective again, referring simply to the anteriority of a situation. How does this path relate to documented uses of *be after V-ing* with past-time reference?

3. Semantic History of Past-Time Be After V-ing

Studies of present-day Dublin English (Kallen 1989, 1990, 1991) show that *be after V-ing* is used with all the meanings conveyed by the *have*-perfect in other Englishes. This range is not restricted to Dublin. Fieß (2000: 197) reports resultative perfect usage in east Galway. And among Ronan's (2005) Dublin and Wexford speakers, some of those who did not use the *have*-perfect used *be after V-ing* across the full perfect range, while users of the *have*-perfect restricted *be after V-ing* to hot news only. Findings like these for present-day IrE raise the issue of how long the gram has been used across this range. The survey presented below documents a time-depth of more than three centuries and continuity to the present.

3.1. Perfect Uses, 1670-1800

Use of *be after V-ing* right across the semantic range of the perfect is present in the earliest data from the seventeenth century. Of 21 examples in Bliss' (1979) anthology of texts from 1600 to 1740 – in which the earliest example of

⁸ Carey's example is: *Lauerd king queð þe cniht to soðe ich þe cuðe her riht. / he hafuð inome þine maye hahliche strende* (Layamon 25667) "Lord king," quoth the knight, "in sooth I make known to thee right here, he hath taken away thy relative, with great strength," (Carey 1995: 94)

be after V-ing is recorded in a text dated 1670-75 – there are only three perfect tokens. Bliss regards just one of these (6) as equivalent to present-day (i.e. hot-news) usage (*ibid.*, 300):

- (6) ... you shee here de cause dat **is after bringing** you to dis plaace (Dunton 1698; in Bliss 1979: 133)

However, if a hot-news perfect typically conveys information that is ‘news’ to addressees, (6) is anomalous, since the addressees already know what has brought them to their present location. Rather, (6) is a resultative perfect, with focus on a present state resulting from a past event.

The other perfect uses in Bliss (*ibid.*) are cited in (7) and (8). These hybrids combine elements of *be after V-ing* and the *have*-perfect. Neither has hot-news meaning. Example (7) is another resultative use, referring to a present state (the treasure is hidden) brought about by the act of hiding. The existential perfect in (8) refers to a situation (the wearing of Irish brogues rather than English shoes) that has occurred on some unspecified occasion(s) in the past.

- (7) ... but what do dee say to Chests full of Plaat, Barrels of de Money, dat **have been after hid**, dare is Treasure upon Treasure in *Darry*. (Michelburne 1705; in Bliss 1979: 147)
- (8) ... day tell me, his Graash *Tirconnel* fill not let de Officer go in Brogue, or be in his Shamber, wearing de *Irish* Brogue, fait Joy, he **has been after wearing** dem himself. (Michelburne 1705; in Bliss 1979: 146)

There are just four further examples of perfect use by writers born to 1750 in other sources, listed as (9)-(12). Example (9) is a conditional perfect (‘would have been slain’), the only such instance to 1750. (10) is a hybrid existential perfect, referring in this case to a situation that has *not* occurred in the past. In (11), the adverbial *all along* indicates a continuative perfect: the situation has persisted up to the time of speaking (and may continue into the future). Finally, (12) is the only clear example of hot-news semantics from a writer born before 1750, and the recency of the event is underscored here by the adverb *just*. Hot news is also implied in that (12) introduces by name someone hitherto unknown to the addressees and provides information about him that may be assumed to be news to them.

- (9) Have I Converted sho many Hereticks dogs and was sho deep in your braave Plott, and **had like to have bin after being slain** upon a Gibbet, and been a great Martyr for de Plott, and dosht dou require a Reashon of mee? (Shadwell 1690: 21)
- (10) ‘Upon my Shoul I do love the King very well, and I **have not been after breaking** any Thing of his that I do know ...’ (Fielding 1752: 9)
- (11) Now, in troth, ‘tis a pity, quoth mine Irish host, that all this good courtship should be lost; for the young gentlewoman **has been after going** out of hearing of it all along. (Sterne 1760, VII: 25)
- (12) Why, friend, my master is *Mr. Delamour*, who **is just after coming** from *Paris*, ... (O’Keeffe 1767: 23)

Analysis of the semantics of all 72 past-time tokens of *be after V-ing* to 1800 is presented in Table 2. Hot news was already the predominant past-time semantics of the gram, although it must be emphasised that past-time reference remained a minority semantics throughout this period, when future uses are much more frequent in the data (cf. McCafferty 2003, 2004). Hot-news uses account for 61% (n = 44/72) of perfect tokens in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Of the other perfect senses, the existential is the next most frequent, with 10 tokens (14%), and there are 5 resultative (7%) and 4 continuative perfects (6%). There are also 3 future and 5 conditional perfects (4% and 7%, respectively). And finally, the material contains one genuinely ambiguous example (1%): “(...) give him to me if **you’re after leaving** the life in him! (...)” (Banim 1830, II: 287). Here, it is unclear whether we are dealing with a resultative perfect or a desiderative future meaning: the sentence may mean either ‘if you want the victim to live’ or ‘if you haven’t already killed him.’ Ambiguity of this kind reflects the Janus-like quality of *after* (McCafferty 2003, 2004) and is suggestive of how *be after V-ing* could persist as a future and a perfect gram simultaneously in the language of Irish and Anglo-Irish writers born as late as the latter half of the eighteenth century (cf. also survey in McCafferty 2005: 355f.).

<i>Meaning</i>	1601- 1800	%
Hot news	44	61
Existential	10	14
Resultative	5	7
Continuative	4	6
Future perfect	3	4
Conditional perfect	5	7
Hot news/fut. (des.)	1	1
TOTAL	72	

Table 2 *Be after V-ing*: distribution among perfect senses, 1601-1800

The first part of this survey, then, finds all the major perfect uses in the admittedly small amount of data for the period to 1750. Examples (6)-(12), from writers born in the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, show that the situation highlighted by Kallen (1989, 1990, 1991) and others for present-day IrE is not new: *be after V-ing* has been used with perfect meanings other than hot news since the earliest recorded examples, and this situation persisted to 1800. Moreover, the presence of not only hot-news but also other categories, like future and conditional perfects, suggests *be after V-ing* was already an old perfect. It does not, however, show any sign of evolving into a preterite in this period.

3.2. *Perfect Uses, 1801-2000*

Continuity in this range of perfect senses can be traced to the present. In (13)-(15), examples of each use are listed from 1801 to 2000. All four uses are found throughout the recorded history of the gram. The resultative senses in (13) are focused on the present results of past actions or processes. The continuative uses in (14) refer to situations that persist up to the discourse now.⁹ The existential senses in (15) refer to events at unspecified points in the past. And hot-news examples are given in (16).

(13) *Resultative*

- a. "... here – taste this – musha, bad end to id, but **it's afther makin'** idsef empty." (Banim 1826, I: 256f.)
- b. "You think it's a grand thing **you're after doing** with your letting on to be dead, but what is it at all?" (Synge 1903/1968, III: 57)
- c. "'No reflection on yourself,' he said, 'but this lad **is after becoming** a danger to people.'" (O'Connor 1998: 78)

(14) *Continuative*

- a. "**Is it afther bein'** up all night on the road betune Hollywood and Rathdown; sure you have had no rest at all?" (Boucicault 1868: 120)
- b. "I'm half thinking if it wasn't that I'm destroyed wanting to see herself **is after being** ten years beside me I'd do the way I am, for it isn't a bad way at all, Timmy the smith." (Synge 1903/1968, III: 86)
- c. "I mean, **I'm after bein' cooped up** for an age, Homer." (O'Connor 1998: 338)

(15) *Existential*

- a. "I lay my life **you're afther gettin'** money from the masther." (Griffin 1829, II: 98)
- b. "You did not, mother; it wasn't Michael you seen, for his body **is after being found** in the far north, and he's got a clean burial by the grace of God." (Synge 1904/1968, III: 19)
- c. "... She's heading back to America on Tuesday, where **she's after getting born again**." (Bolger 1997: 25)

(16) *Hot news*

- a. "... I have a little spot av ground at a fair rint, an' the ould parson – good luck to him! – **is just afther givin'** me a laise." (Kickham 1882: 31)
- b. "I **am just after reading** in the paper that St. Cecilia – you remember St. Cecilia, Jack! – is at present on her honeymoon – married to a policeman." (O'Brien 1890: 282)
- c. "**The bar's just after closing**, Father." (O'Connor 2000: 309)

In summary, *be after V-ing* was used with the full range of perfect semantics to 1800, and has continued to be so used to the present day. Resultative, continuative and existential senses alongside hot-news uses in contemporary IrE might, therefore, be evidence of the survival of older semantics rather than ex-

⁹ In (14c), and also in (21a, b and d) below, the gram is used in a subordinate *and*-clause.

tension to other perfect senses. In this respect, there has been no change in the range of past-time uses in the last 330 years, although we have, of course, not yet looked at the relative strengths of these meanings. This is one of the issues that will be addressed when we now turn to the question of whether *be after V-ing* is evolving beyond the perfect. The next section presents a diachronic analysis of uses of *be after V-ing* with temporal adverbials.

4. Temporal Adverbials and Uses of Be After V-ing, 1701-2000

The hypothesis examined here is that co-occurrence of *be after V-ing* with different types of temporal adverbials may reveal its progress along the past grammaticalisation path. As, for instance, Michaelis (1998: 163ff.) shows, the preterite and various senses of the perfect co-occur with certain types of temporal adverbial. Present or indefinite past-time adverbs (e.g. *now, ever, before, already*) and time-span adverbials (e.g. *since*) specifying the starting point of a phase, all co-occur with resultative, continuative or existential perfects, and may thus indicate a pre-hot-news stage of perfect development. The same applies to durational adverbials (e.g. *for*-phrases), which co-occur with the continuative perfect. The hot-news stage is indicated by adverbs referring to immediate or recent past time, e.g. *just, only, just now, this minute, there now, lately*, etc. In the final stages, we find co-occurrence with hodiernal and punctual past-time adverbials that refer to a gradually more distant past and signal grammaticalisation beyond the perfect stage. Hodiernal adverbials like *this day, this morning* and *today*, which may convey punctual past-time meaning at a greater distance to the discourse now, show post-hot-news uses of *be after V-ing*. Definite deictic and punctual past-time adverbials like *yesterday* and *in 1954*, respectively, indicate the even more distant past-time meanings usually associated with the preterite.

This evolutionary grammaticalisation path from resultative, continuative and existential perfect to hot-news perfect, and then on to hodiernal and preterite uses owes a great deal to Schwenter (1994 a, 1994 b). A preliminary comparison of the results of judgments by present-day speakers of IrE (Kallen 1989: 24-27) suggests the same developmental order. Only 17% of Kallen's judges ($n = 4/24$) accepted the test sentence *John is after working at 8:00* with its definite past-time adverbial. However, examples with arguably hodiernal meanings – *It's after being a nice day* and *I'm after being hungry all morning* – were judged grammatical by, respectively, 58% ($n = 14/24$) and 54% ($n = 13/24$) of respondents (Kallen 1989: 24f., Tables 3 and 4). Greater acceptability for the hodiernal sense might indicate that it is more likely to have emerged before preterite uses and occurs more frequently. As we will see, uses with hodiernal adverbials are documented from writers born in the late eighteenth century, and examples with punctual past-time adverbials from writers born in the 1830s.

4.1. Hodiernal Uses

In Schwenter's (1994 a, 1994 b) view, hodiernal uses referring to situations on the same day as the utterance point to a shift from perfect towards preterite meaning. In the Irish English data, this use first occurs in a work by John Banim (born 1798), cited as (17a). Hodiernal uses are also found to the present day, as illustrated by (17b-c), in works by writers born in the eighteenth, nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Only one example of *be after V-ing* with a hodiernal adverbial (from present-day Dublin) is cited in the previous literature on this gram (18).

- (17) *Be after V-ing* with hodiernal reference
- a. "“There you go, an’ may you never know what it is to have a heart as heavy as the hearts **you’re afther makin’** happy this day!” – added Peery.” (Banim 1839: 241)
 - b. “Con Cooney remarked to his sister Mave, as they passed over the bridge in the jennet’s cart on their way home from the butter market, that Mr. Armstrong ‘**must be after doing** great work on the river to-day.’” (Kickham 1886: 179)
 - c. “But **I’m after been** [*sic*] out for a walk already today, Homer.” (O’Connor 1998: 247)
- (18) Hodiernal *be after V-ing* in present-day speech
I’m after falling over that about ten times this morning. (Kallen 1989: 10)

Hodiernal senses might, as Schwenter (1994 a, 1994 b) observes, play an important role in the shift from perfect to preterite because, with hodiernal adverbials, *be after V-ing* refers to situations prior to the discourse now on the same day as the utterance. While these situations belong to the recent past, hodiernal adverbials also refer to a period of time (the discourse today) that is still ongoing up to the discourse now, which is the semantic core of the continuative perfect. But it is also possible to interpret adverbials like *this morning* as having punctual past-time reference to a morning viewed as firmly in the past. The latter reading, Schwenter (1994 b: 99) argues, makes this kind of adverbial co-occurrence a bridge linking perfect and preterite senses, and might reinforce a tendency to use *be after V-ing* with adverbials that, strictly speaking, violate the constraint on definite past-time reference with a perfect gram.

4.2. Preterite Uses

Since definite past-time adverbials like *yesterday* and *in 1954* are not used with the perfect (Michaelis 1998: 164; Bybee, et al. 1994: 62), co-occurrence of such adverbials with *be after V-ing* might be evidence of generalisation to preterite meanings. In (19), the definite punctual adverbial *forty-seven years ago* locates an event in the very distant past. The perfect is incompatible with such time reference, but perfects grammaticalising into preterites must at some point begin to be used with adverbials of this category.

- (19) **I'm after paying** £12 for pram for Tony forty-seven years ago that wasn't worth £1!
(Kearns 1994: 190)

The example in (19) is from an interview with a Dubliner born in 1919, suggesting that the possibility of using *be after V-ing* as a preterite stretches back to the early twentieth century at least.¹⁰ A further instance of such use in present-day spoken IrE is cited in (20).

- (20) They know **they're after dirtying** it the day before. (Kallen 1989: 12)

Further evidence comes from the list of adverbs co-occurring with *be after V-ing* in Kallen's Dublin English data. Included there are single occurrences of *only yesterday* and *about ten minutes ago* (Kallen 1989: 14), both of which locate their situations at definite points in the past and indicate uses interpretable as preterites.

The first example with a definite past-time adverbial occurred in a work by Charles Kickham (born 1828), cited as (21a), and there are four such uses in the data for this study (4%). Here, too, there is continuity to the present (21b-d), with uses of this kind attested in modern written representations of IrE. In (21b-c), the deictic punctual adverbs *last night* and *yesterday* co-occur with *be after V-ing*, while (21d) contains the adverbial *only last Christmas*, which combines deictic punctual and recent adverbials.¹¹

- (21) Preterite *be after V-ing* 1801-2000
- "An' are they all gone wudout mindin' me, or takin' the laste notice uv me, **an' I afther houldin'** my breath for the bullets to go through my heart tin minutes ago?" (Kickham 1882: 82)
 - "... I'm thinking it's my own bloody destiny this day is making circuit here, **and I after thinking** last night as I sat on this stool I was shut of the great lonesomeness of the world," (Synge 1904/1968, IV: 108, fn. 5)
 - "The chairman of the East's Residents' Association and the mother of Tommy O'Rourke who has that pub in the village **are after both kicking the bucket** yesterday." (Bolger 1990: 87)
 - "What? **And her after scooping** all before her only last Christmas?" (McCabe 2001: 14)

This small amount of data makes a *prima facie* case that, for at least some users of IrE over the last two centuries, *be after V-ing* has undergone further generalisation, losing core characteristics of the perfect and becoming possible with preterite meaning, too. It must be emphasised, however, that this kind of use is by no means frequent in the data used here.

¹⁰ Ronan (2005) cites this as an 'experiential' (or existential) perfect. In my view, the definite past-time adverbial makes this reading unlikely.

¹¹ I read (21a), (21b) and (21d) not as non-finite, but rather as examples where the gram appears in clauses introduced by subordinating *and*. Thus, (21a-b) might be paraphrased '... when I held/was holding my breath ...' and '... when I thought/was thinking ...,' while (21d) refers to an attendant circumstance that has consequences for the person(s) concerned.

So far, then, we have suggested that the occurrence of hodiernal and definite past-time adverbials with *be after V-ing* might indicate incipient shift towards preterite meaning. These uses are attested in the language of writers born from the late eighteenth or early nineteenth century to the present day, and a small amount of data from native speaker judgements and studies of spoken IrE in the twentieth century also shows usage like this to be part of the language of some speakers of IrE. While the answer to the question of whether *be after V-ing* is becoming a preterite must be in the negative, it is still worth examining the pattern of semantic variation in past-time *be after V-ing* to give a more detailed picture of how far it has progressed along the past grammaticalisation path.

4.3. How Far Is It after Coming?

Table 3 summarises patterns of adverbial co-occurrence in past-time uses of the gram since the seventeenth century. Here, light shading is used for collocation with temporal adverbials (indefinite past, durational and present) that are indicative of perfect senses that, in the model outlined above, develop prior to hot news (i.e. resultative, continuative and existential). Lack of shading indicates co-occurrence with the adverbials of recent and immediate time typically found in hot-news contexts; and darker shading represents collocation with hodiernal and definite past-time adverbials that are taken as evidence of development in the direction of preterite meaning.

	1701- 1800	%	1801- 1900	%	1901- 2000	%	Total (n)
Indef. past	2	17	2	4	5	10	9
Durational	2	17	2	4	4	8	8
Present	-		4	9	8	17	12
Imm./rec.	7	58	34	76	26	54	67
Hodiernal	1	8	1	2	3	6	5
Def. past	-	-	2	4	2	4	4
TOTAL	12		45		48		105

Table 3 *Be after V-ing* with temporal adverbials, 1701-2000

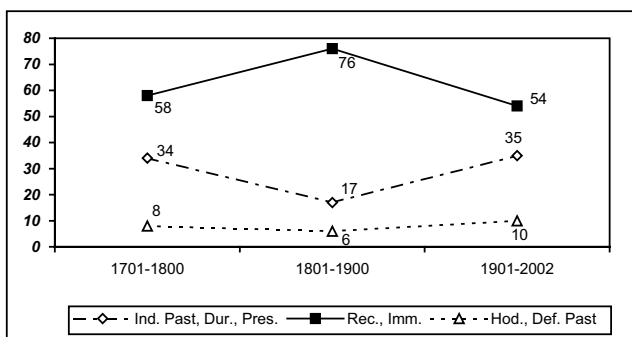


Fig. 2 Adverbial co-occurrence with perfect and past senses of *be after V-ing*, 1701-2000

Figure 2 plots the relative proportions over time of co-occurrence of *be after V-ing* with these three categories of temporal adverbials. The immediate and recent time adverbials associated with the hot-news sense dominate throughout the period since 1701, accounting for a minimum of 54% of tokens, but showing a peak in the nineteenth-century data (76%). The pre-hot-news categories of indefinite past, continuative and present adverbials occur with some frequency throughout, accounting for between 17% and 35% of tokens across the last three centuries. The dip in use of this type of adverbial in the nineteenth century, followed by an increase in frequency since 1901, might be read as supporting the findings of Kallen (1989, 1990, 1991), Fieß (2000) and Ronan (2005), who suggest that perfect senses other than hot news are spreading in present-day IrE.

However, the fact that this data shows these wider perfect senses to have been minority uses throughout the last three centuries supports the hypothesis that they are as old as the prototypical hot-news meaning. Nonetheless, the upturn in frequency suggests that the evolution of this gram is not unidirectional. Increased use of senses other than hot news since 1901 represents bleaching of the hot-news sense, but not in the direction that the past grammaticalisation path might lead us to expect. The wider perfect uses previously documented for present-day IrE are found throughout the recorded history of the gram, but relative to the nineteenth century, they show a marked increase in the twentieth century, during which they have become more vigorous variants.

For hodiernal and definite past-time adverbials, the pattern revealed by this analysis is one of stability. Combined scores for these two post-hot-news categories range from 6% to 10% from 1701 to the present. Co-occurrence with hodiernal adverbials from the late eighteenth century, and with definite past adverbials from the early nineteenth century, is evidence of semantic innovations that show the *be after V-ing* gram to have taken further steps along the past grammaticalisation path for some users. However, the combined frequency for these two categories remains low. Some 200 years on, they must still be regarded as evidence of potential change in the direction of preterite use.

5. Conclusion

The *be after V-ing* gram has never been an exclusively hot-news perfect in IrE. Besides predominantly future uses until 1800 (McCafferty 2003, 2004, 2005), it has also throughout its history been used across the full range of perfect meanings, occurring in resultative, continuative and existential as well as hot-news senses. There is a possibility that the Irish source gram was not an exclusively hot-news gram at the time of transfer (Greene 1979; Ronan 2005), although as yet no empirical study examines the relative strengths of these senses in the Irish language. Perfect uses other than hot news have also become more frequent in IrE since 1901, partly confirming synchronic findings on usage in the spoken language reported by Kallen, Fieß and Ronan.

While all perfect senses are documented from the seventeenth century onwards, hot-news use itself suggests the gram had already reached a late stage of perfect development in terms of the model proposed by Bybee, et al. (1994), Carey (1994, 1995, 1996) and Schwenter (1994 a, 1994 b). This IrE gram has also apparently evolved further along the past grammaticalisation path, being possible with preterite meanings for some users. Preterite uses emerge relatively late, in the usage of writers born in the early nineteenth century, and this shift might have been facilitated by uses of *be after V-ing* with hodiernal adverbials, which first appear in the language of writers born in the late eighteenth century. While certainly conveying recency or even hot news, some hodiernal adverbials are also capable of punctual interpretation, and thus prepare the way for use with the definite past-time adverbials that suggest evolution towards preterite meaning. Grammaticality judgments by late twentieth-century speakers from all parts of Ireland, reported by Kallen (1989: 24f.), offer further support for this view, showing fairly high acceptability rates for hodiernal adverbials and much lower acceptability for definite past-time adverbials with this gram.

It is suggested, then, that the Irish construction that is the source of *be after V-ing* might already have reached a late stage of evolution when transferred into IrE. If so, *be after V-ing* was transferred as an old perfect and was as such a candidate for evolution into a preterite. The analysis of adverbial co-occurrence provides some evidence of semantic shift in this direction. For users who allow *be after V-ing* to co-occur with hodiernal adverbials, this gram has progressed to the next stage beyond hot news, while for those who use it with definite past-time adverbials, preterite meaning is already possible.

This pilot study indicates that it may be worth pursuing the question of the grammatical evolution of *be after V-ing* as a gram with past-time reference. But further work along these lines will have to address several important issues. First, before taking the next step in the analysis of my own data on past-time *be after V-ing*, it is necessary to find reliable means of determining the meaning expressed by the gram in the absence of a time adverbial. The wider textual context of tokens is likely to provide pointers to the sense intended by users. Second, a diachronic study of the Irish source gram would be useful for scholars of

Irish and IrE alike, and also for scholars interested in language contact more generally. Only a diachronic survey of this type will permit us to assess the semantic range of the Irish gram that was transferred into IrE. Third, it would be an advantage to be able to compare the findings of a survey like the present one, based on literary data, with the results of diachronic studies using, e.g. emigrant letters, journals and other writings by less literate writers, whose language may be more representative of vernacular IrE in the past. As more of this kind of material comes into the public domain, comparative studies along these lines may become a real possibility. Finally, synchronic studies based not only on larger collections of modern data than those reported hitherto in the literature but also with a wider, systematic geographical spread, are necessary for charting the present-day status of *be after V-ing*.

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