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## THE USE OF THE PLUPERFECT IN THE CORPUS OF EARLY ENGLISH CORRESPONDENCE

The study shows that the primary function of the pluperfect tense in the corpus of early English correspondence (15th–17th centuries) was the expression of counter-factuality rather than anteriority. Its use to refer to pre-past actions was by no means obligatory, especially if other exponents of anteriority were present. Some attention is also paid to the variation between the auxiliary verbs *be* and *have*.

### 1. Introduction

In this article I take a look at how the pluperfect tense was used in the corpus of Late Middle English/Early Modern English official and private correspondence compiled by Sociolinguistics and Language History Project Team at University of Helsinki. For the purpose of the present study I have used *The Corpus of Early English Correspondence Sampler* (CEECS). The timespan covered is from 1417 to 1681, and the size of the whole corpus is 450,000 words. Obviously, certain typical restrictions of a diachronic study need to be taken account of, as the corpus represents rather formal register of the language. Because of widespread illiteracy at the time only the highest ranks of society are well represented, and women's letters form no more than one fifth of the full *Corpus of Early English Correspondence* – cf. Nevalainen & Raumolin-Brunberg (eds.) (1996) and Keränen (1998). The period is traditionally called Late Middle English and Early Modern English, which as compared with the previous epochs is the time of relative stability, especially in the morphosyntactic structure of English. I believe that it was not until this period that the pluperfect tense (otherwise known as past perfect) became fully grammaticalized.

In the whole corpus I have found c850 tokens of the pluperfect construction. The use of the pluperfect will be discussed with reference to other constructions that made use of the auxiliary *have* and the past participle, e.g. the experiential *have*. Some attention will also be paid to the emerging pluperfect progressive forms.

## 2. The pluperfect tense in earlier medieval English

The earliest instances of the construction with the auxiliary *have* + past participle are found even in early Old English texts from the ninth century, but the opinions of linguists vary as to when the form became fully grammaticalized. The structure with *have*, originally restricted to transitive verbs followed by the direct object appears to have merged into a grammaticalized pattern with a different structure made up of the auxiliary *be* + the past participle of an intransitive verb. Since a similar construction is found in early Romance, many linguists believe this was an areal phenomenon (cf. Traugott 1972). Unlike in Modern English, where the form is usually described as the ‘present perfect tense’, the form with the present form of the auxiliary was equivalent to the simple past tense, with it which competed. On the other hand, the past form of the auxiliary marked the construction known as the pluperfect and in Old and Early Middle English was used only to indicate anteriority.

However, Ælfric, a native speaker of Anglo-Saxon, in his *Latin Grammar* preferred to use a periphrasis *ic dide gefyrn* (‘I did before’) rather than a compound verb phrase *ic hæfde gedon* to render the Latin *plus-quam-perfectum*. But Old English displayed the tendency to grammaticalize the structure, e.g. with less and less frequent case/number/gender agreement between the object and the participle. And from the very beginning English showed some preference for the choice of *have* as the auxiliary even with intransitive, mutative verbs, albeit under special conditions (cf. Molencki 2004).

In Early Middle English the frequency of occurrence of the pluperfect increased while the concord disappeared with the loss of inflexions. And on the turn of the 13th century (first unambiguous examples to be found in the *Ormulum*, cf. Molencki 1999a) the structure developed an important new role, viz. it began to mark counterfactuality in past contexts. Thus, by the period covered by the CEECS two major roles of Middle English pluperfect were the indication of anteriority and past unreality.

## 3. The pluperfect tense in CEECS

### 3.1 The choice of auxiliary

As late as the mid-17th century the writers of the letters still vary the choice of the auxiliaries *was/were* and *had* for intransitive and transitive verbs, respectively, often in the same sentence, as in:

- (1) the Prince with other forces went to meete them, but first sent a false alarum, informing them that the Cavalleeres **were all fled** and **had left** the citty, and also that his Excellency **was come** even to the gates *Wharton* 1642

Thus prototypical **intransitives** took *was/were*:

- (2) At the writinge hereof sir William Stanley **was come** hither *Leycester* 1586

- (3) There was a report that the kinge **was goone** to Loundoun, which came to his eare, at which he was much displeased. I hard that marquise Hamleton **was gone** with 7000 men to land them in Scotland. *Harley* 1639
- (4) he desyreth to have the leag that **was begon** to be fynished. *Leycester* 1586
- (5) Sir undoubtedly ther **was** never man **departed** with more shame nor with more feare than the Duke hath doon this daye. *Howard* 1523
- (6) but if it was he that gave out a report to the tenants that the Bishop **was fallen** into the King's displeasure, by that false suggestion and designe. *Cosin* 1662
- (7) The gret Shipp of Scotland **was ron** on gronde, bot sho is recovered. *Dacre* 1513
- (8) and for that cause he **was stayed**. *Fleetwood* 1585

However, we find important **variation** here, which marked the process of gradual transition whereby English intransitive verbs came to take the auxiliary *have*, thus generalizing it as the sole marker of the perfective aspect. Various accounts of the process are found in the literature. According to the so-called *unaccusativity hypothesis* (e.g. Bresnan 1982, Hoekstra 1984, Burzio 1986), the intransitives are not a homogeneous class, but split into two complementary groups of (1) ergatives (unaccusatives), i.e. verbs that have an underlying initial object which becomes the surface subject (take *be*) and (2) unergatives, i.e. verbs which have an underlying subject (take *have*). This purely syntactic explanation is countered by the semantically based analysis employing the cognitive theory of prototypes (e.g. Shannon 1990), whose proponents believe that prototypical transitives take *have* and prototypical intransitives (mutatives) take *be*, but there may be variation in less prototypical uses. To these hypotheses we should add the problem of heavy "functional load" of *be*, which – unlike in German – became the auxiliary of the passive voice and of the progressive aspect (Denison 1993).

In the period covered by the CEECS we find strong preferences for *have* to occur with intransitives under the following circumstances:

I. The normally intransitive verb is followed by a direct object, thus becoming transitive, e.g.:

- (9) after he **had** with 8000 **entred the cittie** and spoiled it, he blewe vp the cheefe church and ruined all ye best buldings. *Cornwallis* 1631
- (10) This day we had such foul weather that before I **had marched one mile** I was wet to the skin. *Wharton* 1642
- (11) About some 20 months since some of the Romish Limitors **had come** within my pale, and ben tampering with some wooman att Stanford Rivers. *Cosin* 1624

II. The intransitive verb is followed by a **prepositional particle** (the so-called phrasal verb), e.g.:

- (12) But in trawth I **had clymed up** and stooede from your Lordship's comming in, to your going owt, which made me faynt and sweat truly. *Russel* 1594

- (13) that the man deserved no small punishment who, in this unwonted sort, **had gone about** to disgrace the Church, and to dishonour the solemnitie of God's service there. *Cosin* 1628

III. The context is hypothetical or **counterfactual**, e.g.:

- (14) by the which yt apperethe unto her most playn, that, unles she **had entred** into the actyon, she **had** ben utterly undon, *Leycester* 1586

Witness the following **contrasting pairs**, where the transitive and counterfactual uses take *had*:

- (15) I do wonder much that the com-ission **was not returned** in the prescribed tyme, since I my self beinge at Norwich with Mr Morse did so much vrge yt to Mr...*Cornwallis* 1624
- (16) and so his carcase **was returned** to the buryall grounde neere Tyborne. *Fleetwood* 1585
- (17) And, after the Clarke **had returned** his search to the Counsell, subscribed with his hand, my Lord of Limerike and others then at Yorke did. *Hutton* 1602
- (18) You tould me you **was become** a water drinker. *Cosin* 1661
- (19) I must and doe acknowledg ... that yt **had becomd** me eare now (yf I held not some particulars of my poore estate of you) to have tendred the dutye that I doe. *Hutton* 1617
- (20) for the prince **was come** as farr as Eltons with his forces to reskew it, but he came to late. *Leycester* 1586
- (21) This same day Wendisday, as sone as y **was come** to towne ayenst mete tyme, my lord Chaunceller send for me yn hast. *Shillingford* 1448
- (22) Wherefore he hath not spedd as he myght have done if your wrytting **had com**. *Plumpton* 1486
- (23) **Had** this or the originall **come** to my hand sooner, I had sooner tendered my services herein. *Jones* 1659
- (24) yf you **had come** to town sooner, I could have done *Cornwallis* 1628
- (25) I wold have kept the tydynges till I **had comen** my self, because it is good. *Stonor* 1476
- (26) Sir, I have beene at Newcastle and at Sir Wm. Wrey's, but Sir Wm. Wrey **was gone** into Yorkshire. I stande in doubt I shall not gitt money in tyme. *Bowes* 1623
- (27) that there came no letter from me this weeke, for I had written, and the carrier **was gone** to bedd and would not rise. *Cornwallis* 1635
- (28) If Mr Randolph **had not gone** as he did, it seemes he had lost his offis. *Cornwallis* 1629
- (29) As, uppon my honour and truth to you, they **were** almost utterly **gonn** yf I **had** not **aryved** when I dyd. *Leycester* 1586

### 3.2. The three-verb pluperfect forms

In the CEECS we find quite a few instances of the **passive** pluperfect, which were uncommon in earlier English, the simple past passive being the usual form. The first instances of *had + been + past participle* are recorded in the 13th century (Moléncki 2004: 44), but the structure became frequent in Late Middle English:

- (30) in case any sooche synister information **had ben gyven** unto you agaynst him.  
*Leycester* 1586
- (31) the wenche told to her fellowes very lamentably what **had ben donne**. *Fleetwood* 1583

Another three-verb pluperfect form is the first instances of the pluperfect **progressive** (*had + been + present participle*). But in the whole CEECS we find mere three tokens of the construction, all of them from the 17th century:

- (32) to whom alone I **had binne beholding** for a curtesy of this natur. *Cornwallis* 1620  
which they could not possibly have done if any winde **had beene stirring**, as Cap=t= Clarke informs us. *Jones* 1652
- (33) Just the night before God took her from me, she **had been discoursing** with one of our sisters, who lamented the misery of humaine frailty. *Tixall* 1680

However, Visser (1963–1973: §2148) gives clear evidence that the ‘(plu)perfect progressive’ or ‘expanded (plu) perfect’ structure arose as early as the 14th century (in *Cursor mundi*), most likely from the prepositional phrase:

- (34) a knyght that **had been on huntynge** Malory *Morte d'Arthur* 90.25 1485

Langford (1956) offered a psychological explanation of the rise of this new form, which was used “to emphasize unusually long duration of an action”. On the other hand, Onions (1905: 113) believed that the longer form of the pluperfect gives “an emotional colouring to the sentence, [expressing] surprise, disgust, impatience, and the like”. Many other authors took into account metrical, rhythmical, euphonic and other stylistic considerations.

In Visser’s (1963–1973: §2148) subjoined list all the 14th–17th century instances (4 Middle English ones, 5 from the 16th c. and 5 from the 17th c.) are mentioned in order to “show the erroneousness of various statements concerning date of earliest appearance”, e.g. (Åkerlund 1911:85): “even as late as Shakespeare they are strikingly scarce”; Kisbye 1971:47 “this compund tense being uncommon till the 19th c.”; Strang (1970:207): “periphrastic perfect did not become fully current till the 18<sup>th</sup> c. and the periphrastic pluperfect showed its full maturity from the time of the Restoration”. Strang believed that the pluperfect progressive appeared earlier than the perfect progressive, but Visser proved her wrong by showing examples of both from the *Cursor mundi*. In my CEECS sample there are four instances of the present perfect progressive vs. three of the pluperfect progressive.

### 3.3. Word order

As compared with the Present-day English pluperfect, we still find in the corpus some interesting variations in the word order. It looks that the **negative particle *not*** could freely occur **before or after the subject** in interrogative and conditional sentences:

- (35) he will doe no more, and I cannot blame him, for, **had not he bene**, I had ben dead in prisson afore now. *Hutton* 1621

versus

- (36) **Had I not had** this ocation to send to your father, yet I had sent this boy vp to Loundoun; *Harley* 1642

Another important difference was the common **separation of the auxiliary and the past participle** by long adverbials in a sort of brace construction, which obviously was the Germanic heritage:

- (37) **Had** I not continually for a long tyme **expected** your coming up, it had been more needfull for me then you to have excused so long a silence. *Cornwallis* 1616

According to Visser (1963–1973: §2001) “after about Shakespeare’s time the pattern with post-position of the object gradually became the normal one”, but my data show that this must have happened much earlier, as even the earliest letters invariably have no objects preceding their verbs. This coincided with the tendency for a complex English verb phrase to appear as a continuous unit, but in the case of the pluperfect the mid-position of the object may have been confused with the same surface pattern known as the so-called experiential *have* and/or the causative *have*. The earliest examples of the structure where the subject noun denotes a person experiencing something (usually unpleasant) date from the beginning of the 14th century:

- (38) Som the throte, and som the heorte **Hadyn y-perced**. *Kyng Alisaunder* 940 c1300

The CEECS example is

- (39) I **hade** last Satterday **broute** me by a Londonere a bill of exchange, as they cale it, for tow hunderd pounds. *Cornwallis* 1634

Brinton (1988) calls it “the indirect passive with *have*”, a later offshoot from three-place verbs like *give* (‘I had a present given me’); see also Denison’s (1993: 342) “passive of experience”.

The first clear, albeit sporadic, examples of causative *have* are from Late Middle English:

(40) Hanybal ... cam by fore the cite **for to haue hyt dystroyed**. Caxton 1489

Visser (1963–1973: §2069) quotes many examples from Shakespeare onwards, which is connected with the decline of the earlier causative construction with the verb *do* + (active and passive) infinitive, as in

(41) Mærlin ... **dude him to understonde**. *Lay. Brut* 17121 1205

(42) he **dyde** Abeney **to be arested**. *Paston Letters* 1465

The last instances quoted by Visser are from Spenser, i.e. the end of the 16th century. Another causative structure *make* + object + infinitive appeared in Early Middle English, e.g.

(43) I shall **make** an harpere **to syng** hit. *Malory Morte d'Arthur* 1485

In earlier periods, particularly in Old English, the interpretation of the structure *had* + past participle is more difficult, as in:

(44) 7 hie ealle on þone Cyning wærun feohtende oþ þæt hie hine **ofslægenne hæfdon** *ChronA* 48.4 (755) 'and they all fought against the king until they had killed him / had him killed'

## 4. Functions of the pluperfect

### 4.1 Anteriority

The original and most prototypical function of the pluperfect tense was to indicate temporal anteriority. In the corpus we find it used both in independent clauses and in all kinds of subordinate clauses with reference to an action/state preceding some other past event:

#### 4.1.1. *independently in narration*

(45) by the way, in the great merkett place, they **had sett** a squadron, at the leaste of viij=c= or a 1000 pikes, all armyd, which was a mervellous fayr sight. *Leycester* 1585

#### 4.1.2. *in temporal clauses*

(46) Madam, I can say nothing of Sir Tho., only, **as soone as you were gone**, he went to lead me up to your chamber, and then he said to me and I to him as before. *Cornwallis* 1637

(47) This Monday... **after I had dyspatched** my other letters to ye, my lord Wyllowby aryved here very well, and doth tell me how very well affected. *Leycester* 1585

(48) but before I cam, all **was gonn**. *Leycester* 1586

(49) **before we had marched** two miles towards the Cavalleeres, we were informed by the post that sixty of them were taken and imprisoned. *Wharton* 1642

- (50) for you know how old you are, and you weare borne **when I had bine maried** a yeare and 3 months. *Harley* 1639

It is particularly frequent in the structure *no sooner/rather...but...*

- (51) Mr. Stapylton, I **had no sooner sealde up and sent away** my last letter to you (Jan: 30) **but** I received one from Sir Wm. Turner, *Cosin* 1662
- (52) Syr, ye **were no rather gon** from my house **but** þe parsons man came unto us and lete my Suster understande þat... *Stonor* 1462

#### 4.1.3 in reported speech

- (53) and said they **were returned**. *Plumpton* 1464
- (54) And at my commynge home it was told me how that my mayster your husband **had bene** verry sore seeke. *Stonor* 1478
- (55) for I did not thinke the Kinge **had beene** so angrie before I receaved yours. *Charles I* 1623
- (56) I was very sorry to heare that the Queene **had forbidden** Dr. Cosins the exercise of our religion, as he was wont to do. *Charles II* 1657

#### 4.1.4. in other types of clauses (especially relative and adverbial clauses of cause)

- (57) This day a whore, which **had followed** our campe from London, was taken by the soildeirs, and first led about the city, then set in the pillory. *Wharton* 1642
- (58) I hade last Satterday broute me by a Londonere a bill of exchange, as they cale it, for tow hunderd pounds, presently to bee paid to the barare therof, becas hee **had alreedy hade** the munie. *Cornwallis* 1634

#### 4.1.5. anteriority without pluperfect

But the use of the pluperfect to indicate anteriority/posteriority was by no means obligatory. In the CEECS we find the adverb *formerly* used with both apparently redundant pluperfect and with simple past verb forms:

- (59) beside short in some thing of what **formerly had been spoken of**. *Cornwallis* 1613
- (60) Her haire, in discharge of a vowe she **had formerly made**, she cutte of close by the rootes that afternoone. *Cornwallis* 1624
- (61) and at the end of ten miles we came to Rugby, in Warwickshire, where we had good quarter.
- (62) **At this town Mr. Norton formerly preached**. *Wharton* 1642

Parallel simple past tense forms are also often found in narration in temporal clauses:

- (63) When he **was executed**, his bodye was brought into St. Pulchers to be buryed. *Fleetwood* 1585

- (64) for it **was written** before he came home, and sent to the carrier's after he **was gon**. *Cornwallis* 1631
- (65) That after he **got** to Durham upon Munday 30 July he forthwith sent for Mr. Shadforth, who came to him the day after to Durham. *Cosin* 1660
- (66) but presently plucking out the knife from himselfe, before he fell to the ground, hee **made** towards the Traytor, two or three paces, and then fell against a Table. *Carleton* 1628

Likewise in the reported speech:

- (67) And Hans Nagell told me that a servaunt of the Kinges **told** hym that **herde** the said ambassador saye but late, that your pais shuld bee made. *Killingworth* 1505
- (68) Also it **was told** me that Sir Robt. Ughtred **was send** for, but I trust to God it is not so. *Greene* 1468

## 4.2. Counterfactuality

Another important use of the pluperfect was in various hypothetical and counterfactual constructions referring to the past. Unlike in the sense of anteriority discussed above, the use of the pluperfect form appears to have been obligatory. All the CEECS instances of past counterfactuals consistently have the complex verb phrase *had* (also for intransitive verbs, which otherwise took *was*) + past participle.

### 1. *in past conditionals*

Parallel pluperfect forms were used both in protases and apodoses of the past conditional period:

- (69) Iff I **had hadde** anie speciall creditte when Durham and Carl. were bestowed, some **hadde not spedde** so well. *Hutton* 1577
- (70) He was very ill, and I preuailed with him to take a vomit, which, he says now, if he **had not taken** he thinkes he **had bine** in his graue. *Harley* 1641
- (71) if he **had bine** of a milder temper it **had bine** better; and so Erasmus says; but I thinke no other spirit could haue sarued his turne. *Harley* 1639

The protasis could be introduced either by the subordinating conjunction *if*, as above, or by means of the interrogative inversion, e.g.:

- (72) **Had she lived** till Allhollandtyde she **had died** a wyfe, for I had concluded such a match for her, as I had reason to beleive she should have lived contentedly. *Cornwallis* 1614
- (73) I **had written** to you sooner **had I knowen** where you **had been**; and particularly that express which, upon Saterdag last, I directed to your brother I **had sent** to you. *Charles I* 1648

Quite often we also find the Present-day English pattern with the pluperfect form in the protasis and modal *would/should* + perfect infinitive in the apodosis, even in the earliest letters:

- (74) bot yf y **hadde be** at home at this faire he **sholde have had** better stuf and other thynges, &c. *Shillingford* 1448
- (75) yf ye **had be**, I **wold have trusted** ye **shuld had** the warde and possession of Lovels doughters or this. *Stonor* 1479

Unlike in Present-day English, which requires the modal verb, Early Modern English often used the pluperfect to express what could have happened in the past, but fortunately did not happen:

- (76) God hath ben her best phisition, or she **had died**. I would gladly have those reliques disperst. The empostumation was in her stomacke. *Cosin* 1624

The pluperfect was also used in subordinate clauses of hypothetical comparison introduced by *as if/as though* and hypothetical *in case*:

- (77) of the money in his masters presens was adjudged to be **as if it had ben** in his masters owen custodie. *Fleetwood* 1585
- (78) my power and the helpe of my frinds have don, as I am bownd, **in case he had come** unto me, as he did not. *Doddington* 1539

## II. in optative constructions

The pluperfect tense also obligatorily occurred in wishes referring to the past, introduced by such optative phrases as *I wish, I wold, would God, had rather, oh that!*:

- (79) “**Wolde god hit hadde be** so,” and yet “Wolde hit were so, for oure discharge.” *Shillingford* 1447
- (80) I schold have ben thus intreated: that **wold God** my Lord of Zorke **had com** with me yn the rome of Northfolke. *Mary Tudor* 1514
- (81) I **wold he had byn** here at the beginning; but yf I tarry here I wyll be sure we wyll have men for our money. *Leycester* 1586
- (82) I **wold I had had** Prometheus for companion, for Epimetheus had like have bine myne to sone. *Elizabeth I* 1586
- (83) Na, how doe I **wish it had been committed**, though I wear to undergoe the pennance dew to itt. *Thimelby* 1670
- (84) she was xxx wynter off age; and whanne I woyke I **wyschyd** she **had bene** but xx: and so by lykelyod I am soner lyke to have my wysche þan my dreme. *Stonor* 1478
- (85) I **wishe** another tyme **had binne taken** for that hasty busynes, in regard of the want of so able a man at this tyme in the upper house. *Cornwallis* 1626
- (86) and all this Contre **had rather** any other **had been chosen** Emperor than the King Catholique. *Boleyn* 1519
- (87) But oh! that I **had been** at Westminster that Sunday on which my freind preach't there! *Cosin* 1661

## III. other structures (unreality?)

This hypothetical use of the pluperfect to refer to unreal past situations is also known in the literature as the “modal pluperfect” – cf. Visser (1963–1973: §2039). Apart

from the counterfactual and optative constructions discussed above, we find it with various mental verbs, where the wrongness of thinking, supposition, belief and forgetting is emphasized by the use of the “modal” pluperfect, e.g.:

- (88) **thinking they had bee** Scotts that wold have saulted the campe. *Howard* 1523  
 (89) I thanke you for the care you have of my person, but indeed I thinke **I had bine** as saffe in the army as heere, for the soldiers were so kind to me upon my first comeng that the next day... *Charles II* 1650  
 (90) I did not thinke **I had bine** with child when you weare with me. *Harley* 1639  
 (91) **I had almost forgotten** an earnest request I am to make by you to M=r= Bacon, but that a tricke my Lo. of Arundell. *Cornwallis* 1617  
 (92) Good Mr. secretarie. **I had forgotten** in my former letters to send unto you theis letters which I therein mencioned, which I presently send. *Leycester* 1585

Commenting on the sentence *I did not think we had been so near Scotland* Henry Sweet (1898: §2247) observes that here “the pluperfect is more graphic than the preterite as heightening the surprise by the reminder that it was too late to take advantage of the knowledge”. It should be added that the use of the pluperfect is not obligatory in this case, “constructions with the preterite normal in O[Id] E[nglish] have never become rare” (Visser 1963–1973: §2039). Visser presents an abundant material from the period between 1300–1900. In such contexts Present-day English prefers simple past.

## 5. Discontinuous grammaticalization

The association of the auxiliary *have/had* with the sense of unreality resulted in the development of a kind of verb form agreement, where the presence of the unreal pluperfect triggered off whole series of multiple *have*’s, either finite pluperfects or perfect infinitives (Molencski 1999b). In the 18th century the structure was strongly opposed by prescriptive grammarians (cf. Molencski 2003). Yet in the CEECS it is still very common:

- (93) upon oath for the King, and they proved strongly for hym; otherwyse he **had** been condemned att the last assises, and **had** suffered death, which **had** gyven an end to all hys troubles: butt now... *Hutton* 1623  
 (94) and **had** that beene granted mee then, which was about May, **I had** beene able **to have** done somewhat, in order to the recovery of the Land in Controversie, and **to have** paid this. *Jones* 1653  
 (95) for the Queene **had** gifen me leaue to **a** com to y=r= La=pe= when shee **had** gon her progres, and then I shud **a had** too munths ore 6 weeks to **af** staide with you. *Cornwallis* 1634

## Conclusion

From the data gathered it turns out that the primary function of the pluperfect tense between the 15th and the 17th century was the expression of counterfactuality rather than anteriority. Its use to refer to pre-past actions was by no means obligatory, especially if other exponents of anteriority were present. Statistically speaking, the number of counterfactual uses of the pluperfect (especially in conditional and optative constructions) outnumbers its instances in temporal clauses and in the reported speech as manifestations of the sequence of tenses. In unreal contexts we often find a kind of verb form agreement when the instances of the pluperfect are followed by the perfect infinitive, sometimes yielding sequences of multiple *have* constructions, which became the subject of strong attack on the part of 18th century prescriptive grammarians.

In the period in question the verb *have* becomes generalized as the sole auxiliary of the pluperfect, which distinguishes English from the other languages in the Germanic group. Except for some isolated instances with mutative verbs, *be* mostly co-occurs with two verbs *go* and *come* to express the state resulting from a previous action. When a more dynamic action is involved, the letter-writers preferred to use *have* with those two common verbs of motion, and obviously other intransitive verbs.

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