



Preference and Reluctance for the Present Perfect

Georgetown University, Akitaka YAMADA

ay314@georgetown.edu



GEORGETOWN UNIVERSITY

1 Introduction

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

Our Intuition

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

Task

"it is difficult to pin down the nature of this 'current relevance' in a way which is both explicit and able to account for the full range of data (*ibid.*: 1225)."

(B) Aims of this presentation:

(i) Empirical Contribution:

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

Observation

Corpus Research (quantitative)

Proposal

How current relevance appears (qualitative)

(ii) Theoretical Contribution:

Findings are naturally explained in terms of:

A) Markedness Theory (Stump1985; Schaden 2009)

B) Current Relevance (Portner 2003)

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

e.g.) Indefinite Past Theory

2 Corpus Study

(A) Design:

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

Informative Verbs

Verbs are characterized by their distribution in the corpus.

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

(B) Data

VERB	PRESENT	FUT (WILL)	PAST	PRS PRF	PST PRF	FUT PRF	PRS PROG	PST PROG	FUT PROG	TOTAL
BECOME	32,211	6,043	89,105	31,547	10,340	55	6,203	2,208	2	291,488
EVOLVE	942	209	1,813	2,222	336	7	374	84	3	12,421
CHANGE	14,003	2,531	16,976	10,903	3,303	38	3,090	768	22	139,217
INCREASE	6,993	2,050	6,883	4,962	676	31	1,245	248	13	69,476
SCREAM	1,202	42	4,212	4	100	0	367	862	4	18,699
NOD	1,229	21	20,951	12	79	0	75	219	1	30,482
SMILE	2,498	60	22,302	16	165	0	421	1,212	11	45,951
STARE	3,088	40	15,996	35	140	1	644	1,612	2	43,096
REMEMBER	48,731	970	14,108	40	242	2	141	224	5	121,157
LIKE	71,705	385	22,536	78	259	0	28	18	0	207,626
NEED	135,622	5,366	42,551	165	229	0	26	19	15	323,740
Total	19,915,160	571,588	14,262,925	966,351	531,979	2,922	508,233	406,085	10,578	60,877,297

Table 1. Distributions over nine temporal and aspectual categories

Figure 1. Partial Correlation Plot between the Present Perfect and the Past (The effect of the total frequency in the corpus is controlled)

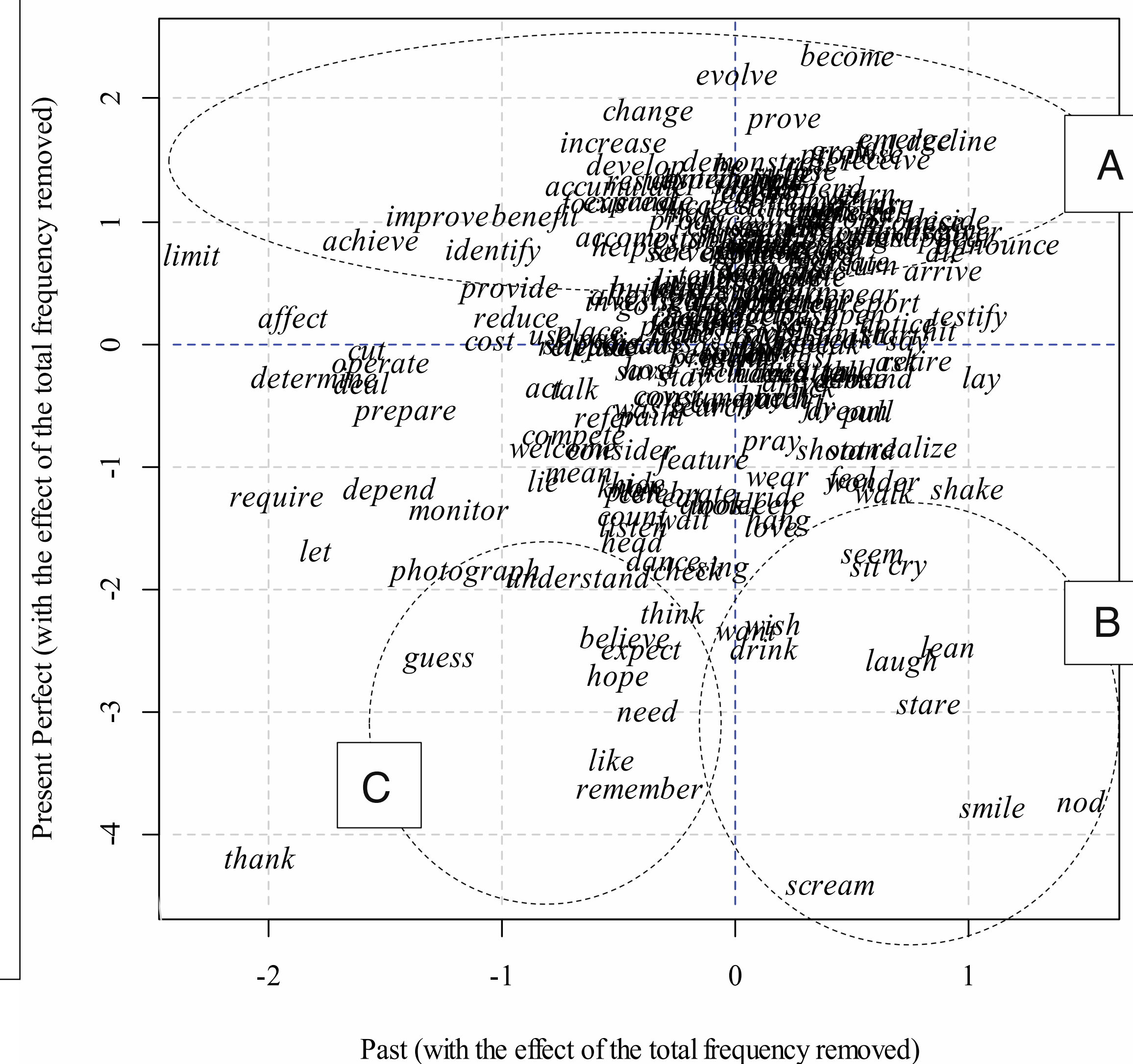
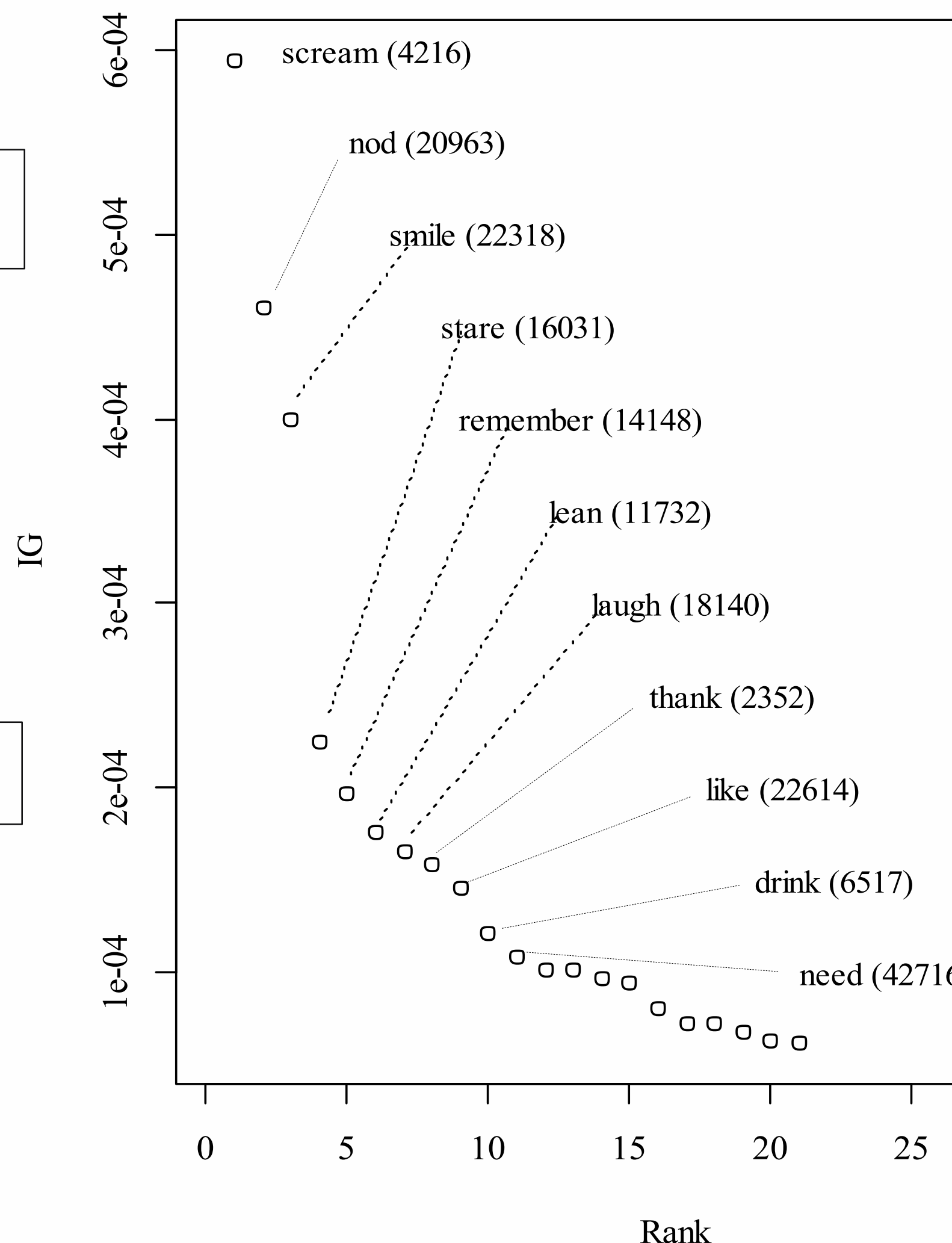


Figure 2 Verbs with high Information Gains (Descriptive Statistic)



Note (Information Gain): $IG(w) = H(C) - [P(X_w = 1)H(C|X_w = 1) + P(X_w = 0)H(C|X_w = 0)]$

(C) Results 1 (Scatterplot) : Figure 1

One can identify three clusters:

- Group A:** verbs with (relatively) strong preference for the *present perfect*. verb of change
- Group B:** verbs with strong reluctance to the *present perfect*. simple event
- Group C:** verbs with strong reluctance to both *the present perfect* and *the past*. psychological verb

(D) Results 2 (IGs): Figure 2

Suggests that such verbs as *scream*, *nod*, and *smile* are worth examining (informative).

3 Discussion

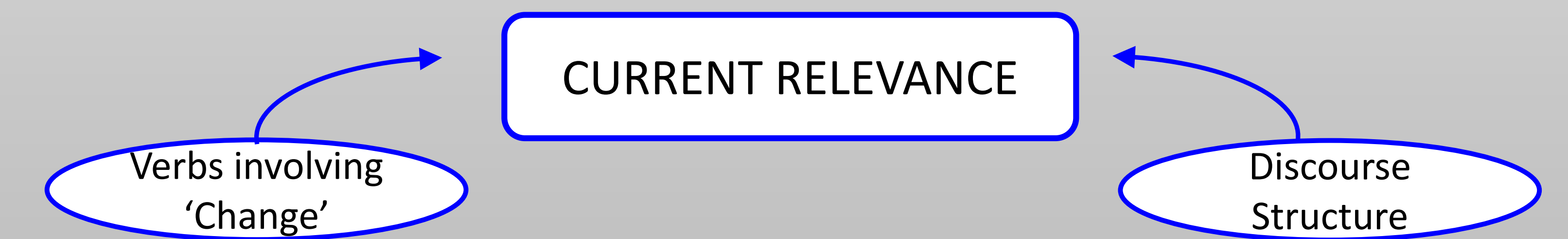
Looking at the context of extreme verbs...

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

(2) *smile*

- when good things happen, we are certain fortune *has smiled on* us.
- Though his expression is serious now, the crinkles at the corners of his eyes make me think *he has smiled* a lot. He looks kind.

PROPOSAL: several ways to contribute to the current relevance



4 Conclusions

Empirical contribution (Findings)

- The preference and the reluctance for the present perfect are highly predictable from the verb's meaning; the distribution is not arbitrary, but verbs are grouped into several clusters (Group A, B and C), which are semantically well-motivated.
- Even the verbs which show a strong reluctance to the present perfect can be used in this form, when the current relevance is provided by the discourse.

Theoretical Contribution

- The finding is compatible with the idea of the *markedness* of the present perfect (basically the present perfect is not used unless there is a particular requirement (Current Relevance).
- Since they are frequently used in the *past*, verbs falling in the Group B suggest that it is not the *pastness* that prevents them from having the form of *the present perfect*.
- The current relevance is achieved by both the discourse structure (coherency) and the lexically implied (or, entailed) meaning.

References

- Portner, Paul (2003) The temporal semantics and modal pragmatics of the perfect. *Linguistics & Philosophy* 26, 459–510.
 Portner, Paul (2011) "Perfect and progressive." *Semantics: An International Handbook of Natural Language Meaning*. (eds.) Claudia Maienborn, Laus von Heusinger and Paul Portner. 1217–1261. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.
 Schaden, Gerhard (2009) Present perfects compete. *Linguistics & Philosophy* 32, 115–141.
 Stump, Gregory T (1985) *The Semantic Variability of Absolute Constructions*. Dordrecht: Kluwer.