

### The Present Perfect Continuous

§ 17. The Present Perfect Continuous is an analytical form which is built up by means of the auxiliary verb **to be** in the Present Perfect and the mg-form of the notional verb (e.g. / *have been working*. *He has been working*, etc.). (On the formation of the *ing*-form see "Verbs", § 11.)

In the interrogative form the first auxiliary verb is placed before the subject (e.g. *Have you been working?* / *Has she been working?*, etc.). In the negative form the negative particle **not** is placed after the first auxiliary (e.g. *We have not been working*. *They have not been working*, etc.). In spoken English the contracted forms *I've*, *he's*, *she's*, *it's*, *we've*, *you've* and *they've* are used in affirmative sentences and *hasn't* and *haven't* in negative sentences.

§ 18. The Present Perfect Continuous falls within the time sphere of the present. Hence it is not used in narration where reference is made to past events. It is found in present-time contexts, i.e. conversations, newspaper and radio reports, lectures and letters.

The Present Perfect Continuous has two uses which will be further referred to as **Present Perfect Continuous I** and **Present Perfect Continuous II**.

**1) Present Perfect Continuous I** serves to express an action which began before the moment of speaking and continues into it or up to it. In this meaning it is parallel to Present Perfect II and may be used with the same indications of time as described in "Verbs", § 16.

e.g. He said he was in town and wanted to see me. That was a couple of hours ago and I **have been waiting** *ever since*.

"We've **been staying** here *nearly a week*. "I hope you are not thinking of leaving." "Her ladyship is waiting to see you and Sergeant Cuff," he said. "*How long has she been waiting?*"

I wish you'd go, Chris! We've **been getting** on each other's nerves *lately*.

"**I have been thinking** about it *for a long time*," said Erik frankly.

**I've been sitting** here *quite a while*.

He's your elder brother. But you are the one who looks after him. You've **been making** excuses for him *all your life*.

Present Perfect Continuous I may be used with both durative and terminative verbs.

As has been said, Present Perfect II can also be used in this meaning with durative verbs, though it is less common (see also "Verbs", § 16, 2) and it is never used with terminative verbs.

It stands to reason that the Present Perfect Continuous is not common with stative verbs.

**2) Present Perfect Continuous II** serves to express an action which was in progress quite recently and which in one way or another affects the present situation, explains or gives reasons for the state of things at the present moment.

The precise time limits of the action (i.e. its beginning and its end) are not specified. This use of the Present Perfect Continuous seems to be prevailing over its use described under I. Besides, in this meaning the Present Perfect Continuous is not parallel to Present Perfect II.

e.g. "Your shoes are wet." "I've **been walking** in the rain."

She said: "I've **been talking** to your boy-friend, Adeline, and I like him."

She's **been washing** her hair, but it may be dry now. He began abruptly: "I've **been thinking** about what you told me."

Don't tell your mother what I've **been saying**. He clasped the massive woollen underwear against his chest.

"Just what I need," he declared. "The moths **have been eating** mine."

What **have you been doing?** Then Phil called: "I'll be right down. I've **been shutting the** windows."

The Present Perfect Continuous in this case is, as a rule, not associated with any indications of time (see the examples above). It is only occasionally found with indications of a recent period of time or with the adverb *just*.

e.g. Augustus **has been dining** with us *tonight*.

**I have been discussing** it with Arabella *this evening*.

I've **just been having** such a delightful chat with Margaret.

§ 19. In negative sentences the Present Perfect Continuous is not common. Present Perfect II is preferred in this case (for examples see "Verbs", § 16, 2c).

However, the Present Perfect Continuous is also found in negative sentences but in this case the negation does not refer to the / action itself but to the circumstances attending the action.

e.g. "We don't wish to overtire the boys." "A walk would only do them good," Jenny said. "They haven't been sleeping at all well recently." (*which means that they have been sleeping but their sleep has not been sound enough*) I'm sorry I'm late. I hope you have not been waiting for me. (*which means that I know you have been waiting but I hope it is not for me*)

§ 20. Present Perfect Continuous I and particularly Present Perfect Continuous II are sometimes found with stative verbs.

e.g. "There's one thing I've been meaning to ask you, Miles," Fred said one afternoon. "Hello," she said. "I'm glad you're having lunch here. I've been wanting to talk to you." I've been noticing these changes in you ever since you got that university degree. A little break like this is what she's been needing all these years. "Do you know Mr Nesfield?" "Oh, yes. We have been seeing him every day."

§ 21. Note the following sentence patterns:

- a) He has been reading since he came.
- b) He has been reading since he has been working in the library.

In the first pattern the action in the subordinate clause introduced by *since* is expressed by the Past Indefinite and serves to indicate only the starting point of the action in the principal clause.

In the second pattern the action of the subordinate clause is parallel to that of the principal clause as they both began at the same time in the past and continue into the moment of speaking. In this case the Present Perfect Continuous is used in both clauses (or Present Perfect II, with stative verbs).

## The Past Indefinite

§ 22. The Past Indefinite is a synthetic form (e.g. *I worked. He sang*). (On the formation of the Past Indefinite see "Verbs", § 5 and Appendix.) But the interrogative and negative forms are built up analytically, by means of the auxiliary verb to do in the Past Indefinite and the infinitive of the notional verb without the particle to (e.g. *Did you work? Did he work? We did not work. She did not work*). In spoken English the contracted form *didn't* is used in negative sentences.

The Past Indefinite may have a special form which is used for emphasis. This emphatic form is built up analytically, by means of the Past Indefinite of the auxiliary verb to do followed by the infinitive of the notional verb without the particle to. The auxiliary is heavily stressed in this case (e.g. *I 'did insist on it. He 'did insist on it*).

§ 23. The Past Indefinite is commonly used to express a past action. It may be found in present-time contexts as well as in past-time contexts.

The Past Indefinite is used in the following cases: 1) To express a single action which took place in the past. The time of the action is often indicated. It is usually an indication of the past time. Yet the Past Indefinite may also be found with such adverbial modifiers of time as *this morning, today, tonight*, etc. (For details see also "Verbs", § 16, 1.)

e.g. Things came to a crisis *in July*.

My mother first heard of him *when I was a mere child*.

I only met her *six months ago*.

I had a letter from Willy *yesterday*.

Why, I saw the announcement in the paper *this morning*.

The time of the action may be implied in the situation through the mention of the place of the action or other attending circumstances.

e.g. I ate turnips *in Germany*.

Did you belong to any society *at the University*? "What a lot you know," said Miss Marple, "about the private lives of film stars. Did you learn it all in *California*?"