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Interpreting the Perfect: the Past as Explanation

There is a lot of research dealing with the English tense system and particularly with the meaning of the relative tenses. Recent typological studies of tense-aspect systems (Dahl 1985, Bybee & Dahl 1989) have provided us with concepts of prototypical categories and tendencies which, hopefully, bring light to the somewhat confusing descriptions of the perfect tense (or aspect) in various languages. This paper is my contribution to the on-going discussion concerning the present perfect. There is now enough cross-linguistic material to show that it is a type of grammatical meaning. Here it is exemplified mainly by British English, which provides the basis for a great amount of research and most of the currently prevalent definitions. Other languages will serve as material for illustrating the developmental potentialities of the perfect and a scenario for certain historical changes.

1. Subvarieties of the English present perfect

The traditional definitions of the English present perfect appeal to several facets of meaning that ultimately reflect its present tense: a) the past event has "current relevance" at the present; b) the past event is temporally unidentified; c) the past event is placed within a period extending up to the moment of speaking; d) the past event is embedded within a present-tense matrix clause.

In the heyday of TG grammar, the last-mentioned definition produced another list of different perfect "senses" to explain various co-occurrence regularities in the use of temporal adverbs. The best-known is that proposed by McCawley (1971), which is essentially the same as that proposed by the more influential Comrie (1976). McCawley's meanings for the perfect are:

a) Universal: "I've known Max since 1960" — indicates that a state of affairs prevailed throughout some interval stretching from the past into the present.
b) Existential: "I have read Principia Mathematica five times" — indicates the existence of past events (Comrie calls it Experiential, saying that the state of affairs prevailed at least once).
c) Stative (or Perfect of Result): "I can't come to your party tonight — I've caught the flu" — indicates that the direct effect of a past event still continues.
d) "Hot News": "Malcolm X has just been assassinated" — to report hot news (more popularly, this meaning is called Perfect of Recent Past).

Later studies came to the conclusion that the above senses are not really separable, nor is the perfect really ambiguous, at least when the customary ambiguity tests were used. According to them the forms in the following example should express the same sense:

(1) John has lived in Chicago from time to time since 1973, and Bill continuously since 1970.

Inoue (1979: 565), who presented the example, claimed that they do not. Consequently, she arrived at the definition that "the present perfect asserts that the situation in question occurred within the interval of time from the past through the present, and the forms are non-committal as to the existence of the situation at the speech time". Thus, the basic sense of the form would correspond to the existential sense in the above list. Another definition, by R.W. McCoard, also preferred to avoid all contextual information, and analysed the perfect as "the marker of prior events which are nevertheless included within the overall period of the present (McCoard 1978: 123), while the preterite marked events assigned to a past which is concluded and separate from the extended present.

The idea of inclusion/exclusion of events has been basic also in the European, psychologically-oriented approach repre-

sented by e.g. E. Benveniste (for French) and H. Weinrich (for German, 1964). They take the tenses rather as signals for attitudes, or roles, which the speech participants are to take towards the content of the message. The tenses of Erzählen (histoire, narration) remove the speaker and the hearer from the actual speech situation, they do not demand any reaction from the hearer or bind the speaker for action (preterite, pluperfect). The tenses of Besprechen (discours, discourse) engage the speech participants immediately and concern the speech situation. With these forms (present, present perfect, future) the speaker "changes the world a little bit, he acts", while the hearer has to react, adopt an attitude (Weinrich 1964: 50-55). As to the present perfect, Weinrich defines how it "feels" to use the form:

> "Die Perfect-Schau ist nicht rein passiv; sie ist somit Ausdruck einer wertenden, urteilenden Stellungsnahme zum vergangenen Geschehnis, das Perfekt ist das Tempus der subjektiven Feststellung oder Meinungsäusserung". (1964: 80.)

As it is difficult to find anything more definite than this (except consecutio temporum) in Weinrich's texts, it is perhaps no wonder that, generally, the reaction among linguists towards psychological descriptions seemed to be consternation (for a later evaluation of Benveniste and Weinrich see e.g. Fleischman 1990). However, even without tests we can see that the only difference between Weinrich's and McCoard's definitions is the additional reference to "evaluative attitudes" in the former. Later treatments of the French verbal systems have, moreover, stressed the role of the passé composé (periphrastic past and perfect form) as the commentative tense, the form for contextual participant interaction (Fleischman 1990, Waugh 1990, 1991).

While getting at the "pure grammatical meaning" is possibly a praiseworthy goal, however, the question arises why some event or state is included in the present, and what exactly are the pragmatic inferences that are claimed to be responsible for the "subvarieties" of the perfect. In view of the notorious diachronic

instability of the perfect, it seems to me that these are legitimate and important questions.

2. Relevance

A functional explanation for the subvarieties of the English perfect (see the a-b-c-d list above) was suggested by Inoue (1979), who accounted for the traditional concept of "relevance" sensed in the perfect by appealing to the topic of discourse and its repeatability. In the sentence:

(2) Daniel Jones has done linguistic work in colonial India.

the topic is an entailment of the sentence, and one denoting a situation that is repeated or can be repeated at the time of speech act. As both Daniel Jones and colonial India are no more, the topic can only be "talking about linguists working in colonial territories".

The repeatability condition also seems to explain why the perfect is inappropriate in situations that have to do with unique cognitive events of discovery by particular individuals:

(3) *Captain Cook has discovered Hawaii.

No suitable repeatable topic can be found, since Captain Cook is dead, and Hawaii as a unique location identifiable by that name was the result of the single act of discovery. Similarly, we would say:

(4) Picasso painted this picture (*has painted).

However, in questions we can have the perfect - a fact deemed inexplicable by Inoue (Inoue 1979: 582):

(5) Who broke/has broken the vase?
(6) Who painted/has painted this picture?

Example (5) is appropriate in a situation where the speaker sees the shattered pieces of the former vase. In (6), according to my informants, the question with the perfect form contains an evaluation, e.g. "Who is responsible for this confused mass of colour and line?" It could be used in an art class where the students have just finished painting.

Further, in a footnote Inoue remarks that the repeatability condition is impossible in cases that "describe irreversible changes of state in existing entities", e.g.

(7) Malcolm X has just been assassinated.

Here, the topic must be simply the change itself.

I think that these cases deserve more than a footnote; rather they could be a foothold for developing the functional treatment. To my mind, the way the subvarieties of the perfect are named already reveal what is the relevance of including a past event within the present.

3. The aspectual-temporal dimension

The immediate remedy is to specify how past events can be conceived of. I want to suggest two alternative strategies for this: sequentiality and non-sequentiality, which divide the subvarieties into two groups, 1) perfect of result and of recent events, representing sequential imagery, and 2) experiential perfect, non-sequential (to be treated below in 4.). Universal perfect, or perfect of persistent situation, stands apart from both, since it does not denote an event, but a state or a continuing process.

The sequential imagery conceives of past events as placed in a linear order leading up to the present, each event or situation being definable via entities that undergo change. Each entity in the speech situation is in a state produced by its history, but the perfect form only names the last development contiguous with the present, by asserting a state and backgrounding the event with a non-finite form. In sentences with one argument (subjects

of intransitive verbs and underlying objects of transitive verbs in the passive) the state interpretation is obvious. When more surface arguments are involved, however, it is by no means grammatically determined what in the sentence is the relevant state. As J.D. McCawley noted (and consequently discarded the "state" from his definition), in the situation described by:

(8) The police have arrested my wife, so we can't come to your party.

it is the wife and not the police who is being asserted to be in a relevant state. Moreover, the immediate interpretation of the sentence:

(9) John has left, you are too late.

is that John is away, which is not directly asserted. Thus, we should take the "state" to mean the state produced by the event in its totality with all its consequences, and paraphrase: "There is a new state in our world of discourse due to the fact that X V-ed".

The above formulation covers both the "hot news" perfect and the perfect of result. One can think of several reasons for introducing a new state arising from the past into the speech situation:

• It is important to keep up with the latest developments of certain entities, because they may demand action and decisions to be taken — cf. "There has been an accident". This motivation is implicit and can be connected with the meaning of the present tense: the present is used to signify the open-endedness of a state-of-affairs. Functions like these could, indeed, be called "news", or "stage-setting".

• Something else in the speech situation is in focus that needs explanation, cf. "He has sold his car" is an explanation for his having money, or for the absence of the car.

Now we can consider again examples like

(6′) Who has painted this picture?
(10) Who has written this manuscript?

Both convey an emotional attitude or a need for comment on the part of the speaker: perhaps high praise for the picture/manuscript or sarcasm is to be expected, and the question concerns not only "who", but also "what are we going to do about it". Thus, it is the present state of the object that the speaker wants to discuss. It is also assumed that the event took place recently. Perhaps these nuances make the use of the perfect in the following question feel "frivolous":

(11) Who has killed Malcolm X?

That is, in our legal system the matter is out of the hands of the speech participants, no action can be contemplated.

If we take the interpretation of the present state as a consequence of the latest development in the history of some item present in the speech situation, or the world of discourse implicitly containing people and phenomena that are of importance to the speech participants, it is natural that the latest development can also be an irreversible change — what is relevant is that it may have important consequences.

Inoue discussed the universal and the existential senses of the perfect in the following examples:

(12) Jack Norbert has taught at MIT for ten years.
(13) Jack Norbert has taught at MIT for ten years, he has done some research in Alaska for a year, ...

She claims that the difference is only brought about by the topic of discourse. In the latter example it would the subject's activities, in the first it is left unspecified. Presumably it is what the subject has been doing last. I think that in both cases we are speaking about the subject's present situation, but in the first case it is placed in sequential history, the activity named being contiguous with the present (a change is perhaps anticipated). In

the latter example, past activities are taken as separate facts constituting the subject's experience.

4. The logical dimension

In contrast to the sequential imagery, the non-sequential one conceives of past activities, events and states as separate, isolated facts. Typically, such facts are used to back up a claim the speaker makes concerning the abilities, qualities etc. of some entity in the present situation:

(14) You can fix the tire, you have done it before.
(15) I have eaten chocolate, it will not harm me.

This use is obviously the same as Comrie's "experiential perfect", which qualifies how the past fact is relevant from the standpoint of the present. We are not speaking about the immediate result of a specific event, but about its effects in history, even if it is only experience the subject has about the kind of event named. The term "existential" is, in fact, more appropriate, since "having the experience" is again inferred from the rest of the message. The usage can be paraphrased as: "There exists an event 'X V-ed' in the history, classifiable as evidence, instantiation or counterargument to the topic concerning the present situation". A sentence with an existential perfect should thus always be textually subordinate to some claim made about the topic at hand. This could perhaps be seen as a reflection of the fact that argumentation as a discourse form is surely derivative to communication of more vital information.

Inoue's definition of the topic of discourse as an entailment of the proposition in the perfect tense is apt here, for it shows how the existence of a past fact can be connected with a more general phenomenon under discussion. For example, the sentence:

(16) Newton has explained the movements of the moon.

is appropriate if one is making a survey of the achievements of British scientists, and the topic is thus "British scientists making achievements". The next question is, naturally, why the example

(3′) *Captain Cook has discovered Hawaii.

does not fit into this type of topic. It seems that however generic the topic (for genericness as a condition for experiential perfect, cf. Dahl 1985), this type of event is too unique to be taken out of its history and brought forth in the perfect — unless it was reported as news immediately upon the discovery.

Some manipulation of topics may make the perfect acceptable even when talking about discoveries, but in the following example:

(17) America has already been discovered by Columbus, so you need not do it again.

repeatability itself is clearly under discussion.

Intonational differentiation of sentences with the present perfect seems to support the bipartite classification. D. Crystal notes that "I've bèen to the Old Vìc" refers to an occasion in the more distant past, whereas "I've been to the old! Vìc!" refers to very recent past (Crystal 1966: 8, footnote 2).

Lastly, there is the possibility of using the existential perfect for introducing a topic via the present situation:

(18) I have read a dissertation where ...
(19) Have you done any skiing?
(20) There have been several cases during the last few years of ...

The motivation does not seem to be "repeatability" of the actions, at least not so much as the avoidance of the simple past. If we ask:

(21) Did you do any skiing?

the hearer is expected to know which specific past situation is in question. Thus, the use of the perfect is motivated by a co-operation principle concerning temporal reference: it is preferable to offer the addressee the equal footing of the present, rather than to plunge directly into history and expect the addressee to figure out for himself whether the speaker has a definite point in the past history in mind, and where it might be approximately, or the existence of the action in general. — The American usage, resorting increasingly to the simple past, seems to avoid the perfect as "pedantic".

If we now compare the uses of the perfect both as separate facts and as latest development in sequential history, we see that the past is backgrounded in favour of the present in order to provide explanation or stage-setting for something else. The connection is made either in the temporal dimension, i.e. actual, historical level, or in the logical dimension, arrangement of discourse, typically in argumentation and expository texts (for the increasing use of the perfect in French written discourse in exactly such functions, see Waugh 1990). Inoue did point out that the perfect conveys an explanatory sense, gives information that exemplifies or explains the topic (Inoue 1979: 585). What I wish to stress is that the sequential/non-sequential imagery is just as important.

5. The evidential dimension

There is a tendency in languages to have a division of labour between past forms. It is the perfect that is used for events that are necessarily temporally indefinite, being non-witnessed and merely inferred. In e.g.

(5′) Who has broken the vase?
(22) So you've been sneaking around listening outside the house, have you?

the event is inferred and offered as an explanation for something in focus in the speech situation. An eye-witness would report on the event in the preterite. In (22), the inference is based on knowledge about the general regularities in causal sequences, applied to the "remainings effects" of an event. The speaker may even infer a more or less definite time-point.

Much the same motivation applies to hear-say, or Quotative (the term used in the typological project in Dahl 1985; quotative as a "relative" of the perfect). Temporal adverbial specifications co-occur easily, but such information is, however, also hear-say. Evidential, or suppositive, uses of the perfect and specific Quotative categories developed on the basis of perfect forms naturally appear in the third person.

6. Temporal specification and domain

Much research has been devoted to the co-occurrence of temporal adverbs and the perfect form (latest Klein 1992). Due to the "indefiniteness" of the event, anything more specific than denoting a temporal domain — "today", "recently", "ever", "never" — is deemed inappropriate in English. It is claimed that it is the experiential sense that will combine with temporal expressions denoting extended periods of time — as Östen Dahl puts it, one or more occurrences of an event-type is asserted to have taken place. The restriction of the temporal domain to a point in time reduces the number of possible events to one (cf. the repeatability/non-repeatability condition), favouring a "token-focusing" perspective, i.e. preterite. (Dahl & Hedin 1994: 23.)

Still, contrary to the norms, quite point-like temporal specifications do occur. They are typically utterance-final, which is generally taken to prove that they represent an after-thought. This is not always the case. J. Miller (1994: 113) provides examples of what he calls "non-deictic perfects" ("the present tense of has does not relate directly to the moment of speech"):

(23) It's not much fun to arrive at the station at midday and find that the only train has gone at ten in the morning.

(24) Next I pour on the sauce — which I've made the day before. (in a television cookery programme)

Miller also states that in spontaneous conversation, utterance-final temporal specifications without preceding pause can be heard in Britain regularly and with increasing frequency; perhaps a historical change is underway. An example (Miller 1994: 115-116):

(25) It's just been announced five minutes ago.

7. Universal perfect

The perfect of persistent state, or universal perfect, has a correspondence in the present tense in many languages, and the semantic content of the predication is a state or an activity that continues at the speech time. The perfect is apparently motivated by the "historical" dimension: the state/activity had started in the past, and the present leaves the situation open. A change in the state is provided for, or expected. Moreover, this seems to be the only motivation for using the perfect for truly eternal states, e.g. the following example from Viethen (1979: 179):

(26) Lions have been mammals for as long as I can remember.

A situation is presented as existing in someone's world of experience, where a piece of knowledge may appear at a certain time and from where it may vanish, in other words, have a history. The speech-participant may have experience that differs on the point in question. Similarly, we might say:

(27) The earth has always been round.

in the course of an argument, if there is likelihood of someone entertaining beliefs to the contrary.

8. Diachronic contemplations

It could be thought that the two conceptions of history — separate facts and sequence — are basic and always present in the interpretation of texts about the past. In temporal-referential categories, they interact with the distinction definiteness/indefiniteness — sequences establish their reference points mutually. Typically it is the perfect that presents non-witnessed situations, and events in the perfect form are interpreted as non-sequenced. There is a seeming contradiction between this and my claim that the perfect of result and the perfect of hot news are part of the sequential conception. Still, "stage-setting" is associated with the meaning of "having finished with something". It is merely a difference in perspective, for to be finished with something is to be ready to start something else. The implied dynamism can hardly be placed in any other frame-work than the idea of a linear sequence evoked by the communicative sense of "a new state".

Stage-setting as "current relevance" is also suggested by Dahl & Hedin (1994). Comparing the functions of aorist and perfect forms in Greek newspaper usage, they state that the former describes a recent change in the world, and the latter introduces a "scene" where later developments may take place (Dahl & Hedin 1994: 29).

A category that directly reflects these conceptions is aspectual perfectivity/imperfectivity (or sequence/non-sequence). In discourse-oriented studies the distinction has appeared also under such terms as "contiguity" vs. "gapping" (Gleason), which are obviously connected with the traditional aspectual notions of completion vs. non-completion. Other terms are "tight" vs. "loose" linkage, observed on both the temporal and the logical level by R. Huisman in Angaataha in Papua New Guinea (studies

cited in Grimes 1975). Although somewhat exotic, the latter is worth citing:

> One dimension [is/ML] tight vs. loose, and the other [is/ML] temporal vs. logical. Temporally tight and loose correspond fairly well to Gleason's contiguity and gapping [...], loose asserting that the next action begins some time after the one with the temporally loose aspect marker ends, and tight asserting that such is not the case but that the two actions either abut or overlap. The logical counterparts are a little different: logically tight asserts that the next action is a direct consequence of the one that bears the aspect marker, and logically loose says that the earlier action has effects which persist and are factors in what takes place later, but without direct causation. This idea of latent effects is not very different from the perfect tense of Koiné Greek, which also asserts relevance of the effects of an action at a later time. (Grimes 1975: 234.)

As to completion/non-completion, there have been unsuccessful attempts to connect the former (telic verbs) with the perfect-of-result and the latter (atelic verbs) with the existential perfect (see McCoard 1978: 141-145). Telicity of a verb is too concrete a notion to serve here. However, seen from a point of view of sequenced history, there is something held in common: an agent producing changes is the prime mover of history, therefore the source of a present state is most likely a unique telic event. Atelicity, on the other hand, is connected with indefiniteness and iterativity, both of which contribute towards the interpretation of a verbal notion of a state without result.

The contiguous and non-contiguous (sequential/non-sequential) interpretations of the perfect form can be compared to foreground and background material. This is actually no mere re-naming, for in order to put something in the background, the material in question must be related to something else that is in the foreground, which is in accord with the characterization of the existential (= non-sequential) perfect as textually more subordinate than the other variants (cross-linguistically, it appears in non-assertive contexts; Dahl & Hedin 1994: 23). Of course, the foreground/background distinction in this case can also be seen as reflecting more recent and more distant states of affairs. Such

chronological notions are, besides, easy to associate with tight and loose linkage.

If the two conceptions are universal, it would seem odd why the supposedly primary category of aspect should be in continuous conflict with the speech-time anchored tenses in the diachronic development of temporal-aspectual systems, and why the perfect category keeps disappearing and reappearing.

In Indo-European languages there are two kinds of change that have affected the perfect form. Either it has adopted the meaning of the present tense, or it has taken over the functions of the narrative past (= perfective). In the first case, the gap has been replaced by new constructions, in the latter case the form may have retained both the value of the perfect and that of the past (East and West Slavic, Southern German), or perfective past (spoken French) (Bybee & Dahl 1989: 73-77).

The change from perfect to present in Indo-European is recoverable by reconstruction, and apparently concerned a certain type of verb only. According to Kuryłowicz, the Indo-European synthetic perfect form was intimately related to the mediopassive. The semantic feature common to these two categories was the intransitive value, the differentiating contrast being state (perfect) vs. action (mediopassive) (Kuryłowicz 1964: 63). Transitive (active) perfect appeared only later. The intransitive value can be paraphrased by defining the grammatical subject as Patient or Experiencer that has undergone a change. As the change only concerns the Patient/Experiencer, naming a past event that has produced the present state is self-explanatory and has not much information value. Thus the association with a formally past event may fade entirely, and the result is a pure present meaning. The Germanic languages show only a few cases of preterito-present, e.g. *can*, *may*, *shall* (Kuryłowicz 1964: 82-83).

In Indo-Iranian, Greek, Latin, Celtic and Germanic the individual form of the old perfect was retained, but its value changed. In all these languages the perfect ceased to be exclusively intransitive. A semantic merger of the perfect and the aorist (= perfective) took place, entailing the total ousting of the aorist

in Germanic (the strong preterites in Germanic languages go back to IE perfects), and a syncretism of the two paradigms in Latin and Celtic. (Kuryłowicz 1964: 81.) This has lead to a renewal of the perfect function through analytical means (constructions with *esse/habere* verbs), which in turn have overtaken the function of expressing past events in general. Thus, there is a clear tendency for formal state to replace past, especially perfective forms.

As transitivity seems to play a role in guiding the changes, it could be assumed that a new state which is not clear by its communicative function is reinterpreted as just an anterior event. For if X has V-ed Y, the hearer cannot immediately know whether the resulting state of X or Y is the relevant factor under discussion. Further, the use of the perfect in introducing simple news may be taken as mere information, when no specific conclusions seem to be needed or appropriate. The next step would be to generalize the form to express new development not only "now" or "recently", but anywhere in the past. Thus it becomes the narrative form taking the plot forward. In other words, the changes in the functions of the perfect are due to semantic bleaching through overuse, which in turn is caused by its multitude of functions and implications.

9. Recent changes

The spearhead of the change should thus be either narrative sequencing or adverbial temporal specification. If we opt for the narrative, the speakers must have initially had a constant conflict between what T. Givón calls the "two separate but equally-valid aspects of text coherence" - the current relevance-point of the event and the natural script-coherence of the event (Givón 1993: 182).

As a good representative of an intermediate stage, French could illustrate what may have happened. The spoken language has taken the step into "perfect history", while the written language lingers on in the older system, retaining the perfective

simple past (passé simple). In spoken language, its functions are fulfilled by the periphrastic perfect (passé composé). In both, the perfect function of the latter, as well as the descriptive past, the imperfect, are retained. In spoken Middle French, the present perfect became in addition a preterite and could be used to refer directly to past time (*J'ai mangé une pomme à deux heures* 'I have eaten an apple at two o'clock'). It thus began to encroach upon the territory of the simple past. (Waugh 1991: 254.) In medieval written French, the periphrastic perfect was used in narratives that were originally and stylistically "oral". In Modern French, there have been literary experimentations (notably by Albert Camus) with periphrastic perfect narratives, which depend on adverbs like *puis* 'and then' and the natural script coherence for sequencing — and have, so far, not been accepted as a literary norm. (Fleischman 1990.) It is evident that the form remains as a sign of dialogue, speech participation, while the written language accepts the form in discourse functions that belong to the typical experiential perfect. The "natural script event coherence" may not, in fact, have a great role to play in conversation. As Suzanne Fleischman states:

> Iconic sequence may not be appropriate to the overall structure of traditional oral genres. For lengthy narratives, a linear plot comes only with writing [?/ML]. But within lower-level narrative units such as episodes or scenes, which often correspond to prosodic or performance units, temporal ordering in narrative is a cognitive and ultimately linguistic process that does not directly map a real or imagined world. Insofar as an event is but a hermeneutic construct, [...] the idea that a complex experience can be reduced to a sequence of events laid out in linear order and translated into a sequence of narrative clauses is likewise a hermeneutic idealization ... (Fleischman 1990: 134-135.)

Another situation, more in line with my suggestion, is illustrated by Komi, a Uralic language, which has the tenses simple past, perfect and pluperfect. The perfect is used in narratives when a resulting state in the past needs to be expressed. B.A. Serebrennikov, whose term for the usage is "impressivnyj perfekt", gives an example which translates into English as follows: "Stepan could not sit down: the children sitting around the table *have*--

taken all the chairs" (Serebrennikov 1960: 60-68). In addition to state, the perfect expresses evidentiality in Komi. Presumably the pluperfect, which sequences past events, would transfer the previous event too far back in time ("remote past") to guarantee the resulting state interpretation.

As is well known, the Eastern and Western Slavic languages took the total step in remodelling their perfect form to denote general past tense. In Eastern Slavic, this took place in spoken language and "minor genres" in writing (Holden 1990). The change began in the third person, which dropped the auxiliary. It is tempting to see this as a reflection of an evidential use of the perfect, or a "telescopic" view of the non-deictic agent, rather than script-coherence or temporal definiteness. The traditional description appeals to economy: in the 3rd person, the subject is usually lexicalized, and there is no need for the congruent auxiliary (Istoričeskaja grammatika russkogo jazyka 1982).

Finally, we should note that languages show an opposite tendency - that of the definite, "witnessed", sequenced past taking over the functions of the perfect. This has partly happened in Portuguese, where the use of the periphrastic perfect has diminished within the attested history of the language. The perfective preterite (simple perfect) is widely used, often together with *já* 'already', to imply a resulting state that prevails at the moment of speech. The periphrastic perfect is reserved for phenomena that may be continued or repeated in the present situation. (Sten 1973.) In many cases it should in fact be translated with the present tense in e.g. German (Hundertmark & Martins 1982: 180-187). Reportedly, in American English, the preterite has been ousting the perfect in its resultative function (Lindstedt 1994, manuscript), while *have got* seems to be synonymous with *have*.

10. Resultatives and perfects

As was mentioned above, for certain verb phrases the resulting state is unambiguous — if someone has left, he is gone; if something has broken, it is broken at the following stage. Such changes of state in the subject are "trivial", automatic. The construction, not always identical with the perfect, is called resultative (Nedjalkov 1988, Bybee & Dahl 1989: 68-73). The connection with the perfect is, however, fairly wide-spread and symptomatic (cf. the Indo-European preteritopresents above).

Resultatives clearly play a part in the generation of the perfect. In Russian, there is no formal differentiation between the perfect and the preterite (except in the passive participle construction, a typical resultative, e.g. *dom postroen* 'house (is/has been) built'). In the dialects, however, there are dialectal forms of intransitive "perfects", formally preterital gerunds, such as *ushedši* 'having gone, is gone', *vypivši* 'having drunk, is drunk'. At the beginning of this century, it was predicted that they would spread into the literary language. This has not happened, presumably due to strong normative attitudes in language-planning, which stigmatized the forms as sub-standard, even vulgar. (Vinogradov 1947: 568 attributes the prediction to K. Žitomirskij in 1915). Still, Russian North-Western dialects the forms are alive and a new resultative construction, or perfect, has been re-created even for transitive verbs (Trubinskij 1990).

11. Conclusion

Bybee & Dahl and Miller present the development of the perfect, expressed by auxiliary plus past participle construction, as starting from the resultative construction: the resultative views a past event in terms of its prevailing results, the perfect de-emphasizes the perspective of the present moment, by focusing more on the past event, requiring only that event have some relevance to the present moment, and not that it produce some current state. In the change to past or perfective, the sense of

relevance to the current moment disappears altogether. (Bybee & Dahl 1989: 77, Miller 1994.) We could specify the development in the following way:

1) contiguity/sequentiality; a) resultative constructions, b) perfect of result, spreading to transitive constructions with objects,

2) non-contiguity/non-sequentiality, adding to the above; a) extension of the temporal domain and of the discourse functions into existential perfect, b) evidential perfect,

3) ambiguity; adding to the above, perfect forms for single events with "bleached" relevance, most likely for fairly recent events,

4) adding to the above, perfect forms for past narrative (all the while retaining the resultative in embryo).

At some stage, there is competition between several forms which have the same implicational content — the aorist in certain situations may imply that a result is present and relevant, and the perfect mentions a past event. The result often is elimination of excessive redundancy.

Typological research on the verbal systems now needs more detailed attention to documented historical changes. An obviously necessary viewpoint is, besides study of oral variants, areal linguistics in a concrete form — what has happened and is happening in language contacts.

While this paper was mainly concerned with the English present perfect, we have seen that some directions can be given, and most of the above stages of development are visible in its synchronic functions as well.

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