

A decorative graphic consisting of a thin yellow circle on the left side. A thick black left square bracket is positioned to the left of the circle's center. A thick yellow right square bracket is positioned to the right of the circle's center. A horizontal bar with a light yellow-to-white gradient is overlaid across the middle of the circle, containing the title text.

# **Towards a typology of perfect and related categories**

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# Generalities

**Perfect** (also referred to as *anterior*)  
– one of the most intricate  
representatives of the verbal  
grammatical domain.

# Generalities

Especially problematic are:

- the meaning of perfect
- its relations to other verbal categories (both typologically and language-internally)
- and its grammatical evolution (sources, diachronic development, post-perfect meanings).

# Generalities

Still, perfect is one of the most widespread verbal grams:

according to Dahl 1985 and Bybee et al. 1994, at least one third of the world's languages are likely to have perfect markers.

Importantly, perfect can be considered as a characteristic feature of the European linguistic area (Dahl 2000), among others.

# Outline

- I. **Semantics of perfect**
- II. **Structural and areal types of perfect**
- III. **The status of perfect in the verbal system**
- IV. **Diachronic development of perfect**

# I. Semantics of perfect

- How to specify perfect value of a verbal form?
- Usually, a simpler notion of *resultative* (Nedjalkov et al. 1974, Coseriu 1976, Nedjalkov (ed.) 1988, Wiemer & Giger 2005, etc.) is relied on.
- Resultative is one of the basic (= primary) aspectual values specifying, for a telic process, that its resultative state takes place (= includes the topic time, in Klein 1994's terminology).

# Resultative vs. perfect: similarities and differences

- *The door is open*
  - – (present object) resultative from ‘to open’
- *The door has been opened*
  - – (passive present) perfect from ‘to open’

# Resultative vs. perfect: similarities

- Similar discourse functions, namely:
  - both cannot mark main story line predicates in the narrative;
  - both cannot be used with “exact time” expressions of the type *at 5 o'clock, last year, etc.*



# Resultative vs. perfect: differences

- However, resultative and perfect differ in many aspects.
- Basically, perfect can be conceptualized as an “advanced” and “eroded” resultative.

# Resultative vs. perfect: differences

- Different syntactic and semantic properties, namely:
  - different combinability with *still*-adverbials (Nedjalkov & Jaxontov 1983/1988): resultatives do allow, perfects typically do not
  - actionality restrictions: resultatives can be formed only from telic processes, perfects do not have specific restrictions (cf. Engl. *have known / sung / walked*)

# Resultative vs. perfect: semantic differences

- The notion of ‘result’ is substituted by a much looser notion of ‘current relevance’ (Comrie 1985 et al.)
  - which is sometimes argued to form a scale (Dahl, Hedin 2000)
- consequences of a past situation in the present,
- (any?) relation of a past situation to the current state of affairs (Michaelis 1998),
- or even a mere “participation of the subject” in the situation (Giorgi & Pianesi 1997)

# Resultative vs. perfect: other attempts

- A purely “temporal” approach to perfect (Declerck 1991, Klein 1992, 1994, partly also Bybee et al. 1994, etc.) seems less felicitous, especially within the formal-logical treatment that analyzes perfect only as a kind of relative tense
  - expressing situation prior to the moment of speech
  - and/or holding at somewhat mystical “extended now” interval (according to McCoard 1978).

# Resultative vs. perfect: argument structure differences

- Resultative verbal form is a one-place stative predicate
  - which denotes a resultant state ascribed either to the subject or to the object of the core situation (neither to both!).
- Perfect, on the contrary, retains all the arguments of the core situation.

# Resultative vs. perfect: argument structure differences

Thus, Standard Russian

*izba zaperta* ‘the hut is / has been barred’

is ambiguous:

RES.            *Izba vsě eščě zaperta* [\**Ivanom*]

‘the hut is/remains still barred [\*by John]’

PASS.PF.      *Izba* [\**vsě eščě*] *zaperta Ivanom*

‘the hut has been [\*still] barred by John’

Cf. North Russian perfect:

PF.     a) *Ivan*<sub>nom</sub> *izbu*<sub>acc</sub> *zaperši*<sub>conv.act</sub>

b) *U Ivana*<sub>obl</sub> *izbu*<sub>acc</sub> *zaperto*<sub>part.pass.neut</sub>

‘John has barred the hut’

# Resultative vs. perfect

- The degree of “perfectness” is gradually decreasing from resultative to (aoristic/perfective) past
- Hence the problems with an unambiguous qualification of many language-specific perfect-like forms
- (Lithuanian perfect may be among these problematic cases)

# Resultative vs. perfect

- Thus, even the resultative perfect (= perfect of result) is not identical to the resultative in the strict sense.
- Moreover, the perfect forms are, as a rule, polysemous and express a lot of other values (including those which are rather far from resultative domain).



# Perfect: polysemy

- The study of this polysemy usually relies on the seminal paper McCawley 1981 on English perfect, where four types of perfect uses are distinguished:
  - ‘resultative perfect’
  - ‘experiential perfect’ (with the focus on subject’s properties)
  - ‘continuous perfect’ (core situation is extended to the MoS)
  - ‘immediate perfect’ (with the focus on short temporal distance)

# Perfect: polysemy

- These four uses can be referred to as “McCawley’s cluster”.
- Typologically, they all relate to different semantic domains.
- Still, their synchronic combination with resultative value is not unique (though is likely to be rather a European areal phenomenon).

# Perfect: polysemy

- Nevertheless, when perfect is defined as something similar to “McCawley’s cluster” (as, e.g., in Dahl 1985), it is a gross confusion of a possible language-specific cluster with a universal cross-linguistic gram type.
- Cross-linguistically, what we call ‘perfect’ need not by any means have immediate, or experiential values, etc.

# Perfect: polysemy

- NB: There are other widespread types of clusterization, for example, evidential perfect (= perfect with evidential uses), typical for many linguistic areas, such as Balkan, Caucasian, Baltic, a.o.
- Non-European perfects: are there semantic differences due to differences in structural types and lexical sources?

## II. Structural and areal types of perfect

- 1) Stative perfect, involving perfective (passive) participle with an auxiliary ('esse' or 'habere')
- 2) Terminative perfect, involving constructions with 'finire'

# Stative perfect

- Mostly “European” phenomenon, both ‘esse’-based (Ital. *è uscito*, North Rus. *on uexavši*) and ‘habere’-based (Ital. *ha chiuso la casa / ha risposto*).
- NB: North Russian type *u nego izbu zaperto*
  - not identical to Standard Russian resultative constructions of the type *u nego sdelany uroki* ≈ ‘he has his homework done / as for him, his homework is done’
  - cf. *u nego syn nagražděn medal’ju* ≈ ‘as for him, his son has been awarded a medal’ ≠ ‘he has awarded...’
- The original semantics is the expression of state, the original construction is the resultative one, gradually evolving towards a perfect (and beyond).

# Stative perfect

- NB: The problem of “auxiliary choice” within an analytic participial construction:
  - only ‘esse’ (Finnish, North Russian),
  - only ‘habere’ (English, Spanish, Greek),
  - diachronically unstable lexically-based distribution (“split auxiliary system”, as in Italian, French, German),
  - coexistence of several perfect constructions (Macedonian, Lithuanian)
- The rules of lexical distribution may be very complex and unstable (Sorace 2000, Aranovich 2007, Sičinava 2008); the relation of this group of facts to a notorious “unaccusativity hypothesis” is not proven.

# Terminative perfect

- One of the most common types outside Europe, including Africa, Oceania, South-East Asia, etc. (cf. Bybee et al. 1994, Howard 2000).
- The original semantics is a reference to the “post-terminal” phase of the situation



# Terminative perfect

- The similar iconic pattern is exploited by **locative constructions with preposition ‘after’** expressing perfect:
  - in Irish (as well as in Irish English) and in colloquial Czech (*jsem už po snídání* ‘I have already had my breakfast’, litt. ‘I am after breakfast’)
  - and by ‘already’-constructions in Upper Sorbian (Tommola 2000, 2001).

# **Structural and areal types of perfect**

Stative and terminative perfect  
may differ both in their semantics  
and in the details of their diachronic  
development.

# III. The status of perfect in the verbal system

- An old problem: is perfect an aspect (Maslov), a tense (Jespersen, Klein) or both (Comrie)?
- If it as an aspect, how is it related to other aspectual grams in the language?
- In particular, can Modern Russian be said to have a special perfect aspect, apart from perfective and imperfective? – (Cf. Beedham 1988, Gavrilova 1998, Knjazev 2002 and 2007 etc. for discussion.)

# Perfect and tense/aspect

- If perfect is considered a tense, does it express a present (Jespersen) or a past (Michaelis) time-reference? Or does it have a special “complex” temporal reference (Comrie)?
- The problem may also rely in the fact that, structurally, resultative perfect (still) tends to the present, while, semantically, it (already) tends to the past.

# Perfect and tense/aspect

- ➔ Perfect is a specific aspectual gram.  
The problem of its temporal reference depends on whether perfect-based “temporal paradigm” is to be recognized at all.

# Perfect and tense/aspect

- The problem of “perfect tenses” of traditional grammatical descriptions: are past perfect (= pluperfect) and future perfect real instances of perfect?
- It is often so from the formal point of view, but semantically the question is much more debatable, especially for pluperfect (cf. Comrie 1985, Salkie 1989, Squartini 1999, Plungian 2001 etc.).

# Perfect and pluperfect

- Typologically, pluperfect (usually going back to past-resultative forms) may belong to the semantic domain of “**discontinuous past**” (Plungian 2001, Plungian & van der Auwera 2006),
- where it is driven by diachronic evolution separating it from present-resultative forms, evolving differently.

# Perfect and pluperfect

- The more the semantic asymmetry, the less strong is the motivation for a unified category of “tensed” perfect with a temporal past-and-present paradigm.
- In addition, there are quite a few languages which do have a pluperfect but lack a dedicated (present) perfect – like Latin, Standard Rumanian, Yiddish, etc.



# Perfect and passive

- Passive  $\approx$  syntactic promotion of object
- Object resultative  $\approx$  profiling object-related resulting state
- Close functional correspondence, explaining a greater frequency of the passive (or passive-based) resultative/perfect in the world's languages (cf. Comrie 1981)

# Perfect and passive: Russian

- Standard Russian resultative is predominantly passive
- Cf. *dver' sloma-n-a / otkry-t-a* 'the door is broken / open', etc.
- Intransitive verbs like *upast'* 'fall' display virtually no dedicated resultative forms, except a number of "pseudopassives" of the type *vlyublën* 'enamored', *rasterjan* 'confused', etc. (Trubinskij 2001, Knjazev 2002).

# Perfect and passive: Russian

- Standard Russian resultative is predominantly passive
- NB: The opposite does not hold, because Standard Russian (participle-based) passive may be both stative and dynamic (= non-resultative)
- However, according to the modern norm, mostly in the past

# Perfect and passive: Russian

- Past passive in Russian:

*Dver' byla otkryta* 'the door was opened / open'  
(both readings out of the context)

*Dver' byla bystro otkryta* 'the door was opened  
quickly' (only non-resultative reading)

- Present participle-based passive in Russian:

*Dver' [\*bystro] otkryta* 'the door is [\*quickly]  
open / \*opened' (only resultative reading)

# Perfect and passive: Russian

*Скажи-ка, дядя, ведь не даром  
Москва, спалённая пожаром,  
французу отдана?*

(the first lines of Lermontov's "Borodino",  
1837)

*otdana* = 'was given away', not 'is given'!  
(past) dynamic passive, not present  
resultative

## IV. Diachronic development of perfect

- A particular diachronic instability of perfect
- From a diachronic point of view, perfect is rather an intermediate area somewhere between several more clear-cut semantic domains
- Within perfect continuum, different stages can be distinguished, depending on how far from the resultative prototype the given perfect form is
- Cf., for example, the situation in Lithuanian – vs. Finnish, Swedish – vs. Spanish, English, Dutch, Italian – vs. German, Serbian, etc.

# **Main possible scenarios of perfect evolution**

**A.** “Extended perfect”

**B.** “Dedicated perfect”

**C.** “Weak perfect”

## A. “Extended perfect”

- Resultative > perfect > (perfective) past with resultative uses (Russian, Polish, Rumanian, Hungarian, Yiddish)
- If a language already has an “old” aoristic (non-resultative) past:
  - either it disappears (as in Russian or Swiss German)
  - or it may be retained in some residual uses, variously related to the forms of a “new” extended perfect (as in French, German or Serbian linguistic continua)



# “Extended perfect”

- The scenario A may also yield a recurrent “new” resultative, taking over some functions of the extended perfect
- This is what is called “a perfect cycle” (as attested in early Romance, North Russian, etc.): two or more perfects, successively.

# “Extended perfect”: the perfect cycle

- Classical Latin: *litteram scripsit* ‘wrote/has written’ [Ext.Pf–1]
- Late Latin / Early Romance: *litteram scripsit* ‘wrote’ [Aor.] ~ *litteram scriptam habet* ‘has written’ [Res.Pf.]
- Modern Romance: *habet scriptum* ‘wrote/has written’ [Ext.Pf–2]

# “Extended perfect”

NB 1: Several perfect forms may compete also beyond the scenario A: the most familiar example is Macedonian, cf. Fici Giusti 1995, Graves 2000.

NB 2: Sičinava 2008 points out the relation of scenario A to a “split auxiliatio” strategy.

## B. “Dedicated perfect”

- Evolving away from the resultative prototype, the perfect forms specialize in a single value belonging to the “perfect cluster” –
  - for example, in the experiential one (Vostrikova 2009),
  - or in the immediate one (Fleischman 1989, Schwenter 1994),
- but most often, in the evidential one.

# “Dedicated perfect”

- Evidential perfect (or perfect-based evidential)
  - may both retain and lose the original resultative value
- In the latter case, we are left with an evidential past.
- The evolution is extremely typical for all “Great Evidential Belt” languages, as well as for Baltic area (Tatevosov 2001, Wiemer 2006, and many others).

## C. “Weak perfect”

- Original resultative perfect neither evolves towards perfective past nor develops special dedicated uses,
- but simply disappears (or gets marginalized to a great extent), the resultative uses being taken over by an “old” (perfective) past.
- One of the less studied scenarios: a case of “failed grammaticalization”?

# “Weak perfect”

- Languages which tend towards scenario C:
  - American English (Miller 1997, 1998, Michaelis 1998),
  - most probably, Modern Greek, Portuguese.
- In American English, perfect uses are narrowed down mostly to experiential contexts
  - according to Michaelis 1998, constructions like *Harry's left* “sound British”
  - Jim Miller points out the increase of “new resultatives” of the type *I have my leg broken* also in colloquial British English, where scenario B seems to prevail

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# To conclude

- All known types of perfect instantiate synchronically vague and diachronically unstable phenomena.
- There are (practically) no specimens of “pure”, or “prototypical” perfect.
- Every language-specific case has its individual aberrations: studying perfect means describing ways of this aberration.





**Nobody is perfect...**