

The Gothic perfective constructions in contrast to Western Germanic

The term *perfect* is one of the most ambiguous concepts in linguistic terminology, since it refers to both the aspect and tense domains. In Indo-European reconstructions, *perfect* is treated as a verbal aspect within the basic categorial opposition of imperfectivity vs. perfectivity in the Proto-Indo-European verbal system, being primarily a grammatical indicator of the so-called “viewpoint aspect”. A similar definition remains for “aspect languages” like Slavonic. On the other hand, however, the term *perfect* is used also in descriptions of the verbal systems of aspectless languages like Germanic, where it denotes the category of verbal tense. Moreover, *aspect* or *aspectuality* often refer to phenomena like the so-called “lexical aspect” (the opposition between telicity and atelicity), which is situated on the border between pure lexical categorization (“*aktionsart*”) and the viewpoint aspect.

In order to avoid terminological ambiguity, the term *aspect* is treated in my paper as a functional category which originally dates back to the verbal aspect, but has been re-analysed in many languages which have lost the aspect as a grammatically marked opposition.

In Gothic, which can without exaggeration be treated as a “test laboratory” of language change, there are several markers of “perfectivity” generally heading for “lexicalization” or “temporalization”: (i) the so called *ga*-composita like *gahausjan*, *gasaihan*, *gabindan*, *gaskapjan*, encoding perfectivity in opposition to the simplicia *hausjan* ‘hear’, *saihan* ‘see’, *bindan* ‘bind’, *skapjan* ‘create, manage’; (ii) the periphrastic constructions with *wisan* ‘to be’ and *wairþan* ‘to become’ with past participle which connect aspectual, temporal and diathetic functions and can be reinterpreted as a trace of the genuine Indo-Germanic perfect medium category as opposed to the present active.

However, Gothic does not have the construction with *have* and past participle, which was the main indicator of the latest analytic form in Western Germanic encoding *perfect*, which has been re-interpreted as a tense form with several aspect-like features. This form, which arose from the possessive syntactic construction of the AHD type, for example: *phîgboum habêta sum giflantzôtan in sînemo uuîngarten* (Tat. 102) lit. ‘a fig tree had somebody planted in his vineyard’, appears in the oldest Western Germanic texts (Old English, Old Saxon and Old High German). Its functional status is a “categorial mixture” of aspectuality, temporality and diathesis. The Western Germanic *perfect* as an analytic tense form developed then, as a “competition” between the – elder – “to be” and the – younger – “to have”-perfect.

In English, the “to have”-perfect with a relatively strong aspectual markedness has won through; whereas in the continental West Germanic languages (Dutch and German), both types of the analytic perfect with a relatively weak aspectual function exist. The selection of the perfect form depends on the “aspect-like” and, partly, on the diathesis properties of the verbs in question, cf. Germ. *Wir haben einen VW gefahren* vs. *Wir sind nach Rom gefahren*; and D. *Gister zijn we naar Leiden gefietst* ‘Gestern sind wir nach Leiden geradelt.’ vs. *Op vakantie heb ik veel gefietst* ‘In den Ferien bin ich viel Fahrrad gefahren.’ Moreover, passive

constructions without temporal reference with *have* are possible, cf. *Das Pferd hat die Beine gefesselt*. In the latter case, the perfective aspectual reading is a sine qua non. Southern German dialects select *sein* in perfect constructions even in cases when intransitive verbs do not indicate perfective transformation, i.e. belong to the group of durative inaccusatives (or, according to Z. Vendler, *states*), cf. *Peter ist lange gesessen*.

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