

The Perfect as a Rhetorical Device in Sistani Balochi (Iranian) and New Testament Greek

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Recent claims (e.g. in Campbell 2015) that the perfect in NT Greek has imperfective aspect overlook the fact that οἶδα ‘know’ and the intransitive of ἵστημι ‘stand’, the verbs most often cited as evidence for an imperfective reading, are ‘defective’ in that they lack imperfective forms, which results in neutralisation between the perfect and imperfective. For verbs with a three-way contrast between the perfective, imperfective and perfect, the traditional position that the perfect portrays an event occurring prior to reference time that relates in some way to the situation holding at reference time still provides a good starting point for further refinements.

This paper examines the nature of the situation holding at reference time when the perfect of a ‘say’ verb such as λέγω (Greek) or ‘gošt- (Sistani Balochi) introduces reported speech, and argues that the perfect often backgrounds the speech concerned in relation to something in the context. The perfect of other verbs in Greek and Balochi sometimes has a similar rhetorical effect.

Crellin (2012) classifies the perfect of λέγω as accusative since the event of speaking does not “result in a change of STATE for the SUBJECT”. In his corpus, it “most frequently occurs in parentheses in subordinate clauses referring the reader either to some other writer or to an earlier point in the writer’s own work”. A NT Greek example is Heb 4:3 (καθὼς εἶρηκεν ‘just as he said’), since the following quotation ‘As I swore in my anger...’ had been cited earlier in the letter. The perfect is appropriate in such a context because the speech act took place prior to reference time, yet relates in some way to the situation holding at reference time.

Nevertheless, **initial** references to an earlier writer are often introduced with a ‘say’ verb in the present or perfective. For example, the initial quotation which Heb 4:3 repeats (Heb 3:7) was introduced with ‘as the Holy Spirit says (καθὼς λέγει τὸ πνεῦμα τὸ ἅγιον)’. An additional factor must therefore influence when an author chooses to use the perfect. Crellin’s observation, “most frequently occurs in parentheses” suggests that backgrounding has a part to play.

Levinsohn and Nourzaei (2015) discussed events presented in the perfect in Sistani Balochi oral folktales that “can be viewed as backgrounded in relation to a following speech or event”. These included instances of reported speeches in Nourzaei’s corpus that were introduced with *gošt-a* ‘he/she has said’. All were found in stories told by female speakers and appeared to be used as a rhetorical device to direct the hearers’ attention to what would happen as a result. In the following passage, for instance, the use of the perfect in #b directs the hearers’ attention to the response of #c.

- a. When Alam came there, friends and relatives said (‘*gošt-ant*—perfective) (to the husband),
“Well, why did you divorce this girl for nothing?”
- b. He has said (‘*gošt-a*—perfect), “No, she is useless.”
- c. He (Alam) said (‘*gošt=e*—perfective), “Alright, I will take care of my daughter, now you did like this. I will take care of her.”

A similar distribution of the perfective and imperfective is found in the Greek of Rev 7:13-14:

- a. Then one of the elders addressed (ἀπεκρίθη—perfective) me, saying, “Who are these, robed in white, and where have they come from?”
- b. I have said (εἶρηκα—perfect) to him, “Sir, you are the one that knows.”
- c. Then he said (εἰπέν—perfective) to me, “These are they who have come out of the great ordeal...”

The paper discusses other passages in which the perfect may have been used to direct the hearers’ reader to what follows; e.g., ‘This, then (μὲν οὖν), is what Aristotle the philosopher has said’ (εἰρηκέν), pointing forward to ‘but (δ’) Euripides ... shows what the world thought of Pittheus’ (viz., ‘pure and holy’) (Plutarch, *Theseus* 3.2). It ends by asking whether another rhetorical effect of

using the perfect in NT Greek is to highlight the quotation itself, as in ‘It has been said (Εἶρηται), “Do not put the Lord your God to the test”’ (Luke 4:12).

References

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