Chronologizing the European Perfects: 
Have and Be in the Charlemagne Sprachbund 
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The so-called “Charlemagne Sprachbund” was proposed by Johan van der Auwera (1998) to account for the large number of similar features to be found in French, German, Dutch, and northern Italian—the original territory ruled by Charlemagne. The perfects of the Romance and Germanic languages provide considerable support for the existence of this linguistic area: the borders of the Carolingian realm correspond almost perfectly to the borders of the HAVE/BE dichotomy in the perfects of western Europe. As a result of the political and social ties established during the time of Charlemagne, innovative strengthening of the dyadic relationship between HAVE and BE tended to occur in the core area, with BE periphrastics undergoing considerable growth. Evidence from Carolingian documents demonstrates that this expanded use of BE periphrastics is closely, and significantly, correlated with the increased use of deponents and middles in these documents.

The Old Continental West Germanic languages add support to the claim that the HAVE / BE dichotomy did not grow up independently in the Germanic languages but that it was constructed on the model provided by Latin, first, through extensive contact with vernacular Late Latin spoken in Merovingian Gaul in the 6th-7th centuries and, subsequently, through the reinforcement of written Latin, especially that connected with the Carolingian court and church.

This paper thus demonstrates the essential role of Latin “roofing” in the development of the perfect in both the Romance and Germanic languages, and points to the need for a stratified, three-dimensional model to represent the layers of innovation in the perfect construction across time and space. By charting the distribution of HAVE and BE auxiliaries on the map of Europe, and then stacking these maps to represent three distinct stages, we obtain a stratified, three-dimensional view of how this multi-faceted linguistic area developed:

I  The widespread use of the HAVE perfect across western Europe represents the diffusion of the Latin habeo construction, inherited in Romance, calqued into Germanic.

II  Within the HAVE area, a division of labor between HAVE and BE auxiliaries later developed, corresponding to the increased use of deponents seen in Carolingian documents; as mentioned above, the boundaries of the distribution of HAVE / BE perfects coincides precisely with the boundaries of the Carolingian realm (Drinka 2013; Drinka forthcoming).

III  Within the HAVE / BE area, anteriors began to take on preterital value. First witnessed in the vernacular of twelfth-century Paris and its environs, it spread to areas influenced by French culture, such as western and southern Germany and northern Italy, and eventually into contiguous areas such as the Slavic territories under the rule of the Habsburgs.

The HAVE / BE dichotomy of the present-day languages of Europe turns out, then, to reflect the complex and multi-layered history of the region with remarkable precision.

References
Drinka, Bridget (Forthcoming). Language contact in Europe: The periphrastic perfect through history. (Cambridge Approaches to Language Contact). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.