Gradient auxiliary selection at the syntax-lexicon interface

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Much research on the syntax-lexicon interface has shown that notion of a categorical distinction between unaccusative and unergative verbs is difficult to maintain: verb behaviour in syntactic diagnostics of split intransitivity, such as the selection of perfective auxiliaries, systematically varies along a gradient hierarchy defined by the aspectual type of the verb and the context in which the verb appears (Cennamo & Sorace, 2007; Keller & Sorace, 2003; Legendre, 2007; Legendre & Sorace, 2003; Sorace 2000, 2004, to appear). Based on online and offline experiments on native and non-native speakers, I will show that gradience in the selection of perfective auxiliaries avere/haben (‘have’) and essere/sein (‘be’) with intransitive verbs in Italian and German is sensitive to interactions between the event structure complexity of verbs and the cognitive capacity of individual speakers to apply aspectual coercion. I will briefly compare these phenomena with data from the syntax-pragmatics interface, and especially pronominal reference (Sorace 2011, in press), where one sees similar interactions of linguistic and general cognitive factors. I will finally discuss the implications for linguistic models of split intransitivity and for models of gradience in language.
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 multifaceted 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.

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The HAVE/BE alternation in contemporary Faroese

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As observed in Larsson 2015, all the Scandinavian languages exhibit an alternation between HAVE and BE in constructions with an active participle, but closer investigation reveals that the alternation does not have the same status across all the languages. On the one hand, modern Danish exhibits a pattern of auxiliary selection in the perfect that resembles that found in, for example, German. On the other, Larsson has argued extensively that what might appear to be instances of perfects with BE in Swedish, Norwegian, and Icelandic are in fact resultatives (Larsson 2009, 2015), as argued also for late Middle and Early Modern English in McFadden & Alexiadou 2010. Further, even within this latter group of Scandinavian languages there are differences in where on the Auxiliary Selection Hierarchy (Sorace 2000) the HAVE/BE distinction falls.

The one Scandinavian language for which the facts concerning the HAVE/BE alternation remain very little explored is Faroese. There are some remarks about auxiliary selection in Lockwood 1977 and Henriksen 2000. Larsson 2014 reports on a small set of data from Faroese (alongside data from other languages) from the Nordic Syntax Database and the Nordic Dialect Corpus but concludes in her 2015 overview that “the situation in Faroese is unclear.” In their recent survey of Faroese, Thráinsson and his colleagues included three minimal pairs bearing on auxiliary selection; one result here is that a majority of speakers prefer BE to HAVE as the auxiliary with the verb fara ‘go’, when occurring together with a PP denoting an endpoint, even in an iterative context—suggesting a system more like Danish than like the other Scandinavian languages, as the iterative context excludes the necessarily resultative interpretation of BE+past participle in the latter languages, while the true perfect use of BE in Danish occurs happily in this environment. On the other hand, Lockwood claims that verbs that normally appear with be always take HAVE in “conditionals” in Faroese—but the ungrammaticality of BE+past participle in past counterfactual conditionals is a hallmark of the interpretation of BE+part participle as a resultative, rather than a true perfect, now suggesting that the Faroese system is more like the Scandinavian languages other than Danish.

In this paper we aim to extend what is known about the HAVE/BE alternation in Faroese, building on the initial survey in Petersen 2013 and presenting the results of a more systematic/extensive collection of data on this topic than has been undertaken to date.

References
Perfects in contact
On external and internal explanations for the demise of the analytic perfect in Romance
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The expansion of a Perfect, as in French, where the passé compose has taken on the functions of the passé simple, is well-known, and has led researchers to define the perfect as an unstable category: perfects frequently emerge, but easily become something else (Lindstedt 2000). In grammaticalization theory (Bybee et al. 1994), the observed development of perfects has led researchers to the identification of cross-linguistic paths of developments, such as the presumably well-travelled perfective path: A lexical possessive construction with auxiliary habere in Romance later develops perfect function, and eventually past/past perfective function, as in French. The past/past perfective – here referred to as a preterit – tends to disappear as a result of the expansion of a perfect, it is claimed. Examples of such developments are found not only in Romance, but in a number of non-Indo-European languages, as argued by, e.g., Bybee and colleagues, who claim that the perfect expands as the current relevance (CR) component is lost (Bybee et al. 1994: 86-87), assuming that the CR component triggers a more frequent use of the perfect, on the premise that speakers want to express themselves as more relevant.

However, there is an increasing awareness that when one looks beyond the well-studied Indo-European languages, it is in fact the preterit that is gaining terrain; as confirmed by Fløgstad (2016) for Argentinian and Uruguayan Spanish, see also Howe (2013) for Peruvian. Fløgstad (ibid) argues that although there were external factors present in late 19th century Argentina and Uruguay that could have explained the expansion of a preterit (the presence of past threshold L2-learners; intense multilingualism; possible transfer from varieties in which a preterit was preferred); these factors were the unlikely instigators of the change.

This study further systematizes the distribution of perfects/preterits, and shows that the expansion of a preterit is not marginal or rare, or confined to certain Latin American varieties. This paper shows, however, through a primary study of Argentinian and Uruguayan Spanish, and a secondary study of 50 Indo-European languages, that the instability both relates to perfects and preterits – and that either may expand. A study of secondary sources from 50 Indo-European languages shows that perfects and preterits expand at equal rates. Clearly, it illustrates a substantial variation in the distribution of the Perfect and Preterit in a selection of Romance languages. These findings have important implications. Recall Dahl’s claim, that “Past tenses and perfectives rarely develop into anything else: they seem to be, in a sense, the stable final point of that development” (2004: 275). In the languages in which the preterit has expanded, the older, synthetic form—with past-perfective function—has indeed gained terrain.

It appears, then, that both categories may expand, and that the instability is not only related to the perfect. This observation is linked to findings from experimental psycholinguistics, which show that analytic and synthetic forms have different processing benefits in hearers and speakers (Boyd 2007), thus favoring an internal over an external explanation for the observed patterns.

References

Developing a New Perfect
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It is standardly assumed that Icelandic is a “straight-have-perfect” language in the sense of McFadden, for instance (2007:675ff.), unlike Danish and German, for instance, witness examples like the following, for instance (see e.g. Thráinsson 2007:11−12):

(1) a. Þessi bók hefur aldrei verið lesin. (*er aldrei ...)
   this book has never been read (*is never ...)
   b. Ég hef oft verið í Kaupmannahöfn. (*er oft ...)
       I have often been in Copenhagen (*am often ...)

But in addition to the standard have-perfect, which can have many of the perfect-interpretations familiar from other languages (see e.g. Jónsson 1992), Icelandic has developed a second type of perfect illustrated in (2):

(2) María er búin að lesa þessa bók.
    Mary is finished to read(inf.) this book
    ‘Mary has read this book.’

Following Jónsson (1992) I will refer to this second perfect as the bf-perfect (bf for ‘be finished’). Since literal meaning of búinn is typically ‘finished’ (cf. the gloss in (2)), the bf-perfect often has a resultative reading, as in (2). Some examples of the bf-perfect do not carry any sense of completion, however, as pointed out by Jónsson (1992:129n):

(3) María er búin að vera veik.
    Mary is finished to be sick
    ‘Mary has been sick.’

Despite the bf-perfect, (3) normally implies that Mary is still sick.

Interestingly, the Old Icelandic meaning of búinn is ‘ready’ and the corresponding Faroese word bágin still has that meaning. Hence Old Icelandic and Faroese example like (2) would not have a perfect reading but would mean ‘Mary is ready to read this book.’ Searches in the Icelandic parsed corpus IcePaHC (Wallenberg et al. 2011), which contains about 100.000 words from each century from the 12th to the 21st, indicate that the earliest examples of the perfect reading are from the 16th century. As expected, the construction becomes much more common once it begins to function as a perfect. The extensive variation study IceDiaSyn (Icelandic Dialect Syntax) also suggests that the bf-perfect is still gaining ground and it is now being used in new contexts by younger speakers.

In this paper I will first outline the (sometimes very subtle) differences between the have-perfect and the bf-perfect in Modern Icelandic, then trace the historical development of the bf-perfect and describe the synchronic variation, and finally give some examples of the popularity of the bf-perfect in Icelandic as a second language.

References:
Counterfactual present perfects
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Across the Scandinavian peninsula stretches a belt of dialects where the present perfect is used as an exponent of present and past counterfactuality.

   has it [the bunker] been built today, has it not ended up there
   If it were being built today, it wouldn’t have ended up there.

b. Har Ressa Kommune fått ut fengern [...] fer læng sia,
   Has Rissa municipality gotPTCPL out finger.DEF for long since
   har mang tå dæm mellionan vorre spart.
   havePRES many of them millions bePTCPL saved
   If the municipality of Rissa had stopped procrastinating a long time ago, many of those millions would have been saved.

Cross-linguistically this is a very rare trait, and the surrounding dialects, like the standard languages of Norwegian (2a) and Swedish (2b), use the pluperfect for counterfactuals instead, both present and past.

(2) a. Hvis jeg hadde vært deg, hadde jeg kjøpt en gave til meg.
   if I had been you, had I bought a present for me.
   If I had been you, I’d buy me a present. (I am not/was not you)

b. I så fall hadde jag inte stått här/där.
   In that case had I not stood here/there
   In that case; I would not have stood here/there [now/then].

This paper (Eide, forthcoming) is an investigation into the perfect constructions used for present and past counterfactuality in these dialects and standard languages. The analysis starts from a description of the corresponding constructions in Old Norse, and the descendant dialects and standards are compared to each other and their ancestor. We observe how syncretisms have changed the paradigms and the exponents for counterfactuality, giving rise to differing and unexpected patterns.

Dutch perfect auxiliaries with motion verbs: The role of attested data
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Since Dutch manner of motion verbs can take both hebben ‘have’ and zijn ‘be’ as their perfect auxiliary, they play a prominent role in the literature on unaccusativity, the hypothesis that there are two types of intransitive verbs: unergatives and unaccusatives. A manner of motion verb is generally analyzed as unergative when it is atelic and takes hebben, it is analyzed as unaccusative when it has been ‘telicized’ by means of a particle or a directional phrase and takes zijn, cf. (1) and (2) from van Hout (1996: 332, 192).

(1) *John heeft de hele nacht gelopen*  
John has the whole night walked  
‘John walked all night.’

(2) *John is weggelopen / in 5 minuten naar de bus gelopen*  
John is away-walked / in 5 minutes to the bus walked  
‘John walked away / to the bus within 5 minutes.

The literature on unaccusativity is largely based on constructed examples with grammaticality or acceptability judgments. Attested data gathered from the internet, however, show a much wider range of possibilities, posing problems for the proposed generalizations. These data include atelic examples with manner of motion verbs that take zijn, and telic ones that feature hebben, cf. (3) and (4) from Beliën (2012: 8, 11) Directed motion verbs show similar possibilities (Beliën 2014): atelic examples of *stijgen* ‘ascend, rise’, for instance, mainly take zijn, while telic examples of *keren* ‘turn’ can also occur with hebben. I have argued that auxiliary choice with both types of verbs (manner of motion and directed motion) can be accounted for in terms of the cognitive-grammar notion of ‘construal’ (Langacker 1987): hebben is chosen when the motion event is construed as a type of act, while zijn is used when it is construed as a change of state.

(3) *Op deze manier zijn we 2 uur naar boven gelopen met de sneeuw recht in ons gezicht*  
in this way are we two hour to above walked with the snow right in our face  
‘We walked up in this way for two hours, with the snow blowing right in our face.’

(4) *Onze kameel Ned blijkt een kameel die ... in vier maanden tijd*  
our camel Ned turns-out a camel that in four months time  
van het midden van Australië (Alice Springs) naar Broome gelopen heeft.  
from the middle of Australia (Alice Springs) to Broome walked has  
‘Our camel Ned turns out to be a camel that walked from the middle of Australia (Alice Springs) to Broome in four months’ time’

In this presentation, I would like to examine whether this analysis can also be extended to motion verbs with particles, such as *weglopen* ‘walk away’ (cf. 2 above), *omdraaien* ‘turn around’ and *afdalen* ‘descend (off)’. While the possibilities seem more limited, some speakers here too appear to choose hebben rather than zijn when the motion event is construable as a type of act.

References


The supine verb form in Danish (e.g. *mal-et* ‘paint’-SUP; in most mainstream descriptions called the perfect particle) is used in a number of syntactic constructions – the central ones being retrospective tense and periphrastic passive – and is typically combined with one of a set of auxiliaries: *have* ‘have’, *blive* ‘become’ and *være* ‘be’, or the semi-auxiliary *få* ‘get’ (Hansen & Heltoft 2011: 194-195, 630-631, 676-677, 718-721, 1344-1347, 1326-1329). In Swedish, the supine verb form (e.g. *ät-it* ‘eat’-SUP) is essentially used only in the retrospective tense construction, and the only auxiliary of the supine is *ha* ‘have’ (Telemann et al. 1999: II: 551, III: 272-274).

In my talk, I will take a look at the role of the auxiliaries of the supine in the semantic configuration of the syntactic construction with particular focus on the assignment of arguments to the supine. In a comparison of Danish and Swedish, I will describe the role of the auxiliary in semiotic terms based on a distinction between symbolic and indexical function (Anttila 1975; Andersen 1980, 2008; Nielsen 2012, forthcoming) and an analysis of the interplay between auxiliary syntax and supine morphology.

In Scandinavian languages, a central grammatical means for determining the assignment of arguments to the roles of (semantic, logical) subject or object of the main predicate of a clause is voice inflection. Both Danish and Swedish have a morphological opposition between active and passive expressed by zero vs. -s, e.g. in Danish past tense *tal-te-0* ‘speak’-PAST-ACT (‘spoke’) vs. *tal-te-s* ‘speak’-PAST-PASS (‘was spoken’). However, while the Swedish supine is inflected for voice (e.g. *ät-it-s* ‘eat’-SUP-PASS), this morphological means of determining argument assignment is absent in Danish. I will argue that this noticeable absence functions as a call for voice determination through the auxiliary selection, which therefore has a central symbolic function in Danish. In Swedish, on the other hand, the voice inflection of the supine leaves only a marginal role to the auxiliary category, which only has indexical function aside from being a carrier of mood and tense. The absence of a set of different auxiliaries in Swedish means that there is no semantic specification provided by selection, and this explains the possibility of auxiliary omission (Telemann et al. 1999: III: 272-273; Nielsen 2012, forthcoming).

**References**


Developments in the perfect and perfect-like auxiliaries in the history of English have been the subject of a great deal of study, and the broad patterns are by now reasonably well understood (see e.g. Hoffmann, 1934; Fridén, 1948; Johannisson, 1958; Mustanoja, 1960; Traugott, 1972; Zimmermann, 1972; Kakietek, 1976; Rydén and Brorström, 1987; Kytö, 1997; McFadden and Alexiadou, 2006, 2010). Earlier stages of English had such periphrases with both auxiliary have and auxiliary be. While their origins predate the earliest records of the language, it is fairly clear that both the version with have and the one with be go back to fairly simple stative resultative constructions, built out of the regular stative resultative meaning of the past participle. In the course of OE and early ME, both of the resultative constructions seem to have developed more or less in parallel fashion, with their usage expanding and their function moving more in the direction of what we might recognize as a perfect.

Still, up to around 1350 it is clear that we are not yet dealing with fully modern perfects. The overall frequency of the constructions is still quite low compared to later periods, with large numbers of examples where in PDE we would expect a perfect, but where in OE and early ME we get a simple past form (see Mitchell, 1985, vol. I, p. 247-252). Around 1350, there is a sudden jump in the frequency of the have perfect, which quickly becomes considerably more common than the be perfect, and starts showing up for the first time with prototypical unaccusative verbs like come that had previously strictly appeared with be. A long tradition of work has uncovered a series of contexts in which have was more or less strongly preferred over be during the ensuing period (see e.g. Fridén, 1948; Johannisson, 1958; Rydén and Brorström, 1987; Kytö, 1997; McFadden and Alexiadou, 2006), including past counterfactuals, iteratives and duratives, atelics, and telics where the target state no longer holds. McFadden and Alexiadou (2010) accounted for this development as follows. Before 1350, both constructions were restricted to a perfect of result interpretation, but around 1350, the one with have expanded to be used as an experiential perfect, while the one with be remained purely resultative. This explains the expansion of have, including to verbs that previously only used be, while also explaining why be didn’t really decline in absolute terms at this time—it kept on expressing the perfect of result with unaccusatives, with the have experiential perfect advancing instead at the expense of the simple past. It also captures the particular distribution of the two auxiliaries during this period — those contexts where have is favored over be are the ones that favor an experiential interpretation over a resultative one.

This situation with a full-fledged have perfect alongside a restricted perfect of result with be remained fairly stable until the late 17th century, when have began to expand again and began to actually take over ground from be. Our understanding of exactly how and why this happened is currently limited, partly due to the fact that no large-scale parsed and annotated corpus, along the lines of the ones for OE, ME and EModE that served as the basis for McFadden and Alexiadou (2010) was available for Late Modern English at the time. What is known is that the use of the be periphrasis hangs on well into the 19th century — e.g. it is reasonably frequent in the writings of Jane Austen — but it is increasingly restricted lexically, especially to come and go, and it seems to be gone for good around 1900. In this talk I will take some first steps toward understanding what happened in Late Modern English to lead to the actual disappearance of be, by taking advantage of the high quality data now available in the Penn Parsed Corpus of Modern British English (Kroch, Santorini, and Diertani, 2010). In particular, I will explore the question of what changed after 1650 to throw out of balance a system that had been stable since the innovation of the experiential perfect with have around 1350.

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