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Tense and Aspect in Indo-European Languages: Theory, typology, diachrony

John Hewson and Vit Bubenik

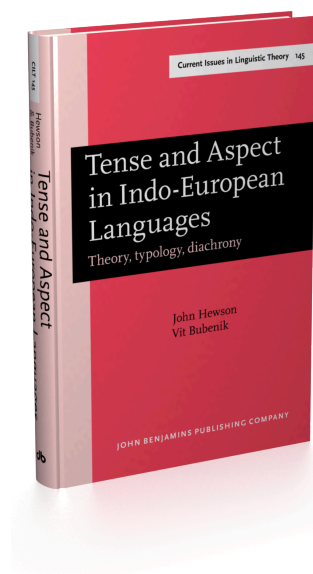
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realised early in the century, linguistic change is largely teleological.

A third idea is that everything is significant. Irregular morphology is not just a nuisance, or an anachronism: it is a clue to linguistic evolution and to the subtle and subconscious operations of linguistic processes. The affixes added to IE present stems (e.g reduplication, *yod*, *-n*, *-sk*, etc.) to form the well known morphological categories of IE verb classes are not just there to create classes, they mark subtle adjustments of Aktionsart that can only be understood if one understands why these adjustments are necessary.

A fourth, and very novel idea, is that linguistic systems are stratified. Jakobson's studies in child language and aphasia showed that certain parts of phonological systems are learned last in childhood, and lost first in aphasia. Guillaume's concept of *chronogenesis* proposes that verbal systems are likewise stratified, and that the more complex forms, such as the indicatives, represent complex cognitive contrasts that are built out of the simpler contrasts that are found in participles and subjunctives. This insight into the nature of verbal systems has been an enormously powerful tool in the preparation of this work.

Much of what is in these chapters is not new; it is old ground that has already been well trodden. What is new is the attempt to see all the languages of the IE phylum as sharing variants of the same fundamental cognitive contrasts, and to trace this coherence, this fundamental unity, through both history and prehistory. In short, we have attempted to conceive of tense and aspect as similar basic elements of the verbal system of a dozen related language families over a period of at least four thousand years.

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