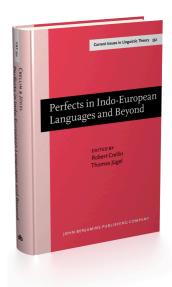
Editors' foreword



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Editors' foreword

The present volume is a beginning rather than an end. It is an expression of the state of the art in research into the perfect in a particular language family, that of Indo-European, in order to provide a springboard for future research. We set out to address two principal issues:

- 1. Regularity (and irregularity) in the functional and semantic development of perfect(s) in the individual branches of Indo-European (IE);
- 2. The function and semantics of the Proto-Indo-European (PIE) perfect.

To this end we asked our contributors to provide an overview of what each one understood to be the category of the perfect in their respective branches of the family. From these surveys it is possible to identify cross-linguistically common as well as less common patterns, synchronically in terms both of function and semantics, and diachronically in terms of cyclical recurrence and areal spread. We observe that common to all IE branches is the reorganisation of the verbal system with respect to the reconstructed situation in PIE. This is usually in the form of a reduction, whereby imperfect, aorist, and perfect are reduced to two or even just a single representative, followed by a reinstatement of the member(s) of the system that had been lost. Furthermore, in some language families these reinstatements follow a cyclical pattern, yielding a system similar to the point of departure, as, for example is the case in Iranian, while in others the structure of the system diverges more and more from its point of departure, as is the case in Germanic. Accordingly, we see that neither functional nor semantic change in the perfect are necessarily dependent upon genealogical relationship. Instead we observe that the semantic domain of the perfect narrows or shifts following typologically common pathways. We can see evidence of areal convergence affecting languages belong to both the same and different families. The development of the verb systems in Iranian and Aramaic can be seen as instances of the latter case.

By investigating the development pathways taken by 'perfects' attested in the later history of the Indo-European language family, the present volume sets out to facilitate future discussion of the original functions and semantics of the PIE perfect. The sporadic appearance of semantic subdomains of perfect forms, such as evidentiality, shows that deviations can always occur (as well as disappear again),

whether triggered or intensified by language contact or not. This is salient for attempts to reconstruct any original state of affairs, insofar as it demonstrates that the 'original' semantic field(s) with which one is contending may well have been broader or narrower than the reconstruction of the semantic fields in each branch may suggest. If languages such as those in the Iranian family can reduce the verbal indicative system to two forms in the course of approximately a thousand years and rebuild a system fairly similar to the original one in the next thousand years, such restructurings are likely to have happened in the unattested periods of other branches as well. Indeed, such changes can in principle occur either at relatively faster or slower rates of change, with a very fast rate of change one possibility for the development path in Anatolian (see Kümmel, this volume, § 2.1.3).

These observations, furthermore, have implications for the treatment of IE branches attested only relatively late, such as Albanian, Baltic, Germanic or Slavic: it is in principle impossible to say whether, and if so when, there may have been cycles of grammatical change, restructuring(s) of the verbal system or conservative periods during which the status quo was maintained in these languages before their attestation. One may certainly set out to identify the semantics of the forerunner for each branch, but inevitably the connection of the various branches to a common origin will always be somewhat speculative.

The volume opens with two introductory chapters. The general introduction by Bernard Comrie, Chapter 1, sets out some of the key themes he has identified in the collection along with his own observations, while Chapter 2 provides an overview of the form and function of the PIE perfect and its subsequent development in its various branches.

In the following chapters, each branch of the IE language family is represented at least once, with the ancient and modern varieties tackled separately in a number of cases. Some contributors focus on specific languages, while others give an overview of their respective branch in its entirety. An important factor is the question of language contact, which is discussed in a number of contributions. Chapter 9 on Neo-Aramaic is included as an example of a language with which one branch of IE has been in contact over a sustained period, in this case Iranian: the interaction between Aramaic and especially Kurdish serves to demonstrate how the instantiation of particular grammatical categories can be copied across language family boundaries. Chapter 17, which addresses the HAVE perfect in Europe, provides an areal-linguistic perspective, vital for understanding the instantiation and development of new constructions in individual languages. Other contributions discuss particular features of the perfect from a cross-linguistic perspective, its discourse functions, its origins and/or its typological variations.

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The editors