

# Editors' foreword

 <https://doi.org/10.1075/cilt.352.for>

Pages vii–x of

**Perfects in Indo-European Languages and Beyond**

**Edited by Robert Crellin and Thomas Jügel**

[*Current Issues in Linguistic Theory*, 352]

2020. xiv, 686 pp.

© John Benjamins Publishing Company

This electronic file may not be altered in any way. For any reuse of this material written permission should be obtained from the publishers or through the Copyright Clearance Center (for USA: [www.copyright.com](http://www.copyright.com)).

For further information, please contact [rights@benjamins.nl](mailto:rights@benjamins.nl) or consult our website at [benjamins.com/rights](http://benjamins.com/rights)



## 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.

## Acknowledgements

We would like to convey our great appreciation and thanks to our contributors for their tireless efforts to bring this project to a successful conclusion. Most participated in the symposium “The Function and Semantics of the Perfect in Indo-European Languages”, held from September 28 to October 1, 2016, at Uppsala University (Sweden). The symposium was generously supported by the Swedish Research Council, Indo-Iranska Fonden at Uppsala University, and Kungliga Humanistika Vetenskaps-Samfundet in Uppsala.

The review process consisted of two steps in order to ensure the highest scientific standard. The editors of and contributors to this book examined the individual papers, which after their first revision were sent to experts in the respective fields. We would like to express our deep gratitude to the following expert reviewers for their generous support (in alphabetical order):

Patrick Caudal	CNRS & Université Paris-Diderot
James Clackson	Jesus College, Cambridge
Eleanor Coghill	Uppsala University
Hanne M. Eckhoff	University of Oxford
Thórhallur Eythórsson	University of Iceland, Reykjavík
David Goldstein	University of California, Los Angeles
Dag T. T. Haug	University of Oslo
Joachim Matzinger	Austrian Academy of Sciences, Vienna
H. Craig Melchert	University of California, Los Angeles
Amalia Moser	National and Kapodistrian University of Athens
Peter Arnold Mumm	Ludwig Maximilian University of Munich
Birgit A. Olsen	University of Copenhagen
Michaël Peyrot	Leiden University
Paolo Ramat	University of Pavia (retired)
Paul Russell	University of Cambridge
Nicholas Sims-Williams	School of Oriental and African Studies, London
Henriëtte de Swart	University of Utrecht
Sheila Watts	University of Cambridge

We are very grateful to Joe Salmons for all his support and encouragement during the publication process, as well as to him and his team for all their editorial work. We also thank Cemile Çelebi for her compilation of the language index. The editors gratefully acknowledge the financial support of their positions during the editing process. Robert Crellin contributed as editor to this volume as part of the CREWS project (*Contexts of and Relations between Early Writing Systems*) that has received funding from the European Research Council (ERC) under the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme (Grant agreement No. 677758), while Thomas Jügel did so under the projects *The development of the tense-aspect system in Sogdian* (Japanese Society for the Promotion of Science: FY2018 JSPS Postdoctoral Fellowship for Research in Japan) and *Langues, dialectes et isoglosses de l'Aire Iran-Caucase-Anatolie-Proche-Orient* of the Labex *Fondements Empiriques de la Linguistique* (in France).

Finally, we are hugely indebted to Carina Jahani (Uppsala University), who encouraged us to organise the original symposium, raised funding, supported us through the whole process, and without whom this project would simply not have happened. We could not have wished for a better host whose enormous commitment made the symposium a successful as well as most enjoyable event.

The editors