

Diachronic and synchronic studies on Time, Tense and Aspect in varieties of English and other Germanic languages: Introduction

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This volume brings together eight contributions on Germanic languages (German, Norwegian, English). All papers concern in some respect the development of time and aspect nuances and the morphological means used correspondingly to express those shades of meaning. The umbrella term of ‘Germanic languages’ is used here perhaps unconventionally to encompass, next to recognised national idioms such as German, Norwegian or English, other more exotic contact varieties exhibiting signs of strong substratal influence (Hawaiian English, Singapore English, Irish English).

In ‘The Ghost of the Old Norse Subjunctive: the Norwegian Subjunctive Participle,’ Kristin Melum EIDE argues that modern Norwegian constructions such as (1) below where past participles are unexpectedly placed in infinitival positions – which have traditionally been described as cases of ‘*have*-omission’, or also ‘misplaced perfect’ – may be better described as *irrealis* forms, *e.g.*:

- (1) Jon skulle vært på kontoret
Jon shallPRET bePTCPL¹ on officeDEF
‘Jon should have been in his office’

Following on earlier analyses (Eide 2002; 2005) the author defines this participle as a *distal* form, that is to say a form expressing modal remoteness (Langacker 1978) and one therefore functioning as an *irrealis* marker.

The relative scarcity of this participle in standard written Norwegian and normative grammar books should not be taken as an exhaustive reflection of reality, argues Eide, since the form is in actual fact well established in many dialects and varieties of spoken Norwegian.

Her assumption is that the morphological collapse of the old subjunctive preterit form and the past participle led to the subjunctive preterit retaining its counterfactual meaning and disguising as a past participle although confined to constructions with a hypothetical or counterfactual meaning.

The author aims therefore to show that analysing the participial form, or subjunctive participle, as *irrealis* in such contexts enables generalisation over a range of seemingly different constructions.

¹ By PTCPL, Eide means a verb form formally indistinguishable from a past participle.

Christopher D. Sapp, next addresses the question of the alternation between the *haben* ‘have’ and *sein* ‘be’ auxiliaries in a corpus of over 6,000 early-modern German sentences with the present perfect or pluperfect tense. His contribution, entitled ‘Auxiliary selection in the Early New High German perfect tenses,’ is based on Sorace’s (2000) Auxiliary Selection Hierarchy (ASH) framework, which divides intransitive verbs into smaller semantic categories in order to capture both cross-linguistic and language-internal variation. Thus, intransitives indicating telic change are the core BE verbs, while agentive intransitives make up the core HAVE verbs. Placed in the middle of the hierarchy are verbs representing states and uncontrolled processes, which show the most variation between BE and HAVE.

As expected, Early New High German transitives in the database uniformly use the auxiliary *haben* in the perfect tenses. This also holds for reflexive verbs indicating motion (‘sit oneself’); thus these verbs in ENHG behave just as in Modern German and unlike French and Italian. Likewise, intransitives at the HAVE end of the ASH exclusively select *haben*, e.g. non-motional agentive verbs like *arbeiten* ‘work’ and uncontrolled processes like *träumen* ‘dream,’ whilst the core BE intransitives, which indicate a change of location (like *fahren* ‘go’) or change of state (*veralten* ‘grow old’), overwhelmingly select *sein* in ENHG.

Sapp further investigates a number of exceptional patterns (e.g. sentences in which the duration of time is specified and verbs that indicate manner of motion such as *treten* ‘step’), as well as the case of verbs indicating the existence or the continuation of a state, more especially a physical position, e.g. *liegen* ‘to lie,’ *sitzen* ‘to sit,’ and *stehen* ‘to stand’

The auxiliary system of ENHG turns out to be quite similar to that of Modern Standard German, in contrast to other Germanic languages where BE has lost ground or disappeared as a perfect auxiliary.

Philippe Bourdin’s paper tackles competing ways of encoding deictic past time reference –which he calls *Deictic Scalar Localization in the Past* (DSLPL, see Bourdin 2002, 2009)– in late Middle English and Early Modern English. In ‘*Ten years ago* and *ten years since*: competition and standardization in Early Modern English,’ he shows how these patterns were unequivocally dominant through most of the period at issue. Though issued from markedly different constructions, they both emerged at roughly the same time, in the course of the 14th century, but did not gain ascendancy simultaneously, as shown, for instance, by the early lead over its rival of the *ago*-construction in Chaucer’s *Canterbury Tales*.

Syntactic convergence, however, was achieved at a fairly early stage, although it took a long time before the past participle origin of *ago(ne)* became obscured by phonological attrition (and its orthographic correlate). By 1630 *ago* and *since* had established themselves as the standard markers of DSLPL, and exhibited much the same degree of collocational versatility in most of the literary texts surveyed, with, among the most striking exceptions, the King James Bible, which eschews *since* completely, and the *Anatomy of Melancholy*, which shuts out *ago*. At no point in this period, however, did *ago* and *since* achieve complete dominance, forced as they were to compete with an assortment of non-canonical devices, many of which survived to this day, if only peripherally, well beyond Early Modern English: *ten years past*, *just this day three weeks*, *within these five hours* (meaning *less than five hours ago*) are

a few of the options to be found in Tyndale's Bible and in authors such as Thomas Nashe, Ben Jonson and Shakespeare. Judging from instances such as:

(2) *O he's drunke sir Toby an houre agone (Twelfth Night, V.1.)*

it may well be that *ago* had a wider functional range than it does in Present-day English, specifically that the *ago*-phrase had the ability to refer to the length of the interval associated with a state of affairs continuing up to speech time. Though such instances are indeed rare, they do suggest, nonetheless, that the semantics of *ago* had not quite stabilised yet.

Following topically on Bourdin's survey of *since* and *ago*, and more particularly on the related question of whether the English present perfect tense is at all compatible with definite past time reference, Jim Walker offers a paper entitled 'The emergence of the Narrative Present Perfect in British English: reality or illusion?'

"Something is happening to the perfect," once observed Peter Trudgill (1978), commenting *en passant* on what appeared to him as an ongoing shift in the use of the present perfect (PP) in contemporary English. Proponents of the "something is happening to the perfect" view contend, says Walker, that in recent years, there has been some relaxation in the rule whereby the PP is incompatible with any adverbial adjunct indicating definite past time. He adds, however, that if (3) is still typically held to be an ill-formed sentence:

(3) * I have kissed my wife yesterday.

it is not (no longer?) unusual to encounter forms such as:

(4) A copy of Saussure's original manuscript of his work was found in his summer house in 1996 and *has been published in French in 2002* and will be published by Oxford University Press this summer.

The phenomenon is well documented (e.g. Foulet 1920, Boulle 1987), in which grammatical means previously associated with pragmatically 'hot' meaning –e.g. directly observable implications upon the situation of speech, such as resultant state, deictic reference, etc.– progressively lose this relevance and become 'cold' markers of distal reference. The expression of 'dérive aoristique' (or *aoristic drift*) (Boulle 1995, Fryd 1997) has been used to define such manifestations. But Walker chooses to depart from this view and seeks, in his contribution, to focus on narrative uses of the present perfect, in which the PP form is used for what is clearly past reference, but *without* any supporting temporal adverbial and often in conjunction with more expected preterit forms:

(5) ... the balloon clipped a power wire and tried to go up, then they've sort of gone across the road then it's caught fire.

Walker's view as regards such instances is that the dividing line between the PP and the preterit has in fact remained fairly stable, and that the situation today is not radically different from other stages in the history of the language. To ascertain this view, he draws partly on diachronic and dialectal evidence, to investigate whether the claim for the recency of the phenomenon can be upheld. He concludes instead that if there is indeed a change going on, it is not so much the English language that is changing as the social acceptance of non-standard forms by native speakers. In his pan-British dialectal study, Walker also shows that it is not possible to determine a geographical basis for the use of the narrative PP, something which would seem to weigh in favour of the idea that this is no new phenomenon.

Another contribution pertaining to disputed grammatical usage in English is provided by Marc Fryd's 'Since when is the Present Tense ruled out with *since*!' in which the author investigates the choice of the Present Tense in English (e.g. (6)) in retrospective (also called 'extended-now', or Xnow) contexts where normative grammar prescribes the Present Perfect (e.g. (7)):

- (6) Of course it's all none of my business, but I feel happier since I've seen her.
(7) I have felt happier since I have known that I am going.

While the Present Tense is indeed the norm in a wide variety of languages, the latter in English often carries non-standard or regional connotations. It is indeed the case that Irish English favours the Present Tense in retrospective contexts to levels unmatched in other Englishes, if one excepts those also exhibiting likely influence from a Celtic substratum, such as Hebridean English (Sabban 1982), or more exotic varieties such as Indian English (Kachru 1983).

Fryd shows, however, that the Xnow Present in English is in fact deeply rooted in the history of the language, and did not suffer its current disgrace until Late Modern English.

Perhaps one of the contributing factors to the resilience of the Xnow Present in Present-Day English, the author argues, lies in the aspectual properties of the present tense *vs* those of the perfect, whereby the truth-value of the former is not bounded by the moment of speech and may therefore denote a state extending beyond T_0 , whilst the perfect shows compatibility with counterfactual meaning (e.g. (8) *vs* (9)):

- (8) He **wears** only black since his mother died.
(9) He's **worn** only black since his mother died but it's over now and he's wearing colourful clothes again.

The last three articles tackle varieties of English exhibiting very specific characteristics which set them apart from Standard English.

In 'Irish English Habitual 'DO BE': More on Origins and Use,' Patricia Ronan investigates the use of the *do* periphrasis in a corpus of contemporary Irish English. In contrast to previous studies, the linguistic material does not consist of regional or traditional dialects of Irish English but stems from the International Corpus of English – Ireland component (ICE Ireland). The study thus offers an overview of

habitual present marking in contemporary spoken and written Irish English and facilitates comparison with habitual aspect marking both in other international dialects of English and with traditional dialects of Irish English.

The survey of usage and frequencies of alternative habitual marking (*be/bees*, and potentially *are be*), in the ICE Ireland corpus confirms that, while standard Irish English uses present habitual markers to a lesser degree than more traditional Irish English dialects, this category remains in use. Ronan also sums up previous research on the development of the category and discusses the likely contribution of the Celtic languages with which English is and has been in contact. It is shown that habitual marking in Irish English differs from habitual marking in Scottish English in the same way that habitual marking in Irish Gaelic differs from habitual marking in Scottish Gaelic. A survey of the Scottish system reveals strong similarities with present habitual marking in Brythonic languages such as Welsh and suggests that the Scottish system, both in Gaelic and by extension also in English, may have been influenced by contacts with Brythonic languages.

Viveka Velupillai takes the reader to more distant shores: in ‘The *had VERB* Construction in Hawai‘i Creole English,’ she discusses a construction formed by the invariant marker *had* and the base form of the verb (*had VERB*). Hawai‘i Creole English (HCE) has a rich tense/aspect system. The tense system consists of absolute and relative tenses, where the former locates an event in relation to the moment of speech and the latter locates the event in relation to a given reference point. Relative tense is expressed by the bare form of the verb and may indicate either present or past time depending on the context. Absolute tenses are expressed by either inflected forms or constructions involving a tense marker and the base form. The past tense is typically expressed by an inflected form, while the future tense is expressed by the overt marker *go(i)η/gonna* plus the base form of the verb. The present tense may be expressed by the inflected form in the third person singular.

The HCE aspect system consists of five markers, which all appear as invariant forms with the base form of the verb: *wen* indicates past perfective aspect, *pau* is a completive aspect marker, *ste(i) VERB-(ing)* denotes progressive aspect, and *justu* denotes past habitual.

The fifth aspect, *had VERB*, is found predominantly on the island of Kaua‘i and has been analysed as a regional alternative to the simple past or anterior tenses. Velupillai shows that the construction does not carry temporal connotations but that it specifies the perspective taken on an event. More specifically, it indicates that the orientation point of the perspective is placed after what the author calls the *transgression* of the event, with the effects of the event still relevant at the orientation point. While it may combine with the past or the anterior tense, it is not synonymous with it. In fact *had VERB* readily occurs alongside the past or the anterior tense, where the same speaker uses both forms with different connotations in the same utterance. Whatever tense it interacts with, the perspective of the event marked with *had VERB* remains the same, showing that it is therefore better analysed as an *aspect* rather than a *tense* marker.

The concluding article, written by Debora Ziegeler, is entitled ‘Experiential aspect in Singapore English: the depolarisation of ‘ever’.’ Though broadly concerned with the topic of aspect, Ziegeler’s perspective is that of grammaticalisation.

The patterns of grammaticalisation in contact languages have indeed been a topic of much recent research, with particular studies such as Bruyn (1996), Heine & Kuteva (2003; 2005) and Matras & Sakel (2007) featuring prominently as seminal studies of the two-fold model proposed by Heine & Kuteva of (i) ordinary contact-induced grammaticalisation and (ii) replica grammaticalisation. An interesting case of contact grammaticalisation which does not appear to follow precisely either of the above two patterns is that of the adverb *ever*, used in positive assertions, which in Singapore Colloquial English (SCE) has the meaning ‘(at least) once’, thus replicating an experiential perfect aspect marker in many dialects of Chinese (e.g. Mandarin *guò* – ‘pass’). In her paper, Ziegeler investigates possible influence from the various substrate and contact languages in the Singapore situation; for example, Mandarin Chinese, Hokkien, and Malay, and finds no definitive evidence to attribute such a feature to contact factors, apart from the motivation of the functional need for a marker of experiential aspect. However, in earlier periods in the history of English, *ever* also carried the function of a universal temporal marker meaning ‘always’ when used in positive declarative sentences (as still understood today in forms such as *forever* and indefinite pronouns such as *whatever*, *whoever*, etc.). The present-day adverb *ever*, though, is mainly restricted to negative polarity contexts in standard dialects, and such uses also appear in SCE alongside the positive polarity uses. It would seem then, that it appears to be innovating an experiential aspect either from its lexically negative counterpart, *never* (see, e.g. Ho & Wong (2001), or equally, from the use of its negative-polarity counterpart, *ever*, thus presenting a clear case of reanalysis or backformation. A number of questions are further raised, including how the speaker of SCE accommodates both the negatively-polarised use of *ever* alongside the experiential usage, and whether this indicates polysemy or a case of maintaining separate lexical entities. If the latter, the question of selection in contact needs also to be addressed. According to Ziegeler, the positive polarised *ever* can be understood as an extrapolation from its negatively-polarised counterpart already present in the dialect, and is derived by a process of semantic back-formation.

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