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# HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT AS A KEY TO UNDERSTANDING THE TENSE-ASPECTUAL DISTINCTION: A CASE OF INDO-EUROPEAN LANGUAGES

## 1. Introduction

Tense and aspect have been a research topic for various disciplines of studies relating to linguistics, including philosophy, anthropology and linguistics itself. Human languages normally deal with time in some way. It is known that some languages have a more elaborate system of temporal relationship than the others (see, among others, Dahl 1985; Nedjalkov and Jaxontov 1988; Bybee et al. 1994; Verkuyl 1999). There have been detailed analyses on the internal structure of the tense-aspectual system, and some research may pay attention to historical development (cf. Bybee and Dahl 1989), but little on the temporal expression has been discussed regarding the generic relationship within a single linguistic family. As this paper reveals, the development of the tense-aspectual system can show interaction between tense and aspect over a period of time.

The main focus is placed on Indo-European (IE) languages. The development of languages in this family has been studied based on the written records, dating from ca. 600 AD. However, some older languages such as a reconstructed language, Proto-Indo-European (PIE, spoken around 4000 BC), will be incorporated. The historical interaction between tense and aspect in IE languages will be examined. Some languages preserve older constructions better than others. Therefore, persistence of earlier aspectual devices and newer tense systems will be identified. In addition, attention will be given to the development of tense-aspect in relation to other constructions. Thus, the development of other constructions and their interaction with the aspectual system are analysed.

This paper is organised as follows: firstly the initial tense-aspectual system in the IE languages, namely grammatical structure of PIE,

and development into its daughter languages are presented, then some archaic features in modern IE languages. Some of these archaic structures can be considered to descend directly from PIE. Some typical examples of such structures are initially presented and then specific cases relating to tense-aspect are studied. These changes of the tense-aspectual system are placed against various other changes in different features of IE languages, such as the grammatical voice. This type of comparison reveals that the tense-aspect does not develop on its own, but there is much interaction with other related constructions. Finally, a brief encounter with a general changing pattern is presented, based on the binary feature. This proves to be useful for understanding the development of the tense-aspectual system.

## 2. Initial distinction in tense-aspect

The reconstruction of PIE does not assume the presence of tense, and this language was solely based on the perfective-imperfective aspectual distinction (cf. Lehmann 1993, 2002; Gamkrelidze and Ivanov 1995). This duality distinction stems from the nominal distinction into active and inactive nouns. The former entails animate nouns, i.e. their referents are alive, and some inanimate ones which are metaphorically considered as animate, and the latter includes inanimate nouns, which lack life cycles (Gamkrelidze and Ivanov 1995 : 238-239). The distinction more or less corresponds to the animacy distinction between animate (active nouns) and inanimate (inactive nouns) in general, but some inanimate referents were metaphorically considered active when beneficial to human life, e.g. 'water' in PIE can be considered as animate: *\*H<sub>2</sub>O*<sup>h</sup> 'water, river, stream (as a moving element, carrying rich soil for farming, being a food source, etc.)' and inanimate *wol'or<sup>h</sup>* 'water (as a non-living element)'. Another case is a classification of trees. The names of trees are often active, since they can bear fruits (a sign of productivity), while their fruits are inanimate, e.g. Latin *pinus* 'pear tree'; *mālus* 'apple tree' (animate), while *pinum* 'pear' and *mālum* 'apple' (as fruits) are inanimate) (cf. Meillet 1948 : I 211-229). Note that the active nouns have different forms for nominative and accusative, but the inactive nouns have the identical form for both nominative and accusative, as exemplified in [1]. The verb also has forms corresponding to the nominal active-inactive distinction, as shown in [2]. The typical verbal paradigm appears to be like the one in Table 1.

[1]

active nouns:

*\*t<sup>h</sup>en<sup>h</sup>-s* 'tooth (NOM)', *\*t<sup>h</sup>en<sup>h</sup>-m* (ACC);

*\*p<sup>h</sup>et<sup>h</sup>-s* 'foot (NOM)', *\*p<sup>h</sup>et<sup>h</sup>-m* (ACC),

inactive nouns: *\*yuk<sup>h</sup>-om* 'yoke (NOM, ACC)'.

- [2]
- a. *\*b<sup>h</sup>uH-* 'be' (active)      *\*es-* 'be' (inactive)
- b. *\*k<sup>h</sup>ei-* 'lie' (active)      *\*ses-* 'lie, sleep' (inactive)
- c. *\*or-* 'stand' (active)      *\*st<sup>h</sup>-aH-* 'stand' (inactive)
- d. *\*se<sup>h</sup>-* 'sit' (active)      *\*es-* 'sit' (inactive)

Table 1. Divalent construction with active and inactive nouns (Gamkrelidze and Ivanov 1995 : 258)

a. Active argument		b. Inactive argument			
Actor	Predicate	Undergoer	Actor	Predicate	Undergoer
1SG Active	-V- <i>mi-</i>	Active <sup>1a</sup>	1SG Active	-V- <i>Ha-</i>	In
2SG Active	-V- <i>si-</i>	Active <sup>1a</sup>	2SG Active	-V- <i>*t<sup>h</sup>Ha-</i>	In
3SG Active	-V- <i>ti-</i>	Active <sup>1a</sup>	3SG Active	-V- <i>e-</i>	In
Person	kills	Animal	Person	Moves	stone

An initial Tense-aspectual distinction in Proto-Indo-European was based on the perfective-imperfective aspectual distinction. There was no tense distinction at this stage. *Ha*-series involves inactive nouns, which lack the ability to act. This implies that the monovalent *Ha*-series, as shown in Table 1, is used to express the state of inactive nouns as subject. This naturally fits the nature of perfective aspect, i.e. a state resulting from a previous event. One example is shown in [3]. Paradigms involving active nouns can be both perfective and imperfective.

Table 2. Full paradigm of monovalent *Ha*-series

Actor		Predicate
1SG Inactive	—	V- <i>Ha</i>
2SG Inactive	—	V- <i>*t<sup>h</sup>Ha</i>
3SG Inactive	—	V- <i>e</i>

PIE

[3]

*\*nebh<sup>h</sup>es-lenk<sup>h</sup>-e*

sky-blue-3SG.INAC

'The sky is blue.'

When PIE diverged into its ancient daughter languages, a tense distinction between past and non-past appeared originating from the aspectual markers. One sign can be taken from the Proto-Germanic so-called preterite-present tense. Proto-Germanic *wīti* 'I know' is derived from PIE *\*weyd<sup>h</sup>-* 'see'. The aspectual meaning 'I have completed seeing' was not shifted to the past tense 'I saw/have seen', but rather to 'I know'. Similar examples are: *kann* 'I know' from 'I have recognised'.



og 'I fear' from 'I have suffered in spirit'. A specific change involving these verbs goes against a common grammaticalisation path (i.e. from the perfective aspect to the past tense, cf. Bybee et al. 1994 : 91-93, 105), but most cases follow the standard pattern, i.e. the earlier perfective form becoming the past tense, and the imperfect, non-past tense. There are indeed other typologically attested sources for the development of the tense, such as adverbial markers (Heine and Kuteva 2005 : 383), or definiteness and the number of direct objects (cf. [4] e.g. the indefiniteness is more likely to produce stative reading, while the definiteness tends to produce dynamic reading, except for the combination with plurality, where the distinction is ambiguous). However, these are not common sources in IE languages. Nevertheless, by now it is clear that the tense was not present earlier in IE languages. Details of the developmental path will be discussed further in Section 5, but what seems to be common is the reinterpretation of the perfective aspect to the past tense.

[4]

- a. Singular-indefinite (stative), e.g. *He read a book.*
- b. Singular-definite (dynamic), e.g. *He read the book.*
- c. Plural-indefinite (stative), e.g. *He read books.*
- d. Plural-definite (stative/dynamic), e.g. *He read the books.*

### 3. Tense-aspectual system in daughter languages of PIE

In modern IE languages, the aspectual development found in PIE does not play a prime role in distinguishing temporal relationship of events, i.e. aspect is replaced by tense. Arguably, an exception is found in Slavic languages. These languages are still sensitive to the marking of aspect (perfective and imperfective) on each verb and this distinction is obligatorily made, as exemplified from Serbian in [5]. This means that aspect is as important as the tense in Slavic.

Serbian

[5]

- a. *ubiti* 'kill (perfective)'
- b. *ubijati* 'kill (imperfective)'

Nevertheless, regardless of the overt marking, there are two basic ways to consider the temporal relation based on tense (cf. Dixon 1994 : 97-99): the first type involves a gradually unfolding scale as shown in Figure 1. In this scale, the current relevant point in time 'now' moves steadily along the scale and the guessable but unknowable future be-

comes the established past. This type is often grammatically coded as past v. non-past.

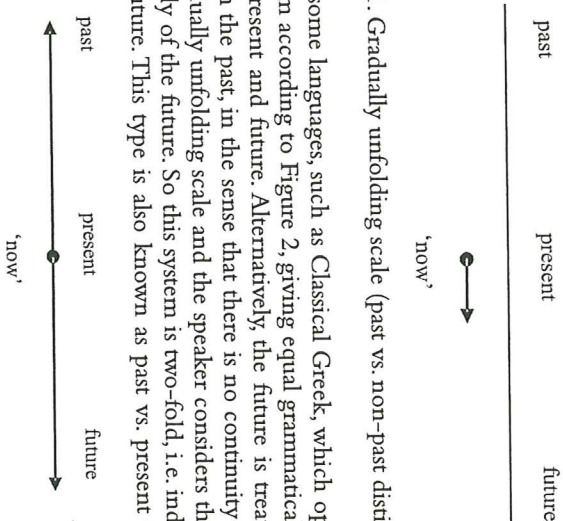


Figure 1. Gradually unfolding scale (past vs. non-past distinction)

There are some languages, such as Classical Greek, which operate the tense system according to Figure 2, giving equal grammatical status to the past, present and future. Alternatively, the future is treated differently from the past, in the sense that there is no continuity observed in the gradually unfolding scale and the speaker considers the past independently of the future. So this system is two-fold, i.e. independent past and future. This type is also known as past vs. present vs. future type.

Figure 2. Two-fold scale of tense (past vs. present vs. future distinction)

Most IE languages seem to work according to Figure 2, only differing in the marking of the future, e.g. Germanic languages have an overt marking for the past tense, but the future tense is marked by the use of an auxiliary. On the other hand, Baltic, Celtic, Slavic and Romance languages have a special conjugational form for the future tense (cf. [6] from Irish).

Irish

[6]

- a. *Ritheann tú go dtí an oifig na phoist*  
run.PRS you to the office the post  
'You run to the post office.'
- b. *Rithfidh tú go dtí an oifig na phoist*  
run.FUT you to the office the post  
'You will run to the post office.'

As far as the older written records are concerned, some languages such as Classical Greek, Latin and Old Irish had the future distinction (i.e. the past v. present v. future type in Figure 2), e.g. Latin examples in [7]. Note that Latin also has a perfective-imperfective aspectual distinction. The examples in the left column are imperfective, and in the right column, perfective. Others such as most Germanic languages do not have the overt future form, where only the past vs. non-past distinction existed, e.g. Old English examples in [8].

#### Latin

[7]

- a. *amo* 'I love'                      *amavi* 'I loved/I have loved'  
 b. *amabam* 'I loved/I was loving'    *amaveram* 'I had loved'  
 c. *amabo* 'I will love'                *amavero* 'I will have loved'

#### Old English

[8]

- a. *ic write* 'I write' (non-past)  
 b. *ic wrot* 'I wrote' (past)

Historically, the past v. non-past binary distinction (cf. Figure 1) is older, since the future tense tends to develop later than the past. This is related to the mood between realis and irrealis at the functional level: the past tense belongs to the realis mood, in a sense: what happened in the past can be perceived as a factual event, which is easier to capture cognitively than events that can fall into the irrealis mood. The future tense, on the other hand, belongs to the irrealis, i.e. an event that is not factual, and what one assumes will happen still belongs to something non-factual. In Sanskrit, there is a future tense form, but the majority of the future tense is expressed by the subjunctive form (cf. [9]). This shows a close connection between the future tense and the irrealis mood.

#### Sanskrit

[9]

- |               |         |                  |               |                   |
|---------------|---------|------------------|---------------|-------------------|
| a. <i>yāt</i> | re      | ghōsān           | titarā        | yugān             |
| REL. PRON     | 2SG.DAT | resound.3PL.SUBJ | future.NOM.PL | generation.NON.PL |
- 'which future generations will resound for/to you' (*Rgveda* III, 33, 5)

This relationship is also shown in the periphrastic formation of the future tense. In IE languages in particular, the future tense auxiliary is derived from the irrealis mood expressed by lexical words such as

'become', 'wish' or 'go'. For instance, consider a case in Serbian: the future can be expressed with an auxiliary *ću* as in *ja ću raditi* or *raditi ću* 'I will do' or morphologically, i.e. *raditiću* 'I will do'. This auxiliary or morpheme is derived from a lexical verb *htjeti* 'want', whose abbreviated form *ću* became the future tense marker. This change is possible, since the irrealis mood refers to an event or state which has not yet eventuated and the time frame implied by this mood belongs to the future tense. Exceptions in the formation of the future tense are found in Celtic languages (cf. [6]), where the creation of a new present form turned an older present into a future form (cf. Haspelmath 1998).

It is obvious by now that IE languages have evolved considerably from PIE in terms of the tense-aspect system, but the development does not seem to be uniform, i.e. the current system differs significantly from one language family to another. It can be studied at both ends of the changes, i.e. oldest existing system and the most recent. This diversity may not be very significant when it is viewed alone, but when it is compared with other changes in the grammatical system, something significant emerges.

#### 4. Residues of earlier constructions and aspectual markers

The tense-aspectual changes presented in Sections 2 and 3 may be perceived by assuming that these languages have changed so much that the earlier grammatical system found in PIE is no longer visible. However, there are various pieces of evidence that convincingly show that residues of the PIE structure can be found in various forms in modern IE languages. Historical change is not punctual but gradual, and it often leaves some residues (e.g. Givón 1979 : 235; Heine et al. 1991 : 261; Harris and Campbell 1995 : 261; Croft 2000 : 63), hence, some earlier grammatical structures can still be found, one example being of the gender system. Some languages with the gender system have the neuter form and some consistent patterns in the declension. Consider cases from Latin (Table 3) and Serbian (Table 4). The common factor is that the neuter does not differentiate the nominative and the accusative forms, unlike masculine and feminine forms. This is because the neuter form descends directly from the PIE inactive nominal form. Inactive nouns, as seen in Section 2, cannot initiate an action and simply function as a recipient of an action. Therefore, distinguishing a doer form (nominative) and a recipient form (accusative) was not required. Active nouns, on the other hand, can be used in the direct object position, and it was necessary to clarify whether an active noun was used as a doer or a recipient. A case in Latin shows an older form of IE language,



and the gender system in Romance languages has been simplified and distinction is made between only the masculine and feminine. A case in Serbian, however, is an example from a modern language. Its ancestor, Old Church Slavonic, had a similar declensional pattern (cf. Table 5) and it has been well-preserved. Actual case marking morphemes might have changed (the accusative is supposed to be marked with *-m* as in Latin, which is not the case in Serbian), but the basic declensional system can be preserved to this day from PIE.

	Non neuter	Neuter
MASC	FEM	
NOM	<i>servus</i> 'servant'	<i>femina</i> 'woman'
ACC	<i>servum</i>	<i>bellum</i> 'war'

Table 3. Nominal declension in Latin

	Non neuter	Neuter
MASC	FEM	
NOM	<i>sin</i> 'son'	<i>ženā</i> 'woman'
ACC	<i>Sinā</i>	<i>ženū</i>

Table 4. Nominal declension in Serbian

	Non neuter	Neuter
MASC	FEM	
NOM	<i>moži</i> 'man'	<i>ženā</i> 'woman'
ACC	<i>Možā</i>	<i>město</i> 'high hill'

Table 5. Nominal declension in Old Church Slavonic

When it comes to the tense-aspect system, residues from PIE may not be as obvious, but there are some. In Present-day English, for instance, two types of suffixes for the past tense and the past participle, e.g. *-en* and *-ed*, can be traced back to the late PIE active and inactive verbal marker, respectively (cf. Mann 1977 : 121). The t-participles, the origin of the *-ed* suffix, imply the presence of doer of action (i.e. active), but the n-participles, the origin of the *-en* suffix, do not. Some verbs such as *prove* have both forms for the past participle, *proven* and *proved*, although it should be noted that the implication of active-inactive distinction based on the choice of suffix is nearly non-existent in Present-day English. Another case is an obligatory marking of the perfective-im-

perfective aspectual distinction in the Baltic and Slavic languages (cf. [5] for a Serbian example). These languages have developed the tense system, but still employ the aspectual distinction. Subsequently, the combination of tense and aspect allows the speaker to produce complex temporal expressions. In addition, note that historically Classical Greek and Latin had a similar aspectual system, which later disappeared as the language evolved (cf. [7]). Thus the inclusion of the tense is a development, but the preservation of the aspectual distinction is a residue of PIE, regardless of the degree of reliance.

The examples available are not numerous, but can be a reminder that one should not underestimate the pervasiveness of the PIE grammatical system in the modern IE languages. However, most grammatical structures observable in the modern IE languages have gone through various stages of change and their origin may be difficult to trace. What is significant here is not the development of the tense-aspect per se, but something relating to it. There are several clues, such as the grammatical voice system. In what follows, a structure that is not conventionally analysed with the frame of tense and aspect but are, however, of historical importance will be shown.

## 5. Iconic relationship with other constructions

It is often the case that presence of certain grammatical features automatically signals the presence or absence of others, i.e. there is an iconic relationship (cf. Haiman 1980, 1983, 1985; Bybee 1985). For instance, the presence of the case marking system generally means that the word order in a language is relatively free. Similarly, the integration of the tense system into a language seems to indicate the iconic development relationship with the rest of the grammatical structures. In particular, the formation of the grammatical voice is closely related to the tense-aspectual system particularly in Indo-European languages (cf. Toyota 2003; Toyota and Mustafović 2006). When the aspectual distinction was the prime source of temporal distinction, the grammatical voice was poorly made, and the distinction was made between the active and the middle voice without the passive. The middle voice, being concerned with the spontaneous event, does not imply the presence of a doer of an action or what is termed as the actor. The subject of the middle voice is normally a recipient of action/event or undergoer, and the active clause only had the actor subject. This means that the speaker could not express intentional action with the undergoer subject. Therefore, the range of expressiveness was previously very defective.



An innovation was made in order to solve this defectiveness: new types of participles were made, i.e. active and passive, with which some events were construed from a doer's perspective and others from a recipient's. In the Baltic and Slavic languages, the past participle is often divided into two types, i.e. active and passive. For example, Lithuanian has a pair of participles such as *mylintis* 'loving (active)' and *mylinas* 'beloved (passive)' for *myli* 'love'. This is a remnant of earlier active-inactive distinction. Similarly, Classical Greek has *legon* 'saying (active)' and *legomenos* 'said (passive)' for a verb *legō* 'say' or Latin *laudans* 'praising (active)' and *laudatus* 'praised (passive)' for *laudare* 'praise'. The active participle normally denotes imperfective aspect, and the passive participle, perfective. Despite being termed active and passive, they are in fact closely associated with the aspectual distinction. However, what is crucial in the development is that different forms were no longer solely concerned with the aspectual differences, but with the causer-causee relationship. This is, indeed, one of the first signs of transitivity in language.

Moreover, this sequence of change is closely tied up with a change in alignment (Harris and Campbell 1995). PIE is known to have an active alignment, where the basic organisation of a sentence is structured around the perfective-imperfective aspectual distinction. Most IE languages changed their alignment into the accusative, except for Indo-Aryan and Celtic languages where the split alignment can be found in the resultative aspect. This issue will be returned to shortly below. The accusative alignment's primary concern is not with the aspectual difference, but with the major grammatical distinction that is made between intransitive and transitive constructions. This in essence means that the grammar is more concerned with the presence or absence of outer cause and its recipient. Due to this shift in the organisation of sentences, the aspect lost its prominence in the grammatical status, although it is still fully expressive. In this sense, languages that make a fine aspectual differentiation, such as Baltic and Slavic languages, are more archaic than the rest of the IE languages. Historically, Latin seems to have preserved much of the fine distinction found in PIE, but it has been lost along the way to its daughter languages. Therefore, the aspect can be an important indicator of historical change.

The languages with active alignment tend to lack the passive, since the causer-causee relationship is not explicitly encoded in the grammatical structure in these languages and this is generally required in the passive (cf. Kitilä 2002 : 23). Modern IE languages are normally considered to have the accusative alignment and the earlier resultative has normally been turned into the passive, however, there are some cases of

alignment split. One such case is found in the Celtic and Indo-Aryan split ergative. The periphrastic construction such as [10] superficially has the appearance of the passive in other IE languages. However, the original aspectual implication has not been changed, and it still denotes the perfective/resultative aspect. The subject has to be the undergoer because there is no alternative. This type of construction is often mistaken for the passive (but see Orr 1984; 1989 for an argument for the split ergativity in Irish and Toyota and Mustafović 2006 for another case in South Slavic), but the aspectual development can easily reveal that this is not the passive, but more the resultative.

#### Irish

[10]  
*Tá mac leinn seo mola againn*  
 is student this praised at.us  
 'We have praised this student.'

At the stage of the active alignment, the perfective-imperfective aspectual distinction was the basic grammatical system. This aspectual distinction turned into the intransitive-transitive distinction system. This change does not mean that the aspectual distinction was replaced by something else entirely, but there was a shift of prominence. The importance or frequent use of fine aspectual distinction as in the Slavic languages seems to indicate that the development in this family has not gone as far as that of, for example, Germanic or Romance languages. The Germanic language must have discarded the aspect-based grammar earlier, since older attested languages in this family do not show aspectually complex structure that could be found in Latin or Classical Greek. With Romance languages, however, a transition from a complex (i.e. Latin) into a somewhat simpler construction (i.e. French, Italian, etc.) can be found. This distinction is also directly related to the presence or absence of the passive voice. The Germanic languages tend to have a better-developed periphrastic passive voice than, for example, the Slavic languages. This is due to the earlier resultative being well-preserved in languages with a complex aspectual system.

It has been noted that it is a peculiarity in IE languages (perhaps along with Finno-Ugric languages) that the passive is periphrastic. Dyer (1982 : 55) claims that "the use of copula plus an adjective in the passive clause is rare outside Indo-European. In most languages, the passive is formed by adding a passive suffix to the verb" (cf. also Haspelmath 1990 : 29). This resulted from the passive being derived from the earlier perfective/resultative construction, i.e. an earlier pe-



riphrastic form was reanalysed as the passive (cf. Givón 1990 : 600–602). The presence of the passive in the grammar indicates some changes regarding the aspectual system. In English, for instance, the earlier auxiliary *be* was replaced by *have* in the perfective construction, making the construction with *be* detached from the aspectual construction. This is a rather simple change, since the Germanic languages did not have the distinction between the active and the passive in the participle. It is more complex when languages have both of these participles. In the case of Slavic languages, the active participle was reanalysed as the past tense, and the passive participle was stranded. This was later reanalysed as the passive, along with the obligatory copula verb, which is omitted in the past tense (cf. Russian example in [11]a). In South Slavic, the grammaticalisation of the past tense has not, to date, appeared. As [12]a shows, the copula is obligatory in the past tense, but not in Russian (e.g. [11]a). The earlier periphrastic construction with the passive participle is more likely to be continual resultative construction, not the passive, as [12]b from Bosnian demonstrates. The addition of the actor in the instrument case is odd in South Slavic.

## Russian

[11]

- a. *On napisl zto kartino*  
 he.NOM paint.PST.PRT.ACT this.ACC painting.ACC  
 'He painted this picture.'

- b. *Zla kartina bila napisana im*  
 this.NOM painting.NOM was paint.PST.PRT.PASS he.INST  
 'This picture was painted by him.'

## Bosnian

[12]

- a. *On je slikao ovu sliku*  
 he.NOM is paint.PST.PRT.ACT this.ACC picture  
 'He painted this picture.'

- b. *Ova slika je slikana*  
 this.NOM picture.NOM is paint.PST.PRT.PASS  
 'This picture was painted.'

Apart from the passive, there are several other constructions which can be considered an indication of the development of the tense-aspect.

The case marking system is another such feature. Those languages that have developed a tense system without much influence from the aspect seem to have rid the case marking system intact. In the history of the IE languages, eleven cases are attested, the nominative, accusative, dative, genitive, vocative, locative, ablative, instrument, illative, adessive and allative. Old Lithuanian had all of the above except ablative, as shown in Table 6. Modern Lithuanian lost illative, adessive and allative, but preserved the others. In Old Church Slavonic, seven cases are attested (cf. Table 6), and they are all preserved in its daughter languages such as Serbian. What is noticeable is that they have a more complex aspectual system, represented by, for instance, the presence of both active and passive participles. On the other hand, the Germanic languages have had a rather simplified tense-aspect system in comparison to the Baltic or Slavic even from an earlier period. Proto-Germanic had five cases (cf. Table 7), but most Germanic languages have lost case except Icelandic, Faeroese and German, where four cases, nominative, accusative, genitive and dative, are preserved. A more dramatic change can be found in the Romance languages. Latin, as seen earlier in Section 3, had a complex and elaborated tense-aspectual system, and it had seven cases. However, the system is not as complex as the one in its daughter languages such as French. An exception is Romanian, which has five cases.

	Old Lithuanian	Lithuanian	Old Church Slavonic	Serbian
Nominative	✓	✓	✓	✓
Accusative	✓	✓	✓	✓
Dative	✓	✓	✓	✓
Genitive	✓	✓	✓	✓
Vocative	✓	✓	✓	✓
Locative	✓	✓	✓	✓
Ablative				✓
Instrument	✓	✓		
Illative	✓			
Adessive	✓			
Allative	✓			

Table 6. Case marking pattern in selection of Baltic and Slavic languages

	Proto-Germanic	German	English	Latin	Romanian	French
Nominative	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Accusative	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Dative	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Genitive	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Vocative	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Locative				✓	✓	
Ablative				✓	✓	
Instrument						
Illative						
Adessive						
Allative						

Table 7. Case marking pattern in selection of Germanic and Romance languages

The case marking system illustrates that constructions not directly related to the tense or aspect can be an indicator of the development. Another such feature can be found in the word order. Those languages with a more complex system tend to preserve the earlier SOV order, which can be traced back to PIE (cf. Lehmann 1993, 2003; Gankrelidze and Ivanov 1995). It is a general tendency that the older IE languages had a flexible word order, which turned into a more rigid one (cf. Li and Thompson 1976 on topic- and subject-prominence). By forming a rigid order, the basic order moves from SOV to SVO or VSO. Table 8 shows a selection of modern IE languages and their word order. As can be expected, the Baltic and Slavic languages have a flexible order and their basic order is SOV. Note that Romanian has a basic order SVO, but its order is still flexible. This is an exceptional case, but is an intermediate stage in a historical change. Table 8 also shows a relationship between the case marking and the word order. It is clear that languages with the older SOV order have the case system. Romanian is again an exception, since it has the case marking and its basic order is SVO, but this table also shows that the relationship among the word order, case and aspect are somehow related.

	English	German	Italian	Romanian	Slovak	Lithuanian	Irish
Flexibility	Rigid	Flexible/rigid	Rigid	Flexible	Flexible	Flexible	Rigid
Case	Absent	Present	Absent	Present	Present	Present	Absent
Basic order	SVO	SVO	SVO	SVO	SOV	SOV	VSO
Aspect	Absent	Absent	Absent	Absent	Present	Present	Absent

Table 8. Word order and case marking in some IE languages

All the instances shown illustrate that the tense-aspect can be analysed in relation to other constructions, when a historical analysis is made. One change can trigger changes in other constructions, and this is exactly the case in the tense-aspectual system. The process of grammaticalisation is known to be cyclic, and what can determine stages of changes is often made clearer once other constructions are also taken into consideration.

## 6. Further key to identifying chronology

Apart from the grammatical evidence that has been shown so far, there is another particular feature that can help in identifying different stages of development. As mentioned earlier, the historical development tends to be cyclic. The grammaticalisation path has a common pattern (cf. Heine et al. 1991; Bybee et al. 1994; Heine and Kuteva 2005 for various patterns), but there is another less discussed pattern: a binary feature. Whether it is an aspect or a tense, an initial distinction is normally binary. As the language develops, there are periods when ternary, quaternary or even more distinctions are made. For instance, the tense can be considered in terms of a binary past and non-past distinction, but the future is often integrated later in the development, forming the ternary distinction with past, present and future. The same can be applied to the aspect. The earlier perfective and imperfective distinction became more complex when languages started to distinguish within the imperfective, e.g. habitual, progressive, iterative, etc. Thus, the binary choice seems to indicate the earlier distinction, and more complex ternary or quaternary distinctions seem to be an indicator of a more recent development. When the aspectual system turned into the tense system, the first type consists of the past and non-past binary distinction. Hence there seems to be a cycle between binary and ternary/quaternary features.

In this sense, the aspectual distinction in the IE languages seems to be well-developed, but the tense system seems to vary depending on each language family. Table 9 shows a sample of patterns in IE languages. This means that Celtic and Romance languages have a more advanced tense system than Slavic and Germanic languages. When the aspectual system is taken into consideration, the development becomes more complex. As shown, the Baltic and Slavic languages still preserve the complex aspectual marking system, but not the others. Therefore with the aspect, the Slavic languages seem to preserve the oldest, since the Baltic languages have developed the future tense. In other words, the tense system of Lithuanian and Latvian has developed into the



ternary. Germanic languages have not developed the future tense (i.e. it is still binary), but its aspect has become simple. Overall, in conjunction with the prominence of aspectual distinction and the lack of ternary distinction in the tense, it could be claimed that the Slavic languages preserve the most archaic system, while Celtic and Romance languages have the most developed. The Baltic and the Germanic languages are intermediate, although the Baltic languages certainly are more archaic than the Germanic due to the prominence of the aspectual system. This archaism can be schematised in Figure 2.

	Baltic	Celtic	Slavic	Germanic	Romance
Past	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Present	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Future	✓	✓			✓
Aspect	Complex	Simple	Complex	Simple	Simple

Table 9. Binary and ternary tense distinction

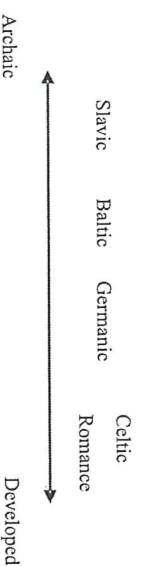


Figure 3. Chronology of tense-aspectual system in IE languages

## 7. Summary

The history of tense-aspectual structure began with the perfective-imperfective aspectual distinction in PIE. Tense did not exist at this stage. Tense came in much later, and the initial distinction was between past and non-past. The development of the future tense is reasonably new and this can be an important step in the development of our cognition. Among the IE languages, we can observe various stages in the development. The Baltic and the Slavic languages tend to preserve an older aspectual system, while the Germanic languages lost the aspectual marking at an earlier stage. The Romance languages kept the older system for a long time. However, after Latin developed into different daughter languages, tense dominates the grammatical structure. Considering these developments, we can identify how far each language family within the IE languages has gone. The Slavic are perhaps the most conservative languages, and the Germanic most developed.

This type of claim can also be supported by analysing the structure

by looking at other constructions such as the grammatical voice, the case marking system or the word order. They all co-relate with each other. For instance, the passive is closely related to the aspectual system historically in the IE languages. Therefore, the presence of the passive naturally indicates a further development of the tense-aspectual system. The loss of case and the emergence of rigid word order also signal the development. In addition, the binary opposition in the aspect or tense is, as seen, another important indicator of the development. When tense or aspect is binary, a feature tends to be older. The newer distinction normally involves a third or fourth distinction. In the case of tense, the original distinction was made between past and non-past (cf. Figure 1), but the newer tense system involves the future tense, creating the third option in the tense distinction along with the past and the present (cf. Figure 2). There seems to be a cyclic development between binary and ternary distinction.

Judging from various features analysed in this paper, we could claim that the Slavic languages are perhaps the most archaic IE languages as far as the tense-aspect is concerned. The Baltic languages do not differ a great deal, except that they have the future tense while preserving the complex aspectual system. The Celtic and Romance languages are perhaps the most advanced languages, losing the aspectual system and developing the tense further. Others, such as the Germanic languages, form intermediate stages. They have lost the aspectual distinction, but tense has not developed as much as in the Celtic or Romance languages.

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Université de Tartu  
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STUDIA ROMANICA TARTUENSIA VI

# **L'aspect dans les langues et les théories: similitudes et différences**

## **Aspect in languages and theories: similarities and differences**

Édité par Daniele Monticelli et Anu Treikelder

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