Formation of the periphrastic perfect tenses in Romance has been described since the 19th century but relatively few explanations have been offered to account for what is a remarkable linguistic feat. Emile Benveniste and Joaquim Nattoso Camara have explained periphrastic formation in terms of manipulation of the lexical meaning of the elements involved. I would like to go a step further and examine aspect and tense in the Latin PERFECTUM and in Romance in morphosemantic terms. After a discussion of the nature of aspect and tense and how they are formally marked in Latin I shall attempt to show how they affected periphrastic formation.

1. Tense in this paper will refer to the conjugational categories of a verb used by traditional grammars. For example, present indicative, imperfect indicative, preterite, etc., are all tenses of the Portuguese verb. The term time will refer to the deictic, temporal reference of the verb with respect to the moment of speaking. Time is often called tense, obviously creating confusion with regard to the concept of verbal categories. Verbal time is either past or nonpast, with the former considered the morphologically marked notion in Latin and Romance.

2. John Lyons has characterized aspect as being a non-deictic, temporal notion (p.702). That it is intimately related to the expression of time is undeniable. Some scholars prefer to describe aspect in the terminology traditionally used by the Latin and Greek grammarians: imperfect and perfect. In his case study on aspect Bernard Comrie used perfectivity and imperfectivity because he leaned heavily on the Slavic verb system where those terms are traditionally preferred. Although the terms are adequate for Romance as well, they are neutralized in the Latin present perfect tense which represents a fusion of Proto-Indo-European aorist and perfect tenses, both marked for perfectivity of action. The Latin perfect is explicitly marked in the verb stem and absence of this marker indicates an on-going stem. We have to look elsewhere for an analysis that allows for differentiation of aorist and perfect meaning of the verb.

Paul Friedrich, in an article concerning aspect in Homeric
Greek, proposes that the verb stems are formally marked for durativity rather than perfectivity and they are further marked for realization of the event. Realized refers to the state of a past action that is realized at the time reference of the verb and is what he calls a "complex category that conjoins past tense and completed action" (§19). The difference between the aorist and perfect tenses in ancient Greek is that the perfect always contains past completed action that is realized in the state of the subject at the time reference of the verb while the aorist refers only to an act that is completed without reference to its duration or to the resultant state of the subject. In Homeric Greek, for example, the verb "to loose" would have the following forms in the active indicative (Pharr:202-204):

(1) lyei [ +durative ] "he looses" present
   [ -past ]
(2) éllye [ +durative ] "he was loosing" imperfect
    [ +past ]
(3) lél-ly-k-a [ -durative ] "he has loosed" perfect
    [ +realized ]
    [ -past ]
(4) él-ly-s-e [ -durative ] "he loosed" aorist
    [ -realized ]
    [ +past ]

We can see that this verb has a durative stem, lye-, a perfect stem, léllyk-, and an aorist stem, élly-, to all three of which mood, voice and personal suffixes are added. Both the perfect and aorist stems are interpreted as [+realized]. The perfect is further understood as [+realized] and the aorist as [-realized].

Ever since the days of the Roman grammarian Varro it has been convenient to characterize the Latin verb as having an imperfect and a perfect stem, respectively called the IMPERFECTUM and the PERFECTUM. L.P. Palmer comes closest to Friedrich's classification of primary aspect when he describes the verb as having a durative and a perfect stem (306). The Latin PERFECTUM, as I mentioned above, is historically a combination of Proto-Indo-European aorist and perfect forms, both of which marked the stem in a number of ways. By the Classical Period the perfect stem was always morphologically distinct from the durative stem. The latter was not marked, rather,
it was the absence of a perfect marker that made the stem durative. Furthermore, Latin is a synthetic language so there is some aspectual redundancy in the affixes that are used for time, mood, and voice. For example, the -BA- suffix used in the imperfect tense formally demonstrates past and indicative as well as reinforces the feature [+durative] because it is used only with the durative stem. Likewise, the -ERA- suffix that indicates pluperfect indicative is used only with non-durative stems.

(5) CANTA-BA-T "he was singing" imperfect
(6) CANTAV-ERA-T "he had sung" pluperfect
(7) DICHI-BA-T "he was saying" imperfect
(8) DIX-ERA-T "he had said" pluperfect

Because both aorist and perfect tenses are included in the PERFECTUM it must contain the semantic features:

\[
\begin{bmatrix}
\text{-durative} \\
\text{+realized}
\end{bmatrix}
\]

It is more complicated than the Greek examples we examined because Latin must distinguish the two aspects with adverbs or else leave the distinction morphologically ambiguous. Thus LITTERAS SCRIPSI can mean "I wrote the letters" or "I have written the letters." Vulgar Latin and Romance found it necessary to have a formal means of determining the two notions and so a periphrastic construction was developed that marked [+realized] in the paradigm of any verb.

3. Documented in inscriptions and literary texts since the early days of Rome are examples of a construction that has no similarity to the synthetic forms we have so far described. It is a syntactic unit that uses a conjugated form of HABEO "to have, keep, possess" plus a perfect participle that agrees with the direct object as if it were an adjective. In this context HOC CONVERTIUM HABET means "he possesses this thing learned" or "he has this learned." (Benveniste:86). The structure has existed since the earliest texts of Latin and appears to be semantically distinct from the perfect. It is precisely this construction, however, that has become the Romance periphrastic perfect. Benveniste argues that the process involved in its evolution was a shift in the lexical meaning of HABEO from "to have" to "auxiliary." In Iberian Romance the agent of the participle was gradually confused with and later reanalyzed as the subject of HABEO. Thus the conjugated verb lost its lexical meaning in this situation and carried only grammatical meaning, forming an auxiliary. Eventually the construction was extended to all tenses,
creating a periphrastic paradigm not unlike the Romance passive paradigm.

Mattoso Camara, writing on the evolution of Portuguese forms, claims that the perfect tenses developed from what he calls the Latin periphrastic when the conjugated verb came into contact with the participle and "the object was subordinated to the construction as a whole, creating a perfectum" (145). So, for example, HABEO LITTERAS SCRIPTAS, meaning "I possess written letters," is reanalyzed as "I have written letters," a transitive construction that shows loss of the lexical meaning of HABEO and a reinterpretation of the participle as the verb for which LITTERAS is the direct object. When the participle is seen more as a verb than as an adjective it has a profound effect on the syntax of the construction:

(10)

```
(10) VP 
    | 
    V 
    | ________________
    HABEO         LITTERAS       ADJ          SCRIPTAS
```

Now the participle identifies more with the conjugated verb than with the noun which in turn becomes subordinated to the entire construction.

These arguments and descriptions are compelling but I think they are missing another basic ingredient: an explanation of the shift in aspect so that the new construction is marked with the aspect of the perfect tense. If we analyze the PERFECTUM for aspect and time in Friedrich's terms we see that the matrix is:

(12) `[durative]`  
    `+realized`  
    `+past`

Phonological changes and reanalysis of the aorist function of the PERFECTUM as always being `[+past]` modified the matrix to:
This change left the inflectional paradigm with no form to represent:

\[ \begin{array}{c}
-\text{durative} \\
-\text{realized} \\
+\text{past}
\end{array} \]

At the same time changes in the verb stem shifted the aspect marker to the time and mood suffixes where it already redundantly existed. The total effect of all these changes is that there is no non-durative stem and all verbs considered [-past] are also considered [+durative]. The so-called permansive construction had the following representation:

\[ \begin{array}{c}
\text{HABEOR} \\
+\text{vb} \\
+\text{durative} \\
-\text{past}
\end{array} \]

\[ \begin{array}{c}
\text{LITTERAS} \\
+\text{vb} \\
+\text{number} \\
\text{gender} \\
\text{case}
\end{array} \]

\[ \begin{array}{c}
\text{SCRIPTAS} \\
+\text{vb} \\
-\text{durative} \\
\text{number} \\
\text{gender} \\
\text{case}
\end{array} \]

Even after the changes above have taken place the form has the same features, except for case which has become accusative only. If we compare this matrix with that of the present perfect we see that it contains all the ingredients of a perfect tense. The conjugated verb, by being durative and nonpast, solves the problem created by normo-semantic changes that any verb that is [-past] must be [+durative] as well. It is then closely associated with another form that is clearly marked [-durative, +realized]. When the agent of the latter fuses with the subject of the other form the stage is set to neutralize for the moment the lexical meaning of HABEOR.

The mechanism of transformation from inflected to periphrastic forms probably involved the coexistence of the PERFECTUM and the permansive for some time with the latter occasionally confused for the former. As this process grew more prevalent it also weakened the resistance of the inflected forms to the phonological changes taking place in the language, or the two phenomena affected one another. Whatever the sequence, the PERFECTUM was reanalyzed as aorist only.
At this point the language turned to the permissive to fully represent [+realized] and eventually discovered that it could conjugate the auxiliary, releasing the other tenses of the Perfection to undergo the effects of sound changes and reanalysis that had already started and had created some confusion. Aspect and time were mapped onto the new forms in this manner:

\[
\begin{align*}
&\text{(16) } \text{CANTAVI} \\
&\begin{array}{c}
-\text{durative} \\
+\text{realized} \\
-\text{past}
\end{array} > \begin{array}{c}
-\text{durative} \\
+\text{realized} \\
-\text{past}
\end{array} > \begin{array}{c}
-\text{durative} \\
+\text{realized} \\
-\text{past}
\end{array}
\end{align*}
\]

The present perfect tense has become modern Portuguese pretérito (aorist with past time value) while the aspectual features of the perfect matrix have been realized by the perfect participle. The feature [-past] must also be durative, a condition easily provided by the present tense of HABEO or TEMPO. The whole construction in turn undergoes sound changes and becomes the medieval NEI CANTADO or TEMPO CANTADO and finally the modern TEMPO CANTADO. Now it is possible to see how Gregory of Tours could write EPISCOPUM INVITAVIT HABES and have it mean "you have invited the Bishop" and not "you have an invited Bishop." (Benveniste:83) In Classical Latin the statement should read EPISCOPUM INVITAVISTI but since we know that this form of the verb became the aorist the meaning would be "you invited the Bishop." The periphrastic construction is the only one that can convey the meaning [+realized].

4. To summarize, the Latin verb system experienced changes in its shape that caused its present perfect tense to be reanalyzed as aorist thereby depriving the inflectional paradigm of a way of expressing the perfect tenses. While these changes were occurring an originally unrelated syntactic construction contained the proper balance of aspect and time features to be employed as a surrogate perfect, thus forming the Romance periphrastic paradigm. In other words, changes had occurred that caused a verb system that
previously had marked its steno for durative aspect to consider all inflectional forms but one as [+durative] and to consider time and mood the most important inflectional markers. Spanish is perhaps the best example of these changes in that it still has a preterite-aorist that is distinct from the periphrastic perfect in form and meaning. French has carried the transformation full circle in the spoken idiom. The present perfect tense in French functions as both preterite and present perfect, marking the construction with the same features that the PERFECTUM had. Modern Portuguese is an example of incomplete change. The preterite carries the same features as the PERFECTUM:

\[
\begin{array}{c}
\text{[\text{-durative}]}\\
\text{[\text{+realized}]}
\end{array}
\]

The most salient difference is that, true to the Romance changes, if the feature chosen is [\text{-realized}] then it must be also [\text{+past}]. Meanwhile the periphrastic construction has carried the notion [+durative] to the extreme point of being equal to the progressive aspect, that is, it conveys the idea of action in progress.

REFERENCES


