ASPECT CHANGE AND PERIPHRASTIC FORMATION

Lee Webster

University of Kansas

Formation of the periphrastic perfect tenses in Romance has
been described since the 19th century but relatively few explana-
tions have been offered to account for what is a remarkable lin-
guistic feat. Emile Benveniste and Joaquim Mattoso 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 for-
mation.

1. Tense in this paper will refer to the conjugational catego-
ries 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 speak-
ing. 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 morpholo-
gically 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 Ro-
mance 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 dur-
ativity 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" (S19). 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:282-284):

(1) lyei   "he looses" present
$\begin{bmatrix} +\text{durative} \\ -\text{past} \end{bmatrix}$

(2) élye   "he was loosing" imperfect
$\begin{bmatrix} +\text{durative} \\ +\text{past} \end{bmatrix}$

(3) lé-ly-k-a   "he has loosed" perfect
$\begin{bmatrix} -\text{durative} \\ +\text{realized} \\ -\text{past} \end{bmatrix}$

(4) é-ly-s-e   "he loosed" aorist
$\begin{bmatrix} -\text{durative} \\ -\text{realized} \\ +\text{past} \end{bmatrix}$

We can see that this verb has a durative stem, ly-, a perfect stem,
lélyk-, and an aorist stem, élys-, to all three of which mood, voice
and personal suffixes are added. Both the perfect and aorist stems
are interpreted as [-durative]. 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 INFECTUM and the PER-
FECTUM. L.R. 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 morphologocally
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 as-
pectual 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 in-
dicative is used only with non-durative stems.

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

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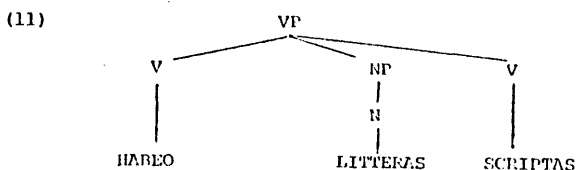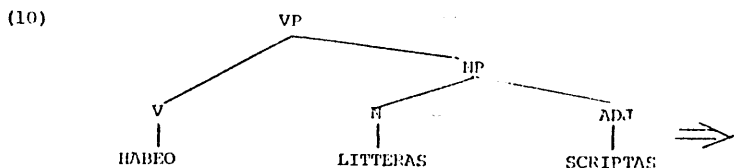FECTUM it must contain the semantic features:

$$(9) \quad \begin{bmatrix} -\text{durative} \\ +\text{realized} \end{bmatrix}$$

It is more complicated than the Greek examples we examined be-
cause 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 para-
digm 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
COMPERTUM 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.   Ben-
veniste argues that the process involved in its evolution was a
shift in the lexical meaning of HABEO from "to have" to "aux-
iliary."   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 permansive 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 re-
analyzed as "I have written letters," a transitive construction
that shows loss of the lexical meaning of HABEO and a reinterpre-
tation 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 con-
struction:

(10)

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                              VP
                    /                  \
                   /                    NP
                  /                  /        \
                 V                  N          ADJ        ⟹
                 |                  |           |
               HABEO            LITTERAS     SCRIPTAS
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(11)

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                              VP
                    /          |         \
                   V           NP          V
                   |           |           |
                 HABEO         N        SCRIPTAS
                               |
                           LITTERAS
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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)
$$\begin{bmatrix} -\text{durative} \\ +\text{realized} \\ -\text{past} \end{bmatrix}$$
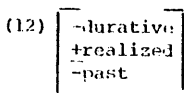
Phonological changes and reanalysis of the aorist function of the
PERFECTUM as always being [+past] modified the matrix to:

(13) $\begin{bmatrix} \text{-durative} \\ \text{-realized} \\ \text{+past} \end{bmatrix}$

This change left the inflectional paradigm with no form to re-present:

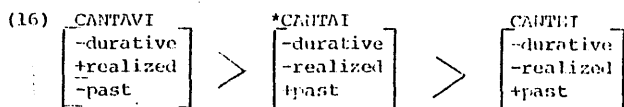(14) $\begin{bmatrix} \text{-durative} \\ \text{+realized} \\ \text{-past} \end{bmatrix}$

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:
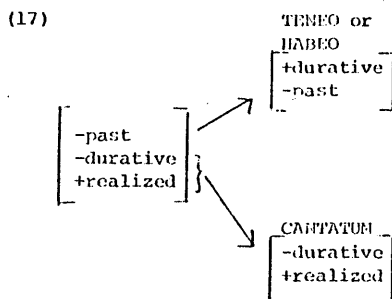
(15) $\begin{array}{ccc} \underline{\text{HABEO}} & \underline{\text{LITTERAS}} & \underline{\text{SCRIPTAS}} \\ \begin{bmatrix} \text{+Vb} \\ \text{+durative} \\ \text{-past} \end{bmatrix} & \begin{bmatrix} \text{+N} \\ \alpha\text{number} \\ \beta\text{gender} \\ \gamma\text{case} \end{bmatrix} & \begin{bmatrix} \text{+Vb} \\ \text{-durative} \\ \alpha\text{number} \\ \beta\text{gender} \\ \gamma\text{case} \end{bmatrix} \end{array}$

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 morphosemantic 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 HABEO.

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:

(16) ___CANTAVI___   ___*CANTAI___   ___CANTET___
      ⎡ -durative ⎤   ⎡ -durative ⎤   ⎡ -durative ⎤
      ⎢ +realized ⎥   >   ⎢ -realized ⎥   >   ⎢ -realized ⎥
      ⎣ -past   ⎦   ⎣ +past   ⎦   ⎣ +past   ⎦

At this point the language turned to the permansive to fully
represent [+realized] and eventually discovered that it could con-
jugate the auxiliary, releasing the other tenses of the PERFECTUM
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:

(17)   TENEO or
                                  HABEO
                                  ⎡ +durative ⎤
                                  ⎣ -past   ⎦

      ⎡ -past   ⎤
      ⎢ -durative ⎥
      ⎣ +realized ⎦

                                  CANTATUM
                                  ⎡ -durative ⎤
                                  ⎣ +realized ⎦

The present perfect tense has become modern Portuguese preterite
(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 TENEO. The whole construction in
turn undergoes sound changes and becomes the medieval HEI CANTADO
or TEHO CANTADO and finally the modern TENHO CANTADO. Now it is
possible to see how Gregory of Tours could write EPISCOPUM INVI-
TATUM HABES and have it mean "you have invited the Bishop" and
not "you have an invited Bishop." (Benveniste:88) 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 reanalized
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 stems 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:

(18) CANTEI
      $\begin{bmatrix} -\text{durative} \\ +\text{realized} \end{bmatrix}$

The most salient difference is that, true to the Romance changes,
if the feature chosen is [-realized] then it must be also [+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.

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