

DOUBLE PERFECT FORMS IN GERMAN: THEORETICAL CONSIDERATIONS
AND EMPIRICAL EVIDENCE

[Please consider for Workshop 6 (Sonnhauser & Zeman), or, alternatively, for the Main Session; subdomains: theoretical & experimental approaches; tense; aspect]

The verbal paradigm of Modern German exhibits a temporal form, the “Doppelperfekt” (Double Perfect), which has as yet defied any attempts to categorize it, both in terms of its form and its content. On the form side, it appears that its morphology is fairly transparent—it consists of a regular perfect (Aux + participle), expanded by a participle of the auxiliary; s. (1):

- (1) *Peter hat den Sieg verdient gehabt.*
Peter has the victory deserved had.
'Peter has (had) deserved the victory.'

Although the Double Perfect is well-attested in both spoken and written German (s. Litvínov & Radčenko, 1998; Rödel, 2007), its semantic and pragmatic properties are still the matter of considerable debate. Although there are some hypotheses around as to what functional role the double perfect may play in the verbal paradigm of German (e.g., compensation of praeterite loss, or compensation for loss of temporal features of the “simple” perfect, to name only two), these hypotheses face two problems: firstly, many of the actual occurrences of the double form do not serve any noticeable function whatsoever in their context of appearance, thus providing counterevidence against overly simple mono-causal explanations. And, second, all the hypotheses fail to make clear empirical predictions that could be tested in corpus studies or experiments.

In this talk, we present four experimental studies dealing with different aspects of the Double Perfect in German. Experiment 1 and 2 were paper-and-pencil studies in which participants were asked to rate the acceptability of sentences on a 7-point scale and, in addition, had to decide between two paraphrases. Experiment 1 tested sentences which were globally ambiguous between the Double Perfect and the 'haben'-passive (cf. Gese, 2013) and served to establish the overall interpretation preference. In Experiment 2, these sentences were disambiguated by the co-presence of *since-X-time* vs. *in-X-time* adverbials, testing for the sensitivity of the Double Perfect for

syntactic factors. Experiment 3 was a production study concerned with the realization of the nuclear pitch accent of sentences containing perfect forms, depending on the discourse status of the direct object and the perfect form (simple vs. double). Experiment 4, a mouse-tracking study, tests the influence of aspectual verb classes on interpretation preferences. This study is currently under way. These experimental results will be evaluated against independent results from a corpus study.

Given the results of our experiments, we will argue against existing analyses by proposing a multi-causal scenario, in which several factors—syntactic, temporal/aspectual, information structural—interact to pave the way for the Double Perfect.

REFERENCES

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Litvínov, Viktor P. & Vladimir I. Radčenko (1998). *Doppelte Perfektbildung in der deutschen Literatursprache*. Tübingen: Stauffenburg.