

Workshop for  
Chronos 11 – 11<sup>th</sup> International Conference  
on Actionality, Tense, Aspect, Modality/Evidentiality  
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**Perfect puzzles:**

**The discourse-pragmatics of perfect constructions  
from a cross-linguistic point of view**

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**GOAL**

Despite the fact that perfect constructions have been debated extensively in the literature, they have never completely lost their secrets: Perfect constructions seem to behave like grammatical chameleons as they oscillate between different interpretations and meanings, which comprise not only the ‘classical’ perfect values such as current relevance, resultative, extended now or indefinite past, but also inferential, evidential, and admirative readings (for a short overview cf. Lindstedt 2000). Because of their aspectual and modal shades, the categorical status of these constructions has been questioned, and analyses of the perfect in terms of epistemicity and evidentiality have been proposed (cf. e.g. Izvorski 1997; Katz 2003; Portner 2003). What is also puzzling are the significant preferences with respect to collocation with temporal adverbials (Klein 1992), syntactic constructions (main clause vs. hypotactic embedding), medial oppositions (oral vs. written, dimension of proximity vs. distance), and discourse modes (dialogical vs. narrative) (Zeman 2012). Moreover, perfect constructions are interesting from a euro-typological perspective, both as regards form (auxiliary retention/loss/variation) and function (perfect and/or narrative tense). This is closely interrelated with the possible emergence of new ‘true’ perfects, mainly of the ‘have’-type (cf. the new ‘have’-perfect in Macedonian and its consequences for the function of the older ‘be’-perfect; e.g. Fici 2000/2001).

The workshop aims at addressing these puzzles by an approach that aligns pragmatic and discourse-based perspectives. Starting point are the following observations from Germanic and Slavic data which shall be put forward for cross-linguistic discussion:

The discourse behavior of perfects in languages such as contemporary Bulgarian and Serbian, Old and Middle Czech, and in the history of German suggests that the perfect-evidentiality-link correlates with point of view phenomena on the textual level, whereby a relevant factor seems to be auxiliary drop: In Bulgarian, the perfect can omit the 3<sup>rd</sup> person auxiliary and thereby suggest a shift of perspectives from the narrator to a character in the text (cf. Sonnenhauser 2012). In Old and Middle Czech narratives, the variation between the presence and absence of the third person auxiliary seems to correlate with the distinction between the expression of current relevance (presence of auxiliary) and neutral preterit (absence of auxiliary), whereby the former signals the access of the event from the domain of the speaker which is lacking for the latter (Dickey 2013). In German, truncated perfects are only present in a short period of Early New High German. Unlike the Bulgarian and Old/Middle Czech forms, the auxiliary ellipsis is restricted to embedded sentences, cf. Breitbarth (2005: 69) who argues that it indicates a loss of assertive force. According to her view, also the “afinite construction” in German functions like an evidential as it marks the source of an indirect acquisition of knowledge (Breitbarth 2005: 144).

Against this background, a cross-linguistic comparison of perfect constructions seems to be promising in order to substantiate the assumed link between evidentiality, assertive knowledge and point of view phenomena. As the perfect is an unstable category, it offers furthermore a window on processes of language change, particularly with respect to its transition from the present to past domain and the implications for its use on the textual level. Aiming at a typological as well as diachronic perspective on the sketched interface, we are thus particularly interested in the following phenomena:

- > Interaction of perfect constructions with different discourse modes
- > Functions of truncated perfect and its variation in discourse
- > Perspectival effects of perfect constructions as point of view phenomena
- > Epistemic and evidential meanings of perfect constructions and their textual inferences
- > Diachronic development of perfect constructions with respect to their pragmatic features
- > Relationship between present and past perfects

## References

- Breitbarth, Anne. 2005. *Live fast, die young – the short life of Early Modern German auxiliary ellipsis*. Utrecht: Netherlands Graduate School of Linguistics.
- Dickey, Stephen. 2013. See, now they vanish: third-person perfect auxiliaries in Old and Middle Czech. *Journal of Slavic Linguistics* 21/1, 77-121
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- Klein, Wolfgang. 1992. The present perfect puzzle. *Language* 68/3, 525-552.
- Lindstedt, Jouko. 2000. The perfect – aspectual, temporal and evidential. Dahl, Ö. (ed.). *Tense and aspect in the languages of Europe*. Berlin, New York, 367-383.
- Portner, Paul. 2003. The (temporal) semantics and (modal) pragmatics of the perfect. *Linguistics and Philosophy* 26, 459-510.
- Sonnenhauser, Barbara. 2012. Auxiliar-Variation und Textstruktur im Bulgarischen. *Die Welt der Slaven* 57/2, 351-379.
- Zeman, Sonja. 2012. “More than ‘time’: The grammaticalization of the German tense system and the ‘frame of reference’ as a crucial interface between space and time”. Jaszczolt, Kasia / Filipović, Luna (eds.). *Space and time in Languages and Cultures. Language diversity*. Amsterdam / Philadelphia, 157-178.

## STRUCTURE

30 minutes	“The pragmatics of perfect constructions in Slavic and Germanic languages” (Sonja Zeman & Barbara Sonnenhauser)
30 minutes	Anastasia Meermann (LMU Munich): The truncated perfect in Serbian
30 minutes	Björn Rothstein (RU Bochum): On the perfect-evidentiality-link in Continental Scandinavian
30 minutes	
30 minutes	
30 minutes	
30 minutes	Moderated final discussion / data comparison

## ORGANIZERS

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