

THE CATEGORY OF TAXIS AND THE SEMANTIC EVOLUTION OF THE TERM "PERFECT"

Dumitru MELENCIUC

Catedra Filologie Engleză

În prezenta lucrare, se analizează categoria anteriorității și evoluția unității lexicale „perfect”, care inițial avea sensul de acțiune terminată. Cu timpul, termenul dat a căpătat și alte sensuri folosite de diferiți lingviști: anterior, rezultat, corelație în timp etc. Acest fapt duce la o anumită confuzie în procesul de categorisire lingvistică.

Taxis as a historical linguistic category developed various means of expressing anteriority in the Indo-European languages. In English, beginning with the Old Period, the grammatical categorial forms started to develop to support the already existing lexical and contextual means. At present the English category of taxis is one of the basic grammatical morphological categories which comprises the whole system of the finite and non-finite verb forms. Thus, the opposition of anteriority - simultaneity can be expressed in English in a purely grammatically. At the same time, it can be also expressed lexically, by contextual markers, like adverbial modifiers, etc. We should carefully keep apart the conceptual category of anteriority and the grammatical one as constituted by the oppositions of the relevant categorial forms. Thus, the function of anteriority is universal in the sense that in all languages we are supposed to be able to express the anteriority of an action to another action or moment on the axis of time. The fact that the category of taxis is interconnected with other grammatical categories (aspect, voice, mood, etc.) and expressed by certain grammatical forms results in different interpretations and various metalinguistic term systems (as aspect, tense, etc.). In the previous publications we have analyzed mainly the finite perfect and partially the non-finite ones. In the present article we make an attempt to speak on taxis and the evolution of the term “perfect”.

The simplification of the system of perfect forms is compensated by lexical and contextual means getting a more important function in expressing anteriority within the universal category of taxis. Different meanings can be expressed by one and the same form in different contexts or by changing the lexical character of the verb. Synchronic relationship studies linguistic categories which are state of permanent change. Change is the main category of natural human languages, for they are historical categories, they develop or die out. By so doing, they follow the fate of the speaking community, which has created them as the principal means of communication [1, p.122-143].

Anteriority or taxis is grammatically expressed by perfect forms, which are variously interpreted as expressing anteriority, a complete action, result, tense categorial meaning, time correlation. But more and more linguists (E.Benveniste, A.Smirnitsky, R.Allen, H.Palmer, O.Akhmanova) consider anteriority to be the main categorial meaning of finite and non-finite perfect grammatical forms [2, p.122-143].

Anteriority in the purest way is expressed by lexical means and by finite forms of the verb. The anteriority expressed by the marked grammatical forms has much in common in many European languages, as their systems go back to the same source. The grammatical taxis forms appeared in the old times, developed into a system, and then at present they are in a process of weakening their position and ceding it to lexical and contextual means, which up till now played a secondary part in the conceptual category of anteriority. That does not mean that the category of anteriority is not present in languages where most grammatical forms of anteriority have practically disappeared or they do not exist at all. In such cases, the grammatical forms lose their weight and are substituted by much simpler forms of the verbs, anteriority being expressed by non-grammatical means. Any linguistic category should never be studied in isolation only as facts of a single language. A diachronic investigation should be undertaken, in order to find out everything concerning the evolution of the perfect forms, the tendency in their historical development. If we confront related languages, we expect fewer differences and more coincidences in the result of confrontation of various categorial forms [3, p.122-143].

Having analyzed the category of anteriority in English and Romanian, we can state that it can be expressed grammatically and lexically, contextually, and it may be prosodically intensified. In the majority of cases taxis is expressed by at least two of the existing categorial means (lexical and grammatical means occur more

frequently). Lexical means are now in the process of gaining more ground than the grammatical ones. In case of the category of taxis (simultaneity-anteriority, correlation, anteriority, perfectivity, time relationship, perfect aspect, etc.) we observe a process of transition from pure grammatical categories in both languages to lexical and grammatical ones, and, finally, to pure lexical means. In the English and Romanian languages, lexical, contextual and grammatical means, or the combination of grammatical and lexical means are used to express anteriority. At present the category of taxis is studied in different functional styles. It has been observed that the non-finite perfect forms are practically not used in journalese, either in British or American newspapers. As far as finite perfect forms are concerned, preference is given to present perfect, because this is the form that is best suited to establishing a correlation between past and present, on the one hand, and the connection between the performer and the undergoer of the speech event, on the other.

There is a metalinguistic confusion in case of the terms *perfect* and *perfective*, which are treated differently by various linguists and this leads to confusion in the process of categorization. The original meaning of the Latin term *perfect* was a **finished action** and formed an aspectual opposition with **imperfect forms (unfinished actions)**. This aspectual category still exists in most European languages and is expressed grammatically, lexico-grammatically and lexically. In the English language it is expressed lexically and lexico-grammatically. Gradually the metalinguistic unit *perfect* acquired an additional homonymous meaning of *anteriority*. That is why now it would be more convenient to use the term *perfective* in the meaning of finished action and the term *perfect* to express the meaning of anteriority. A perfect form English, depending on the context, may express either a finished or an unfinished action and, thus, it may be realized in both members of the aspectual opposition of perfective/imperfective (or finished/unfinished) [4, p.234-236].

Thus, the approach to categorization may be untenable in the sense that the researcher fails to keep clearly apart the object of analysis (the facts of the language in question) and the metalanguage - the words and expressions used when people talk about the object language. But even if this is not the case, we very often find a large number of different metalinguistic expressions and we have a peculiar situation: we must compare those different systems and try to understand why the different metalinguistic units were introduced. Very often there is a discrepancy not only in the terms used to denote certain more specific or particular categories, but also in the naming or description of the most general concepts themselves [5, p.104-114]. The inclusive perfect forms usually express an imperfective (unfinished) anterior action, which includes the present moment and continues in the future: *I have lived here for many years and I am not intending to move to any other place*. This example would be in aspectual opposition of perfective/imperfective to *I have lived here for many years and now I move to a new place* (finished anterior action). At the same time both examples could be part of the marked member of the opposition of Continuous/non-continuous aspect (found in English and some Romance languages). Here we should take into consideration the lexical durative aspectual lexical meaning of the verb 'to live', which will **contribute to the intensification of the general aspectual durative meaning** combined with the continuous form, where its expressivity is considerably enhanced: *I have been living here for many years*. In the examples like "*He had been reading his book for two hours before I came back*" we observe that the prevailing aspectual meaning is that of a continuous action (unfinished action) in development during a certain period of time before another action in the past (past anteriority).

The secondary aspectual lexical/contextual meaning may be a finished or unfinished action depending on the given context. The term "perfect" here is not used in the meaning of "finished" (perfective or perfect), here it expresses grammatical anteriority supported and intensified by the lexical anteriority marker "before". A finished action can be expressed both by perfect and non-perfect forms: "*I have written a letter*", "*I had written the letter before he returned to the office*", "*I will have written the letter before they return to the office*" and "*Yesterday I wrote a letter to my friend*". In all these cases we have the same result. On the other hand, as we have seen from the examples given above, all the perfect forms in English, like in other languages, can easily be divided into several groups, expressing the grammatical, lexical and lexical-grammatical oppositions of continuous/non-continuous, perfective/imperfective or finished/unfinished, expressing various lexical aspectual meanings (durative, inceptive, terminative, point action, etc.). That means that there are many possibilities to express various aspectual meanings even in the English language [6, p.236].

One of the most important elements of all the perfect grammatical forms of the verbs in English is **past participle or participle II** (Romanian - *participiul trecut*), expressing anteriority in the purest way. It may be used separately and can synthetically express anteriority and voice, serve to form a number of perfect and

passive voice analytical forms. Thus, we can form oppositions of participle I and participle II forms like in the following examples: *reading – read, citind – citit; writing – written, scriind - scris; seeing – seen, văzând, văzut; creating - created, creând – creat* - we observe three distinct categorial oppositions, that of simultaneity vs. anteriority (category of taxis), active vs. passive (category of voice) and continuous vs. non-continuous (category of aspect). Not all the participles possess all the three categorial forms. Thus, the intransitive verbs do not possess the passive meaning: *going – gone, plecând – plecat*. Thus, the category of transitivity-intransitivity should also be taken into consideration in the analysis of participles. Some intransitive verbs gradually acquire submeanings, which are transitive in character: *Running a factory is not easy. The factory is run well. He was laughed at – El a fost luat în răs*. Past participles can be used independently. They are usually found in analytical combinations of perfect and passive voice forms. The intransitive verbs are used in perfect forms, but are not found in passive analytical structures, with the exception of the verbs **go** and **come** found in some word combinations: **he is come, he is gone** [7, p.236].

The verbs can also be classified according to their lexical meanings: terminative, inceptive, iterative, durative, etc. The expression of both anteriority and passive voice is usually found in terminative verbs, while in the durative ones only the passive meaning is clearly seen. Thus, A.Smirnitsky thinks that “loved” as a *past participle* loses its “perfectivity”, which is clearly seen in participles like “broken”. But sometimes this division is not clear-cut. Thus, in case of repeated actions of terminative verbs “perfectivity” may weaken or get lost and a durative meaning is taking over. The categorial function of a given *past participle* depends on the contextual meaning and on its semantic feature. There is a multitude of combinations of the verb “to be” with the past participle. There are cases of homonymy in this case. Combinations of the verb “to be + past participle” like in “The letter is written by Peter. Soon he will finish writing it”, or “The door is closed by Peter” (as a process) should be distinguished from “The door is closed” as a state, where “is closed” is not a passive construction, but just defines the state of the door, that it is not open, there is no meaning of *perfectivity* in the latter case [8, p.268-278]. It is known that the perfect non-finite forms of the verb express anteriority in a much more pure way in comparison with the finite forms. The past participle expresses anteriority in the purest way.

Let’s take some examples of *participle II* used in the function of an attribute: *The house **built** a hundred years ago is still in a very good state. Casa **construită** o sută de ani în urmă s-a păstrat în condiții foarte bune. Unfortunately it is not possible to present in this book all the information **obtained**. Din păcate nu este posibil de a prezenta în cartea aceasta toată informația **obținută***. In both languages a complete coincidence has been attested of *past participles* in attributive functions. But in many cases this coincidence is not always possible because of some structural and semantic differences, and also because of certain linguistic and socio-linguistic traditions in the confronted languages, combinability of words, homonymy, etc. A.Smirnitsky takes as an example the past participle “gone”. “Is gone” may be identical to the combination “have gone” in a transferred meaning “he died” like in the sentence “*Poor Mr. Brown is (has) gone. He has left us. He has joined the great majority*” *Sărmanul dl.Brown a murit (a plecat). El a murit (ne-a părăsit). El a plecat (e dus) în lumea străbunilor. “Is gone” can also be used in the direct sense of the word to express anteriority in colloquial speech as in “Where is Mr. Brown? He is gone (=has gone). He will be back in an hour” “Unde e dl Brown? El e plecat (=a plecat). Se va întoarce peste o oră”* In case of transitive verbs the past participle has a passive meaning closely connected with “perfectivity” (finished action) (*The letter written yesterday was sent in time.*). But when used in analytical non-perfect forms the past participle gets **devoid of anteriority meaning** and **preserves only the passive categorial** function (*The letter was written and sent in time*) [9, p.278-288].

The past participle is regularly confronted the Romanian with participiul trecut: *The methodology **tested** in the Indo-European field set the pattern. Metoda **experimentată** în domeniul indo-european a devenit exemplară. All these observations bring out the essential difference between the method of communication **discovered** among bees and our human language. Toate observațiile acestea scot la iveală diferența esențială dintre metoda de comunicare **descoperită** la albi și limba umană*. The English participle II can sometimes correspond to the Romanian mai mult ca perfectul: *On the staircase Charny met only some officers, friends of his, **informed** beforehand. Pe scări, Charny întâlnește numai câțiva ofițeri, prieteni de ai săi, **care fusese anunțați** (= *anunțați*) din timp*. The anteriority meaning in English is expressed only lexically, while in Romanian both lexical and grammatical anteriority means are used for the sake of expressivity.

Let’s consider some of the syntactic functions fulfilled by past participle:

a) attributive - *The data obtained are being carefully analyzed and studied. Datele obținute sunt analizate și studiate atent*; In both languages the participles have the function of attributes.

b) adverbial modifier of time - *Asked (being asked) to comment about the U.N. resolution tabled by the Afro-Asian countries, the Prime Minister replied... Întrebat (fiind întrebat, când a fost întrebat) să comenteze rezoluția ONU propusă de țările Afro-Asiatice, Primul Ministru a răspuns...*; In this case the English participle „asked” has the function of adverbial modifier of time and could be substituted by the passive voice form of the present participle „being asked”. The form „tabled” has the function an attribute;

c) adverbial modifier of condition - *If given the opportunity, this industry will rapidly develop. Această industrie se va dezvolta rapid, dacă vor vi create posibilități favorabile (=Posibilități fiind date, această industrie se va dezvolta rapid)*; The past participle in the function of an adverbial modifier corresponds in Romanian to future indefinite passive voice and this shows the fact that the forms are different in the main variant, though it is possible to render it into Romanian using *gerunziul pasiv*, the grammatical categorial voice meaning is the same – passive voice;

d) adverbial modifier of concession - *But the Right-wing Labour leaders, though forced to give way on some questions, will stick to their policies. Liderii laburiști de dreapta, deși forțați să cedeze în unele probleme, vor susține politica lor*;

e) complex object with past participle - *We hope to see this issue raised in all trades councils, in every union. Noi sperăm vedem această problemă ridicată în fiecare sindicat.*

The construction of complex object with past participle in English corresponds to a construction of complex object with subjunctive in the meaning of future and in the second complex object with past participle [10, p.152-164].

Thus, we can state that past participle express anteriority in cases when the action is preceding the moment of speech. There are quite a number of cases where the forms under research express both anteriority and passive voice (in case of transitive verbs) meanings, or only the latter one.

As to the term “perfect” – it is still considered by different linguists as part of various categorial oppositions: of anteriority, aspect, tense, result. In Romanian “perfect” in the grammatical form of *perfectul simplu* is now expressing an action finished in the past, and thus, it has preserved the old meaning going back to Latin. The term “perfect” in the European linguistics is used in several meanings: of finished action (perfective), expressing result, time correlation, but more and more linguists state the fact that the main meaning expressed by perfect forms is that of anteriority.

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