

Kibort, Anna (2009): “Modelling ‘the perfect’, a category between tense and aspect”. In: *Current Issues in Unity and Diversity of Languages. Collection of the papers selected from the CIL 18th, held at Korea University in Seoul on July 21-26, 2008*. Seoul: The Linguistic Society of Korea, 1390-1404.

## Perfect

### a. Reichenbach (1947)

“[P]ast events are seen, not from a reference point situated also in the past, but from a point of reference which coincides with the point of speech [= R]” (Reichenbach 2005: 72)

PRESENT PERFECT: (= *Anterior present*)      E > (R = S)

SIMPLE PAST:      (E = R) > S

### b. Comrie (1985)

“The perfect indicates that the past situation has **current relevance** (i.e. relevance at the present moment [= S])” (Comrie 1985: 25)

(1) ‘John has broken his leg.’ a John’s leg is still broken

### c. Present perfect & adverbials

#### The present perfect puzzle (Klein 1992; also Comrie 1985)

Freakishly, the present perfect in English is reluctant to co-occur with **past adverbials** (*deictic: yesterday, [last X], [X ago], [PAST DATE],...*; *non-deictic: back then, back in the old days,...*)

(2) a. \*John has broken his leg yesterday.      *Present perfect*

b. John broke his leg yesterday.      *Simple past*

This suggests that the English present perfect is **no past tense**; in contrast, it *is* compatible with **present adverbials** (*now, today,...*) – is it a *present tense*?

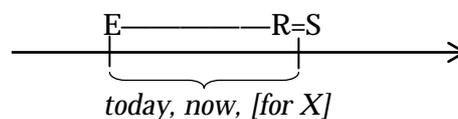
(3) a. I’ve seen him today. (= *since today began*)

b. I’ve collected ten signatures today. (= *since today began*)

c. I’ve now collected ten signatures. (= *up to now*)

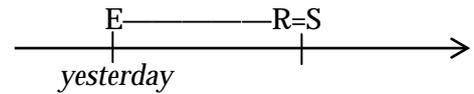
∪ Here, *today* does not denote S, but a **span** ranging from E to R/S (E———R=S; ‘**process**’-like); the **context** forces this **time span** reading (PRESENT PERFECT + *Adverbials* ® time span E–S)! Thus, explicitly marked time *spans* are not unusual with the perfect...

(4) I haven’t seen him for ten years.



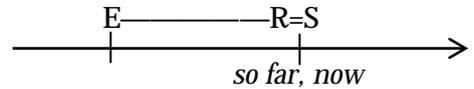
As expected, adverbs may also make explicit the **starting point** as well as the **end point** of the event, either explicitly ([*since t*], [*from t on*] vs. *so far*, [*by t*], [*up until t*]) or covertly (coerced by context)...

(5) Since yesterday, I've collected 1,000 signatures.



(6) a. So far, I've collected 1,000 signatures.

b. I've now collected 1,000 signatures. (= *by now*)



But

Present perfects in other languages *do* allow past adverbials...

(7) a. Jeg har sett ham for et øyeblikk siden.

Norwegian

I have seen him for the moment ago

b. Ich habe mir gestern das Bein gebrochen.

German

I have me yesterday the leg broken

c. Je me suis cassé la jambe hier.

French

I me am broken the leg yesterday

d. Mi sono iscritto all'università quattro anni fa.

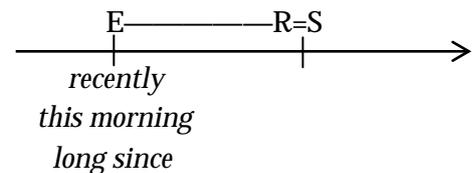
Italian

I am inscribed to.the-university four years ago

Exceptions having to do with *recency*...

(8) a. I've recently broken my leg.

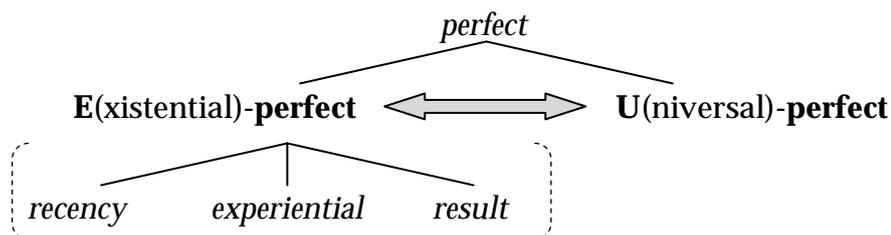
b. I've seen him this morning.



Idiomatic adverbial referring to a *remote* past...

(9) I've long since given up drinking.

#### d. *Fours uses of the perfect* (= 'types'?)



#### **Kibort:**

1. **Experiential** perfect (a.k.a. existential perfect, indefinite past)

(10) I've seen John.

$E > (S = R)$  (*anterior present*)

2. **Resultative** perfect (a.k.a. stative perfect)

(11) John has left

$E > (S = R)$  (*anterior present*)

3. Perfect of **recent past** (a.k.a. hot news perfect)

(12) I've just spoken to John

$E > (S = R)$  (*anterior present*)

#### 4. **Universal** perfect (a.k.a. perfect of persistent situation, perfect of extended now)

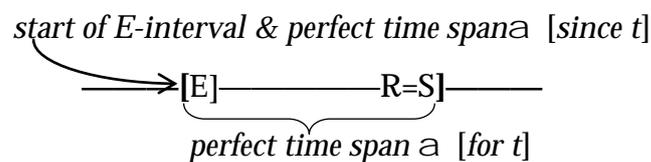
(13) I've lived here for years.  $E \succ (S = R)$  (*anterior present*)

∪ *Note*: The basic opposition is that between **E-perfects** and the **U-perfect**!

#### Difference E-perfect vs. U-perfect

Put informally, the basic difference between the E- and the U-perfect is that R of the former does not really reach into S, while the latter does. Also, the latter typically co-occurs with durative adverbial expressions like [*for X*] and inceptive ones like [*since X*]. Let's illustrate this...

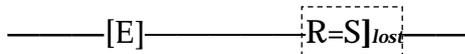
**U-perfect**: "The universal perfect (U-perfect) conveys the meaning that the predicate holds throughout some interval stretching from a certain point in the past up to the present."



**E-perfects**: What distinguishes E-perfects from the U-perfect is that only the latter includes the **whole time span** (i.e. from '[' to ']' = NOW), while the former only cover the span **partially**:

#### (14) *Resultative perfect*

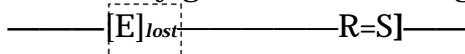
I've lost my glasses.



*It's a present property of the glasses that they are lost because at some indefinite time in the past I accidentally dropped them.*

#### (15) *Experiential perfect*

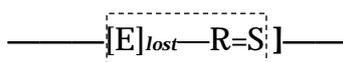
I've lost my glasses (but, thank god, they've been found)!



*I now have the experience that at some indefinite time in the past I accidentally dropped my glasses, but luckily someone returned them to me.*

#### (16) *Perfect of recency (remoteness?)*

I've just lost my glasses!



*Not long before the present moment I lost my glasses?*

#### **Ambiguity:**

#### (17) I've been sick since 1990.

a. *U-perfect*. I fell sick in 1990, and as of now, I am still sick.

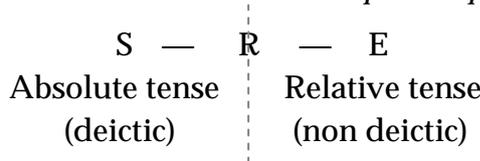
- b. *E-perfect*: During the time span from 1990 until now, I was sick for a period < (1990–NOW). (*experiential*)

**Kibort’s (2009) model**

**Simple tenses: R = E vs. extended tenses: R ≠ E**

Perfect as a “dimension within tense” a **relative tense** (relation R—E vs. deictic tense R—S)

- (18) *Absolute vs. relative tense: present/past/future vs. simultaneity/anteriority/posteriority*

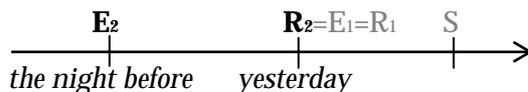


Note: **Deixis** always involves S – the deictic centre ‘I–here–now’ (*origo*)!

- (19) *Purely relative tense in English complex sentences*

Yesterday, John seemed [to have partied too hard the night before].

Here, the event  $E_2$  of partying (which took place the night before) is located **anterior** to the reference time  $R_2$  (marked by have), which, in turn, is identical with  $E_1$  of the main clause (seem)...

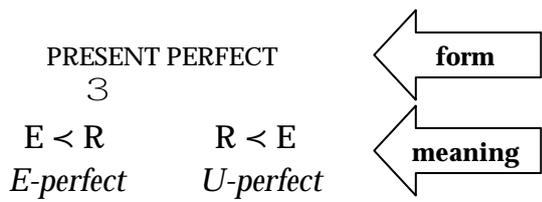


**Perfect: R ≠ E a R > E (anteriority) or E > R (posteriority)**

*NEW!* Kibort proposes that both  $E < R$  and  $E > R$  are grammaticalised in English as semantically different (but morphologically identical) types of perfects...

- (20) **I’ve lived here for ten years.**                      **R > (E = S) (posterior past)**

So, what Kibort does is – apart from the perfects we already know (i.e. 1. to 3. above) – to ascribe the **universal perfect** (i.e. 4.)  $R > (E = S)$ , which, in Reichenbach’s system, was considered **ungrammaticalised** in English. **The event E, which still holds at the moment of speech, is looked at from an earlier reference point R.**



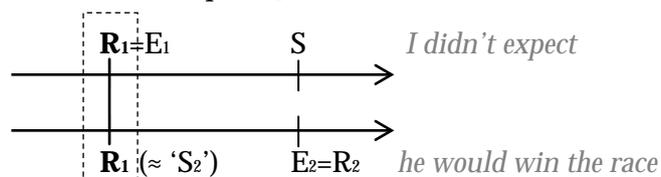
Q: So, what’s become of the posterior past as the future-in-the-past...?

- (21) You said yesterday [that John would be here by now].       $R_{would} > (E = S)_{now}$  (*posterior past*)

A: She thinks that the future-in-the-past is *not* the tense corresponding to  $R \succ (E = S)$ : Reichenbach misinterpreted his system because didn't differentiate between **mono-clausal** and **bi-clausal** sentences; thus  $R \succ (E = S)$  really is the representation of the **U-perfect** (in a simple clause).

*A proposal:* Indeed, on closer inspection the future-in-the-past doesn't really involve S (only indirectly) –we really have **two pairs {E, R} of time points**, and one S:

(22) I didn't expect [that he would win the race].



Thus, the representation of the subordinate clause would actually be  $R_1 \succ (E = R_2)$ , where  $R_1$  is the sub-clauses 'deictic centre' ('S') copied from the main clause.

### e. Past perfect

Past perfect is basically the present perfect **shifted to the past**. However, this is a **simplification** facing the same problems that e.g. the future-in-the-past does: Some tenses cannot be analyzed in isolation (i.e. in mono-clausal sentences), but must be analysed w.r.t. another tense (in bi-clausal sentences; or w.r.t. even more in multi-clausal sentences)  $\cup$  **dependent tense**.

*Test:* They usually cannot occur in independent main clauses (theses are not supposed to be elliptical answer fragments: (*I said that*) *they had moved in*):

- (23) a. ?John would be here by now. *future-in-the-past*  
 b. ?They had moved in. *past perfect*

As sketched above, in (18), they need a 'derived deictic centre' ( $R_1$ ).

The interesting thing about the past perfect is that it is not only able to express both the **E- and U-perfect**, but also that it can express real **perfective anteriority**, i.e. an **anterior past** ('simple past before simple past', a complete past event before another past reference point):

- (24) *Yesterday*, Bert claimed that...
- a. ...Ernie had *just* stolen his blanket. *E-past perfect*  
 b. ...Ernie had been obnoxious *for 10 years*. *U-past perfect*  
 c. ...Ernie had betrayed him with Kermit *the day before yesterday*. *anterior past*

Note that shifting (c) back to the present, yielding **present perfect**, renders the sentence ungrammatical (due to what's captured by the **perfect present puzzle**):

- (25) \*Ernie has betrayed Bert with Kermit *yesterday*.

## f. Perfect and progressive aspect

Note that in principle the perfect (bot E- and U-perfect?) is compatible with any **situation aspect** – another argument to keep the perfect distinct from aspect...

- |   |                       |
|---|-----------------------|
| (26) a. I've been hungry (for years now).                   | <i>state</i>          |
| b. I've finally managed to whistle (after years of trying). | <i>achievement</i>    |
| c. I've drawn pictures (since my 1 <sup>st</sup> birthday). | <i>accomplishment</i> |
| d. I've really grown since I lost my head.                  | <i>process</i>        |
| e. I've slapped my dog for years!                           | <i>punctual</i>       |
| f. I've whimpered for the whole last week.                  | <i>series</i>         |

Note that some combinations of present perfect and situation aspects yield **habitual aspect** (again: perfect ≠ aspect): the guy in (e), for ex., has had the habit of slapping his dog every two hours (or so) during the last years, whereas the verb *slap* itself denotes a **punctual eventuality**.

The compatibility of present perfect progressive with **situation aspect**, however, is subject to the common interactional restriction, but because of the *progressive*, and not because of the perfect as shown in (22)....

- |  |                       |
|--|-----------------------|
| (27) a. I've been being an idiot the whole day! (= 'behave')       | <i>state</i>          |
| b. I've been drawing pictures (since my 1 <sup>st</sup> birthday). | <i>accomplishment</i> |
| c. Swine flu infection rates have been increasing dramatically!    | <i>process</i>        |

*Note:* It's hard to combine present perfect with **achievements** (which focus the end point of an event): \**I've been managing to get in trouble for years*; \**I've been finishing my homework for hours*. This also holds for punctual events: \**I've been blinking for hours now!* Why?

## g. Typology

According to the *World Atlas of Linguistic Structures* (WALS [wals.info](http://wals.info)), perfects are attested in 118 languages. Possessive perfects (i.e. whose morphology is based on HAVE) are a Western European phenomenon; other notable clusters are perfects derived from FINISH, ALREADY.

