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Talking About the Past that Lingers in Our Present

Bozhil Hristov's book, entitled *Grammaticalising the Perfect and Explanations of Language Change: HAVE- and BE-Perfects in the History and Structure of English and Bulgarian*, appeared in 2020 as volume 10 of the series "Brill's Studies in Historical Linguistics" (Hristov, 2020). In it, the author weaves together linguistic theory with close reading and analysis of a thoughtfully built multilingual corpus. His comparative perspective on the perfect tense and domains related to it translates in the book's pluricentric organization: the introduction and the theoretical chapter 2 are followed by chapters dealing with the situation in English (3–5) and English in comparison with German (6), and chapters devoted to the situation in Bulgarian/Macedonian (7–8). Conclusions are drawn at various interim stages, reaching a conclusion in chapter 9. The book advances our understanding of a complex grammatical category with partially overlapping functions across languages, or at different evolutionary stages of the same variety.

Skillfully presented in a way that is both compelling and professional, the research project, nonetheless, is influenced at various levels by strategic choices pertaining to framing, which have left behind areas that could be improved upon or refocused. Below, there are several examples that clarify what is meant by that. Different framing choices have the ability to subtly alter how a message is formulated and perceived.

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Striking a balance between depth and breadth is no easy feat; however, the journey towards finding such a balance is certainly rewarding.

Hristov's theoretical goal is to assess the validity of functional explanations of grammatical change involving the avoidance of ambiguity and/or the reduction of functional load in the rise and evolution of the perfect. He asks whether the search for a better form-to-function mapping is the driving force of change and provides a negative response. The conclusion he reaches is that language change is driven by speakers' natural cognitive abilities to interpret and reinterpret linguistic structure; or, in other words, humans reinterpret linguistic structure because they can. Grammaticalization and reanalysis do not depend on formal prerequisites such as ambiguous or missing morphosyntactic marking. A subtype of grammaticalization is polygrammaticalization, a term used since the 1990s to denote a process in which a single form becomes the source of multiple grammaticalization chains.

This interpretation makes perfect sense. It is unfortunate, however, that the exclusive focus on grammar disconnects the cognitive processes of reanalysis from widespread similar processes affecting the lexicon at large. Hristov's discussion regarding how the grammaticalization of auxiliaries like *be*, *have* and *get* recycles the same schemas over and over again nicely dovetails with the findings of etymologists who have collected in their publications many instances of parallel word derivation whereby an ancient model has been replicated within the same word family or within families of synonyms in different epochs. Furthermore, semanticists exploring the regularities of semantic derivation are working on large-scale projects like the "Catalogue of semantic shifts in the languages of the world" (Зализняк, 2013) and DECOLAR (Koch et al., 2003). To quote Anna Zalizniak,

> A special case of semantic shift is grammaticalization: a shift, the "goal" of which is a "more grammatical" meaning […]. Thus, for example, the meaning 'at, to, or toward the rear' of English *back* is more grammatical than the original meaning 'the rear part of the body'; for the Russian verb *собираться* the meaning 'to intend' is more grammatical […] than the meaning 'to pack up', but it is of no less interest for lexical semantics. A semantic shift, the content of which is grammaticalization, can materialize in different forms: as polysemy, for example, in French *aller* 'to go' also functions as an auxiliary verb that forms Futur immédiat; semantic evolution, as illustrated by French *avoir* 'to have' coming from Latin *habere* 'to hold'; cognates, e.g., French *tenir* 'to hold' and the Portuguese auxiliary verb *ter*; or morphological derivation, which may involve a change of morphosyntactic features as in the French preposition *en attendant* 'until' formed from the verb *attendre* 'to wait' […]. (Зализняк, 2013, pp. 34–35, in my translation into English)

The processes of reanalysis and grammaticalization, so Hristov's narrative goes, can be stimulated by a radical qualitative change in the membership of a speech

community, typically such that comes about when speakers of two different language varieties form a single speech community. It may turn out that the speech community in its new composition is able to reinterpret linguistic structure in novel ways that were unavailable to that community in its previous more uniform state.

Indeed, it pays off to compare the geographic and chronological dimensions of the various types of periphrastic perfect with areas of documented mass bilingualism and language and culture contact, and to do so through a wider lens. Taking a typological approach to the perfect, we can see that, based on the original meaning of the auxiliary, the BE- and HAVE-perfects, which are Hristov's object of study, are two of the three existing types, with the third one being FINISH-perfect, which is predominant outside Europe. The second component of the periphrastic perfect exhibits cross-linguistic variation in its forms as well (Плунгян, 2016, pp. 16–19).

As Hristov notes based on Bridget Drinka's work, within Europe there is an innovative core area, roughly coinciding with the ninth-century empire of Charlemagne, which features a split-auxiliary perfect (shared duties between the BE- and HAVE-auxiliaries in forming the perfect), a use partially preserved until the present time. This is just one of several linguistic phenomena which characterize the Charlemagne Sprachbund languages spoken in that area. The innovations found in Charlemagne Sprachbund languages, or at least some of them, originated in Carolingian Latin, the official written language of the empire, and spread from there to the vernaculars.

At the western periphery of the Charlemagne Sprachbund area, English gradually eliminated its BE-perfect under the Scandinavian influence that spread from the Viking-settled north of England, where Old English and Old Norse were in contact from the late eighth century on. Hristov found empirical evidence in support of the role the Viking invasion played in the demise of the BE-perfect.

Located to the east of that core area, the Slavic languages have historically formed their perfect constructions with the BE-auxiliary, whereas the HAVE-perfect is an innovation that has been popping up in non-contiguous Slavic regions, triggered by language contact (Arkadiev & Wiemer, 2020, pp. 200–201). One such region is in the eastern Balkans.

To complete the cycle, the account of the perfect should venture into the afterlife of perfect periphrastic constructions (Плунгян, 2016, pp. 23–26). In order to fully grasp the distinct Bulgarian/Macedonian situation, one needs to position it against the background of the mainstream Slavic scenario of post-perfect evolution. If we recall Benedetto Croce's claim that all history is contemporary history (Croce, 1941, pp. 18–19), we could say that the mainstream Slavic scenario boils down to imple-

menting a Crocean perspective on the past by generalizing the perfect as the only preterite and enriching it with the semantics of the eliminated synthetic past tenses. In fact, this scenario can also be encountered elsewhere beyond the Slavic languages. In the South Slavic realm, Slovene is part of the mainstream, the Bosnian/Croatian/Montenegrin/Serbian languages are in the process of joining the mainstream, whereas the Bulgarian/Macedonian continuum remains at the margins, unaffected. The distribution of the types of co-relation between synthetic and periphrastic past tenses in the Balkans has been mapped in Asenova (2022, p. 176). Besides, it is in this peripheral area that one can find not only the use of the old inherited perfect to express evidentiality but also – in parts of it – an innovative HAVE-perfect (*има видено* '[s/he] has seen') and a new BE-perfect (*е пиен* '[he] has drunk'), both formed with the past passive participle (see Graves, 2000; Макарова, 2016).

These innovations, but also the preservation of archaic distinctions in that area, which is peripheral within Slavic, have been convincingly explained as an effect of the language contacts that characterize the Balkan Sprachbund, of which it is part (see most recently Asenova, 2022; Asenova & Markou, 2022; Makarova, 2021 with references to earlier literature). To suggest that this explanation somehow implies Western European influence, as Hristov (2020, p. 270) does, is quite misleading. The innovative HAVE- and BE-perfects in the Balkans may be of Western European type, yet they decidedly stem not from Western Europe but from regions further south. Moreover, the area of distribution of the HAVE-perfect shown on the map below is reminiscent of the Bulgarian/Macedonian distribution patterns of some Romance and Greek lexical loans (Младенов, 2008, pp. 211–272).

In spoken British English, the perfect is most vital in its experiential reading, whereas other meanings such as reference to a present state resulting from a past event, a situation that began in the past and continues into the present, or a very recent past event, tend to be expressed differently (Миллер, 1998). In American English, the coalescence of present perfect and simple past tense is especially salient in the area of resultative perfect (Michaelis, 1998, pp. 112–113).

With the post-perfect evolutions of the perfect in the picture, one can better appreciate the distinct evolutionary trajectories taken by English, on one hand, and by Bulgarian and Macedonian, on the other. The broader context also highlights the diverse effects of spoken and written language codes on the rise and the use of the perfect (Abraham, 2004; Миллер, 1998), a pertinent distinction Hristov explicitly considers.

The outcomes of Hristov's valiant effort to process empirical data in several language varieties and explore in detail the use and competition of periphrastic

perfect and perfect-like constructions are interpreted in chapters 4, 5, 6 and 8. The complete set of data excerpted from Hristov's custom-made historical corpora is conveniently made available online at https://doi.org/10.6084/m9.figshare.9675644.v1 (Hristov, 2019). The appendices are based on carefully selected texts in Old, Middle and Early Modern English spanning from the ninth to the nineteenth century, eighteenth-century German, fourteenth-century Middle Bulgarian, and seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Early Modern Bulgarian.

For me as a Slavicist, it is a priority to delve further into the makeup of the Bulgarian/Macedonian corpus. While the choice of *The Tale of Troy* and *A Slavonic-Bulgarian History* by Paisius does not raise objections, there perhaps could have been other texts as well which could have expanded the database, for instance *The Slavic Physiologus of the Byzantine Recension*, and especially the copy of the second translation present in the so-called *Panagiurishte Miscellany*, manuscript No. 433 at the Cyril and Methodius National Library in Sofia (Гечев, 1938, pp. 71–76; Стойкова, 2011).[1]

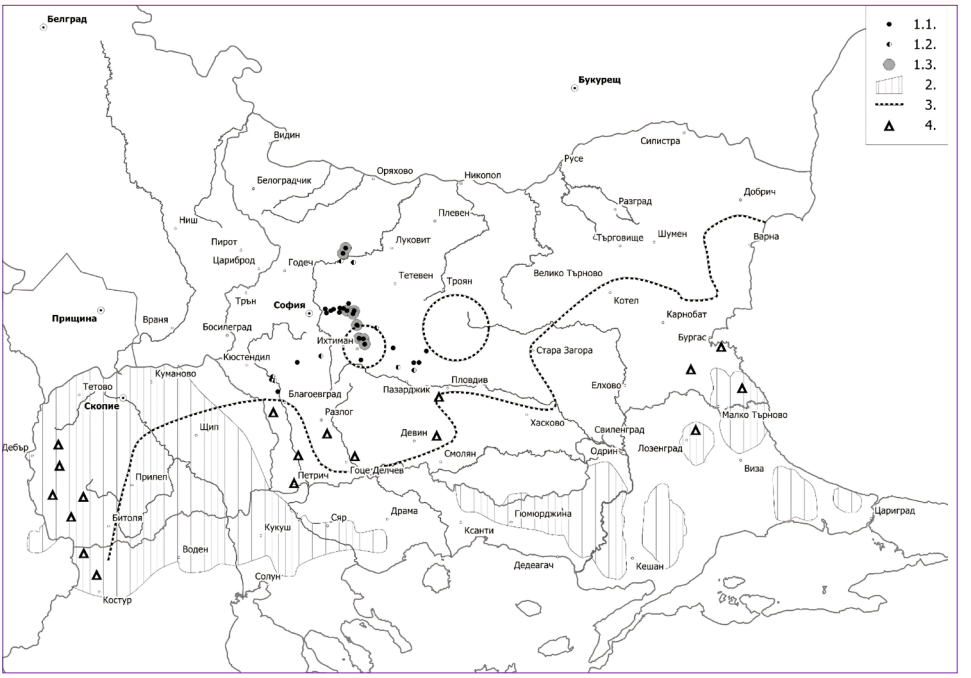
On the flip side, the inclusion of *Damascenus Troianensis*, or, as I prefer to call it, *Troian damaskin*, entails substantial risks. The conclusions Hristov reaches on the material of that source are not surprising given the geographical distribution of the innovative *имам видено* constructions in the Bulgarian/Macedonian continuum, as mapped by Maxim Mladenov on the basis of an exhaustive perusal of pre-1987 dialectological publications, on one hand, and the speculative localization of the idiolect of Troian damaskin's direct creator, on the other (see Младенов, 2008, pp. 182–183, and the map below, authored by Darina Mladenova).

The two chapters from the Troian damaskin Hristov analyzes have different origins and reflect different varieties of seventeenth-century Bulgarian: "On the Ten Commandments" is of type *togiva*, and "St. Symeon Stylites" is of type *togazi*. The classification of early modern Bulgarian vernacular writing produced in the seventeenth century according to the temporal adverb meaning 'then' is the outcome of decades of textual studies by a string of scholars (see О. Младенова & Велчева, 2013). Furthermore, the Troian copy features significant innovations in comparison with the Tikhonravov damaskin, the cornerstone of Evgeniia Demina's monumental study of Bulgarian vernacular damaskins (Демина, 1968–1985). In other words, textual analysis has identified output by at least three different speakers in these two texts, which is less than optimal for the study of a language system. The relations among the idiolects of these three hypothetical speakers are not well understood and ascertaining of their geographical distribution is work in progress.

[1] I owe a debt of gratitude to Ana Stoykova for helping me make up my mind in this regard.

It has been argued that the first group of Bulgarian vernacular texts to come into being in the seventeenth century were the *togiva* texts. At least some of their creators were presumably speakers of a Central Balkan dialect that, according to Boriana Velcheva, can be localized in the vicinity of Troian. For an introduction to the discussion about the texts of type *togiva* and a list of the texts that belong to that category, see О. Младенова and Велчева (2013). It is clear that the language represented in the *togiva* texts is not completely homogenous. For instance, the exquisitely crafted compilation "On Repentance", attributed to John Chrysostom, has stylistic and linguistic features that set it apart from other *togiva* texts.

Visualization of typical areas of distribution of Greek and Romance loans and the construction imam videno versus the hypothetical localization of the speech variety featured in the Troian damaskin. Author of the map: Darina Mladenova



Legend

1. Thematic map of the idiolect of the Troian damaskin creator against the background of Bulgarian regional dialects: **1.1.** full set of coinciding diagnostics, based on the *Bulgarian Dialect Atlas*, vols. 3–4 (Стойков et al., 1964–1981); **1.2.** partial set of coinciding diagnostics according to the same database; **1.3.** enhanced set of coinciding diagnostics (Mladenova, 2007a);
2. Constructions of the type *имам видено* (Младенов, 2008, p. 196);
3. Distribution of the Greek loan *миндàл* 'almond' and its variants (Младенов, 2008, p. 218);
4. Distribution of the Romance loan *тѝмба* 'hill' (Младенов, 2008, p. 257).

Following in the steps of the pioneers, a fresh cohort of anonymous men of letters created the corpus of *togazi* vernacular texts soon afterwards. Demina discerned the silhouettes of two literary figures behind those texts. Their dialect must have been located in an adjacent region, still within the Central Balkan dialect area (see Demina, 1968–1985, but also О. Младенова, 2007).[2] Right from the outset, the collections of *togazi* texts tended to include a few *togiva* texts as well.

The unique features of the Troian damaskin have been explained as a consequence of its lineage. Save for the first section "On the Ten Commandments", the miscellany appears to be a copy of *togazi* texts brought forth by a member of the *togiva* team, who revised them to better match his linguistic and stylistic criteria (see Василев, 1984, 1993; О. Младенова & Велчева, 2013, pp. 69–70).

Despite all these intricacies, it is quite reassuring to discover that Hristov would not have reached significantly different conclusions had he based his analysis on the Tikhonravov version of "St. Symeon Stylites". My comparison of the Troian and the Tikhonravov versions of the data stemming from "St. Symeon Stylites" and included in Hristov's Appendix 11 brought to light just one relevant difference:

и тїѣ́ започе́ха да го съвлѣкѫ́ть,	и тїе започе́ха да го съблѣ́кѵвать,
и не могоха, защѡ̀ изгни́ло мѵ тѣло́то	и не могóха. защó бѣ́ше изгни́ло
и прилѣпи́ла се ри́зата мѵ	тѣло́то мѵ и прилѣ́пила мѵ се
(Tikhonravov damaskin;	ри́зата (Troian damaskin; Ивано-
Демина, 1968–1985, vol. 2, p. 54)	ва, 1967, p. 23)

'And they started to undress him and could not [do so] because his body had decayed and his shirt had got stuck'.

The underlined pluperfects Hristov discovered in the Troian version correspond to stand-alone participles with non-witnessed evidential semantics in the earlier Tikhonravov version. This matter should be studied further based on a complete comparison between all 18 *togazi* chapters of the Troian damaskin and their respective Tikhonravov counterparts before speculating on

[2] An ongoing areal-linguistic study of the temporal adverbs meaning 'then' within the Bulgarian/Macedonian continuum (Д. Младенова, 2023) could be pivotal in arriving at a more satisfactory identification of the geographical origin of early modern literature written in the vernacular.

why the compiler of the Troian damaskin felt compelled to substitute the evidential forms with pluperfects.

As none of the texts Hristov analyzed seem to stem from an area where twentieth-century research has located the use of perfect and perfect-like HAVE-constructions (see the map), a future project could address this gap by considering early modern texts authored by speakers of Western Macedonian dialects, such as manuscript No. 233 of the Ivan Vazov National Library in Plovdiv, written in 1810 and published in Поп-Атанасов (1985, pp. 127–147), or Ioakim Kŭrchovski's 1814 *Depiction of Christ's Dreadful Second Coming* (Кърчовски, 1814).

In any event, when exploring the usage of the perfect in seventeenth-century vernacular Bulgarian and later, scholars should rely, moving forward, on databases that are as linguistically uniform as possible. Since, as Hristov rightly states (see also Asenova, 2022, p. 150), current relevance brought to the fore by perfect forms is more prominent in dialogues, it would be a smart choice regarding the seventeenth century to start with texts of type *togazi*, which are, as a rule, richer in dialogues than texts of type *togiva*, and to limit oneself to the output of just one of the two contributors identified by Demina.

Finally, Hristov's empirical analysis has uncovered telling details of use that boost our comprehension of the semantic range of perfect constructions at different points in time. Here is one – the expressive use of the perfect in the Troian damaskin (Hristov, 2020, p. 297) – that will not go unnoticed by Balkanologists as an early example of the transposition of the perfect in the future, a shared characteristic of the Balkan verbal system (Asenova, 2022, pp. 160–161).

> М[о]лю вы бра́тїе, ско́ро идѣ́те и найдѣ́те го. а́ко ли́ го не на́йдете, тѫка вѣ́ке да нѣ е дошл҃ь ни́кой. 'I beg you, brothers, go right away and find him. If you don't [manage to] find him, no one [of you dare] come here anymore.' (Troian damaskin; Иванова, 1967, p. 24)

Like any inquiry, Hristov's meticulous diachronic study of the domain of the perfect at the two far ends of Europe adds only a fragment to a puzzle of greater proportions. I concur with the author that his contribution to knowledge in this book has three dimensions. First, the ammunition offered by the book allows linguists to push past long-standing antiquated views on the perfect, perpetuated not just in textbooks but also in recent scholarly publications. Second, Hristov's empirical research brings up evidence in support of certain explanations over others and aids scholars to make

strides in untangling the mysteries of a complex and pervasive grammatical structure. Third, his investigation has elucidated aspects of the diachrony of the perfect that are deserving of greater attention and will, hopefully, stimulate further research.

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Mówienie o przeszłości, która trwa w naszej teraźniejszości

Artykuł ten stanowi recenzję badań prowadzonych w oparciu o teorię, która łączy studia germańskie i słowiańskie, integrując analizę ilościową i jakościową. Ukazuje wzajemnie korzystną, symbiotyczną relację między teorią a badaniami empirycznymi, oferując cenne spostrzeżenia, które osoba zaznajomiona z teorią może wyciągnąć z ograniczonych danych

rozsianych w różnych tekstach napisanych w wielu językach i w różnych okresach. Dodatkowo książka pokazuje, w jaki sposób te odkrycia pozwalają na precyzyjniejsze formułowanie teorii.

Słowa kluczowe: recenzja; czas perfekt; gramatykalizacja; kontakt językowy; diachronia; ponowna analiza

Talking about the past that lingers in our present

This article reviews theory-guided research at the intersection of Germanic and Slavic studies that integrates quantitative and qualitative analysis. Showcasing a mutually beneficial symbiotic relationship between theory and empirical inquiry, the book details valuable insights that a theory-trained eye can glean from scant data scattered in diverse texts that are written in various languages at different points in time, and demonstrates how such findings in turn finetune the theory.

Keywords: review; perfect tense; grammaticalization; language contact; diachrony; reanalysis

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