

The Past Perfect in German, English, and Old Russian (Comparative analysis)

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Abstract: *The paper presents comparative analysis of the past perfect in German, English and Old Russian. It studies the formation of this complex tense and its use in these three languages. The past perfect doesn't exist in Modern Russian any more, but historical Russian past perfect conveyed more similarities with English and German past perfect than differences. These observations will be helpful in teaching the past perfect to the learners of these languages and translation of Old Russian documents.*

Key words: *Perfect, Past perfect, Old Russian, Plusquamperfekt, Indo-European languages, differences and similarities of Indo-European languages*

INTRODUCTION

The popularity of typological analysis of languages has been increased recently. The purpose of our paper is a comparative analysis of English, German and Old Russian Perfect tense. In linguistics, the perfect is a combination of aspect and tense, that calls a listener's attention to the consequences, at some time of perspective (time of reference), generated by a prior situation, rather than just to the situation itself. The time of perspective itself is given by the tense of the helping verb, and usually the tense and the aspect are combined into a single tense-aspect form: the present perfect, the past perfect (also known as the pluperfect), or the future perfect. The difference between the perfect and non-perfect forms of the verb, according to the tense interpretation of the perfect, consists in the fact that the perfect denotes a secondary temporal characteristic of the action. Namely, it shows that the denoted action precedes some other action or situation in the present, past, or future (Блох, 1983). The idea of the perfect conveying a secondary time characteristic of the action is quite a sound one, because it shows that the perfect, in fact, coexists with the other, primary expression of time.

The purpose of this paper is to examine the differences and similarities between existing past perfect tense in German, English and historical past perfect in Old Russian. In German and Old Russian this tense is called Plusquamperfekt, in English it is the past perfect. But we will refer to the term "the past perfect" to denote this tense in the three languages generally. The past perfect in these languages will be examined through its:

- a) formation
- b) general use

The study is specific as we will look at the three languages from the same language family and different subgroups. German, English and Russian belong to Indo-European language family but they are included in different subdivisions. One of the branches of Indo-European language family is Germanic languages. Western Germanic languages are sub branch of Germanic languages. English and German belong to this subgroup. Subsequently there are a lot of similarities between these two languages. The basic lexis is similar. In addition grammar issues also convey similarities. Russian is the part of Balto-Slavic languages, specifically to Eastern Slavic branch. Despite a comparable extent of historical proximity, the Germanic languages show less significant Slavic influence partly because Slavic migrations were mostly headed south rather than west. Slavic tribes did push westwards into Germanic territory, but borrowing for the most part seems to have been from Germanic to Slavic rather than the other way.

PLUSQUAMPERFEKT IN GERMAN

German Plusquamperfekt, like the Perfekt, is a complex past tense. It denotes an action which had happened before another past action. Plusquamperfekt is formed with the past forms of the auxiliary verbs *haben* (to have) or *sein* (to be) in Präteritum (the form

of past simple) and the past participle (Partizip II) of the main verb (გვენცაძე, 2000). The main verb expresses the meaning and doesn't change. Below is given the conjugation of *sein* and *haben*:

Singular

ich hatte gelesen
 du hattest gelesen
 er/sie/es hatte gelesen

Plural

Wir/ihr/sie/ Sie hatten gelesen

Singular

ich war gekommen
 du warst gekommen
 er/sie/es war gekommen

Plural

wir/ihr/sie/ Sie waren gekommen

Most of the German verbs take the auxiliary verb *haben*.

e.g. Ich **hatte** einen Brief **geschrieben**. Wir **waren** **gekommen**.

Plusquamperfekt with *sein* verb is formed if the main verbs denote (ანდრაზაშვილი, 2008; Helbig & Buscha, 1993; Griesbach, 1992):

- moving by transport or on foot: e.g. *kommen, gehen, fahren*, etc
- moving from one position to another: e.g. *aufstehen, einschlafen, wachsen*, etc.
- some verbs: *bleiben, begegnen, passieren, folgen, geligen, misslingen, geschehen*
- verbs *sein* and *werden*

e.g. "Sonntag. Der Tag des Rennens. Köster **hatte** die letzte Woche jeden Tag **trainiert**. Abends **hatten** wir dann bis in die Nacht hinein Karl bis aufs kleinste Schräubchen **kontrolliert, geschmiert und in Ordnung gebracht**. Jetzt **sassen** wir am Ersatzteillager und **warteten** auf Köster, der zum Startplatz **gegangen war**. (E. M. Remarque)

Plusquamperfekt is used to express such actions which preceded another past action; therefore this action is already completed in the past and it is connected to the past with its result, e.g. he had written – he had already completed his action. This kind of definition of Plusquamperfekt highlights the idea that Plusquamperfekt is not used separately. It requires another sentence with the verb Präteritum (the simple past), and which is logical continuation of the action in the previous sentence with Plusquamperfekt. According to გვენცაძე (2000), ანდრაზაშვილი (2008), Griesbach (1986) narration is created in two points of view: the first one foregoes the second in the point of view of time; the second line corresponds with the main plot. Plusquamperfekt is used to denote the first line of actions, which in its grammatical sense is completed and serves as a means to report already happened story/actions which is involved in narration, for example:

- Nachdem er das Museum besichtigt hatte, kehrte er ins Hotel zurück.*
 After he had seen the museum, he went back to the hotel
- Das letzte Mal hatte er mich vor zwei Jahren angerufen. Seitdem liess er nichts mehr von sich hören.*

He had called me two years ago, after I did not hear from him

- Sie erzählte mir, dass sie nie wieder Kontakt mit ihren früheren Kameraden gehabt hatte, bis auf dieses einzige Mal.*

He told me he had not had connections with his old friends except this only case.

THE PAST PERFECT TENSE IN ENGLISH

The past perfect is formed with *had* and the past participle. The past perfect is the past equivalent of the present perfect (Thomson & Martinet, 2001). The past perfect expresses an activity that was completed before another activity or time in the past (Azar, 1999). The auxiliary verb doesn't conjugate and the past participle does not change its form:

Affirmative: I/You/She/He/It/We/They had worked

Negative: I/You/She/He/It/We/They had not worked

Interrogative: had I/You/She/He/It/We/They worked?

Past perfect is not restricted to actions whose time is not mentioned, e.g. He had left his case on the 4.40 train. The past perfect can be used similarly for an action which began before the time of speaking in the past, and

a) was still continuing at that time or

e.g. *Ann had lived in a cottage for sixty years and had no wish to move to a tower block.*

b) stopped at that time or just before it

e.g. *Peter, who had waited for an hour, was very angry with his sister.*

c) For an action which stopped some time before the time of speaking

e.g. *He had served in the army for 10 years; then he retired and married.*

The past perfect is also the past equivalent of the simple past tense and is used when the narrator looks back on earlier action from a certain point in the past. Riddle (1987, p.5) indicates that "a stronger sense of looking back with a certain psychological distance that does the simple past". This distal sense does not necessarily imply that the action or event described happened in the distant past. It means that the past perfect is used to report about the actions or events which seem psychologically remote to the speaker than the simple past action. Riddle also explains the other semantic property of the past perfect which it gives to the actions or events; that is its completeness. This is inherent to the past perfect (p. 7). But if actions are given in the order in which they happened no past perfect tense is necessary. The past perfect is used in the time clauses with when, as soon as, till/until, before, after. The past perfect is often used in reported speech, e.g. He said he had been in England for ten years.

PLUSQUAMPERFEKT IN OLD RUSSIAN

The Modern Russian language has only three basic tenses: present, past and future. However due to such simplicity we need to introduce the concept of aspects. There are two aspects in Russian: the imperfective aspect and the perfective aspect. Aspects are only used in the past and future tense. Aspects are used to indicate if an action was completed successfully or is ongoing. To do this in English we use extra verbs like "had" and "have". Aspects are used to illustrate this difference; however their use in Russian is much more defined. The aspects are:

Imperfective - Incomplete, ongoing, habitual, reversed or repeated actions

Perfective - Actions completed successfully

However, in Old Russian there were four past tenses. These forms were inherited from the common Slavonic language through its Indo-European language-base. Two tenses were simple - aorist and imperfect; the other two were compound - perfect and plusquamperfekt. In Russian the word 'perfect' was borrowed from Greek and the other one from Latin.

In Old Russian, plusquamperfekt, or the distal past – was a complex past tense. It denoted past actions, which happened before another past action, i.e. "the past of the past tense" (Букатеви́ч, 1974). The plusquamperfekt is more rarely used in Old Russian than the perfect, and it is mainly used in complex sentences, e.g. и приде Ростовоу и въ то время сумьрль бяше Михалко (1-я Новгородская летопись по Синодальному списку, Букатеви́ч, 1974).

The plusquamperfekt is formed with the imperfective form (incomplete aspect) of the auxiliary verb and perfective forms (complete aspect) of the verb. The plusquamperfekt is usually translated in Modern Russian by perfective aspect in the past tense. In difference with Old Slavic which had only one form of plusquamperfekt, Old Russian distinguished two forms of this tense.

1. The first one, which was older, was formed with the past imperfective form (incomplete aspect) of the auxiliary verb *быти* and the second form (Perfective aspect) of the main verb (the participle) with the different endings expressing category of gender -лъ, -ла, -ло; e.g. бяхъ хвалилъ, -ла, -ло. The auxiliary verb, as well as the main verb, changed the ending according to the category of Person and Number.
2. The second form was produced by the perfect of the auxiliary verb *быти* and the second form (perfective aspect) of the main verb (the participle) with the different endings expressing category of gender -лъ, -ла, -ло; e.g. Есмь былъ (-ла, -ло) хвалилъ, -ла, -ло. The auxiliary verb, as well as the main verb, changed the ending according to the category of Person, Gender, and Number.

Later this system disappeared with the development of the category of Aspect. In Modern Russian the past tense is expressed with the part of the complex past tenses (the participle), which is the second form (perfective aspect) of the main verb with the endings -лъ, -ла, -ло.

CONCLUSION

The central point of our analysis is the distinction of the perfect between these three languages. In German and English the past perfect is widely used, on the other hand Modern Russian does not have the past perfect any more. Old Russian past perfect was simplified and in Modern Russian there is no compound form of the past tense. Even though we don't meet the past perfect in Modern Russian, we have observed the similarities and differences between these languages.

The following similarities were noticed:

- German, English and Old Russian have the formation of the past perfect tense in the similar way: an auxiliary + main verb (participle). The auxiliary verb is in the simple past/ Präteritum/ the past imperfective form
- The past perfect has the same meaning in all three languages; it denotes an action which had happened before another past action
- The Old Russian and German auxiliaries partly coincide (*sein* and *быти*); German and English auxiliaries also partly coincide (*have* and *haben*)
- The auxiliary verbs in German and Old Russian more or less denote the category of Person.
- The main verb (past participle) of English, German and Old Russian past perfect tense doesn't conjugate. However, Russian participle had the different endings for categories of Gender and Number.

Differences:

- Old Russian past perfect had two forms of the past perfect; the first, formed with the past form of the auxiliary and the second, which was more complex, with the perfect form of the auxiliary
- German Perfekt has two auxiliary verbs for different main verbs. Besides the category of Person the auxiliary verbs show the category of Number.

The knowledge of these similarities and differences can largely help language learners in understanding and applying grammar rules in practice. In more practical term language teachers can use the similarities to structure explanation of grammar rules. In addition understanding the similarities between languages can support translation from old documents into different modern languages. Considering all abovementioned it will be

interesting to continue further analysis of Perfect in three languages, specifically, its meaning.

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The paper is reviewed.