Participles and the 'have' perfect

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I discuss the recurring emergence of 'have'-perfects as a feature of Standard Average European. The key question is: why do we find this recurring pattern here? The conclusion is that this complex diachronic process is a product of regular language change in a particular syntactic and semantic context. The 'have'-perfect, formed from a verb originally meaning 'have' and a participle, is a recurring feature of Standard Average European languages (Haspelmath, 2001, 1998); although its widespread recurrence is sometimes explained by contact (Drinka, 2017, 2013), there is evidence that its development is an endogenous change, even in languages in close contact, e.g. Latin and Ancient Greek (Haverling, 2016).

The general story of the 'have'-perfect is well understood (Bybee et al., 1994; Dahl, 1985). The initial construction state involves a stative resultative participle predicated of the direct object of a verb of possession, as in *I have my bags packed* ('I have my bags in a state of being packed', McFadden and Alexiadou, 2010) which then undergoes reanalyses leading to the resultative perfect (*I have packed my bags*), and from that to the experiential, current relevance, and universal constructions. The related 'be' perfect also begins as a resultative perfect. The developments from the resultative perfect to the other types are semantic. The morphosyntactic reanalyses give rise to the (initial) resultative perfect.

The usual explanation for regular, directional change is grammaticalization. However, although this change involves involves grammaticalization of 'have' from transitive verb of possession to auxiliary, the development of the participle is not grammaticalization. In its earliest stages the participle is an adjective, at least in English and Latin (Mustanoja, 1960; Vincent, 1982), which raises a theoretical problem: how is there is a process Verb>Adjective>Verbal inflection? This pattern is not attested synchronically, despite the recurring development of the 'have'-perfect. The development of the participle does not fit the grammaticalization cline is *content word > grammatical word > clitic > affix*, because it is not an affix, or clitic, or a grammatical word in the understood sense (e.g. it is not an auxiliary): it is a word which realizes a non-finite morphosyntactic feature cell of the verb—at once a full word and an inflection. The same form in the initial stages is underspecified, becoming specialised as perfect or passive participle later in its history.

I establish a framework for describing the development of participles in terms of event structure, argument linking, and the lexical specification of morphosyntactic features. The relevant conditioning factors are as follows: (i) the syntactic/semantic space that participles occupy is mismatched with the syntactic argument taking properties of adjectives, and therefore contains a lot of latent ambiguity; (ii) initially, participles are underspecified, allowing for construction-specific developments in the context of the grammaticalization of 'have' and developments in the copula. In the initial stages, participles are both verb and adjective: a mixed category in the formal sense, similar to the gerund (Hudson, 2003; Malouf, 2000). This is possible because verbs and adjectives have orthogonal properties with respect to distribution and the default semantics of adjectives are compatible with the semantics of resultative participles. Adjectives are single-argument predicates; the association with a complex event structure creates the latent ambiguity that facilitates subsequent reanalysis.

In such situations, change can be accounted for in terms of the challenges of resolving ambiguity together with functional pressures driving specialization. In the case of such underspecified structures, pairings between lexical category and word meaning are more fluid. The ambiguities lie in establishing how the different semantic participants should be linked to syntactic arguments. Different associations will lead to an expansion of the construction types, but will also lead to a specialization of different participles because the argument linking possibilities are restricted. As a result, the same constructions should be expected to recur in languages that pair underspecified mixed-category participles with verbs of possession.

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