

Past and Present Non-Past: Parametric diachrony in the tense and aspect systems of ancient

Indo-European languages

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This paper is part of the project *Reconstructing the Syntax of Proto-Indo-European using the Parameter Comparison Method*. The aim of the project is to use the Parameter Comparison Method (PCM), as developed in Longobardi & Guardiano (2009), Guardiano & Longobardi (2017), etc., as a means of reconstructing the syntax of Proto-Indo-European (PIE). While these authors focused on the syntax of nominals, our project builds on the work of Baker & Roberts (2021) who established 87 parameters pertaining to the clausal domain. They established values for 36 contemporary languages, including 22 from the IE family. The current project extends the locus of investigation to the ancient IE languages.

Among the various complicating factors that arise when ascribing parameter values to ancient textual languages rather than contemporary languages is the effect of diachrony within the written record. In short, different stages of the same language may show different parameter values, introducing a level of complexity to the PCM that must be taken into account.

In this connection, I present an analysis of the parameters concerning the grammatical expression of tense and aspect in some ancient IE languages including Latin, Ancient Greek, Sanskrit and Hittite. There is a rich history of research into the tense-aspect systems of ancient IE languages, with far-reaching implications for the proto-language. Limiting myself to just this century see, e.g., Jasanoff (2003), Kiparsky (2005), Bartolotta (2009), Pooth (2009), Kloekhorst (2017), Willi (2018), Lavidas & Kulikov (2020), and references therein, for a snapshot of the volume of work on the topic. Crucially, the grammatical expression of tense-aspect is something that varies with time within the attested history of various languages (e.g., between Vedic poetry and Vedic prose, or between Old and Middle Hittite).

In this paper, I analyse the status of such changes within the PCM framework. I evaluate the complex relationship between the changes in the tense-aspect morphology of these languages, and their parameter values as captured by the PCM. I demonstrate that a level of surface variation in the form and function of tense-aspect morphology may give the lie to a relatively stable set of parameter values - equally, categorical shifts in parameter values may be masked by morphological continuity. This has implications both for our reconstructions of the tense-aspect system in PIE and our understanding of the relative changeability of parameters in the tense-aspect domain over time.

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