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An evidential perfect in Wangerooge Frisian

Sune Gregersen

ISFAS, Kiel University, Kiel, Germany

ABSTRACT

This paper analyses the use of verbal tense forms in Wangerooge Frisian, a West Germanic language spoken on the Wadden Sea island Wangerooge until the early twentieth century. Specifically, the use of the present, past, and perfect constructions is investigated in a corpus of texts from the nineteenth century. It is argued that the Wangerooge Frisian perfect could be used as a non-firsthand evidential strategy marking the propositional content as hearsay or inferred. While such evidential perfects are cross-linguistically well attested, they are generally thought to be uncommon in Western European languages. The Wangerooge Frisian case thus shows the value of lesser-studied vernaculars for the typology of European languages.

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1. Introduction

Perfect constructions developing evidential functions have been described for numerous languages of the world. However, it has been noted that while such evidential perfects are found in many Eurasian languages, they are rare in Western Europe. Most notably, they have been described for several Balkan, Baltic, and Caucasian languages (cf. e.g., Comrie 1976, 108–110; Kehayov 2008, 25–26; Plungian 2010, 19–20; Wiemer 2010, 66; 2022, 704). In this paper, I suggest that Wangerooge Frisian, an extinct Germanic language of northern Germany, had developed a non-firsthand evidential use of the perfect construction.

While the Wangerooge Frisian tense system was in many ways similar to the systems of neighbouring Germanic languages like German and English, the perfect construction could be used in ways which might at first glance seem surprising to speakers of these languages. As an example, compare the beginning of a Wangerooge Frisian fairy tale recorded in the mid-nineteenth century (1) with the beginning of one of the German fairy tales collected by the Brothers Grimm (2):

CONTACT Sune Gregersen s.gregersen@isfas.uni-kiel.de ISFAS, Kiel University, Olshausenstraße 40, 24098 Kiel, Germany

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(1) Wangerooge Frisian

Aínmool	***is***	*dër*	*'n*	*gro$_e$v*	***wizzin,***		
once	be.PRS.3SG	EXPL	INDF	count	be.PTCP		
dan	***hä***	*'n*	*gro$_e$t*	*slos*	***haivt.***		
DEM.3SG.M	have.PRS.3SG	INDF	big	castle	have.PTCP		
dan	***hä***	*ain*	*faun*	*un*	*ään*	*fent*	***haivt.***
DEM.3SG.M	have.PRS.3SG	one.F	girl	and	one.M	boy	have.PTCP
nu *is* *dan*		*bro$_e$r*		*is*		*up* *diu*	
now	be.PRS.3SG DEF.M	brother		be.PRS.3SG		on DEF.F	
dette *gans* *falsk.*							
sister	whole spiteful						

'Once upon a time there was [lit. "has been"] a count; he had [lit. "has had"] a big castle. He had [lit. "has had"] a daughter and a son. And the brother was [lit. "is"] very spiteful towards his sister.' ("King Hans and his children"; EhV 449.37)

(2) German

*Es **war** einmal ein König, der **hatte** zwölf Kinder, das **waren** lauter Buben, er **wollte** auch kein Mädchen haben und **sagte** zur Königin . . .*
'Once upon a time there was a king; he had twelve children, they were all boys, and he in fact didn't want a girl and said to the queen . . . '
("Die zwölf Brüder"; Grimm and Grimm 1812, 24)

Whereas the German fairy tale is narrated in the past tense, the Wangerooge Frisian tale begins in the perfect before shifting to the present tense in the last clause in (1).[1] The story then continues in the present tense before changing back to the perfect towards the very end. Several variations on this pattern are found in the Wangerooge Frisian corpus, which in addition to fairy tales consists of a number of other folkloric texts, descriptions of daily life in the nineteenth century, translations (mainly biblical), and a few autobiographical texts. In the following, I will analyse the uses of the periphrastic perfect in Wangerooge Frisian and suggest that this construction had developed a use as a non-firsthand evidential strategy. It could thus be used in fairy tales, such as in (1), to express that the narrated events had not been experienced by the speaker herself but were retellings of stories from someone else.

The paper is structured as follows: In Section 2, I give an introduction to evidentials – in particular perfects used as evidential strategies – and the

[1]Note that the two finite verbs in the last sentence (*is . . . is*) are not a periphrastic tense construction, but a type of verb "echoing" or *apo koinou* construction also attested in other West Germanic languages (Sassen 1967; Huesken 2001; Schwitalla 2003, 129–130). Its distribution and function in Wangerooge Frisian remain to be investigated.

cross-linguistic literature on this topic. Section 3 provides an introduction to Wangerooge Frisian and the corpus used for the analysis. Section 4 then presents an analysis of the tense system with a particular focus on the distribution of present, past, and perfect in narrative texts. In Section 5, I discuss a few possible alternative analyses and point to an apparent parallel in some Low German dialects which may shed more light on the Wangerooge Frisian case. Section 6 concludes.

2. On evidentials and perfects

Evidentiality as a linguistic phenomenon has attracted much attention in recent decades (see, e.g., Aikhenvald 2004, 2018; Aikhenvald and Dixon 2003; Chafe and Nichols 1986; Johanson and Utas 2000; Wiemer and Marín-Arrese 2022a). According to one characterization, evidential markers "indicate something about the *source* of the information in the proposition" (Bybee 1985, 184, italics in original). Aikhenvald (2004, 1) estimates that about a quarter of the languages of the world have an "evidentiality system", i.e., a dedicated set of markers for expressing information source; however, many more languages have what Aikhenvald calls "evidentiality strategies" (see Aikhenvald 2004: Ch. 4), i.e., evidential uses of morphemes which also have other functions, e.g., tense, mood, or person markers.

A well-known example of a rather elaborate evidential system in Aikhenvald's terms is found in Eastern Pomo (along with similar systems in other Pomoan languages; cf. e.g., McLendon 2003; Mithun 2020; Oswalt 1986; Willett 1988). McLendon (2003, 101–102) gives the following examples to illustrate the four-way evidential contrast in Eastern Pomo:

(3) Eastern Pomo (Pomoan; California)

a. *bi·Yá* *p^{h}a·bé-k^h-**ink'e***
hand burn-PUNCTUAL-SENSORY
'I burned my hand' (= the speaker can feel it)

b. *bé·k-al* *p^{h}a·bé-k-**ine***
3PL-PATIENT burn-PUNCTUAL-INFERENTIAL
'They must have gotten burned'

c. *bé·k-al* *p^{h}a·bé-k^h-**·le***
3PL-PATIENT burn-PUNCTUAL-HEARSAY
'They got burned, they say'

d. *mí·-p-al* *p^{h}a·bé-k-**a***
3SG-M-PATIENT burn-PUNCTUAL-DIRECT
'He got burned' (= the speaker was there)

The four evidential suffixes are as follows: "non-visual sensory" *-ink'e* (3a), used when the speaker has direct sensory (except visual) evidence; "logical inferential" *-(i)ne* (3b), used when the speaker infers on the basis of circumstantial evidence; "hearsay" *-·le* (3c), used for second-hand reports; and "direct knowledge" *-(y)a* (3d), used when the speaker has experienced the event directly, e.g., through sight or because she performed the action herself (for details, see McLendon 2003, 106–109).

Examples of evidential strategies include certain modal verbs in Germanic languages, which in addition to their "core" modal uses may express inferential and/or hearsay meanings. In Danish, for instance, the necessity modals *måtte* 'must, need to' and *skulle* 'shall, have to' have an inferential and a hearsay function, respectively, as shown in (4) with examples from Hansen and Heltoft (2011, 768, 772):

(4) Danish

a. *jord-en* *er* *hel-t* *våd,* *det* ***må***
ground-DEF be.PRS whole-ADVZ wet it must.PRS
lige *have* *regn-et*
just have.INF rain-PTCP
'The ground is all wet, it must have rained just now'

b. *CIA* ***skal*** *være* *dyb-t* *involver-et*
CIA shall.PRS be.INF deep-ADVZ involve-PTCP
'The CIA is said to be deeply involved'

Similar uses may be observed, e.g., in the German modals *müssen* and *sollen* (Mortelmans 2000), in Swedish *måste* and *skola* (Teleman, Hellberg, and Andersson 1999, 308–309, 312–324), and in Wangerooge Frisian *mut* and *sil* (Gregersen 2023b, 62, 68).[2]

The first linguists to use 'evidential' to describe a grammatical marker seem to have been Halpern (1946) in a description of Yuma/Quechan (Cochimí-Yuman; western USA) and Boas (1947) in his overview of Kwakiutl (Wakashan; British Columbia). The extension of the term to refer to a larger functional domain appears to be due to Jakobson ([1957] 1971 (for overviews of the history of research on evidentials, see, e.g., Jacobsen 1986, 3–7; Aikhenvald 2004, 11–16; Plungian 2010, 23–28). Since then, a number of different classifications

[2]These evidential meanings are sometimes described under the heading of 'epistemic modality' (e.g., by Hansen and Heltoft 2011; Teleman, Hellberg, and Andersson 1999), though some authors (e.g., van der Auwera and Plungian 1998) would only consider the inferential use in (4a) to be epistemic, not the reportative one in (4b); for other views of the relation between epistemic modality and evidentiality, see, e.g., de Haan (1999) or Boye (2012: Ch. 1). I will not go further into this terminological question here but merely state that I consider both (4a) and (4b) to be examples of evidential strategies.

of evidential meanings have been proposed. One influential study is Willett's (1988) cross-linguistic investigation of evidentials in 50 languages. Willett proposes a basic distinction between direct evidence and indirect evidence, which may in turn be a second-hand report (cf. the Eastern Pomo hearsay suffix in [3c] above) or some evidence triggering an inference (cf. the inferential suffix in [3b]). Languages may distinguish further subtypes, such as various kinds of direct evidence; the Eastern Pomo distinction between non-visual sensory evidence (3a) and direct knowledge (3d) would presumably be an example of this. Another influential typology is proposed in the larger survey by Aikhenvald (2004), who distinguishes between six basic semantic types, which may combine in different ways in the world's languages. Most languages with evidential systems were found to have only a two- or three-way contrast, e.g., between "firsthand" (direct) vs. "non-firsthand" (indirect) evidence, or between dedicated direct, hearsay, and inferential evidential markers. Various other classifications of evidential meanings have been proposed, e.g., Plungian (2010) and Hengeveld and Dall'Aglio Hattnher (2015). Despite their differences, these approaches all make a principled distinction between hearsay and inferential evidentials. However, while some languages have separate markers for these two meanings (e.g., Eastern Pomo *-(i)ne* vs. *-·le* or Danish *måtte* vs. *skulle*), i.e., make a structural distinction, in other languages, a single "non-firsthand" evidential may be used for both categories.

Another strand of research has focused on the diachronic development and areal distribution of various types of evidentials. It has been known for a long time (cf. Haarmann 1970) that many languages of Eurasia – in particular Eastern Europe and Central Asia – have evidential markers and that these are often derived from perfect constructions.[3] In some languages, a perfect construction can be used as an evidential strategy, while in other languages, a dedicated evidential – or an entire evidential system – has developed out of an older perfect construction. However, while the perfect-to-evidential pathway has been observed in many Eurasian languages, such a development appears to be rare in Western Europe, where evidential meanings are more frequently expressed, e.g., with modal verbs or auxiliaries, adverbs, or constructions with 'say' or 'seem' verbs (see the various contributions to Wiemer and Marín-Arrese 2022a). Perfect constructions in this part of the world have generally retained their more prototypical perfect function ("present relevance of a past situation";

[3]For other sources of evidential constructions, see the overviews in Aikhenvald (2004: Ch. 9) and Friedman (2018).

Comrie 1976, 52) or developed into a general past tense without any evidential value (such as the German *Präteritumschwund*; cf. Section 5). This leads Wiemer (2010, 66) to conclude that perfects in Western European languages "hardly ever show signs of evidential extensions".[4] The only widely reported exception is the inferential function of the perfect construction in some Scandinavian languages. As noted explicitly in the contrastive literature, these languages have an inferential use of the periphrastic perfect which cannot be rendered with a perfect construction in English (Elsness 2000; Haugen 1972). Haugen (1972, 136–137) cites the following Danish example from Wiwel (1901, 179) to illustrate the construction:

(5) Danish
[Context: A dentist has just extracted a tooth from a patient]

Dentist:	*Det*	*har*	*da*	*været*	*en*	*slem*	*tand*
	that	have.PRS	PTCL	be.PTCP	INDF	bad	tooth
	'That must have been a painful tooth' (inferred)						
Patient:	*Ja,*	*det*	*var*	*en*	*slem*	*tand*	
	yes	that	be.PST	INDF	bad	tooth	
	'Yes, that was a painful tooth' (positive knowledge)						

The Danish construction is discussed by Hansen and Heltoft (2011, 699–700) under the heading "evidential perfect"; examples of the same phenomenon in Swedish may be found in Teleman et al. (1999, 242), who term it the "modal" perfect. Note that this use of the perfect in Scandinavian appears to be limited to inferential meaning, which sets it apart from most of the evidential perfects in Eastern European languages. According to Wiemer (2010, 70–75), the evidential perfects in most of the languages in his survey can express both hearsay and inferential (i.e., non-firsthand) meanings.[5] In this paper, I will suggest that the periphrastic perfect in Wangerooge Frisian could also be used as an evidential strategy and that it could be used in both inferential and hearsay contexts. In other words, it is not restricted to inferential contexts like the Scandinavian perfects, but could also be used to report second-hand information in a way similar to evidential constructions in many languages of Eastern Europe and Central Asia. Before laying out this analysis, however, I will give some background information on the language and the material used for the investigation.

[4]The only Scandinavian language discussed by Wiemer (2010) is Swedish, but presumably because the chapter focuses on hearsay constructions, the Swedish inferential evidential perfect is not mentioned. No Scandinavian languages are included in the comparative volume by Wiemer & Marín-Arrese (2022a).
[5]The description of the Swedish perfect in Teleman et al. (1999, 242) actually suggests that the authors consider it to have hearsay uses as well. However, no clear examples of such a use are provided.

3. Wangerooge Frisian

3.1. The language

Wangerooge Frisian is an extinct West Germanic language which was spoken on the Wadden Sea island Wangerooge until the early twentieth century. Its closest extant relative is Saterlandic (*Seeltersk*), spoken in the Saterland region in Lower Saxony. Wangerooge Frisian and Saterlandic are sometimes described as dialects of a larger East Frisian language, which also included a number of sporadically attested dialects in present-day Lower Saxony; these likely went extinct during the eighteenth century (for details, see Versloot 2001a, 2001c).[6]

The Wangerooge Frisian community probably never numbered more than a few hundred speakers, who appear to have been linguistically endogamous and clearly recognized as a distinct group by the inhabitants of the mainland (see Gregersen 2023b, 1–3). The most important contact language was Low German, which the Wangerooge Frisians are reported to have spoken in addition to their first language. After a flood on New Year's Day 1855 destroyed the village on Wangerooge, most of the inhabitants were resettled on the mainland. This resulted in the disintegration of the speech community, which quickly assimilated to the Low German-speaking majority. A census taken in 1890 counted 32 speakers (Kollmann 1891, 384–385), and during a field trip in 1927, the linguist Theodor Siebs found seven remaining speakers, all of them elderly (Siebs 1931, 80). The last two speakers are reported to have died in 1950 (Versloot 2001b, 423).

3.2. Linguistic documentation

Although Wangerooge Frisian went extinct almost a century ago, the possibilities for linguistic work on the language are still very good. This is in large part due to two people: the landowner, civil servant, and autodidact linguist H. G. Ehrentraut (1798–1866) and his main consultant Anna Metta Claßen (1774–1846), with whom he did fieldwork on Wangerooge in the period 1837–41. The material collected by Ehrentraut consists of vocabularies, grammatical notes, and texts running to about 100,000 words. By far the most prevalent text type is fairy tales, but the corpus also contains anecdotes and other short narratives, descriptions of daily life on the island, and translations of Bible passages. A number of these texts were published by Ehrentraut himself (1849; 1854; abbreviated FA1 and FA2 in this paper),

[6]The current version of Glottolog subsumes all of these under "Ems-Weser Frisian" (glottocode sate1242), for which the alternative names "East Frisian" and "Saterlandic Frisian" are given (among many others; see http://glottolog.org/resource/languoid/id/sate1242). This has the unfortunate implication that Wangerooge Frisian is classified as a variant ("daughter") of Saterlandic, while in fact it was a closely related ("sister") language or dialect.

while the remaining material was edited and published by Versloot (cited as Ehrentraut and Versloot 1996; abbreviated EhV). In addition to the Ehrentraut material, a few other texts were collected during the nineteenth century. These include an anonymous translation of the Parable of the Prodigal Son published by Winkler (1874) and several texts collected by Enno Littmann in 1897 and by Theodor Siebs in the period 1884–1899 (published as Littmann 1922; Siebs 1923). Most of these were included in my investigation along with a selection of texts from the Ehrentraut material. In addition to these, further examples were excerpted from other texts in the Ehrentraut corpus when necessary.

Despite the abundant documentation, relatively little linguistic research has been carried out on Wangerooge Frisian. The relevant literature has so far been limited mainly to studies of individual morphological and phonological phenomena (e.g., Bosse 2012; Hoekstra 1998, 2008; Stiles 2008; Versloot 1996, 2002). A brief sketch of the phonology and morphology is provided in the handbook chapter by Versloot (2001b), while the first studies of syntactic phenomena – on the copula *heit* 'be (called)' and word order in complement clauses, respectively – have recently appeared (Gregersen 2023a; Hoekstra 2023). The present contribution is, to the best of my knowledge, the first study dealing with tense and related categories in the language. In order to provide some context for my proposal about evidential uses of the perfect, Section 4.1 will first present a sketch of the tense system of the language.

Before moving on to the linguistic analysis, a few caveats about the data are worth mentioning. First, and most obviously, because Wangerooge Frisian went extinct almost a century ago, it is impossible to elicit any further material or make substitution tests on the available examples. Any proposed linguistic analysis – certainly one concerning rather fine semantic distinctions – must therefore remain tentative. Second, it should be noted that the texts analysed here were not all elicited from the same speaker or at the same time. The Ehrentraut texts were collected around 1840, the translation from Winkler in 1871, and the texts from Littmann and Siebs at the end of the nineteenth century. It thus cannot be ruled out that any observed differences between the texts might be due to individual differences or language change in the course of the nineteenth century. Unfortunately, the Ehrentraut corpus contains only very little material of an autobiographical nature, i.e., texts recounting specific events which took place during the speaker's lifetime. Such texts are highly relevant for the study of evidential expressions, which is why I decided to include the autobiographical texts from Littmann and Siebs in the investigation, although these represent a slightly later diachronic layer. For what it is worth, these texts appear to be similar to the autobiographical material from Ehrentraut with regard to tense use, but it is of course possible that there might be certain "chronolectal" differences between these groups of texts. Finally, an unfortunate drawback to the

material is the almost complete lack of metadata. While we know the identities of the consultants for the Littmann and most of the Ehrentraut and Siebs material, little is known about the circumstances of the fieldwork. For instance, we do not know in which order the individual texts were collected, who else was present during the elicitation sessions, or whether the texts were first transcribed in shorthand and then re-elicited later.[7] In a few cases, this led to uncertainty about the interpretation of a perfect, such as the account of the breaking of a witch's spell in the text "Superstitions" (FA2.13–14), which suddenly changes from the first to the third person. This particular passage had to be left out of the analysis presented in the following section.

4. Analysis of tense use

4.1. Overview of tenses

The tense system in Wangerooge Frisian is fairly simple, consisting of a contrast between two inflected tenses, which I will call present (PRS) and past (PST), and two periphrastic tenses, perfect (PF) and pluperfect (PLUPF). The perfect and pluperfect are formed by combining one of the auxiliaries *wíze* 'be' and *hab* 'have' with the perfect participle of the main verb. Verbs inflect for person, number, and mood (indicative vs. imperative plus a rare subjunctive form which is mainly attested in proverbs). For the sake of illustration, the indicative paradigm of the strong (ablaut) verb *kriig* 'get' is given in Table 1.[8]

The present, past, and perfect tenses are all regularly found in the material, whereas the pluperfect is more rarely encountered. In the remainder of this

Table 1. Paradigm of *kriig* 'get'.

	PRS	PST	PF	PLUPF
1SG	*kriig*	*kreig*	*häb kriigiin*	*haid kriigiin*
2SG	*krichst*	*kreichst*	*häst kriigiin*	*haidst kriigiin*
3SG	*kricht*	*kreig*	*hää kriigiin*	*haid kriigiin*
1PL	*kriig(et)*	*kreigen*	*häb(t) kriigiin*	*haiden kriigiin*
2PL	*kriig(et)*	*kreigen*	*häb(t) kriigiin*	*haiden kriigiin*
3PL	*kriiget*	*kreigen*	*häbt kriigiin*	*haiden kriigiin*

[7]What is beyond doubt is that Ehrentraut transcribed the words of his consultants very carefully. There are numerous indications of this in the material, such as assimilations, deletions (usually indicated by an apostrophe, e.g., *ni'* for *nich* 'not'), and occasional comments on the story by the consultant. Such meta-narrative comments were also recorded by Ehrentraut, such as when the speaker abruptly ends a fairy tale because she cannot remember the rest of it: *nuu weit iik 'er nich moo fon* 'now I don't know any more of it' (EhV 449.220).

[8]Not all of the forms in Table 1 are attested in running text, but they can be inferred with certainty from Ehrentraut's notes. The suffixes between brackets do not appear when a 1PL or 2PL subject immediately follows the finite verb (e.g., *wii kriiget* or *kriig wii* 'we get').

section, I briefly describe the main uses of each tense form; Section 4.2 then zooms in on the functional division of labour between present, past, and perfect in narrative texts.

The present tense is used for situations which are contemporaneous with the time of utterance. This includes both ongoing and recurring events, as shown in (6).

(6) a. *lauk* *naa* *d'* *krog,* *wut* *hii* ***sjuth***
look.IMP.SG after DEF pot(M) whether 3SG.M boil.PRS.3SG
'Check the pot, whether it is boiling' (EhV 447.153)

b. *yaa* ***máckiit*** *uurlóngs* *uk* *wail* *'n* *snée-en*
they make.PRS.PL sometimes also PTCL INDF snow-ADJZ
mon *in* *'e* *wínter*
man in DEF winter
'Sometimes they [the children] also make a snowman in the winter' ("Children's games"; FA2.7)

Present tense forms can be used with future time reference, as shown in (7). One of the modal verbs *wul* 'will, want to' or *sil* 'shall, have to' may also be used to express future time (FA1.33).

(7) *wii* ***kúmmet*** *de* *sülf* *tiid* *wíider*
we come.PRS.PL DEF same time again
'We will come back around the same time' ("Death of T. J. Tannen and H. J. Hanken"; EhV 446.327)

In addition to these uses, the present tense can also be regularly found in narratives. As I will discuss in more detail below, stories often change between present and past or perfect, but may also be narrated entirely in the present tense, such as the version of the Cinderella story quoted in (8):

(8) *a'inmool* ***is*** *der* *'n* *dronk,* *deer*
once be.PRS.3SG EXPL INDF wedding there
weert *all* *daa* *liúud* *too* *nø'øget.* [...] *nuu*
become.PRS.PL all DEF.PL people to invite.PTCP now
gúnget *daa* *twoo* *fa'uner* *naa* *de* *dronk,* *un*
go.PRS.PL DEF.PL two girl.PL after DEF wedding and
den ***smíitert*** *yaa* *'n* *oo$_{e}$rt* *áriit* *in* *'t* *ääsk*
then throw.PRS.PL they INDF quart peas in DEF ash
'Once upon a time there was [lit. "is"] a wedding, and all the people were [lit. "are"] invited to that. [...] Now the two girls were [lit. "are"] going to the wedding, and then they threw [lit. "throw"] a quart of peas into the ashes ...' ("Äskenbridel Saunsidel"; FA2.80)

The past tense appears to have two main functions, one temporal and one modal. In the former, a situation is located temporally prior to the time of utterance. This is found both with episodic and recurring events. (9a) relates a specific episode in the speaker's life, whereas (9b) is from a description of the customs of the islanders and thus describes multiple recurring situations.

(9) a.

Un	*as*	*wi*	*in*	*Altenå*	***kaumen***,	*då*
and	when	we	in	Altona	come.PST.PL	then
fernaumen	*wi,*	*dat*	*'r*	*kriich*	***weer***	
hear.PST.PL	we	COMP	EXPL	war	be.PST.3SG	
tusken	*de*	*Tjuutsk*	*un*	*de*	*Dööin.*	
between	DEF	German	and	DEF	Dane	

'And when we arrived in Altona, we heard that there was a war between the Germans and the Danes'. ("Life of Christian Christians"; Littmann 1922, 20)

b.

daa	***snácketen***	*den*	*fon*	*fáriin*		*un*
DEM.3PL	talk.PST.PL	then	of	sail.GER		and
fríien,	*deer*	***bróo$_e$ten***	*daa*		*de*	
marry.GER	there	bring.PST.PL	DEM.3PL		DEF	
a'iven	*mit*	*weg,*	*un*	*prunt*	*uum*	*acht*
evening	with	away	and	exacly	at	eight
gíingen	*yaa*	*'niin.*				
go.PST.PL	they	home				

'Then they would talk about seafaring and about marriage, they would spend the evening with that, and exactly at eight o'clock they would go home'. ("Pastimes"; FA2.54)

In its modal use, the past tense expresses counterfactuality, as in (10). The pluperfect may also be used to express this, as described below.

(10)

won	*daa*	*twoo*	*oogën*	*nich*	*doo$_e$d* [...]		***weerën***,
if	DEF.PL	two	eye.PL	not	dead		be.PST.PL
dën	***giing***		*ët*	*laang*	*saa*	*nich*	
then	go.PST.3SG		it	long	so	not	

'If the two eyes were not closed [lit. "dead"], this would not go at all' (i.e., would not be allowed to happen) (EhV 447.228)

The perfect has a number of uses where a situation in the past is related to the time of utterance. Three of the four functions which are usually recognized for the English perfect (cf. Comrie 1976, Huddleston and Pullum 2002: 142–146) are also found in Wangerooge Frisian: resultative perfect (11), experiential perfect (12), and perfect of recent past (13).

(11) *deer* *kan* *wis* *nain* *frost* *bii* *kúmme,*
there can.PRS.3SG for.sure no frost by come.INF
iik ***häb*** *miin íirdappel* *gans* *djoo$_e$p* ***biidúulven***
I have.PRS.1SG my potato[PL] whole deep bury.PTCP
'For sure no frost can get there, I have buried my potatos very deep' (EhV 446.257)

(12) *daa* *quaa* *dan fent,* *hii* ***hää*** *noch*
then say.PRS.3SG DEF.M boy he have.PRS.3SG yet
siinleTHiig nain *minsk* ***úumbroo$_e$t***
ever no person kill.PTCP
'Then the boy says that he has never killed a person before' (EhV 449.157)

(13) *wut* ***hää*** *dait been farnacht* *dwelsk* ***wíziin***
what have.PRS.3SG DEF.N child last.night fretful be.PTCP
'How fretful the child was [lit. "has been"] last night!' (EhV 446.256)

In addition, I will argue that the perfect also had hearsay and inferential (i.e., non-firsthand) evidential uses. I will return to these in Section 4.2.

Finally, the pluperfect has two main functions. One is as a relative tense which presents an event as happening prior to another event in the past, as in (14).

(14) *daa* *béener* ***wéeren*** *naa* *der* *dúunen*
DEF.PL child.PL be.PST.PL after DEF dunes
wíziin, *un* *ka'umen* *iin* *un* *que'iden* [. . .]
be.PTCP and come.PST.PL home and say.PST.PL
'The children had been to the dunes [PLUPF] and came home and said [PST] . . . ' (EhV 449.174)

In the other use, the pluperfect presents an event as counterfactual, as in (15). In this function, it competes with the simple past tense (cf. [10] above), but the distribution of the two forms has yet to be investigated in detail.

(15) *won* *hii* *moo* ***haivt*** ***haid,*** *den* ***haid***
if he more have.PTCP have.PST.3SG then have.PST.3SG
hii *der* *noch* *moo* *far* ***roo$_e$t***
he there even more for give.PTCP
'If he had had [PLUPF] more [i.e., money], then he would have paid [PLUPF] even more for it' ("King Daagoobertus"; 449.117)

As shown by this overview, the four tense forms have a number of clearly distinct uses, but there are also some contexts where more than one tense form is possible. I now turn to the similarities and differences between present, past, and perfect in narrative texts.

4.2. Present, past, and perfect

Some of the examples given above have already illustrated the main issue under investigation here: When telling stories in Wangerooge Frisian, speakers could apparently use three of the four tense constructions, present, past, and perfect. To investigate what determined the choice between these forms, I made a selection of texts from the corpus, amounting to c. 29200 running words in total, and analysed the tense use in these sentence by sentence. The texts are listed in Table 2. In the last column, the patterns of tense use in the texts are summarised; round brackets indicate that a form is found sporadically throughout the text, whereas square brackets indicate that a passage in the perfect is used to introduce or conclude the narrative. This pattern is discussed in more detail below.

The analysed material was divided into a number of broad text types. Ethnographic texts describe daily life and customs on Wangerooge, whereas the type 'real-life events' covers retellings of specific historical events that happened on the island in the recent past. These types are clearly nonfictional. Fairy tales, on the other hand, are fictional stories taking place in an unspecified past, either far away from Wangerooge (often in *de Turkíi* 'Turkey') or at an unspecified location. The type 'anecdote' covers a number of short texts with a more ambiguous status. Like fairy tales, they often contain clearly supernatural elements, e.g., ghosts or talking animals, but they only tell of a single event or episode rather than a more elaborate narrative. The characters may be unspecified or named people from the island. Finally, two translations of the Parable of the Prodigal Son were included. A number of text files in the corpus consist of several shorter texts and fragments belonging to more than one type, as indicated in the third column in Table 2.

As Table 2 shows, descriptions of life on the island – i.e., ethnographic texts – are in the past or present. The choice depends on whether the

Table 2. Analysed texts.

Text	Reference	Text type(s)	Words	Main tense(s)
The thumbling	EhV 449.178–179	Anecdote	172	[PF +] PRS [+ PF]
Dau and his bride	EhV 449.180	Anecdote	76	PF + PRS
Crazy Triinnk	EhV 449.182	Anecdote	92	PF + PRS
Fairies	FA2.7–9	Anecdotes + ethnographic	430	PST + PRS + PF
Superstitions	FA2.13–20	Anecdotes + ethnographic	2,560	PST + PRS + PF
Children's games	FA2.4–7	Ethnographic	795	PST + PRS
Seal hunting	FA2.35	Ethnographic	300	PRS
Remarriage	FA2.51	Ethnographic	65	PST
Pastimes	FA2.53–54	Ethnographic	145	PST
How we hunt seals	Littmann 16–19	Ethnographic + real-life events	512	PRS + PST
Death of T. J. Tannen and H. J. Hanken	EhV 446.326–338	Real-life events	2,000	PST + PRS (+ PF)
The old village	Littmann 10–15	Real-life events	606	PST
Life of Christian Christians	Littmann 20–27	Real-life events	967	PST (+ PF)
Shooting seals	Siebs 240	Real-life events	458	PST (+ PRS)
Catching seals	Siebs 241	Real-life events	221	PST
The wine soup	Siebs 242	Real-life events	345	PST
The old village	Siebs 243	Real-life events	281	PST
Äskenbridel Saunsidel	FA2.80–81	Fairy tale	455	PRS
Müüsken and Metwurst	FA2.81–82	Fairy tale	275	[PF +] PRS
The three witches	EhV 449.9–12	Fairy tale	540	[PF +] PRS
King Hans and his children	EhV 449.37–101	Fairy tale	9,290	[PF +] PRS [+ PF]
King Daagoobertus	EhV 449.102–130	Fairy tale	4,680	[PF +] PRS
The deceived witch	EhV 449.183–185	Fairy tale	425	PRS
The clever farmgirl	EhV 449.210–214	Fairy tale	736	[PF +] PRS [+ PF]
The three brothers	EhV 449.221–228	Fairy tale	1,290	PRS (+ PF)
Parable of the Prodigal Son	Winkler 171–173	Bible story	963	[PF +] PST
Parable of the Prodigal Son	Siebs 247–248	Bible story	541	PST

practices in question still applied when the texts were recorded. Examples are given in (6a) and (9b) above. Accounts of specific real-life events are generally told in the past tense, as in (9a). In one of the analysed texts, on the arrest and execution of two Wangerooge men during the Napoleonic occupation of Oldenburg, the narrative changes between past and present at several points. The change to present tense usually happens at the start of a new episode in the narrative, as in (16):

(16) *daa* *kaúmen* *yar* *wü'üfer* *noch* *húulen* *un*
then come.PST.PL their wife.PL even moan.GER and
schríien *mit* *yar* *litk* *béener* *up* *éerem, man* *yaa*
cry.GER with their little child.PL on arm but they
kreígen *nich* *'n* *wood* *mit* *yam* *too* *sprícken,*
get.PST.PL not INDF word with them to speak.GER
daa *híngster* *wúurden* *gliik* *de* *swü'üpuu*
DEF.PL horse.PL become.PST.PL at.once DEF whip
roo$_e$t. *as* *yaa* *daa* *up* *Fúunuux* ***kúmmet,***
give.PTCP as they then on Carolinensiel come.PRS.PL
daa ***is*** *deer* *'n* *schedárm* *leútnant,* *daa*
then be.PRS.3SG there INDF police lieutenant then
weert *yaa* *deer* *glik* *fon* *dan* *leútnant*
become.PRS.PL they there at.once by DEF.M lieutenant
farhéerd
interrogate.PTCP

'Then their wives came [PST] moaning and crying with their little children on their arms, but they did not get to exchange a single word [PST], the horses were given the whip at once [PST]. As they then **arrive** in Carolinensiel [PRS], then there **is** a police lieutenant there [PRS], and then they **are interrogated** [PRS] by the lieutenant on the spot.' ("Death of T. J. Tannen and H. J. Hanken"; EhV 446.331)

In the fairy tales and anecdotes, we see a different pattern. These text types are not narrated in the past tense, but either mainly or entirely in the present tense. Examples of stories told entirely in this "narrative present" include the version of Cinderella story quoted in (8) and the tale "The deceived witch" (EhV 449.183–185). However, there are also several examples of fairy tales and anecdotes which change between the

present tense and the periphrastic perfect throughout, or which begin with a sentence or a longer passage in the perfect before changing to the present tense. In (17), I quote one of the anecdotes in the material in its entirety. For the sake of idiomaticity, the perfect forms are rendered by the past tense in the English translation, but the Wangerooge Frisian tense is indicated between brackets, as in (16).

(17)

a'inmool	*hää*	*der*	*'n*	*faun*	*wíziin.*	*djuu*
once	have.PRS.3SG	EXPL	INDF	girl	be.PTCP	she
hää	*mal*	*Triinnk*		*híitiin,*	*yuu*	*is*
have.PRS.3SG	crazy	Triinnk		be.called.PTCP	she	be.PRS.3SG
gans	*farkíimiin*	*wíziin*		*in*	*'t*	*fríien,*
whole	lose.PTCP	be.PTCP		in	DEF	marry.GER
saa géeren	*hää*	*yuu*	*frii*	*weil.*		*nuu*
so gladly	have.PRS.3SG	she	marry.INF	want.PTCP		now
hä'bbet	*yaa*	*täft*	*yar*	*ónniik*	*saa*	*'n*	*net*	*stíTHii*
have.PRS.PL	they	beside	their	stove	so	INDF	nice	place
too 'n	*widz.*	*daa*	*quaa*	*yuu:*	*deer*	*sil*		*yar*
to INDF	cradle	then	say.PRS.3SG	she	there	shall.PRS.3SG		their
widz	*staun.*	*man*	*deer*	*búve*	*hää*	*de*	*ax*	
cradle	stand.INF	but	there	above	have.PRS.3SG	DEF	axe	
híngen	*an*	*de*	*balk.*	*daa*	*quaa*	*yuu:*	*deer*	
hang.PTCP	on	DEF	beam	then	say.PRS.3SG	she	there	
mut	*de*	*ax*	*dánne,*	*den*	*won*	*de*	*ax*	
must.PRS.3SG	DEF	axe	away	because	if	DEF	axe	
deer	*'erdílle*	*falt,*		*un*	*falt*	*in*	*'e*	
there	down	fall.PRS.3SG		and	fall.PRS.3SG	in	DEF	
widz,	*den*	*is*	*'t*	*been*	*doo$_e$d.*	*un*	*hää*	
cradle	then	be.PRS.3SG	DEF	child	dead	and	have.PRS.3SG	
noch	*nain*	*bre'idgummel*	*haivt,*		*feel*	*we'iniiger*	*noch*	
yet	no	bridegroom	have.PTCP		much	less	yet	
'n	*been.*							
INDF	child							

'Once upon a time there was a young woman [PF]. Her name was crazy Triinnk [PF], she was completely lost in thoughts of marriage [PF], so badly she wanted to marry [PF]. Well, next to the stove they have such a nice place for a cradle [PRS]. Then she says [PRS]: There their cradle has to stand [PRS]. But above it the axe was hanging on the beam [PF]. Then she says [PRS]: The axe has to be moved [PRS], because if the axe falls down from there [PRS], and falls into the cradle [PRS], then the child is dead [PRS]. And she did not even have a groom yet [PF], let alone a child.' ("Crazy Triinnk"; EhV 449.182)

One of the fairy tales in the material, "King Hans and his children", also begins and ends in the perfect. The beginning was quoted in (1) above. The remainder of the fairy tale is told in the present tense until the last few sentences, where the narrator concludes the story in the perfect, as seen in (18):

(18) *un* *de* *ka'izder* *is* *gans* *fargnø'øgt* *dait*
and DEF emperor be.PRS.3SG whole content COMP
hi *sin* *wüüf* *un* *sin* *twein* *fë'nter* *hää;* *un* *diu*
he his wife and his two.M boy.PL have.PRS.3SG and DEF.F
løøv *diu* *wikt* *yam* *nich,* *diu* *kaizderin* ***hää***
lion 3SG.F leave.PRS.3SG them not DEF.F empress have.PRS.3SG
aber *man* *thriiuu* *jeer* *déernaa* ***líbbet,*** *un* *yu*
however only three year thereafter live.PTCP and she
is *sa* *gottsfü'rchtiig* *wizzin,* *yu* *hää*
be.PRS.3SG so devout be.PTCP she have.PRS.3SG
hiri *áltiid* *biischä'ftiigët* *mit* *Gaad,* *an* *all* *dait* *sto$_e$t* *un*
her always occupy.PTCP with God on all DEM.N pomp and
hóochmood *hää* *yu* *nain* *plëzéer* *haivt.*
splendour have.PRS.3SG she no pleasure have.PTCP

'And the emperor is very happy [PRS] that he has his wife and his two sons again [PRS]; and the lion does not leave their side [PRS], but the empress only lived for three years after that [PF], and she was very devout [PF], she was always occupied with God [PF], she did not take any pleasure in all that pomp and splendour [PF].' ("King Hans and his children"; EhV 449.101)

In this tale, the passages in the perfect thus appear to provide a kind of frame around the main narrative, demarcating when the narrator and listener(s) as it were enter and leave the fictional world.

What these anecdotes and fairy tales have in common is that they are most likely retellings of stories which the consultant had heard from others. This sets them apart from accounts of real-life events, such as those cited in (9a) and (16), where the speaker is talking about events that (s)he has first-hand knowledge of. My suggestion is that this distinction is the key to explaining the differences in tense usage: the past tense was the default choice when recounting events which one had direct knowledge of, whereas stories reported from others were told in a combination of the present and perfect rather than the past tense. It is important to stress that such "renarrated" stories were apparently never told entirely in the perfect. The perfect thus did not function as an obligatory hearsay evidential which had to be used in all clauses

containing reported information. Rather, it served as an optional evidential strategy highlighting that the speaker did not have direct knowledge of the narrated events. From the texts analysed here, it seems that it was often used as a kind of scene-setting device introducing (and sometimes concluding) the main narrative, which would then be told mainly in the present tense.

Additional support for the analysis of the perfect as an evidential strategy comes from two of the anecdotes in the account of "Superstitions" (FA2.13–20). In these, the perfect is used alongside a hearsay evidential construction with the modal verb *sil* 'shall, have to'. In both cases, the clause with *sil* is even introduced by an inquit formula like *yaa que'iden* 'they/people said', explicitly pointing to the hearsay nature of the tale. One of these passages is quoted in (19).[9]

(19)

den	*hää*	*hii*	*in*	*siin*	*fiin*	*blau*	*klóo$_e$der*
then	have.PRS.3SG	he	in	his	fine	blue	clothes
longs	*yar*	*píizel*	*líipiin.*		*dait*	*hää*	
along	their	living.room	walk.PTCP		that	have.PRS.3SG	
saa	*thríiuu*	*jeer*	*döör*	*duurd.*		*yaa*	*que'iden,*
so	three	year	through	last.PTCP		they	say.PST.PL
pastóor	*sul*	*him*	*toolést*	*fardríiviin*		*hab.*	
vicar	shall.PST.3SG	him	at.last	exorcise.PTCP		have.INF	

'Then he [a ghost] walked around outside their living room in his fine blue clothes [PF]. That went on for about three years [PF]. People said [PST] that the vicar supposedly exorcised him at last [PST]'. ("Superstitions"; FA2.18)

The perfect is also occasionally found in reported speech, such as in (20), from the fairy tale "The three witches". Here, the steersman of ship tells the captain how he overheard the witches conspiring to put a spell on the ship (which enabled him to break the spell). The steerman's account is retold almost entirely in the perfect:[10]

[9]The other is found in FA2.16 (*yaa quídert. dait sil wis passéerd wíze* 'People say: That is surely supposed to have happened'). These examples both contain the rare perfect infinitive form (*fardríiviin hab* 'have exorcised', *passéerd wíze* 'have happened') as a complement of the modal verb *sil* 'shall, be supposed to'. Its function here is apparently only to express anteriority with respect to the event time. A more direct translation of the final sentence in (19) might be 'They said that the vicar was supposed to have exorcised him at last'.

[10]The exception is the last clause *as won hi sliip* 'as if he was asleep', which is in the past tense. This may be because the clause is counterfactual (cf. Section 4.1).

(20) *nu* *fartäält* *de* *stiurmon* *dait* *jeen* *dan*
now tell.PRS.3SG DEF steersman that against DEF.M
schipper, *dat* *dait* *häbbet* *ya* *an* *bod* *mit* *oren*
captain COMP that have.PRS.PL they on board with RECP
snacket *un* *hi* *hä* *in* *de* *kooii* *lin,*
talk.PTCP and he have.PRS.3SG in DEF bunk lie.PTCP
un *hä* *dait* *herd,* *un* *ya* *häbbet*
and have.PRS.3SG that hear.PTCP and they have.PRS.PL
ment *hi* *hä* *slipin* *un* *hi*
believe.PTCP he have.PRS.3SG sleep.PTCP and he
hä *ni'* *slipin,* *hi* *hä* *beerd*
have.PRS.3SG not sleep.PTCP he have.PRS.3SG act.PTCP
as won *hi* *sliip*
as if he sleep.PST.3SG

'Now the steersman tells the captain [PRS] that they [the witches] had arranged this on board [PF] while he was lying in his bunk [PF] and heard it [PF], and they thought [PF] that he was asleep [PF], but he was not asleep [PF], he was only acting [PF] as if he was asleep [PST]'. ("The three witches"; EhV 449.11)

Finally, in a fairy tale not analysed in full for this study, an example of an inferential use of the perfect was found, i.e., the kind of evidential meaning also observed in the Scandinavian languages (cf. Section 2). In the passage in question, three golden rings found in the belly of a fish lead the characters to conclude that the child who wore the rings must be dead:

(21) *nu* *kan* *diu* *krónkënuppaster* *doch* *sjoo* *dat*
now can.PRS.3SG DEF.F nurse(F) surely see.INF COMP
yar *been* *nu* *do$_e$d* *is,* *den* *dait* *sint*
their child now dead be.PRS.3SG since that be.PRS.PL
siin *thre* *golen* *ring,* *da* *fisk* ***häb't***
his three golden ring[PL] DEF.PL fish[PL] have.PRS.PL
sin *finger* *up* ***frittin*** *un* ***häb't***
his finger[PL] up eat.PTCP and have.PRS.PL
da *golen* *ring* *mit* ***íinslickiin***
DEF.PL golden ring[PL] with swallow.PTCP

> 'Now the nurse can surely see [PRS] that their child is dead [PRS], because those are his three golden rings [PRS]; the fish must have eaten his fingers [PF] and swallowed the golden rings along with them [PF].' (EhV 449.29)

Of course, the fact that the Wangerooge Frisian perfect could be used to express inferential meaning does not prove that it also had a hearsay function (cf. the Scandinavian languages which have the former, but not the latter). It shows, however, that the meaning of the perfect in Wangerooge Frisian had been extended to the evidential domain and provides a likely bridging context between the older perfect function and the hearsay meaning: Inferential meanings like the one in (21) have been described as a link between perfect and hearsay in several languages (see, e.g., Bybee, Perkins, and Pagliuca 1994, 96–97; Aikhenvald 2004, 112–116; Greed 2018). That inferential uses of the perfect appear to be very rare in the surviving texts – (21) is the only unambiguous example I have found – is probably due to the nature of the material. While there are numerous examples of renarrated stories, i.e., contexts where hearsay evidential strategies are to be expected, there appear to be very few contexts where a speaker or character makes a conclusion on the basis of visual (or other sensory) evidence, i.e., prototypical inferential evidential contexts.

Another marginal phenomenon in the corpus is fictional stories told in the past tense. The only exceptions among the texts analyzed here are the two translations of the Parable of the Prodigal Son published by Winkler (1874) and Siebs (1923). Being close translations of a biblical story, these texts should obviously be approached with care. In the German text, the story is narrated in the past tense, and this was probably translated directly in the Wangerooge Frisian version.[11] However, one of the two translations actually begins with a sentence in the perfect before changing to the past tense:

(22)	*Der*	*is*	*ainmool*	*än*	*sjeel*	*wisiin,*
	EXPL	be.PRS.3SG	once	INDF.M	man	be.PTCP
	dan	*haid*	*twein* *fenter.*	*Dan*	*jungst*	*fent* *fon*
	DEM.M	have.PST.3SG	two.M boy.PL	DEF.M	youngest	boy of
	da	*beith* *queid*	*to*	*siin*	*bab* [. . .]	
	DEF.PL	both say.PST.3SG	to	his	father	

[11]Neither Winkler (1874) nor Siebs (1923) states which German Bible translation the Wangerooge Frisian text was based on, but because the parish of Wangerooge was Lutheran, it was almost certainly a version of Martin Luther's translation. I have checked three editions which would have been available in the late 1800s (Luther 1744, 1788, 1842), and in all three, the Parable of the Prodigal Son (Luke 15: 11–32) is narrated in the past tense.

> 'Once upon a time there was a man [PF], he had two sons [PST]. The youngest of the two sons said to his father [PST]...' (Winkler 1874: 171)

It is impossible to say for certain why the perfect was used in the initial sentence, but one possible explanation is the frequent use of the perfect in renarration – because it was so often used to begin fairy tales and anecdotes, it is likely that it had become conventionalized as a kind of introductory formula indicating that the speaker did not have first-hand knowledge of the events of the story. While the use of the past tense in the Parable of the Prodigal Son may not have been representative of native Wangerooge Frisian usage, (22) at least suggests that combining the perfect and the past tense was not ungrammatical.

5. Discussion

In the previous section, I have proposed that the Wangerooge Frisian perfect could be used as an evidential strategy, but it is of course worth considering other possible analyses which might explain the observed distribution. In this section, I will discuss two alternative analyses and then point to an apparent Low German parallel which requires further investigation.

The Wangerooge Frisian perfect construction is formally very similar to the one in German (and many other European languages), consisting of one of the auxiliaries 'be' or 'have' and the perfect participle. It is well known that some (southern) German dialects have replaced the simple past tense with the periphrastic perfect in most or all contexts, a process known in German linguistics as the *Präteritumschwund* (Fischer 2018; see also Lindstedt 2000, 371–373; Thieroff 2000, 282–286; Schwitalla 2003, 136–138). One might wonder if the Wangerooge Frisian tense system was also in the process of replacing the older past tense with the perfect, and if the distribution described above rather represents a system in flux, with the perfect gradually encroaching upon the terrain of the past tense. However, the corpus material clearly does not support such an analysis. As shown in Table 2, accounts of real-life events are told in the simple past, not the perfect (see also examples [9a] and [16]). This also holds for the most recent autobiographical texts in the corpus, which were collected by Th. Siebs in 1899, cf. (23)[12]

[12]I have retranscribed Siebs' complicated phonetic transcription in the practical orthography used in EhV. See Siebs (1923, 240) for the original text with German translation.:

(23) *aimooel* ***weeren*** *wii mit twoo schüüpuu un*
once be.PST.PL we with two ship.PL and
wailen *wäg too siiliichfangen. nuu* ***laigen*** *wii*
want.PST.PL away to seal.catching now lie.PST.PL we
mit de schüüpuu in 'e grooet balg; dåå
with DEF ship.PL in DEF big creek then
giingen *wii mit de jäl nåå 't grooet rif*
go.PST.PL we with DEF dinghy to DEF big shoal

'Once we were with two ships [PST] and wanted to go and catch seals [PST]. Now we were lying with the ships in the main tidal creek [PST]; then we went to the big shoal in the dinghy [PST].' (Siebs, "Shooting seals")

There is thus no evidence of a general *Präteritumschwund* in Wangerooge Frisian. However, one might imagine a weaker version of this hypothesis. Perhaps, the past and perfect were still available forms in the language, but the functional distinction between them was in decline so that they could be used more or less interchangeably. A situation like this has indeed been described for some German varieties which have not experienced a total loss of the old past tense, but where there is no longer a strict division of labour between the past and the perfect. Writing on East Franconian, for instance, Harnisch (1997, 120) characterizes the past and perfect constructions as "merely two variant expressions for one and the same 'past'"; see also Fischer (2018, 67–72) on Hessian dialects. If something similar was also the case in Wangerooge Frisian, however, the distribution of the tenses presented in Section 4 becomes very mysterious. Of course, both the past and perfect were used to talk about past situations, but distinct functions can be identified, and the two constructions were not merely two ways to express the same meaning.

Another possibility which deserves to be considered is that the perfect was indeed functionally distinct from the past tense, but that its use in fictional texts was not evidential in nature. Perhaps, the function of the perfect in examples like (1) and (17) was merely to indicate that the story belonged to a particular genre. Such narrative tenses have been described in several languages, e.g., in Siberia and western North America (Aikhenvald 2004, 116). Greed (2018, 954–956) discusses the development of an evidential perfect into a narrative tense in some dialects of Even (Tungusic, Siberia). This construction is used in fairy tales and other traditional narratives, e.g., about historical events which took place before the speaker's lifetime. Greed (2018, 956) characterizes this use as "purely a genre token", marking that the story belongs to a particular narrative genre. An analysis along these lines would certainly also be able to explain many instances of the perfect in the Wangerooge Frisian corpus, and it cannot be ruled out that the construction

had developed (or was developing) some characteristics of a "genre-marking" tense, being conventionally associated with fairy tales and other traditional narratives. However, this would still be compatible with an evidential analysis, as many languages have been observed to employ evidentials as "tokens" of narrative genres (see Aikhenvald 2004, 310–315 and references there). Note also that there are some instances of the perfect used to report second-hand information (cf. [20] above) where a purely genre-marking function seems quite unlikely.

Finally, I wish to point to an apparent parallel in Low German, a close relative – and the closest neighbour – of Wangerooge Frisian. The distinction between past and perfect in Low German has been characterized as subtle and not always clear-cut (Reershemius 2004, 71; Saltveit 1983, 293), and a closer investigation of this would certainly be of interest in its own right. For my purposes, however, what is especially interesting is that there are hints in the literature that some Low German dialects had evidential uses of the perfect. For instance, in his overview of the syntax of the dialect of Glückstadt, Bernhardt (1903, 18) suggests that "You report an event in the past tense when you were there yourself, the perfect indicates that you heard it from someone else". He gives the following examples to illustrate the difference[13]

(24) Low German

a. *hüt* *morgen* *keem* *eener* *an* *håben*
today morning come.PST.3SG one.M at harbour
op *schreckliche* *wis'* *to* *schåden*
on terrible way to harm
'This morning on the harbour someone had a terrible accident [PST]'
(the speaker was there)

b. *hüt* *morgen* *is* *eener* [*an* *håben* *op*
today morning be.PRS.3SG one.M at harbour on
schreckliche *wis'*] *to* *schåden* *kåmen*
terrible way to harm come.PTCP
'This morning on the harbour someone had a terrible accident [PF]'
(the speaker was told)

A similar observation is made in passing by Mussaeus (1829, 73) on Mecklenburg Low German, who writes that the perfect "sometimes has the

[13]The words between square brackets in (24b) were left out by Bernhardt (1903), but supplied here from the context.:

connotation that one knows it from hearsay". Furthermore, some Low German fairy tales contain examples of a perfect/present alternation very similar to the one observed in the Wangerooge Frisian material. This is found in several of the tales collected by Wilhelm Wisser in northeastern Holstein. Consider (25), from the beginning of the story "Hans with the wooden cow":

(25) Low German

Dạr	*is*		*mạl*	*'n*	*Mann*	*weß,*	*de*	
EXPL	be.PRS.3SG		once	INDF	man	be.PTCP	DEM.M	
hett		*'n*	*Sọ̈hn*	*hatt,*		*de*	*hett*	*Hans*
have.PRS.3SG		INDF	son	have.PRCP		DEM.M	have.PRS.3SG	Hans
hêten.		*Dumm'*		*Hans*	*hebbt*		*se*	*ümmer*
be.called.PTCP		stupid		Hans	have.PRS.PL		they	always
secht.		*As*	*he*	*ut*	*de*	*Schôl*		*is,*
say.PTCP		as	he	out.of	DEF	school		be.PRS.3SG
do	*secht*		*he*	*to*	*sin'n*	*Vadder*		
then	say.PRS.3SG		he	to	his.OBL	father		

'Once upon a time there was a man [PF], he had a son [PF], his name was Hans [PF]. 'Stupid Hans' people always said [PF]. As his schooling is over [PRS], he says to his father [PRS]. . .' (Wisser 1914: 62)

This pattern may not be exactly the same as the one observed in the Wangerooge Frisian material, but Low German was the main contact language of Wangerooge Frisian for several centuries and most likely had a strong influence on its verbal system. To assess this, more research is needed on both languages.

6. Conclusion

This paper has proposed an analysis of the Wangerooge Frisian perfect as an evidential strategy. Having introduced the topic (Sections 1–2) and the linguistic material used for the investigation (Section 3), I presented an account of the tense system in Wangerooge Frisian in Section 4, with a particular focus on the distribution of present, past, and perfect in narrative texts. It was shown that while stories from the speaker's own life were usually told in the past tense, for fictional stories such as fairy tales, ghost stories, and other anecdotes, the "narrative present" was preferred. However, these fictional narratives were often introduced in the perfect, or shifted between perfect and present at various points throughout the story, a use of the perfect not observed in the real-life

narratives. I have suggested that the perfect in such contexts served to indicate that the information was not part of the speaker's direct experience. It was also shown that the perfect attested with inferential meaning, although this use of the construction appears to be very rare in the material. Appearing both in reporting and inferring contexts, the perfect can thus be described as a non-firsthand or indirect evidential strategy. Finally, in Section 5 I discussed (and rejected) two possible alternative explanations and pointed to an apparent parallel use of the perfect in Low German, the main contact language of Wangerooge Frisian.

It is of course not impossible that some alternative analysis which I have not considered might better explain the Wangerooge Frisian data, and it would certainly be worthwhile to extend the investigation to more texts and to material from the neighbouring Low German dialects. If we assume that these two Germanic languages could both use the perfect in hearsay and inferential evidential contexts, that would make them (so far) unique in Western Europe – as far as I am aware, hearsay uses of perfect constructions have not been described for any of the major Western European (Romance and Germanic) languages (see Lindstedt 2000, 375–376; Wiemer 2010, 66, 116). However, while there is an abundant literature on evidentiality in Europe, this is generally limited to the modern standard languages (as explicitly acknowledged in the introduction by Wiemer and Marín-Arrese 2022b, 41). The Wangerooge Frisian case study presented here thus illustrates the need for more work on the grammar of the (non-standardized) vernaculars of Europe.

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ORCID

Sune Gregersen http://orcid.org/0000-0002-3387-4340

Abbreviations

1/2/3	1st/2nd/3rd person
ADJZ	adjectivizing suffix
ADVZ	adverbializing suffix

COMP	complementizer
DEF	definite article
DEM	demonstrative
EXPL	expletive
F	feminine
GER	gerund ("long" infinitive)
IMP	imperative
INDF	indefinite article
INF	infinitive
M	masculine
N	neuter
OBL	oblique
PF	perfect
PL	plural
PLUPF	pluperfect
PRS	present
PST	past
PTCL	particle
PTCP	participle
SG	singular

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