



NOBODY'S PERFECT

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INTRODUCTION

SOME VERY GENERAL QUESTIONS ABOUT THE PERFECT

- What is it/How should it be defined?
 - Semantic/pragmatic criteria?
 - Morphosyntactic criteria?
- Universal?
- Prototypical?
- One perfect?
 - experiential perfects
 - resultative perfects
 - both?

PREVIOUS STUDIES OF THE PERFECT

- **Formal semantic studies**
 - Klein (1992, 1994), Portner (2003, 2011) among others
 - Usually focus on English and its nearest relatives
 - Try to explain the various readings/uses of the perfect in a compositional manner
- **Typological studies**
 - For example, Dahl (1985), Bybee et al. (1994), Dahl & Velupillai (2011)
 - Include a large sample of languages
 - Based on existing grammars and/or large-scale surveys

THE MIDDLE WAY

‘The proposed change is a so-called “middle way” that would allow the comparison of a relatively small, intelligently selected sample of languages, using deeper structural analyses than is currently possible with large-scale sampling methods.’

Polinsky & Kluender (2007)

‘We suggest that there is a “Middle Way” which will shed light on the crucial underlying issues. This Middle Way style of research would look at fewer languages than a typical typological study does, but at more languages than a typical generative study does.’

Baker & McCloskey (2007)

OUR PROJECT

A middle way

- Smaller, **but genetically and typologically diverse** set of languages
- Data based on **intensive fieldwork with native-speaker consultants**, and/or our own intuitions as **native-speaker/linguists**
- Use of **consistent criteria and methods** across the different languages (for example, storyboards)

Goal

- **Develop and test (formal) analyses of the perfect** in a larger and more **diverse set of languages** than has typically been done so far.

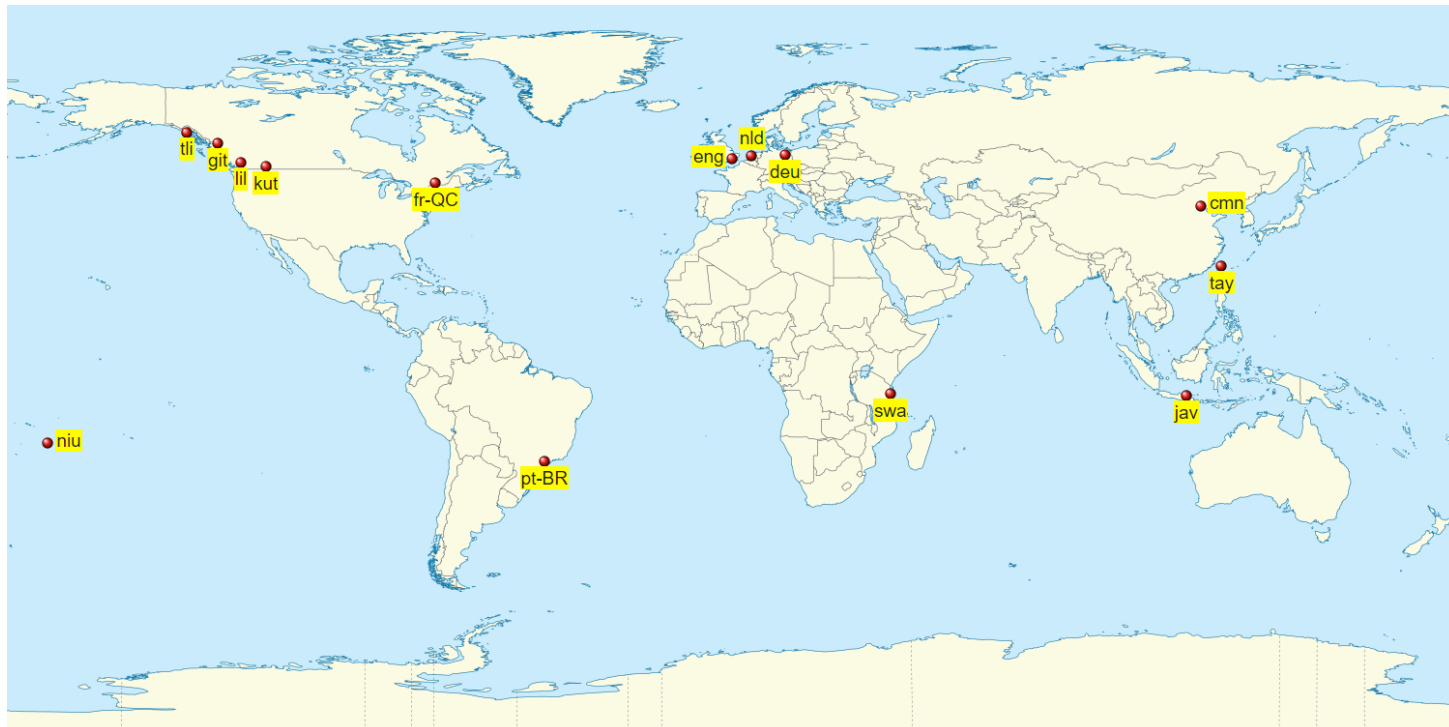
OUR PROJECT

Indo-European:

- English (eng)
- Dutch (nld)
- German (deu)
- Québec French (fr-QC)
- Brazilian
- Portuguese (pt-BR)

Austronesian:

- Niuean (niu)
- Javanese (jav)
- Atayal (tay)



OUR PROJECT

Sino-Tibetan:

Taiwan Mandarin
(cmn)

Bantu:

Swahili (swa)

Tsimshianic:

Gitksan (git)

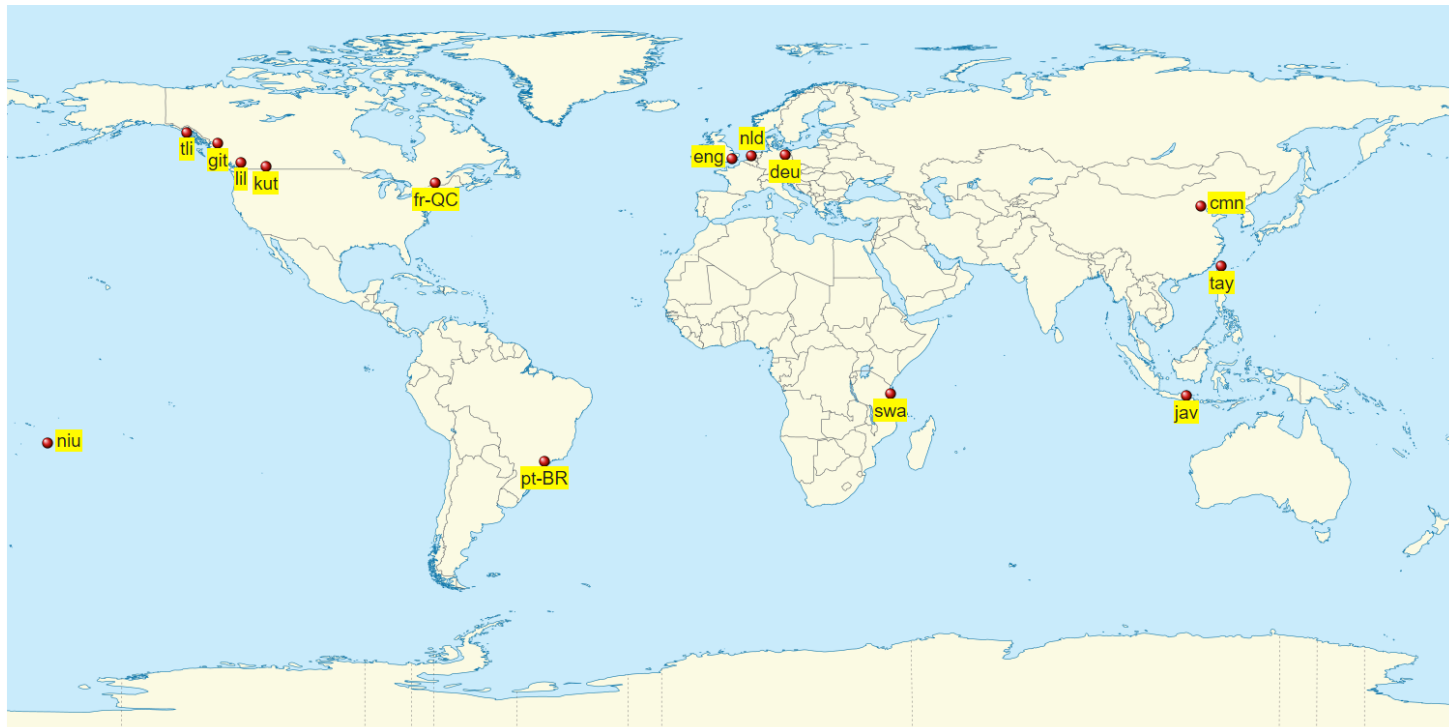
Ktunaxa (kut)

Na-Dene:

Tlingit (tli)

Salish:

St'at'imcets
(Lillooet) (lil)



OUTLINE

1. Properties of the English perfect
2. Methodology and overview of results
3. A “non-perfect”: The general-purpose past perfective
4. Three strategies for expressing perfect-type interpretations
5. Discussion and open questions

PROPERTIES OF THE ENGLISH PERFECT

PROPERTIES OF THE ENGLISH PERFECT

4 readings/uses (Comrie 1976, McCawley 1971, McCoard 1978, among many others):

- Experiential (1)Pat has climbed Mount Everest.
(at least once in a certain timespan)
- Result state (2)Pat has passed out.
- Recent past (3)Tough luck, the train has left.
- Continuous (4)Pat has lived in Vancouver since 2015.
(Universal perfect, perfect of persistent situation, continuative)

PROPERTIES OF THE ENGLISH PERFECT

4 Limitations

- No “dead” subjects (lifetime effects) (5) # David Bowie has lived in London
- No cancellation of result state (6)# I've lost my keys, but then I found them again.
- No narrative progression (7)# This morning, Pat has woken up, and then he has gotten dressed.
- No definite time adverbials (8)# Pat has climbed Mount Everest last year.

METHODOLOGY AND OVERVIEW OF RESULTS

RESTATING THE RESEARCH QUESTION

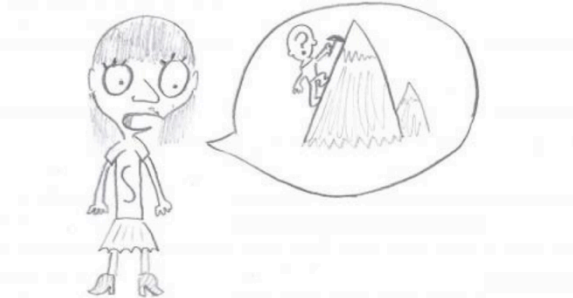
- How do languages express meanings which, in English, are expressed with the present perfect?
- Whatever strategies are used, are they subject to the same restrictions as the English present perfect?

METHODOLOGY

- Fieldwork with native speaker consultants.
 - Storyboard methodology
 - Miss Smith's Bad Day
 - Elicitation
 - Elicit negative data
 - Test other forms in the same contexts



3. One of the children, Tom, is naughty and is already pulling Mary's hair.



4. Miss Smith asks the kids "Who has ever climbed a mountain?"

	eng	eng	nld	deu	fr-QC	pr-Bt	tli	kut	man	tay	jav	swa	niu	lil	man	tay	pt-BR	git
READINGS and limitations	<i>have + participle</i>	Simple past	<i>have + participle</i>	<i>have /be + participle</i>	Passé composé	Pretérito perfecto	ÿa-	<i>ma ... -ni</i>	-guo	-in-	<i>tau</i>	<i>mε</i>	<i>kua</i>	<i>plan</i>	Final participle	<i>wal</i>	<i>ter + participle</i>	<i>hlaa</i>
EXPERIENTIAL	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗	✗	✗	✗
<i>Dead subjects possible</i>	✗	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗	✗	✗	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
RESULT STATE (POSSIBLE)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗	✗	✗	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
<i>Result state cancellable</i>	✗	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	✗	✗	✗	(✓)		✓	✗
RECENT PAST	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	(✗)	(✗)	✗	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗	✓
CONTINUOUS	✓	✗	(✓)	(✓)	✗	✗	✓	✗	✗	✗	✗	✓	✗	✗	(✓)	✗	✓	✗
<i>Narrative progression possible</i>	✗	✓	✗	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗	✗	✗	✗	✓		✗	✗	✗	✓
<i>Definite time adverbial allowed</i>	✗	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗	✗	✓	✓	✓	✗	✗

**A “NON-PERFECT”:
THE GENERAL-PURPOSE PAST
PERFECTIVE**

GENERAL-PURPOSE PAST PERFECTIVE

Positive results to all the tests

- Québec French *passé composé*
- Brazilian Portuguese *pretérito perfeito (simples)* (excludes *pretérito perfeito composto - ter + participle*)
- German (and to a lesser extent Dutch) perfect (*have/be + past participle*)
- Ktunaxa past marker *ma*
- Tlingit *ȷa-*
- English simple past

General-purpose past perfectives

- refer to past events in a wide range of situations
 - including “perfect” contexts
 - may require additional material or support from the context

	English	English	Dutch	German <i>have/be</i> + participle	Q. French Passé composé	Br. Portuguese Pretérito perfeito	Tlingit <i>yä-</i>	Ktunaxa <i>ma ...-ni</i>
READINGS and <i>limitations</i>	Present Perfect	Simple past	<i>have/be</i> + participle					
EXPERIENTIAL	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
<i>Dead subjects possible</i>	X	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
RESULT STATE (POSSIBLE)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
<i>Result state cancellable</i>	X	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
RECENT PAST	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
CONTINUOUS	✓	X	(✓)	(✓)	X	X	✓	X
<i>Narrative progression possible</i>	X	✓	X	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
<i>Definite time adverbial allowed</i>	X	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

GENERAL-PURPOSE PAST PERFECTIVE

Properties these forms share:

- **Experiential contexts**, but no lifetime effects
- **Result state** may hold at utterance time, but this is not required
- **Recent past** possible
- **Definite time adverbials** allowed
- **Narrative progression** allowed (with the exception of Dutch)

Properties on which they differ:

- Continuous reading (often the simple present is used instead)

GENERAL-PURPOSE PAST PERFECTIVE - QUÉBEC FRENCH

Experiential

Qui a déjà monté une montagne?

Who has_{aux} already climbed_v a mountain?

'Who has ever climbed a mountain?'

Moi j'ai monté une montagne

Me I have_{aux} climbed_v a mountain?

'Me, I have climbed a mountain.'

- Needs support from the co-text or the addition of an adverb
- *Déjà* in French is not used exclusively for experiential readings

GENERAL-PURPOSE PAST PERFECTIVE - QUÉBEC FRENCH

Result state

Context 1: John heard a big noise in the living room, he peeks to see what happened, Marie is on the ground, unconscious, and Paul says:

Context 2: John heard a big noise in the living room, he peeks to see what happened, Marie's slowly getting up from the floor, and Paul says:

Marie a perdu connaissance

Marie has_{aux} lost_v consciousness

'Mary fainted.'

GENERAL-PURPOSE PAST PERFECTIVE - QUÉBEC FRENCH

Recent past possible

Context: Albert runs into John on the street and asks him about his wife Marie. John says:

Marie est tombé malade

Marie is_{aux} fallen ill_v

‘Marie has fallen ill.’

Definite time adverbials

Marie est tombé malade hier

Marie is_{aux} fallen ill_v yesterday

‘Marie has fallen ill yesterday.’

GENERAL-PURPOSE PAST PERFECTIVE - QUÉBEC FRENCH

Narrative progression

Marie *est* *tombé malade*

Elle *est* *allée* chez le médecin

Marie *is_{aux}* *fallen ill_v*

Marie *is_{aux}* *gone_v* to the doctor

‘Marie got ill.’

‘She went to the doctor.’

Elle *a* *reçu* une ordonnance.

Marie *has_{aux}* *received_v* a prescription

‘Marie got a prescription.’

INTERIM CONCLUSION

- General past perfectives
 - can be used in lieu of the perfect
 - may even be cognate with the English perfect (e.g., German, Dutch, French).
- The perfect is defined by the **restrictions** on its use (the crosses in the table)
 - General purpose past perfective is not a perfect
- Methodological remark:
 - Targeting the perfect through its contexts of use does not guarantee a perfect form

THREE STRATEGIES FOR EXPRESSING PERFECT-TYPE INTERPRETATIONS

RESTATING THE RESEARCH QUESTION

How do languages express meanings which, in English, are expressed with the present perfect?

- General past perfectives
- What else?

Whatever strategies are used, are they subject to the same restrictions as the English present perfect?

- General past perfective has NO restrictions

THREE STRATEGIES

- Three types of strategies (bound morphemes, constructions, particles) for expressing perfect-type interpretations:
 - Criteria: semantic/pragmatic

- Type A: **Experiential** strategies
- Type B: **Resultative** strategies
- Type C: **Hybrid** strategies

TYPE A: EXPERIENTIAL STRATEGIES

Includes:

- Atayal *-in-*,
- Javanese *tau*
- Mandarin *-guo* 过/過

READINGS and limitations	English Present perfect	Mandarin <i>-guo</i>	Atayal <i>-in-</i>	Javanese <i>tau</i>
EXPERIENTIAL	✓	✓	✓	✓
<i>Dead subjects possible</i>	✗	✓	✓	✓
RESULT STATE (POSSIBLE)	✓	✗	✗	✗
<i>Result state cancellable</i>	✗	n/a	n/a	n/a
RECENT PAST	✓	(✗)	(✗)	✗
CONTINUOUS	✓	✗	✗	✗
<i>Narrative progression possible</i>	✗	✗	✗	✗
<i>Definite time adverbial allowed</i>	✗	✓	✓	✓ remote

TYPE A: EXPERIENTIAL STRATEGIES

Definitional properties:

- **Experiential** reading **possible**
- **Result state** reading **not possible**

Other **shared properties** (for the 3 languages in our sample):

- **Dead subjects** possible (no lifetime effects)
- **Recent past** possible
- **Continuous** reading not possible
- **Definite time** adverbials possible
- Narrative progression not possible

TYPE A: EXPERIENTIAL STRATEGIES - ATAYAL

Experiential reading

q<m><n>alup mit (sraral) hiya'

hunt<av><pst> goat before 3s.n

'He has hunted goats before.'

No lifetime effects (dead subjects possible)

Context: *Talking about who wrote an Atayal dictionary, the speaker is reminded of Egerod (1923-1995):*

m<in>iru' khu' biru' na' tayal qu Egerod qasa ma.

AV<PST>write depot book GEN Atayal ABS Egerod that EVID

'It is said that Egerod wrote an Atayal dictionary.'

TYPE A: EXPERIENTIAL STRATEGIES - ATAYAL

Result state reading not possible

Context: You couldn't find your watch.

m<in>gzyuwaw tuki=maku'

AV<PST>lost watch=1S.GEN

Intended for 'My watch has got lost.'

Definite time adverbials possible

aw'=saku' k<in>t-an shira' rwa!

aw'=1S.ABS see<PST>LV yesterday PRT

'Didn't you see me yesterday?'

TYPE A: EXPERIENTIAL STRATEGIES - ATAYAL

Recent past possible (with cessation of result state)

Context: (Right before dinner) Mother asks if you wash the kid's hands because she sees the kid's hands are dirty. You reply:

m<in>pm-an=maku' la.

AV<PST>wash-LV=1S.ERG PRT

'I washed him.' (Why do his hands get dirty again.)

TYPE A: EXPERIENTIAL STRATEGIES - ATAYAL

Narrative progression not possible

m-zyup ngasal qu Tali', m<in>nbuw qwaw hiya'

AV-enter house ABS Tali' AV<PST>drink wine 3S.N

'Tali came into the house. He drank wine.'

Continuous reading not possible

m<in>qilang krayryax qu Tali'.

AV<PST>lazy every.day ABS Tali'

Intended for 'Tali' has always been lazy.'

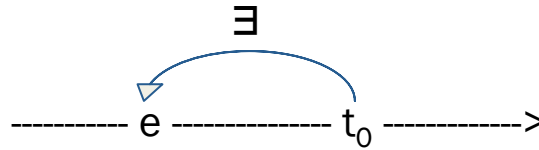
TYPE A: EXPERIENTIAL STRATEGIES

Formalization

Existential past tense (Chen, Vander Klok, Matthewson and Rullmann 2017)

Schematic representation: $\exists e [e < t_0 \ \& \ P(e)]$

Visualization:



TYPE B: RESULTATIVE STRATEGIES

Includes:

- Mandarin final particle *le* 了
- Atayal *wal*
- Gitksan *hlaa*
- Brazilian Portuguese *ter + participle* (aka *préterito perfeito composto*)

READINGS and limitations	English Present Perfect	Mandarin Final particle <i>le</i>	Atayal <i>wal</i>	Gitksan <i>hlaa</i>	pt-BR <i>ter + participle</i>
EXPERIENTIAL	✓	✗	✗	✗	✗
<i>Dead subjects possible</i>	✗	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
RESULT STATE (POSSIBLE)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
<i>Result state cancellable</i>	✗	(✓) w/ adv	??	✗	✓
RECENT PAST	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗
CONTINUOUS	✓	(✓)	✗	✗	✓
<i>Narrative progression possible</i>	✗	✗	✗	✓	✗
<i>Definite time adverbial allowed</i>	✗	✓	✓	✗	✗

TYPE B: RESULTATIVE STRATEGIES

Definitional properties:

- Result state reading possible
- Experiential reading not possible

Properties on which the languages differ:

- Cancellability of the result state
- Recent past
- Continuous reading
- Narrative progression
- Definite time adverbial

TYPE B: RESULTATIVE STRATEGIES - MANDARIN

Result state reading possible

wǒ nòngdiū nà-bǎ yàoshí le

I lose that-CL key LE

'I lost that key.'

Experiential reading not possible

wǒ pá shān le.

I climb mountain LE

Intended: 'I have climbed a mountain.'

Translation: 'I already climbed a mountain.'

TYPE C: HYBRID STRATEGIES

Includes:

- English *have* + past participle
- Niuean *kua*
- Swahili *mε-*
- St'at'imcets *plan*

READINGS and limitations	English <i>have</i> + participle	Swahili <i>mε-</i>	Niuean <i>kua</i>	St'at'imcets <i>plan</i>
EXPERIENTIAL	✓	✓	✓	✓
<i>Dead subjects possible</i>	X	X	X	X
RESULT STATE (POSSIBLE)	✓	✓	✓	✓
<i>Result state cancellable</i>	X	X	X	X
RECENT PAST	✓	✓	✓	✓
CONTINUOUS	✓	✓	X	X
<i>Narrative progression possible</i>	X	X	✓	
<i>Definite time adverbial allowed</i>	X	X	X	✓

TYPE C: HYBRID STRATEGIES

Definitional properties:

- Experiential reading possible
- Result state reading possible
- But not a general past perfective (i.e., some restrictions apply)

Other shared properties (for the 4 languages in our sample):

- Dead subjects not possible (for the experiential reading)
- Result state not cancellable (for the result state reading)
- Recent past possible

Properties on which the languages differ:

- Definite time adverbial
- Narrative progression
- Continuous reading

TYPE C: HYBRID STRATEGIES - NIUEAN

Experiential reading possible

(Ko e) mena kua mohe nakai a koe he kelekele?

KO ABS thing PRF sleep Q ABS 2SG LOC ground

‘Have you ever in fact slept on the ground?’ (Seiter 1980:128)

Context: Who has ever climbed a mountain?

Ko au, ko au! Kua toli e au e mouga.

KO 1SG KO 1SG PRF climb ERG 1SSG ABS mountain

‘Me, me! I have climbed a mountain.’ (‘Miss Smith’s Bad Day’ storyboard)

TYPE C: HYBRID STRATEGIES - NIUEAN

Result state reading (result state not cancellable):

Context: Telling your friend why you were late. You say 'I lost my keys, but I found them.'

#	Kua	galo	(tei)	e	tau	ki	haaku,	ka	kua	moua	tei.
	PRF	lose	(recent)	ABS	PL	key	1SG.POSS	but	PRF	find	recent

'I have lost my keys, but I found them.'

(Na)	galo	e	tau	ki	haaku,	ka	kua	moua	tei.
(PST)	lose	ABS	PL	key	1SG.POSS	but	PRF	find	recent

'I lost my keys, but I found them.'

TYPE C: HYBRID STRATEGIES - NIUEAN

Dead subjects not possible (for the experiential reading)

Context: You are teaching a history lesson. You tell the kids:

a. Ne kitia mua e Columbus a Amelika

PST first sight ERG Columbus ABS America

‘Columbus discovered America.’

b. # Kua kitia mua e Columbus a Amelika

PRF first sight ERG Columbus ABS America

‘Columbus has discovered America.’

TYPE C: HYBRID STRATEGIES - NIUEAN

Recent past possible

kua	faka-meā	tei	e	au	e	motokua	haau
PRF	CAUS-clean	recent	ERG	1SG	ABS	car	2SG.POSS

'I've cleaned your car.'

SUMMARY

- Perfects “strategies” are defined by
 - The type of meaning they convey
 - The restrictions on their use
- 3 types of perfect strategies
 - Experiential
 - Resultative
 - Hybrid
- The properties of the experiential strategy are remarkably consistent for the 3 languages in our sample.
- Resultative and hybrid strategies are more variable cross-linguistically.

DISCUSSION AND OPEN QUESTIONS

“STRATEGIES” = ASPECTUAL CATEGORIES?

- Perfect “Strategies”
 - Have specialized readings
 - Are restricted to these uses
- So are they aspectual markers?
- Brazilian Portuguese and Québec French’s use of *já/déjà* for experientials

Moi j’ai déjà monté une montagne

Me I have_{aux} already climbed_v a mountain?

‘Me, I have climbed a mountain.’

“STRATEGIES” = ASPECTUAL CATEGORIES?

- Are *já/déjà* aspectual markers?
 - Dahl & Vellupillai (2011) consider that some language build the perfect with ‘already’.
 - Do they instantiate an aspectual category?
 - Brazilian Portuguese and Québec French tense and aspectual systems
 - Verbal morphology
 - Should it include adverbs?
- Are *já/déjà* experientials pragmatically equivalent to the experiential strategies without instantiating aspectual categories?

“STRATEGIES” = ASPECTUAL CATEGORIES?

- Morphosyntactic criteria must be language specific
 - Cf. Portner (2011) who defines the perfect as “a grammatical construction which is built from a participial verb phrase and an auxiliary ...”.
 - Restricting the perfect to its morphosyntactic form in English makes the wrong predictions
 - General purpose past perfectives
 - Québec French passé composé, Brazilian Portuguese preterito perfeito, Dutch/German have + past participle
 - Hybrid perfect
 - Niuean *particle*, Swahili *prefix* *mε-*, St’at’imcets *particle* *plan*

“STRATEGIES” = ASPECTUAL CATEGORIES?

- Necessity to use language specific criteria for the form and categorization
 - Tense and aspect markers form paradigms
 - Semantics
 - Morphosyntax

IS THERE SUCH A THING AS “THE PERFECT”?

- Is there one perfect, or are there many different types of perfect?
- What’s special about the specific combination of the experiential and resultative perfects?
- Future research
 - Deconstructing the perfect (more)
 - Derive perfect-type meanings from more basic aspectual components.

We hope that the current project is a first step toward this goal.

Thank you!

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