

Old English

- The semantic perfect (completed event with present relevance) and pluperfect (past of past) were often rendered in OE by the **simple past**. **Adverbs** are frequently employed to make the meaning clear:

(1) Fæder, Ic syngode

Father, I have sinned. (Lk (WSCp) 15.18)

(2) þær manna lic lagon þe wæran ær acwealde on ðam cwearterne gefyrn

there of-men bodies lay rel. were before killed in that prison distant

..the bodies lay there of the men who had been killed in that distant prison. (ÆLS 4.210)

- There were two phrasal constructions in OE:

habban 'to have' + past participle, the so-called *have*-perfect

be periphrasis (see below for details), the so-called *be*-perfect.

⇒ *have*-perfect

⇒ The past participle could (3) but need not (4) be inflected for case, number and gender if it modified an ACC object (more often uninflected¹). The inflected forms were probably first analysed as adjectives. It was never inflected with GEN or DAT objects, prepositional phrases or sentential complements functioning as objects. The number of inflected forms decreased in the OE period.

⇒ It could be used both with TRANSITIVE (3, 4) and INTRANSITIVE (5) verbs, though the latter favoured *be*-perfect.

(3) þa þa ge hiene **gebundenne** (infl.) **hæfdon** (Or 6 37.296.21)

then when you him-ACC bound had

...then when you had bound him/ had him in the state of being bound

(4) Ic **hæbbe gebunden** þone feond þe hi drehte (ÆCHom I, 31)

I have bound that-ACC enemy-ACC rel. them afflicted

I have bound the enemy who afflicted them.

(5) æfterðæmðe hie gesyngod habbað (ÆCHom I, 39)

after-that they sinned have

..after they have sinned

⇒ It is difficult to say whether the inflected forms were understood as truly adjectival (stative) in meaning, especially since the inflected forms are sometimes co-ordinated with non-inflected participles (6):

(6) Fela Godes wundra we habbað gehyred (uninfl.) and eac gesewene (infl)

Many God's wonders we have heard and also seen (ÆCHom I, 39)

We have heard and also seen many of God's wonders.

⇒ However, since the inflected forms occur only with accusative objects, it seems that they were adjectival in meaning; the adjectival construction originally consisting of the main verb *habban*, the object possessed and an adjectival past participle:

(7) ðonne **hæbbe** we begen fet **gescode** (acc.pl.) suiðe untælllice (CP 5.45.10)

then have we both feet shod

very blamelessly

¹ In the acc.sg.n. past participles were uninflected so it was not possible to tell whether the construction was inflected or not with sg.n. objects.

then let us have both our feet very well shod (=in the state of having been shod)

⇒ *be*-perfect

OE possessed also a second (plu)perfect construction consisting of a BE verb + past participle. This was mainly restricted to INTRANSITIVE verbs of the type involving change of place or state. Like the *habban* perfect, the BE perfect could be inflected (8), but often was not (9):

(8) Craccuse **wæron** monege cyningas (pl) .. to fultume **cumene** (pl) (Or 5 4.224.5)

To-Gracchus were many kings as help come

Many kings had come to Gracchus as support.

(9) Hie **wæron cumen** (uninfl) Leoniðan to fultume (Or 2 5.82.13)

They were come to-Leonidas as help

They had come to Leonidas to help him.

- The **inflected participial** constructions with *habban* and *BE* were probably truly adjectival in **PrOE**. As indicated above, in the OE period the construction could still involve adjectival meaning, but the signs of the ongoing reanalysis (*habban*, BE interpreted as auxiliaries + past participle being part of the verb complex) are already present. The reanalysis is likely to have occurred (for the *habban* construction) with neuter acc.sg. objects, since these had Ø inflection, lacking overt morphology marking them as adjectives. Thus a sentence like *we habbaþ [geweorc geworht]* ‘we have the stronghold in-a-state-of-builtness’ got reanalysed as *we [habbaþ] geweorc [geworht]* ‘we have built the stronghold.’ Then the *habban* + participle construction was free to be extended to formerly inflected transitive contexts as well as intransitive contexts.

Middle English

- In ME the development of *habban* as an auxiliary seems to be complete as evidenced by the frequent alternation between the perfect and the preterite in different manuscript versions of the same text and the random use of the inflected past participle (the plural ending *-e* used with singular nouns). The ME construction reflects its origins in word-order, placing the object before the past participle (common until the 16th c.).

(10) þe feader hwen he **haueð** inoh **ibeaen** his child ant **haueð** hit **ituht** wel,

the father when he has enough beaten his child and has it taught well

warpeð the gerde i þe fur.

throws the rod into the fire. (Ancr.)

The father when he has beaten his child enough and has brought him up well, throws the rod into the fire.

- The frequency of the (plu)perfect **increases** enormously in the Middle English period. It is possible that the greater frequency of the construction not only reflects the change in actual usage but is also related to the nature of the extant texts. The (plu)perfect is **not fully grammaticalised** in ME, alternating freely in almost all its functions with the preterite. The construction with *be* (ME *ben*) is still present; the general tendency is to prefer *have* when attention is focussed on the action indicated by the verb, while *be* when the emphasis is on the state or result of the action.
- (11) That we **ben entred** into shippes bord. (CT)

(12) Arcite unto the temple **walked is**. (CT)

- Possible reasons why *have* ousted *be* in the formation of the perfect:
 - 1) the greater functional load of *be* (used as passive, progressive and perfect auxiliary);
 - 2) the ambiguity – *be* + past participle: could be perfect as well as passive;
 - 3) the neutralising effect of the contracted 's which can be interpreted as either *is* or *has*.

Early Modern English

- In the 16th c *have* becomes the sole auxiliary with transitive verbs and the predominant with non-mutative intransitives. It still varies with *be* in mutatives. In the 18th c *have* gains ground steadily at the expense of *be*. The **final establishment** of *have* as the auxiliary of the (plu)perfect takes place in the **early 18th c**.

Modern English

- In PDE the verb *go* is one of the last verbs to permit the *be* perfect:

(13) now they're both gone and I can't replace them. (1917)