

CONTENT AND EXPRESSION IN THE LATIN VERB

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1. Introduction. It is Hjelmslev, one of the most interesting of the post-Saussurians, who develops the terms content and expression. Content is an extension of the Saussurian term signifié; expression is a development of the Saussurian term signifiant. Content is therefore meaning, and expression the morphosyntactic means of conveying that meaning (Hjelmslev 1935:XII). The content systems are the systems of meaningful grammatical contrasts, and the expression systems are the paradigms (e.g. declensions, conjugations) which present those contrasts.

Hjelmslev consequently conceives of expression, the conveyor of content, as playing a subordinate role: for him a grammatical system is first and foremost a content system, a "système de valeurs," to put it in Saussurian terms, where each valeur draws its meaning from its position in the system and the contrasts that it presents with the other valeurs of that system:

"Tout fait linguistique est un fait de valeur et ne peut pas être défini que par sa valeur." (1935:20)

"La grammaire est la théorie des significations fondamentales ou des valeurs et des systèmes constitués par elles..." (1935:84)

"Une catégorie est définie par la valeur, non par l'expression." (1935:77)

This, of course, is in direct contrast to the American "structuralists" (who were behaviorists rather than structuralists) who sought to find the "structure" of language in expression in the directly observable morphology (a positivist or behaviorist prejudice), and who consequently tended to abstract or ignore the element of content. Greenberg is recorded as saying: "By structure is meant here facts about a language as an abstract calculus without reference to meaning" (Hoijer 1954:16), and Hockett at the same conference declared: "...we may have to use semantic evidence in order to find out what the linguistic system of a language is, but...the system does not include the semantics." (Hoijer 1954:152). It appears that the transformationalist separation of syntax from semantics likewise eliminated the element of meaning from all consideration of system in language.

Hjelmslev, however, is not alone in his view that the system of language lies in content. This is what Saussure meant when he said "La langue est une forme, non une substance" (1916:169) and in

the analogy of the game of chess, where the system lies in the function, in the meaningful role of each piece, not in the directly observable shapes of the pieces. This is also the view of Jakobson, who quotes Hjelmslev approvingly in his Kasuslehre article (1936) which is an attempt to delineate the content system of case in the Russian noun. It is also the view of Humboldt, and leads to "Humboldt's Universal," as expressed by Anttila (1972:89): "Language has a general iconic tendency, whereby semantic sameness is reflected by formal sameness."

This view is developed even further by Gustave Guillaume in his two laws: la loi de cohérence which says that a content system will be completely coherent, and la loi de simple suffisance, which says that an expression system will only be sufficiently coherent, sufficiently regular, as is necessary to reflect the related content system (1971:140-1).

There is, then, a long-established European tradition that sees content as determining expression, and that considers that the proper understanding of a paradigm consists in understanding the content system that lies behind it.

This same tradition insists that each morphological element of the paradigm presents a single underlying element of meaning: Saussure's valeur, Hjelmslev's seule signification fondamentale, Jakobson's Gesamtbedeutung, Guillaume's signifié de puissance. Each such fundamental meaning underlies the total range of surface meanings in discourse in much the same way as a single phoneme underlies a range of allophonic usage. But such a meaning, insofar as it is based on the juncture of different parameters within a system, may have several different aspects, elements, or items of information.

2. Cumulation of significates. It is, in fact, a facet of the Indo-European languages that single discrete morphs may convey several distinct items of information: this phenomenon was called by Bally the "cumulation of significates," and such morphs have been called "portmanteau morphs" in the American tradition. Hockett, for example, notes that French au, phonologically /o/, a single phoneme is indivisible as a morph yet represents preposition à as well as the masculine singular definite article (1947:§15).

It is Bazell's interesting typological study Linguistic Form (a regrettably neglected book in too many universities) that introduces the notion of cumulation of significates to an English speaking audience. Bazell notes, for example, that in the plural of Latin noun declensions one single morph marks both case and number: Latin domibus in the houses is ablative plural, but both ablative and plural are marked by the single, indivisible morph -ibus. In Turkish, by way of contrast, we would need to use three morphs to obtain a similar result:

ev-ler-de

house-pl.-in

3. The Latin indicative. The verbal morphology of Latin shows even greater cumulation than the noun morphology. The final vowel of Latin *amō* I love, for example, represents the following: (1) first person (2) singular (3) present tense (4) indicative mood (5) active voice and (6) imperfect aspect. The meanings of (3), (5) and (6) are the result of contrasts with marked forms elsewhere (in which *amō* is the unmarked form), but (1), (2) and (4) are the result of cumulation since the various person, number and mood markers share no common feature.

Not all the verbal inflections are simple, however as in the case of *-ō*. There are six basic tense forms in the indicative of the Latin verb, and Latin grammarians as early as Varro (116 B.C. - 27 B.C.) divided these six forms onto two horizons, the *infectum* and the *perfectum*:

	<u>PAST</u>		<u>PRESENT</u>		<u>FUTURE</u>
(infectum)	<i>amābam</i>	←	<i>amō</i>	→	<i>amābō</i>
(perfectum)	<i>amāveram</i>	←	<i>amāvī</i>	→	<i>amāverō</i>

If we treat the stem of this verb as *am(ā)-*, where (ā) is a theme vowel which is deleted under certain conditions, it becomes possible to make the following morphological segmentation:

- (1) *-v-* (phonologically /u/) marker of the horizon of the *perfectum*. (The *infectum* is the unmarked member of this contrast).
- (2) *-b-* and *-er-* are allomorphs, markers of non-present tenses. (The present *amō* and present perfect *amāvī* are the unmarked members of this contrast.)

The canonical shape of the Latin indicative is therefore as follows:

Stem $\left\{ \begin{array}{l} + \text{ perfective} \\ - \text{ marker} \end{array} \right\} \left\{ \begin{array}{l} + \text{ non-present} \\ - \text{ marker} \end{array} \right\} + \text{ cumulative marker of} \\ \text{tense/person/number/} \\ \text{mood}$

3.1 Allomorphic variation of perfective and non-present markers. The degree of allomorphic variation within this framework is quite large, as is well known to students of Latin. There are, for example, four major types of perfective marker:

- (1) the regular /u/ may be added to theme vowels:

amo	amāvī	<u>love</u>
deleō	delevī	<u>destroy</u>
finio	finivī	<u>finish</u>

and it may also be added to athematic stems:

domō	domuī	<u>tame</u>
debeō	debuī	<u>owe</u>
volō	voluī	<u>wish</u>

- (2) -s (the same Indo-European element that forms the Greek sigmatic aorist) may also be added to athematic stems.

dīcō	dixī (=dīc-sī)	<u>say</u>
scribo	scripsī	<u>write</u>
dūcō	dūxī	<u>lead</u>

(the remnants of this ancient /s/ have even survived as far as the French passé simple: conduisit < L. cōdūxit he led)

- (3) ablaut of the stem vowel:

video	vidī	<u>see</u>
capio	cepī	<u>take</u>

- (4) reduplication of the initial syllable

dō	dedī	<u>give</u>
currō	cucurri	<u>run</u>
pendo	pependi	<u>hang</u>

There is a fifth, but very rare type, namely suppletion: sum/fui be, fero/tuli bear.

There are also variant forms of the non-present marker

- (1) -b- is added to both imperfect and future:

amō	amābam	amābo	<u>love</u>
debeō	debēbam	debēbō	<u>owe</u>

- (2) -b- is added to the imperfect but the future is marked only in the cumulative personal ending:

dīcō	dīcēbam	dīcam	<u>say</u>
finiō	finiēbam	finiam	<u>finish</u>

- (3) both imperfect and future are irregular (only two verbs):

sum	eram	erō	<u>be</u>
possum	poteram	poterō	<u>be able</u>

3.2 Variation in the cumulative markers. Classical Latin is normally analysed as having four verb conjugations, according to different theme vowels: these four conjugations have left traces in the modern Romance languages.

- (1) theme vowel ā > Fr. -er

amāre > Fr. aimer to love

- (2) theme vowel ē > Fr. -oir

habēre > Fr. avoir to have

- (3) theme vowel e/i > Fr. -re

extendere > Fr. étendre to stretch

- (4) theme vowel ī Fr. -ir

finīre > Fr. finir to finish

The vowels a/e/i all operate in different roles in the cumulative endings of the four conjugations, as the following table will show (3rd. person singular forms used as examples).

	<u>Present</u>	<u>Future</u>	<u>Present Subjunctive</u>
(1)	amat	amābit	amet
(2)	habet	habēbit	habeat
(3)	extendit	extendet	extendat
(4)	finit	finiet	finiat

Nothing could demonstrate more succinctly Guillaume's two laws. The Law of Coherence, which states that content systems are regular is supported by each of the four declensions of Latin having the

identical number of meaningful contrasts (future vs. present, etc.). The Law of Simple Sufficiency, which states that the morphology need only be sufficiently coherent to mark those contrasts, is supported by each conjugation using each of the three vowels a/e/i to distinguish present, future and present subjunctive, but there is little coherence among the four declensions.

Humboldt's Universal (see Section 1 above) may also be seen operating in the Romance languages, all of which have in some way reduced these four conjugations of Latin. French, for example, has reduced them to three:

- (1) infinitives in -er. This is the main "living" conjugation to which the great majority of new verbs conform.
- (2) infinitives in -ir. This is also "living" because it forms verbs with an inchoative sense: atterrir to land, amérir to land on the sea.
- (3) infinitives in -re. This conjugation contains the remnants of the Latin second and third conjugations. The second declension infinitive -ēre was regularly reshaped to -ere: L. respondēre > Fr. répondre. (Only a handful of irregular verbs maintain -oir in the infinitive). This conjugation is "dead": no new verbs adopt its morphology.

The paradigmatic differences between the Latin conjugations had become meaningless in Classical Latin. In their reduction from four to three we see the operation of Humboldt's Universal (i.e. that expression will adjust to content); but in the development of a new meaningful contrast (inchoative verbs in -ir) we see the operation of another universal trend in language: the exploitation of morphological variation that is unmotivated. Such variation can stem from one of two sources: (1) the loss of earlier semantic distinctions, leaving behind redundant morphological distinctions (as in the case of the Latin conjugations) and (2) phonological evolution, creating new allomorphy (e.g. L. disjējunō Fr. (je) déjeuner, L. disjējunātis Fr. (vous) dînez: from the allophonic variation in the paradigm this verb split into two new verbs, déjeuner and dîner).

4. Infinitive and subjunctive. The infectum/perfectum distinction is also found in the subjunctive and infinitive, the simple forms of which are as follows:

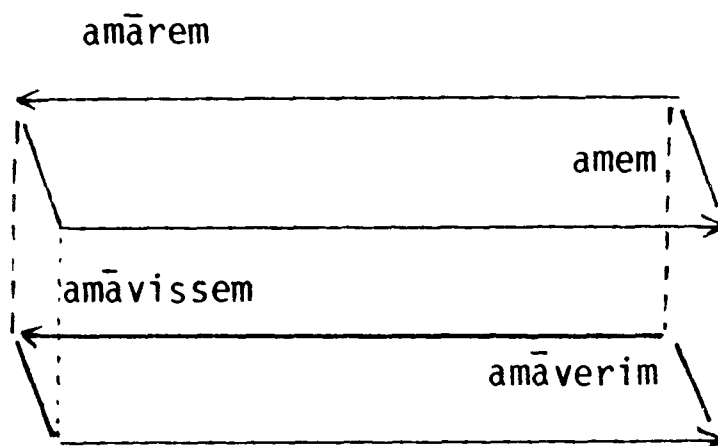
	<u>INFINITIVE</u>	<u>SUBJUNCTIVE</u>
infectum	amāre	amārem/amem
perfectum	amāvisse	amāvissem/amāverim

The morphological shapes of the subjunctive are particularly interesting. The two so-called "past" subjunctives (imperfect *amārem*, pluperfect *amāvissem*) are the same as the infinitives except that they have personal endings: they could be considered as "personalized infinitives." And the so-called present (*amem*) and perfect subjunctive (*amāverim*) both contain elements that elsewhere mark the future: the vowel /e/ of *amem*, as we have seen, marks the indicative future in the third and fourth conjugations, and the element /eri/ marks the indicative future at the level of the perfectum.

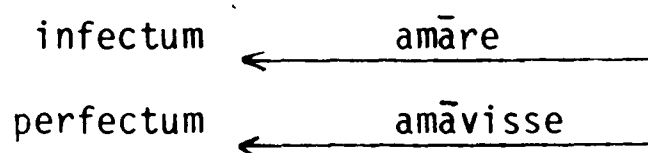
Gullaume has several interesting insights into this morphology, and the content structures that it represents. These insights may be enumerated as follows:

(1) the notional difference between subjunctive and indicative is that whereas event time (the time within the event) is represented in both, universe time (the time which contains the event: the contrasts in Latin, of past vs. present vs. future) is represented only in the indicative. The subjunctive, consequently, represents an event that could happen anywhere, a potential event, whereas the indicative represents an event that is allocated to or contained by experiential time (past, present or future).

(2) consequently there is no tense, as such, in the subjunctive: an event is merely represented as past oriented (*amārem*, *amāvissem*) or future oriented (*amem*, *amāverim*). This orientation refers to the time within the event and Guillaume gives the following figure of the Latin subjunctive contrasts (1945:31):



(3) Since the infinitive is the objective representation of a moment of time (an event) it should be represented as oriented toward the past:



The objective view of time sees time flowing into the past: the time that is present now will become history; it can never become

the future (Guillaume 1971:98). The subjunctive forms that are based on the morphology of the infinitive (amārem, amāvissem) are likewise past-oriented. Guillaume comments that these forms (infinitive and subjunctive) differ only in terms of the personal endings, and adds, in what might be considered a restatement of Humboldt's Universal (1945:31):

"On surprend là, dans l'un de ses effets frappants, la loi qui fait reposer la construction des langues sur la recherche ininterrompue d'une congruence de plus en plus marquée--et dont la marque ne sera jamais excessive--entre le fait de parole et le fait de pensée." (Here parole = expression, pensée = content).

Just as the subjunctives that share a morphology with the infinitive are past-oriented, those that share a morphology with the future (amem, amāverim) are future oriented. None of these forms has any tense, that is, they do not represent past, present or future time as an elemental part of their meaning.

A scrutiny of subjunctive usage reveals the lack of tense distinctions. In the sentence:

amicum	si	habērem,	gaudērem
<u>friend</u>	<u>if</u>	<u>I-might-have</u>	<u>I-might-rejoice</u>

If I had a friend I would be happy.

the so-called imperfect gaudērem has unequivocally a present reference. Furthermore, the frequent use of the perfect subjunctive in negative commands of the type

nē fēceris...

do not do...

shows that the so-called perfect subjunctive can have future reference, to an act that has not yet begun. If the act has already begun there is a tendency to use ne plus imperative as in

nē flē (Plautus, Captivi, 1. 139)

don't cry

We may therefore summarize the differences between the different systemic levels of the Latin verbal system as follows: (1) the subjunctive differs from the infinitive by the introduction of a personal subject, (2) the indicative differs from the subjunctive by the introduction of experiential time that is analysed, in the Latin system, into a past and a future, each of infinite scope, that are separated by a present that represents the position of the individual consciousness in experiential time, so that an event in

the present tense is an event that is represented as being simultaneous with the consciousness of the speaker. In spite of Mr. Einstein.

5. The Latin representation of time. The Einsteinian view of time, however, helps us to understand this point because it helps us to realize what is meant by the individual consciousness. Time and space, we are told, are two different aspects of one and the same thing, so that as we look out across space on a starlit night we also look across time. In fact if we had a telescope so powerful that we could see the astronauts walking around on the moon we would see events approximately one and a half seconds after they took place. If we could see events on distant stars we would be transported back thousands, sometimes millions of years. Back on earth, to use a phrase that the astronauts have given a new meaning, the same facts hold true, but now the differences are not in years, or seconds, but infinitesimal. Nevertheless it is true that just as all of us are separated spatially in our corporal presence (to coin a pretty term) we are all of us separated temporally to the same degree. The individuals that I see are all a little younger than the real individuals, since it takes time for the light reflected from countenances both familiar and unfamiliar to reach my eyes. My consciousness, my body awareness, is therefore as personal a thing as my physical presence, and like my physical presence (which is spatial) my consciousness (which is temporal) inhabits a corner of the universe that cannot be inhabited by another. In short, just as space and time are two different aspects of an indivisible continuum, my spatial body and my temporal consciousness are two inseparable aspects of an indivisible me. Language, however, notoriously represents experience by separating the inseparable, by creating dualisms and binary systems, by separating left from right, good from bad, by separating time from space and creating, for example, categories that we call nouns and verbs, wherever we find them and whatever their dialectal or einzelsprachliche peculiarities.

Language also falsifies, like the moving picture which cheats by throwing out 24 still photographs a second; language falsifies by representing a continuing process as a static entity. But this is merely the human condition: we cannot do otherwise. When linguists wish to demonstrate phonological evolution they make an abstract scheme of imaginary stages, step by step, from one sound to another. In tracing the history of a language they use the myth of different états de langue like Old English, Middle English, Modern English. We should not scorn such devices, because we can do no better: after all, we all accept the conventional photograph of the jet plane in flight without expecting it to fall out of the sky! But we should also not be surprized at the varying devices that are utilized in verbal systems to represent the experiential present, because this same problem is confronted: given a static means of representation, how is one to represent a continuing process?

The closest model that one can find for the Latin solution to this problem is the model of the hour glass where sand continuously drips from the upper chamber into the lower. Latin, in other words, represents the continuing process of the present by establishing a continuing contrast (a tension, if you like) between two terms, the perfectum or lower chamber of the present (where the sand has fallen and is now at rest), and the infectum or upper chamber (where the sand begins its fall). It is a somewhat clumsy solution, but it works, after a fashion. And since the present is seemingly the keystone to the whole system, the contrast of infectum and perfectum runs through indicative, subjunctive and infinitive alike.

The solution, however, has at least one grave disadvantage, namely, that the present perfectum plays two relational roles: it stands as a past in its requisite relation to the present infectum, and it stands as a present in relation to the past and future tenses of the perfectum that it separates. As a result, as is well known, it operates sometimes as if it were a preterite, sometimes as if it were a present perfect, and syntactically commands two quite different sequences of tense. Because of this ambivalence, it is frequently analysed as two different tenses, or as a tense with a separate aspect--analyses for which there is no morphological justification whatever, and which are exceedingly dangerous because once one allows that the present perfect is two separate forms, then every other verbal morpheme may become two or indeed any number of forms. With the loss of all constraints, of course, goes the loss of all rigour, and then any one of any number of fanciful explanations becomes just as good as any other. I insist that the present perfect must be treated therefore as a single form, and that any successful explanation of its ambivalent usage must be dependent upon showing it as a single form with two analysable or demonstrable relational roles within the underlying system from which it operates.

We are now ready to return to the subjunctive. We said that the indicative differs from the subjunctive by the introduction of experiential time. In other words the indicative introduces a representation of an experiential consciousness that divides the rest of experience into past and future, but this element is completely lacking in the subjunctive. The events that are represented by the forms of the subjunctive are never represented as being actualised in experiential time. To put it more simply: the subjunctive represents an event; at the subjunctive level, that event is not allocated to experiential time, it remains free, potential, unplaced. The indicative also represents events, but by the very nature of the structure of the indicative, any event so represented is necessarily allocated to universe time, past, present or future and is thereby seen as an actual, not as a potential event.

The subjunctive, therefore, stands midway between the infinitive and the indicative. The infinitive is an unrefined represent-

ation of an event, the subjunctive is a single further stage of refinement in that it adds a new element, namely person and number, and the indicative is a further stage of refinement in that it adds the representation of experiential time and thereby relates all events to the real experience of the speaker.

6. Verbals and imperative. A survey of the rest of the morphology of the simple forms of the Latin verb reveals that the gerund and the participles may be left out of account because they are declined as nouns and adjectives, not as verbs. The imperative is a phatic form and does not belong directly to the system of the verb any more than the vocative belongs to the system of the noun.

The imperative singular, in fact, as happens in other languages, is the root of the verb stripped of all inflections. With thematic verbs the theme vowel is included in the stem so that we have (1) amā love (thou)! Some third declension imperatives reduced the short thematic vowel to zero, so that we have such forms as duc lead on!, dic say!, fac do!

The imperative plural adds an inflection -te, an element apparently related to the 2nd. plural inflection -tis (from original *-tes). The negative imperative is formed with noli be unwilling, which stems from an ancient optative; such admixture is not unusual in imperative morphology. Most French verbs, for example, base their imperative forms on the indicative, but a restricted set, expressing potentiality, forms the imperative on the subjunctive stem: cf. faites cela vs. sachez que...

Other forms of the imperative exist, but are rare and unusual forms which lie outside the scope of the present analysis, which is concerned with generalities rather than details.

7. The Passive Voice. The passive has been left to the end for two reasons: (1) it corresponds systematically to the active voice in so far as it develops from the infinitive through the subjunctive to the indicative and consequently has a corresponding paradigmatic array, and (2) the forms that it shows throughout the perfectum are curiously prophetic of later developments in the Romance languages. The periphrastic forms of the passive perfectum are the key to the ultimate revamping of the whole system.

The so-called passive of Latin is really a medio-passive voice, since it is notionally not just the opposite pole to the active, but includes the middle ground between the two poles as well. Consequently there is a large quantity of verbs that are not truly passive in sense, but which have passive morphology: the so-called deponents. These verbs cover such notions as nascor I am born, morior I die where the subject is not agentive, in that he does not normally have free choice. They also include such verbs as sequor I follow, where the subject has free choice to initiate the action, but is not free to go where he pleases: an excellent

illustration of a true middle voice notion. Reflexives, where the subject is both agent and patient, also adopt this morphology: vestior I dress myself, lavor I wash myself. (Since the agent is the subject of the active, the patient the subject of the passive, the reflexive, where the subject is both agent and patient, is the very heart of middle voice, at the centre between the two poles of active and passive).

The Romance languages, having formed a new passive voice from the contradictions of the Latin passive have also gone on to form a separate middle voice, often mistakenly called the reflexive: there is nothing reflexive about French se fâcher to get angry, se souvenir to remember, s'endormir to fall asleep.

The Romance passives have been formed from the periphrastic forms of the Latin perfectum, which may be seen in the following paradigmatic set:

	<u>INFECTUM</u>	<u>PERFECTUM</u>
<u>infinitives</u>	amārī	amātus esse
<u>subjunctives</u>	amārer	amātus essem
	amer	amātus sim
<u>indicatives</u>	amor	amātus sum
	amābor	amātus erō
	amābar	amātus eram

These periphrastic forms are an element of turbulence in a paradigm that otherwise is restricted to simple forms. As well as this obvious incongruity, these forms bring in another element of turbulence: it is the perfective participle amatus that brings to the collocation the notion of perfective: the forms of the verb to be (esse, essem, sim, sum, erō, eram) are all infectum forms, and in that sense out of place in the paradigms of the perfectum.

The consequences of this ambiguity are reported by Ernout (1953:228):

"Etant donné la valeur du participe passé, une phrase telle que hic mūrus bene cōstructus est signifiait à la fois 'ce mur est bien construit' (parfait) et 'ce mur fut bien construit' (passé). Pour distinguer les deux sens, le latin tendit peu à peu à opposer l'infectum de l'auxiliaire sum au perfectum fui: cōstructus est et cōstructus fuit, la première forme marquant l'état ou le résultat acquis, la seconde servant à l'expression du passé. Une fois cette opposition créée,

l'inflectum amor devait peu à peu s'éliminer. En effet l'inflectum du passif n'a pas survécu dans les langues romanes qui ont développé le type avec auxiliaire, opposant le présent je suis aimé au parfait je fus aimé."

Congruent with this development is the emergence of an active periphrastic form habeō amātum I have loved. This new form relieves the perfect amāvī of one of its two roles, and amāvī goes on its way historically to become French aimai, the past historic or simple preterit.

8. Postscript: Aspectual Morphology in Indo-European languages. There are three different ways of marking aspectual differences that have been exploited by different European languages, and all of these different morphological devices may be observed in the forms of Classical Latin.

The first, and perhaps the most primitive, is the use of preverbs. This is still the preferred means of expression of the highly developed aspect systems of Slavic languages, and, as is well known, leads to a great deal of complex detail. This means of expression was also exploited in Germanic, flourished in Old English, is still found in the separable and inseparable prefixes of German, and in the use of ge- (cognate with Latin cum/com-) as past participle marker. It seems that Classical Latin never exploited this means of expressing aspect, using it only for derivation, surviving remnants being found in such sets as facio I do, inficio I put in, deficio I withdraw etc.

The second morphological device for expressing aspect is suffixation: the adding of an affix to the stem before the inflectional endings. Such an element is the /u/ of the Latin perfectum, the /s/ that is the common element in Ancient Greek of both the future and the sigmatic aorist, and the imperfective suffixes /iv/ and /va/ of the Russian verb.

The third means of expressing aspect is the utilization of auxiliary verbs as in the French and English perfectives j'ai écrit I have written and the English progressive I am writing.

One must not conclude that all forms of aspect are notionally the same, that only the means of expression varies. Nothing could be further from the truth: perfective aspect changes a Russian present to a future, a French present to a past: the differences of marking express fundamental differences of content that have been examined by Valin (1965). From the systemic contrasts within the Latin verbal system, it is obvious that habeō amātus is not the same systemic element as amāvī, even though there is some overlap of function between the two forms. A difference of content requires a difference of expression; and conversely a difference of expression normally marks a difference of content.

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