

Tense Auxiliaries and the rise of aspectual contrasts in New Indo-Aryan

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Late Middle Indo-Aryan lacks a present–past tense distinction and temporal reference is recovered contextually or supplied by means of optional adverbial devices. The innovation of auxiliaries that conventionally encode tense relations is attested in several New Indo-Aryan languages. These present and past tense auxiliaries form periphrastic constructions with imperfective and perfective markers inherited from the Middle Indo-Aryan system. A peculiar aspect of these innovated periphrases is that although they are built from imperfective and perfective markers respectively, they are predominantly used to signal the semantically more specific progressive and perfect aspects at the earliest stages in their recruitment. Later in the development, these periphrastic expressions become further conventionalized for expressing the broader imperfective and perfect aspect with the expected temporal specification. I investigate this phenomenon in Old/Middle Gujarati and Marathi languages. As an example, consider the data from Bhayani (1998), who observes for Old Gujarati that the earliest stage is without periphrastic tense-based imperfective constructions (1a), which are only introduced around the mid-14th century (1b)–(1c) and used dedicatedly to convey the progressive aspect.

- (1) a. tumhārau bālamitt-u Madanadatt-u cirāgat-u
your childhood.friend-NOM.SG M- NOM.SG long.arrived-NOM.SG
dvārades-i **vartt-ai**
door-LOC.SG stand-IMPV.3SG
Your childhood friend, Madanadattu, arrived after a long time, *is standing* at the door. (SB: 144:16)
- b. ām tāta e sarva loka alika **bol-ai** **chai**
yes father these all people.NOM.PL lie NOM.SG speak-IMPV.3PL PRS.3.PL
Yes father! All these people are lying (lit. speaking a lie) (SiB Story 1; pp.2)
- c. jo-u, jo-u, koi vidyādhara athavā
look-imp look-imp some vidyādhara.NOM.SG or
manuśya rukmiṇī = nai le-i **jā-i** **ch-ai**
man.NOM.SG R = ACC take-GER go-IMPV3.SG PRS.3.SG
Look, look! Some Vidya^{dhara} or man is taking Rukmiṇī away. (SiB, Story 4, pp.12)

The question I address is the following: why should the innovation and spread of morphosyntactic tense marking have an effect on the aspectual contrasts that are expressible in a given linguistic system? More specifically, why should the combination of tense auxiliaries with imperfective and perfective aspect give rise to progressive and perfect aspect meanings respectively? I offer a functionally motivated solution to this puzzle showing how the grammaticalization of scalar inferences leads to an articulated aspectual system.