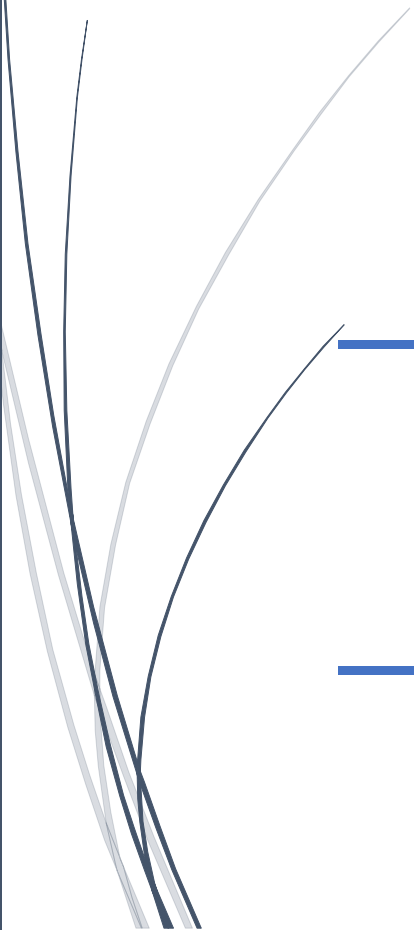


**Speaker Ghosting,
Demystification of
Long-Lived Puzzles and the
Raison D'être of the Perfect:
Anatomizing English
and Balkansprachbund Data**

Krasimir Kabakčiev



**The Athens Institute
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I dedicate this book to someone who,
in a chain of some peculiar and surprising events,
made its appearance possible –
Alexander Kabakchiev Junior, my grandson

Table of Contents

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	7
PREFACE	11
<i>Why this book?</i>	11
<i>A surprising eye opener</i>	13
<i>On the terminological apparatus</i>	14
<i>SOT: sequence of tenses, on English material</i>	14
<i>The Perfect</i>	15
TENSE	16
<i>Tensed verb forms</i>	16
<i>Preterit</i>	16
<i>The Aorist and the Imperfect, historical notions; the Aorist and the Imperfect in Bulgarian</i>	16
<i>The Aorist and the Imperfect in Greek</i>	17
MOOD (modality)	18
ASPECT	18
<i>Vendlerian situations</i>	19
<i>Verkuyl's aspect schemata</i>	19
<i>Verkuyl'sian leaks</i>	19
<i>The article-aspect interplay</i>	20
<i>Verbal aspect</i>	21
CHAPTER ONE	23
<i>Compositional aspect and its role as underlying the novel understanding of the Perfect across languages</i>	23
<i>Compositional aspect: what is it and what does it have to do with the Perfect?</i>	23
<i>Default aspectual value of a sentence</i>	27
<i>Languages analysed in search of the essence and raison d'être of the Perfect</i>	33
CHAPTER TWO	35
<i>The English Sequence of Tenses (SOT) rule: a preliminary issue akin to the essence of the Perfect in and across languages – and another puzzle which also received a solution</i>	35
<i>What is the essence of the English SOT rule?</i>	37
<i>Two speakers in a single sentence simultaneously?</i>	37
<i>Cancelable and non-cancelable content</i>	39
<i>Backshift mood</i>	42
<i>Backshift mood as a structurally important device</i>	44
CHAPTER THREE	47
<i>Speaker ghosting: an intriguing cross-language phenomenon found for the first time and described on Bulgarian data</i>	47
<i>Is it true that there is no SOT rule in Bulgarian?</i>	49
<i>Bulgarian features a Sequence of TAM rule</i>	54
CHAPTER FOUR	63
<i>Theoretical issues crying out to be resolved, preliminary notes on major linguistic categories: tense, aspect, the Perfect and in particular the English present Perfect</i>	63
<i>What is Tense? What is Aspect? What is Perfect?</i>	63

<i>Some more preliminary notes on the Perfect related to general categories such as tense and aspect</i>	83
<i>The English present Perfect and its raison d'être: a grammeme with no own semantics and with residual functions, among which the signaling of non-witnessing</i>	85
<i>Ultimately, what do the present Perfect and the preterit mean?</i>	91
<i>Witnessing, and an intricate question: exactly how witnessed is the Bulgarian witnessed form?</i>	99
<i>Is it really necessary to signify – or signal – witnessing in language?</i>	101
CHAPTER FIVE	107
<i>The Perfect as a grammatical device across languages with no semantic content of its own, used to counterbalance the impact of other grammatical entities; its raison d'être is the effectuation of cancelability</i>	107
<i>More on the Perfect versus the preterit in English</i>	108
<i>A comparison on what the Bulgarian and the Montenegrin Perfect do</i>	109
<i>Aspectologically the Perfect is “an empty bag” like the preterit</i>	111
<i>The Perfect is aspectologically an empty bag like the preterit, but it tends to imperfectivize</i>	111
<i>More on what the preterit and the Perfect do in English</i>	113
<i>Possible objections to the thesis that the Perfect in English is a cancelable form</i>	116
<i>Markers of boundedness across languages and similar interdependencies</i>	118
<i>Summary: many grammatical entities in a language either hang together or exist to make up for the absence of other grammatical entities</i>	120
CHAPTER SIX	123
<i>The Perfect in the Balkanssprachbund, three languages described by theoretical linguists and simultaneously native speakers: Montenegrin by Bulatović, Greek by Dimitrova, Turkish by Kutsarova</i>	123
<i>The Perfect in Montenegrin – and by extension in Serbian and BCMS in general; speaker ghosting on Montenegrin data – found soon after its discovery in Bulgarian</i>	124
<i>The Greek Perfect and its essence of a cancelability device as described by Dimitrova</i>	126
<i>Greek non-witnessed forms as exponents of the cancelability feature</i>	128
<i>Generally on the present Perfect in English, Bulgarian and Greek in Dimitrova's thesis</i>	128
<i>The phenomenon of speaker ghosting and the cancelability feature of the Turkish -mİş forms as described by Kutsarova</i>	132
<i>More on the widely held view in Turkology about the difference between -mİş and -DI verb forms</i>	135
<i>The non-witnessed Turkish -mİş forms as exponents of cancelability versus the witnessed -DI forms</i>	135
<i>Final notes</i>	137
CHAPTER SEVEN	139
<i>Final notes on the entirely novel understanding of the Perfect and where it started from</i>	139
<i>Conclusion</i>	140
REFERENCES	143
<i>Abbreviations</i>	151
<i>Index of terms</i>	153
<i>Index of authors</i>	159

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Although deeply intrigued by the Perfect, for a long time I did not expect to be able to write a book about it, for it was a mystery for me too, not only for the majority of the linguistic community.

I started teaching English in 1978, and the first thing I noticed was the inadequacy of grammars and other grammatical writings about aspect in English. Being a native speaker of a Slavic language, for me aspect was – and is – the specific internal mechanism for the realization in English of the difference between perfectivity and imperfectivity, as between a sentence such as *John drank a beer* and *John drank beer when he was young*, two random examples. The meaning of *drank* in the first sentence is absolutely clearly perfective, and *drank* in the second one is absolutely clearly imperfective. However, mainstream grammars did not, and still do not, have a single word to say about such crystal-clear regularities. At the start of my teaching career, in the period between 1978 and 1982, English grammars were, and most of them still are, **dead silent** about the possible ways English speakers can express the difference between the meaning of the two sentences above with the verb being the same, the same word, the same grammatical form.

I lived behind the Iron Curtain then, and gaining access to modern literature which could guide a teacher's way to understanding a specific linguistic problem was a huge challenge because of the inaccessibility to books "published in the West". I managed to overcome it partially, somehow. I luckily came upon a copy of Henk Verkuyl's (1972) book *On the Compositional Nature of the Aspects*, along with some other important publications of those times, and this opened my eyes about how perfectivity and imperfectivity can generally be effectuated in languages like Dutch – Verkuyl's mother tongue, and English.

Skipping ahead a few years, then came another big nuisance, and I thought this would remain forever. Having already grasped some of the fundamental features of compositional aspect approximately in 1984, I had to ponder meanwhile about the essence of the English Perfect too, another major grammatical entity that I had to not only understand but also teach. I came to the conclusion that I would never be able to understand the Perfect, considering the fact that while, indeed, it exists in my own native tongue, Bulgarian, it is absent in all the other Slavic languages. The obvious question to ask was: "Why is it absent?" I asked it regularly but I had not the slightest idea for a decent answer.

However, living in a very hostile communist environment and a life of struggle for basic necessities in life, I felt motivated, and was stubborn. I never discarded the idea to confront the mystery of the Perfect: whether in English or in another language. If aspect was a near-universal or truly universal phenomenon found in verbs in some languages and in whole sentences in other languages, it was logical to think of the Perfect in a similar way: as present in some languages and absent in others and as something near-universal or universal like aspect. Between 1984 and

2000, my understanding of compositional aspect developed significantly and in the year 2000 my 400-pages monograph *Aspect in English: a “common-sense” view of the interplay between verbal and nominal referents* was published by Kluwer (today Springer). To the present day, in 2026, it remains the only book in history so far devoted to compositional aspect specifically in English.

Fast-forward to 2016, only ten years back from now, one day I was preparing the fourth edition of my *English Grammar for Bulgarians* (Kabakčiev 2017) and was having a chat at home with my grandson Alexander, who was eleven then. Born and raised in Germany with German as his native tongue, he had good proficiency in Bulgarian too, due to the family environment. During the conversation I suddenly heard him say in Bulgarian: **Ne znam kak se zapoznaha mama i tate* ‘I do not know how mum and dad met’. I got startled – because this is a non-grammatical sentence. (What is more, a couple of years later I realized that this sentence, or, rather, this kind of sentence, actually **covers exactly the heart of the matter** as regards the Perfect – but when I first heard it I only recognized it as important.)

In English, the corresponding sentence with a preterit (simple past) form *I do not know how mum and dad met* is perfect, perfectly formed. In German the correct real-world translation generally requires a Perfect: *Ich weiß nicht, wie sich Mama und Papa kennengelernt haben* (literally ‘I do not know how mum and dad have met’). The use in German of the Imperfect form (*Imperfekt* or *Präteritum*) is indeed also possible: *Ich weiß nicht, wie Mama und Papa kennenlernten* ‘I do not know how mum and dad met’. But this use is atypical and restricted to the written register: stories, books, administrative texts. Obviously, my grandson had been misled by the possibility to use *Imperfekt* in German and the preterit in English, because the direct correspondence of an English sentence such as *I do not know how mum and dad met* must in Bulgarian be formed **not** with an Aorist but with a Perfect, obligatorily: *Ne znam kak sa se zapoznali_{PFVPERFECT} mama i tate* (literally) ‘I do not know how mum and dad have met’ – as is normally done also in German. And if formed with a preterit (Aorist) in Bulgarian, the sentence becomes non-grammatical: **Ne znam kak se zapoznaha_{PFVAOR} mama i tate*, an error immediately recognizable by any native Bulgarian speaker (the reason is explained below).

This unexpected error by my grandson rekindled my desire to fight the Perfect. The next ten years I did my best to carry out research into the problem field and discover further regularities and interdependencies in the complex and intriguing mechanism of the functioning of the Perfect: in English, Bulgarian and in other languages, especially in what is known as the *Balkansprachbund*. But the initial inspiration to fight the Perfect occurred precisely thanks to my grandson Alexander Kabakchiev – to whom I dedicate this book.

Apart from my grandson, I am, of course, also indebted to the rest of my family – all the adults in it being researchers, for their appreciation of my work as a scientific endeavor and devotion: my wife Valentina Mincheva,

cardiologist, my son Alexander Kabakchiev Senior, physicist, my daughter-in-law Mariana Kabakchiev, clinical trials specialist. My grandson Alexander Kabakchiev Junior is a university student and my granddaughter Vivian-Mila is beginning her secondary school education.

Back to the linguistics enterprise, in the years between 2016 and 2026, I had the opportunity to meet certain colleagues, some of whom decided to collaborate with me on aspect, tense, modality, the Perfect, nominal determination and some other intricate linguistic issues. To three of them I am especially indebted for the realization of this book: Vesna Bulatović, Professor of Semantics and English, University of Montenegro, Podgorica, Montenegro; Desislava Dimitrova, Assistant Professor at Paisii Hilendarski University of Plovdiv, Bulgaria; Sema Kutsarova, Senior Lecturer at the Medical University of Plovdiv, Bulgaria.

Vesna Bulatović was intrigued by my paper on non-grammaticality and speaker ghosting in Bulgarian and the *raison d'être* of English SOT (Kabakčiev 2018). She immediately reacted to it, did the necessary research in Montenegrin and discovered the same phenomenon there: speaker ghosting (Bulatović 2018). At that time I was not sure that the Bulgarian speaker ghosting phenomenon could be found in another language, no matter whether in one similar genealogically and typologically to Bulgarian or not. I thought that, after all, this phenomenon in Bulgarian might turn out to be an endemic one. For this reason, the fast discovery of speaker ghosting in Montenegrin by Vesna became an important first stimulus for my efforts to understand the possible cross-language distribution and prevalence of this intriguing phenomenon (see it described and explained in the chapters below).

Desislava Dimitrova, native speaker of Bulgarian and Greek, with whom I had already had a long collaboration and many publications on aspect (both verbal and compositional), tense, nominal determination and related matters in Greek, Bulgarian and English, gave a presentation in July 2025 during the Annual Linguistics Conference of the Athens Institute, and in 2026 her paper “The Greek present Perfect as an exponent of cancelability” appeared (Dimitrova 2026). She adopts in it my thesis about the Perfect as a cancelable verb form – though she has also developed some specific understanding on some of the elements of the phenomenon of cancelability.

Sema Kutsarova, native speaker of Turkish and Bulgarian, to whom I had given consultations for the preparation of her revolutionary paper on Turkish compositional aspect (Kutsarova 2025a), a staggeringly complex phenomenon, was the third colleague who subscribed to my understanding of the Perfect as an entity possessing no semantic meaning of its own, exercising structural functions and serving as a cancelability device. Kutsarova also delivered a presentation at the Linguistics Conference of the Athens Institute in July 2025, and her paper “The phenomenon of speaker ghosting and the cancellability feature of the Turkish *-mİş* forms” was published too (Kutsarova 2026), supporting the novel conceptualization of the Perfect as a grammatical entity – on Turkish data, based on my theoretical

framework developed for English and Bulgarian. However, interestingly, her insight into the Turkish phenomenon of speaker ghosting did not come very fast. The vicissitudes prior to her final conceptualization of speaker ghosting in Turkish are described in Chapter Six.

Gregory T. Papanikos, President of the Athens Institute, Professor (Adjunct) of the University of Tennessee, Knoxville, USA, is to whom I am especially indebted. Some years ago he suggested that if I have an idea for a book, and if and when such a book is ready, the Athens Institute can publish it. Of course, it is a high honor for me to have a book published in Greece, in the cradle of civilization, by an institution whose mission is:

to serve as a forum where academics and researchers from various disciplines and different countries can gather in small groups, akin to ancient Athenian symposiums. Here, they can exchange ideas on education and research, as well as engage in discussions about future developments in their respective disciplines [...] Since antiquity, Athens has been an open city. In the words of Pericles, Athens "[...] is open to the world; we never expel a foreigner from learning or seeing" – <https://www.atiner.gr/mission>

Hearty thanks to all the other colleagues at the Athens Institute for helping me through the years with my presentations, articles, and hence also the publication of this book: Kostas Spyropoulos, Zoe Boutsoli, Adrodete Papanikou, Olga Gkounta, Katerina Maraki, Celia Sakka, Konstantinos Manolidis, Aggeliki Bambili and the rest of the team. I am indebted to them also for the great time I have had at the Athens Institute and in Greece for a whole decade already.

Krasimir Kabakčiev
October 2026

PREFACE

Why this book?

This book is mainly about a cross-language phenomenon widely known as the present Perfect verb form. It is usually periphrastic and can be exemplified in English as consisting of an auxiliary *have* plus a past participle of a full verb, example *have/has worked*, henceforward referred to simply as (the) Perfect. In some languages, e.g., Bulgarian, the Perfect is obtained from a *be* auxiliary (Bulgarian *sam*), and other languages across the world use both *have* and *be* as auxiliaries: for example, German, Dutch and Danish in Europe. The Perfect across languages also has instantiations that are synthetic, and in the European region there are two examples (to my knowledge) of synthetic Perfects: in Georgian (one periphrastic Perfect, one synthetic), and in Turkish, where it is represented synthetically (morphologically) by the *-mİş* verb forms.

What is a Perfect? It has been persistently regarded by many or even most members of the linguistic community as something truly baffling and for this reason has repeatedly been labeled *puzzle*, *mystery*, *riddle* and *enigma*: a *puzzle* by Klein (1992), Katz (2003), Pancheva & von Stechow (2004) – in the titles of the publications, Klecha (2016; 2026: 1–4, 15–20), a *mystery* by Higginbotham (2009: 160) and me (Kabakčiev 2020a: 127). All the major elements of the theoretical basis underlying the present work have been published in recent years, between 2017 and 2026 in Greece, Bulgaria, Germany, Ukraine, Serbia, Georgia (mainly in journals), authored by four people – Bulatović, Dimitrova, Kutsarova and me, some in collaboration between Dimitrova and me. After these publications, a necessity was felt that they ought to be brought together into a common theoretical framework, a monograph. The necessity is now realized.

I have been pondering about the enigmatic nature of the Perfect and its essence for almost five decades: from 1978, when I obtained a degree in English philology at Veliko Tarnovo University, Bulgaria, and started teaching English as a foreign language (to Bulgarians), to the present day. Being a resident in a communist country in my school years, I was immersed not in English as a foreign language – as is the case today practically all over the world, but in Russian. Behind the Iron Curtain we were forced to learn Russian from earliest childhood, while English was “the language of the capitalist enemy”. English was practically nowhere to be heard or even read in Bulgaria, apart from the very few largest libraries, where there was restricted access to the whole of the “dangerous Western literature”. Even the music and poetry of the Beatles were unwelcome in Bulgaria and regularly brandished as decadent in the communist press. The Fab Four were effectively forbidden in those years. The state-controlled radio, a single one for the whole country, broadcast only Bulgarian and Russian pop songs all day long. I heard a couple of English words for the first time in life after I had turned 14, a fact that

today sounds shocking. The suffocating ideological embrace in Bulgaria over the whole of the Western culture continued approximately until 1985, when it softened after the Russian *perestroyka* began.

Seven years after having been subjected to the influence of another language, which, albeit also Indo-European, is in many respects very different from English (in phonology, vocabulary, grammar, alphabet), the imposed adaptation in early life to another language stood in the way of my desire to acquire good English. I overcame this obstacle because I had the incredible luck to be enrolled in 1967 in an English language school, only a couple of which existed in the country in those times – to feed the need for the communists’ offspring to learn things about the dangerous world of the “capitalist-imperialist enemy”. Children of people who were not members of the Communist Party were admitted to such schools as a very rare exception – I accidentally turned out to be one of them.

For those readers who are not aware of the existence of facts of history like these and about language employed as a weapon – whether in the narrow political sense or in the linguistic details (see Kabakčiev 2025b), I would ask them to note the following. English has Perfect verb forms. Russian, however, is a language in which the grammatical entity Perfect, known in languages such as English, Bulgarian and Greek, is, indeed, a puzzle to its speakers, as exemplified by many statements of linguists. Let me also explain that Bulgarian, my native tongue, is such that although it is Slavic – like, for example, Ukrainian or Russian, it is the only language among the approximately twenty Slavic ones that differs from all the rest by featuring a true Perfect.¹ This ought to mean that English with its Perfect verb forms ought to be easier to understand for Bulgarians than for other Slavic speakers. I am not sure that this is true. It could be only partly true. To the native speaker of Bulgarian, the essence of the Perfect, whether in its Bulgarian or English version – or in some other language, is, in the long run, and in my personal view, also a puzzle. And what makes things in Bulgarian even more complicated is that the Perfect there features various additional values: grammatical, semantic, pragmatic, etc., that are absent in the other Slavic languages and are purely endemic or characteristic of the Balkanssprachbund.

A Ukrainian colleague teaches Bulgarian to Ukrainian emigres in Bulgaria. She has extensive experience and is supposed to explain to them what a Perfect verb form is, together with the fact that Bulgarian features such forms as parts of very large verb paradigms with intricate meanings. These paradigms are difficult to understand by speakers of Ukrainian and Russian and generally of languages without Perfects. (They are difficult to understand even by Bulgarians.) She complains that her students are

¹Indeed, the official language in the Republic of North Macedonia also has Perfect verb forms, but this is because it is a western Bulgarian dialect (Kabakčiev 2025a). There are some other languages, Slavic, in the Balkanssprachbund that also have what is standardly called Perfects, formed as in Bulgarian with an auxiliary and a past participle. But they are not true Perfects, they are preterits, for detail see below.

adults, most of them highly educated, and that they ask clear questions that she cannot answer. Her students' queries revolve around the following, as formulated by the students themselves:

We are Ukrainians. Some of us speak Ukrainian, some Russian. In both languages there are no Perfect verb forms. Why should Bulgarians, whose language is Slavic like ours – and we, the speakers of the three languages, mutually understand each other roughly 50% of what we say, have Perfects unlike us? Whatever we must say, we say it in Ukrainian and Russian without using any Perfect verb form – something we do not have anyway. What function does the Bulgarian Perfect have that makes this language different from Ukrainian and Russian?

My colleague feels uneasy because of the difficulty to explain this, a result of the inadequacy of the grammars of the languages mentioned, including English, Bulgarian, Ukrainian, Russian. I sympathize with her and understand her situation: a failure of a teacher to explain a seemingly very simple fact – why in Bulgarian and in geographically adjacent languages like Greek, Albanian, Romanian, Georgian, there is something called Perfect, and this thing is absent in Ukrainian, Russian and almost all the other Slavic languages. What sort of grammatical entity is this? What special semantic meaning or meanings does it have that make these languages so different from Ukrainian and Russian?²

A surprising eye opener

When the error made by my grandson (described above) occurred, although at first sight it might appear insignificant, gradually and after careful deliberation by me, it not only started to open my eyes as to certain language regularities, but also shattered into pieces my desire to search for some “meaning of the Perfect”. I realized that the Perfect in languages like English and Bulgarian simply has no standard meaning, something that, e.g., the progressive verb forms in English have: current activity.

Note that native speakers of a language cannot always recognize the reason **why** a certain sentence in their language is non-grammatical, as will be shown later on. But in the case of the non-grammaticality of **Ne znam kak se zapoznaha mama i tate* ‘I do not know how mum and dad met’ the reason is clear: my grandson could not have seen how his mum and dad met. As for why the English sentence with a Perfect **I do not know how mum and dad have met* is non-grammatical with a Perfect, in full contrast to the Bulgarian sentence – which is grammatical **with** a Perfect, this is a separate special issue, also discussed in this book below in detail and at length, and it is also explained, in an entirely novel way (Chapter Two).

²To clarify a bit the issue in advance, let me explain that the problem is actually that the Perfect has no real meaning of its own – of the kind most other tense-aspect-mood verb forms normally have.

But, in any case, a very specific linguistic problem related to non-grammaticality is obviously raising its weird head here. As for the quirky discrepancy between the English and the German sentence in particular described above,³ it has surely been noticed many times by speakers of the two languages and by linguists. However, even professionals have obviously been turning a blind eye to the inconsistency, thus failing, as a result, to understand what lies beneath it. After all, on the one hand, if standard German speech requires the use of the *Perfekt* and not of the *Imperfekt* (*Präteritum*) in certain sentences, **this cannot be accidental**, and the explanation of such a special requirement ought to be sought at deeper levels of language and cognitive structure. On the other hand, the failure by German and English grammarians to grasp the inconsistency is explainable in yet another way, as due to the absence of a specific grammatical feature in the two languages, which, like the Perfect itself, is again severely misunderstood. This specific feature, called witnessing (versus non-witnessing), is absent in the Germanic languages but is present elsewhere. It exists in the Balkansprachbund, as shown and explained below.

On the terminological apparatus

This book presents challenges from a large number of perspectives, but one of them is of greater significance and must be taken into account from the beginning: terminology. The most important terms employed in this work are listed now below and briefly described. Those with a larger scope, namely, tense, aspect, mood (modality), are in capital letters.

SOT: sequence of tenses, on English material

It happened so that initially SOT was not a major target of my inquiry into tense, aspect, the Perfect, etc., but it turned out to stand seriously in the way of my research efforts. It even exhibited a very intriguing puzzle, in that a simple Bulgarian sentence like **Petar kaza, che pristigna*, directly corresponding to the perfectly formed English sentence *Peter said he arrived*, is non-grammatical and must be changed into a sentence with a Perfect: *Petar kaza, che e pristignal* '(literally) *Peter said he has arrived*'. The truly ridiculous fact is that, conversely, the English sentence with a Perfect, **Peter said he has arrived*, is non-grammatical – for flaunting the SOT rule, while the Bulgarian translation equivalent with a Perfect *Petar kaza, che e pristignal* is the correct correspondence of the English sentence with no Perfect – *Peter said he arrived*. I felt that this ludicrous discrepancy could not remain unexplained, so I decided to subject the English SOT phenomenon to a

³The English sentence *I do not know how mum and dad met* is perfectly formed, while in German the Perfect is generally required: *Ich weiß nicht, wie sich Mama und Papa kennengelernt haben*, literally 'I do not know how mum and dad have met'.

stringent analysis (in Kabakčiev 2018), as a result of which the *raison d'être* of SOT was revealed.

The Perfect

This book deals with the verb form widely found across languages and known as *the Perfect*: a grammatical entity that could also be called a grammeme.⁴ It appears in the text always with a capital letter: (the) Perfect. The notion of Perfect ought to be thought of as referring to all possible instances of this grammatical entity across languages and in any particular language, like, for example, English. In principle, Perfect verb forms are all instances of the grammatical entity Perfect, such as the present Perfect (*have/has played*), the past Perfect (*had played*), also called pluperfect, the future Perfect (*will have played*), the future-in-the-past Perfect (*would have played*), the Perfect infinitive (*to have played*).

Note specifically that the combination of Perfect and progressive verb forms (*have/has been playing*, *had been playing*, etc.) falls outside the object of analysis in this work, for another reason. These are verb forms effectuating an additional category of the TAM (tense-aspect-modality) type,⁵ viz., aspect – in its second manifestation, of imperfectivity. For more

⁴Calling the Perfect a grammeme appears right but is a bit problematic from the point of view that a grammeme ought to have a single grammatical meaning or function. The Perfect has more than one, see below. The issue forces me to refer to the Perfect sometimes as a grammeme, sometimes as a grammatical entity.

⁵TAM can be read in two ways: tense-aspect-modality or tense-aspect-mood.

information on imperfectivity and aspect, read below. So, Perfect progressives are verb forms carrying an additional grammatical value, imperfectivity, and for this reason they fall beyond the object of investigation. Also outside are the following verb forms: future Perfect, future-in-the-past Perfect, the Perfect infinitive. The past Perfect is given some consideration, mainly due to the very specific manner of its formation: a combination of a witnessed and a non-witnessed formal marker (see Kabakčiev 2026b), which, indicatively, is observed not only in one language in the Balkansprachbund but in two: Bulgarian and Turkish.

The examples with Perfect verb forms given so far are primarily on English language material. But this book is not only or mainly about the English Perfect. It is about the Perfect as a cross-language and universal phenomenon observed in numerous languages and investigated here mainly on data from the Balkansprachbund. Languages around the world that **do not** feature Perfect verb forms are many. Note the following. The well-known Turkish *-miş* verb forms effectuate the important values of cancelability and non-witnessing, see below – just like Perfect verb forms in English and in the other Germanic and Romance languages, in Bulgarian, Greek, Albanian in the Balkansprachbund, etc., but in different ways (again see below). For this reason the Turkish *-miş* forms are subsumed here under the notion “Perfect verb forms” and given full consideration as such.

TENSE

This work does not make use of the term *tense* in its traditional understanding, in reference, for example, to the well-known sixteen verb forms in English inadequately called *tense forms*, or to the nine Bulgarian verb forms also fully inadequately called *tenses* in grammars and other linguistic writings. The reason why the term *tense* **is not** employed in the book in this way is simple and can be exemplified immediately with the present Perfect progressive form in English: *have/has been playing*. This verb form **does not** “encode tense”. It is **not** a *tense*. It is an aspecto-temporal verb form, which means that it unites a tense value, present, and an aspectual one, imperfectivity, in this case of the current activity type (and not, for example, of the habitual type). Furthermore, the English present Perfect progressive obviously has a modal value too, that could be termed “perfectness” – but as for what exactly perfectness stands for, this is what this whole book is about. For further and more in-depth information on my understanding of tense, aspect, mood (TAM), etc., check out also my *English Grammar: main stumbling blocks for Bulgarians learning English* (Kabakčiev 2017).

Tensed verb forms

A clear distinction must be made between tensed and non-tensed verb forms, with the following random examples in English: *have / has played*; *had played*. These two are **tensed forms**: they exhibit a tense value, present – the former, and pastness (past tense) – the latter, albeit

each in a rather complex fashion. **Non-tensed** forms are, for example, infinitives: *to play*, a simple infinitive, *to have played*, a Perfect infinitive, *to have been playing*, a Perfect progressive infinitive.

Preterit

Preterit stands for a verb form that encodes only a past temporal value in the different languages – pastness, and is not marked for any aspectual or modal value. This verb form is usually referred to in English as a past indefinite or a past simple, and in the English language it represents precisely a preterit: a form that is not marked for an aspectual and a modal value. It is ambivalent vis-à-vis perfectivity and imperfectivity and allows the explication of **either** perfectivity or imperfectivity.

The Aorist and the Imperfect, historical notions; the Aorist and the Imperfect in Bulgarian

These two verb forms represent historically important grammatical notions. Aorist is a term from Ancient Greek grammar, Imperfect from Latin grammar. In Modern Bulgarian, however, they exhibit an intriguing specificity, see below. Henceforward they are in capital letters, to facilitate the reading especially of Bulgarian grammatical terms such as perfective Imperfect and imperfective Imperfect, perfective Aorist and imperfective Aorist. The two terms Aorist and Imperfect also very clearly **do not** encode tense only. Indeed, they encode tense, which is past: pastness of the situation portrayed by the verb. But they also encode another grammatical value, aspectual. The Aorist – in the languages in which it exists, is a composite form encoding pastness plus the aspectual value *temporal boundedness*. The Imperfect, conversely, encodes pastness plus the aspectual value *temporal non-boundedness*. Apart from that, the Aorist and the Imperfect share a third value, the extremely important modal value “witnessed”, which represents a special focus in this book.

The Bulgarian grammatical entity perfective Aorist – i.e., an Aorist obtained from a perfective verb, represents a combination of pastness plus temporal boundedness with a telos reached. But the Bulgarian Aorist form can be obtained from an imperfective verb too and is called imperfective Aorist. The Imperfect is an imperfective grammatical entity, encoding the tense value pastness and the aspectual value non-boundedness, no matter whether an Imperfect in Bulgarian is formed from a perfective verb or from an imperfective one. For all these reasons, the Bulgarian Aorist and Imperfect verb forms cannot, and **must not**, be called tenses. They are TAM entities, combining three elements: tense (past), an aspectual value (boundedness – the Aorist, and non-boundedness – the Imperfect) and a modal value, witnessing. See also below, Chapters Four and Six.

Thus, grammatical entities representing true perfectivity are the Aorist in Greek and the perfective Aorist in Bulgarian. For further detail

in Greek, see Chapter Six. As for the Bulgarian imperfective Aorist, it, indeed, combines pastness and temporal boundedness, but the latter lacks a reached telos. Compare it with the Bulgarian perfective Aorist, which also combines pastness and temporal boundedness but with a reached telos.

The Aorist and the Imperfect in Greek

In Greek – both Ancient and Modern, the Aorist is perfective *per se*, because it is formed from perfective verbs only, and the Imperfect is imperfective *per se*, because it is formed from imperfective verbs only. Both Aorist and Imperfect in Greek encode the tense value pastness as in Bulgarian but, as explained by Dimitrova, see Chapter Six below, they markedly differ from Bulgarian in their modality value. The Aorist and the Imperfect in Greek are ambivalent in modal terms as to the values witnessed and non-witnessed, in contrast to Bulgarian, where Aorists and Imperfects are witnessed, and their non-witnessed correspondence is the Perfect. The Bulgarian renarrative is also non-witnessed but it is not analyzed here because of the insufficiency of space.

MOOD (modality)

English and the group of Balkansprachbund languages analyzed in this book differ considerably in their mood/modality characteristics. Bulgarian is a very special language in this domain, as it features many modal grammaticalized values that are either part of other grammatical entities or constitute independent grammatical units. For example, the Bulgarian *renarrative*, obtained from Aorist or Imperfect participles, is an independent grammaticalized entity, cf. the renarrative verb form *pristignal* in the sentence *Vlakat pristignal* ‘(literally) The train arrived [according to some source]’. However, a renarrative value is also found in the Perfect: *Vlakat e pristignal* ‘The train has arrived’, where *e pristignal* ‘has arrived’ is a Perfect form that also carries a renarrative meaning just like *Vlakat pristignal* ‘(literally) The train arrived’ – where *pristignal* ‘arrived’ is “the official”, i.e., nominal, renarrative.

The modal meanings of the overall Bulgarian verb paradigm are many and extremely complicated and intriguing, but in their entirety they fall outside the object of inquiry here, precisely for being too numerous and intricate. This work is mainly focused on two of the modal meanings in the Bulgarian verb paradigm, namely witnessing and non-witnessing. They pose a conceptual and a terminological difficulty at the same time, in that witnessing is traditionally regarded as part of the semantics of the Aorist and the Imperfect, yet Aorist and Imperfect verb forms are held in almost the whole of the Bulgarianist linguistic literature to be somehow incorporated into the indicative paradigm of the nine TAM verb forms wrongly termed *tenses*. This work does not contain an attempt at a solution of this serious conceptual and terminological issue. It upholds the thesis that Aorists and Imperfects simply encode simultaneously

three values: tense – past, an aspectual value – temporal boundedness (the Aorist) and temporal non-boundedness (the Imperfect), and a modal value – witnessing, which traditionally and infelicitously is called evidential in many publications.⁶

ASPECT

Aspect is conceptualized in the present work on the basis of numerous publications (Kabakčiev 1984; 2000; 2019b; 2023c, 2025c, *inter alia*) as a cross-language and truly universal phenomenon with two fundamental values: perfectivity and imperfectivity. Perfectivity is temporal boundedness with a reached telos, imperfectivity is temporal non-boundedness with or without a telos. The idea rests on the general assumption that there can be no human language in which it is impossible to make the distinction between situations such as *The neighbor drank a beer* (perfective) and *The neighbor drank beer when he was young* (imperfective). Aspect across languages is found in two archetypes: verbal and compositional. Verbal aspect is found in the Slavic languages, in Greek, Georgian, Lithuanian, Kurdish, Chinese, etc. Compositional aspect is found in Europe in the Germanic and the Romance languages, in Finnish, and in Albanian and Turkish in the Balkansprachbund. See more on the distinction in the following chapters.

Vendlerian situations

The Vendlerian situations (Vendler 1957) are four: states, activities, accomplishments and achievements. States and activities are imperfective situations, accomplishments and achievements are perfective. Added to these four Vendlerian situations are the **episodes**, see Kabakčiev (2000: 286–307). An episode is a Vendlerian situation which is again temporally bounded, as are accomplishments and achievements, but has not reached an inherent telos. Episodes in Bulgarian are morphologically represented by imperfective Aorists.

Verkuyl's aspect schemata

Verkuyl's aspect schemata are two: the perfective one and the imperfective one, described in Verkuyl's first two monographs (Verkuyl 1972; 1993), and especially in the latter – but not explained there in a sufficiently clear way. More detailed descriptions of the features of Verkuyl's aspect schemata – which are otherwise, undoubtedly, **the quintessence of the compositional aspect theory**, can be found in Kabakčiev (2023c: 249–260; 2025c: 157–174).

⁶*Evidential* is an infelicitous term in the sense that it is employed in this case on a single value, witnessing (and also non-witnessing), while it is systematically applied in the literature to a very large group of other linguistic concepts.

Verkuylian leaks

The notion *Verkuylian leak* is an element in Verkuyl's aspect imperfective schema (see the previous passage) that stands for such a change in the perfective schema which leads to the relegation of the sentence from the perfective schema into the imperfective one because of the feature non-bounded – found in an NP, or the feature non-telic – found in a verb. On exactly what **a leak** is, see Verkuyl (1993: 18–19, 182), Kabakčiev 2025c: 161–174).⁷ I need to stress that the concept of *a Verkuylian leak* is not some banal linguistic observation. It is part of the extremely complex conceptualization of compositional aspect that would, however, be in need of some specific modification if it must be juxtaposed to verbal aspect as found in languages like the Slavic ones. In this sense, *Verkuylian leak* is a concept, a key one, primarily in the theory of compositional aspect.

The article-aspect interplay

This phenomenon is not simply important, it is **absolutely fundamental** for English grammar. Unfortunately, all English grammar books at a higher level – comprehensive, academic, for university students and the like, are **dead-silent** about the phenomenon, despite its fundamental nature, despite the fact that it was discovered decades ago, and despite the fact that it has been discussed innumerable times in the linguistic literature: both theoretical and applied (linguodidactic). According to Bulatović (2020: 404), there exist (at the time of her publication) only two specialised grammars, Declerck (2006) and Kabakčiev (2017), which provide descriptions of English compositional aspect and incorporate the phenomenon of the **article-aspect interplay**.

The article-aspect interplay in English can be exemplified by four sentences in which – within the confines of the very simplified explanation here – the loss of an article or of more than one article in one of the two types of situation participants in the sentence (*kid, kids, cat, cats*), or in both situation participants, leads to imperfectivity:

- | | |
|-----|--|
| (1) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. The kid fed the cat [perfective] b. The kid fed cats [imperfective] c. Kids fed the cat [imperfective] d. Kids fed cats [imperfective] |
|-----|--|

The first instance of use in the linguistics literature of sentences with an identical pattern as in (1) here, revealing the article-aspect interplay in English, is Kabakčiev (2020b: 116), where the following set of sentences with an identical pattern was introduced:

⁷I believe that the term *Verkuylian leak* used in the aspectological literature is my own. It was coined by me to honor the finder of the phenomenon.

- (2) a. The woman made the child drink from the well [perfective]⁸
- b. Women made the child drink from the well [imperfective]
- c. The woman made children drink from the well [imperfective]
- d. The woman made the child drink from wells [imperfective]

Apart from that, note that the sentences in (2) contain three situation participants, not only two as in (1) above. The sentences in (1) were purposefully constructed as extremely simple, with only two situation participants, with very short NPs and a short verb form – in order not to divert the reader’s attention from the complex and highly intriguing regularities. Sentences with two situation participants exhibiting perfective and imperfective meanings are discussed in more depth in Kabakčiev (2019b); sentences with three situation participants exhibiting perfective and imperfective meanings are discussed in more depth in Kabakčiev (2020b and 2025c).

Verbal aspect

Aspect is **verbal** or **compositional**. Following the conceptualization of aspect as verbal or compositional, languages are categorized as **verbal-aspect languages** and **compositional-aspect languages**, although verbal-aspect languages, as shown in the literature (Dimitrova & Kabakčiev 2021), often exhibit examples of compositional aspect, and vice versa, compositional-aspect languages often exhibit examples of verbal aspect. Examples of verbal-aspect languages are all the Slavic ones, Greek, Lithuanian, Georgian – in Europe, Kurdish and Chinese in the rest of the world, etc. Examples of compositional-aspect languages in Europe are the modern Germanic and Romance languages, Albanian, Finnish, Turkish. Verbal aspect across languages is standardly, but not always, represented by verbs as dictionary items, which are either perfective or imperfective as lexical entries, and the perfective-imperfective contrast there is invariably treated in the aspectological literature as grammaticalized.

In the general and most usual case, unaffixed verbs in verbal-aspect languages – such as the Slavic ones, have imperfective meaning (very rarely perfective), while affixed ones, especially with prefixes, but also with infixes or postfixes, frequently have perfective meaning. Many languages feature verbs with combinations of prefixes, infixes and postfixes, and it is solely up to the native speaker to determine exactly which verb as a lexical item exhibits exactly what aspect: perfective or imperfective. A very specific type of verbal aspect (compared to the Slavic languages, Greek, Georgian, etc.) is observed in Chinese, where standard verbs without a *le* particle are imperfective, and the *le* particle in most

⁸The construction of the first sentence was inspired (so to say) by a sentence in Middle English – *She dud þe childe drynke of þe welle* ‘She made the child drink from the well’, from *Cursor Mundi* (1300 A.D.), translated into Modern English and slightly modified. The other three sentences, imperfective, were architected by me according to the need to create an identical pattern to represent the article-aspect interplay.

cases lends a perfective meaning to a sentence with a verb with no *le* particle (see Wu 2026).