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NOTES ON THE PLUPERFECT WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO 'PHASE'

Yasuhiro Ieki

I. INTRODUCTION

1.1 The categorization of the perfect form has always been a somewhat troublesome task for many linguists. Some traditional grammarians have regarded the perfect as 'tense,' whereas others have considered it as 'aspect.'¹⁾ There has been a general doubt among many linguists in treating the perfect as 'tense,' since it differs in meaning from other tense forms.²⁾ However, the definition of the term 'aspect,' which is said to be concerned with different ways in viewing an event or a situation, has also led some linguists to doubt whether the perfect should be characterized as 'aspect.' In this respect, a search for an entirely new category apart from either 'tense' or 'aspect' was essayed, and one of such candidates turned out to be 'phase.' This term was used and developed by Joos (1964).³⁾ Recent linguists are gradually beginning to evaluate this term, among them is Palmer (1974), where the term 'phase' is accepted for representing the perfect.

The term 'phase' differs from 'aspect' in that whereas the latter views an action from different points, it gives attention to the change of the object. To be more concrete, phases are

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- 1) Comrie (1976) defines 'tense' and 'aspect' as follows. 'Tense relates the time of the situation referred to some other time, usually to the moment of speaking.' (pp. 1-2) 'Aspects are different ways of viewing the internal temporal constituency of a situation.' (p. 3)
 - 2) For further discussion on the distinction of 'tense' and 'aspect', confer Comrie (1976).
 - 3) The term 'phase' was originally introduced by G. L. Trager and H. L. Smith. Cf. G. L. Trager, H. L. Smith, *An Outline of English Structure*, (1957), Washington.

for example understood as aspects⁴⁾ of the moon (or other planets) according to amount of illumination: new moon, first quarter, full moon, and last quarter. Or they can be compared to the traffic lights; the colours green, yellow, and red represent the different phases.

The aim of the present paper, however, is not to argue which candidate is the best in characterizing the semantic function of the perfect, but to apply the term 'phase' to the explanation of various uses of the pluperfect and see that if we can explicate the meaning of the special usages of the pluperfect by the notion of 'phase.'⁵⁾ The reason why we will restrict our analysis to the uses of the pluperfect, is that it is easier to account for the various usages of the pluperfect than for those of the present perfect.

1.2 Before we go into the analysis, it would be necessary to refer to the ordinary use of the pluperfect. It is generally assumed that the pluperfect represents the temporal precedence of an event among two or more events. The pluperfect describes the events according to some other angles which are somehow irrelevant to their temporal anteriority. For if the events were always described in accordance with their (temporal) occurrences, then there would be no need for the pluperfect.

This means that the pluperfect is used where the events are described not in terms of the temporal sequence, but in terms of the variety of angles. This is where the notion 'phase' comes in. The pluperfect seems to signify that there is a discontinua-

4) The term 'aspect' used here should not be confused with the grammatical category 'aspect' discussed above.

5) The discussion on the categorization of the perfect is going to be one of the main problems in my M. A. thesis, which is to be submitted in January, 1980. The present paper concerns the evaluation of the notion 'phase' in explaining the various uses of the pluperfect.

tion in the sequence of events and that the setting has changed. As we will see below, this change of setting leads to the notion of the change of states, which in turn leads to the change of 'phase.' We are not going to consider this problem further on, but for the time being, we will assume that we could apply the notion of 'phase' to the general uses of the pluperfect.

II. UNFULFILLMENT OF PAST HOPES AND EXPECTATIONS

2.1 It is widely known that there is a special meaning of the pluperfect when used with verbs such as *hope*, *expect*, etc. These uses of the pluperfect imply that the past hope or expectation was not realized. We will see it in the following example.

- (1) Calgary had expected bewilderment, incredulous gladness struggling with incomprehension, eager questions There was none of that.

— A. Christie, *Ordeal by Innocence*

The context of the situation is as follows. Dr. Calgary had visited a family with a piece of news that one of their family, who had been convicted of murder, was after all not guilty. He expected them to express some feelings, such as relief and joy, but they remained silent and even seemed to be annoyed by the news. There was none of the expression of feelings that he had expected there to be.

- (2) Elizabeth, having rather expected to affront him was amazed at his gallantry

— J. Austen, *Pride and Prejudice*

This sentence is similar to (1), in expressing the implication rather explicitly. Now let us consider some other sentences.

- (3) They had expected him to come at once. One word of explanation would surely be enough and he would

come charging out to fetch them in, and the next thing would be to arrange for them to get to a proper port and go aboard an English ship.

— A. Ransome, *Missee Lee*

- (4) She herself had felt pretty sure that Dick and Dorothea would have changed their minds and gone home. She had even expected them to turn up at the igroo yesterday afternoon. — A. Ransome, *Winter Holiday*
- (5) ‘I had hoped,’ she said, ‘to show the Taicoon Wu that he could agree with me against my counsellor and Chang.’

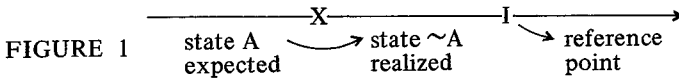
‘I fear I spoilt that, ma’am,’ said Captain Flint.

— A. Ransome, *Missee Lee*

These sentences, apart from (1) and (2), do not have explicit negative implication such as ‘but he didn’t come out for a long time,’ in (3). What these sentences express, however, is not simply a description of past hope or expectation, but they accompany what can be called ‘negative inference’ that they were not realized, whether they are explicit or not. We can see that clearly in (5) by Captain Flint’s words: ‘I fear I spoilt that, ma’am.’ Here we can point it out as one of the semantic function of the pluperfect.

Now, how could the notion of ‘phase’ explain this function? As we have seen above, the function of the pluperfect does not seem to be restricted to the mere description of the past hopes or expectations, since the pluperfects with those verbs imply the unfulfillment of the past hopes. They indicate that they were not fulfilled. In other words, they seem to imply that the least expected thing actually happened instead. According to this assumption, we could generalize this situation as follows. There has occurred an interruption between the point of time designated by the verb (which belongs to the past) and the point after that former point. This gap between the two states

could be explained by the concept of 'phase.' A certain state had been expected. But there occurred a change of phase, so that the other state was realized. Accordingly, this change of phase is signalled by the pluperfect. This can be shown in the following figure.



It would also be clear from this explanation that these implications cannot be expressed by the preterite. The preterite, being an expression of time points, can only account for the description of the events at each time point. It cannot describe the change of state, which has occurred at a certain time point and is completely different from the former state, as can the pluperfect. So we might as well assume that this expression of 'change of phase' can only be represented by the pluperfect, and that it is one of the main functions of the pluperfect.

On the other hand, it might be argued that these 'negative' inferences that the pluperfect is said to carry, are context-dependent and therefore indeterminate; especially those with implicit inferences. So it might be argued against regarding them as a function intrinsic to the pluperfect. It must be admitted that these sentences above are context-dependent, but there are also cases of no indeterminacy

- (6) The twins had arrived by train early today, and no one had expected Lady Veronica.

— A. Christie, *Cat Among the Pigeons*

- (7) Neither of them had expected anything like what they found when they scrambled over the top.

— A. Ransome, *Swallowdale*

Still, it can be charged that in these sentences, the 'negative' inference is due to the constituents such as 'no one' or

'neither.' The charge is tenable, but we could still say that the use of the pluperfect in these cases reinforces the inference.

However, even if we admit the indeterminacy as a defect of the phase theory, the same defect, by viewing from the other side, may turn out to be an advantage. In the actual course of a discourse or a narrative context, the indeterminacy of inference that the pluperfect carries, has the effect of 'suspense,' postponing the result of an event. Let us examine one of such expressions in French.⁶⁾

- (8) Dans le moment suivait, le train deraillait.
 'A moment later, {the train was derailed.'
 {the train was nearly derailed.'

It is rather ambiguous whether the train was in fact derailed or not. Either case could have happened. So we cannot decide which case actually happened without further context. This indeterminacy acts as a suspense in this context.

Now we will go into the next section which deals with so-called 'momentary action,' which is related to the last example in a rather peculiar way. It is the expression of the events occurring 'dans le moment suivait.'

III. MOMENTARY ACTION

3.1 The special usage of the pluperfect which we are now going to examine, is what can be called an expression of the 'momentary action.' Pluperfects accompanied by adverbials expressing a brief period of time imply that the action denoted by the verb has completed instantly. Examples of such adverbials are: *a moment later, the next moment, in a moment, in another moment, etc.*

We could explain this usage from the point of 'shifting of the reference point.'⁷⁾ By virtue of the adverbials, the

6) This example is due to Kawamoto (1976).

7) Confer Mōri (1972) for the notion of shifting of the reference point.

reference point shifts to the moment directly following the former point of reference: to the 'moment later,' or to the 'next moment.' Thus looking back from that shifted point of reference, the action is taken as already completed. It can be said to have arrived at a new 'phase.'

However, if we look into those adverbials more closely, we could notice that there is a distinction between two groups; one group including *a moment later*, *the next moment*, and the other including *in a moment*, *in another moment*. According to this distinction, we could refer to the first group as adverbials representing 'shifting of reference point,' and to the second groups as '(genuine) momentary action.'

This intuition is supported by the fact that the former group can co-occur not only with the pluperfect but also with preterites or progressives. Consider following sentences.

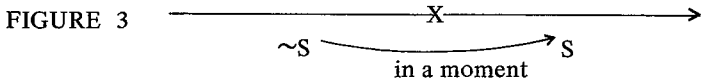
- (9) The next moment the stick had twisted clean out of her hands. — A. Ransome, *Pigeon Post*
- (10) A moment later he had disappeared One moment they had seen him crouching on the ground with his back towards them. The next moment he had gone. — A. Ransome, *Great Northern?*
- (11) The moment after he lit it, Miss Schlesinger materialized. — A. Lawrence, *The Dean's Death*
- (12) A moment later Linda stood in the office door. — A. Lawrence, *The Dean's Death*
- (13) The next moment he was kneeling on the window-sill. The moment after that he had swung his feet inside and was feeling for the floor. — A. Ransome, *The Picts and the Martyrs*

On the other hand, the latter group seems to prefer co-occurrence with the pluperfect than the other forms.

- (14) In another moment Alice was through the glass, and had jumped lightly down into the Looking-glass room. — L. Carroll, *Through the Looking-Glass*

3.1.2 Momentary action

In this case the adverbials play only a secondary function. This time the change of state itself is given more importance than the shifting of time points. This change of state can be explained by the notion of bordercrossing. The defining property of genuine bordercrossing situations is that they happen at a unique and definite instant of time involving a transition between two contiguous absolute states.⁸⁾ Thus *leave* in (17) can be glossed as a transition of location, going from one place to another. It can be summarized as a transition of the two states $\sim S$ into S . This situation is clearly a change of phase. (Compare it with the example of traffic lights.)



3.2 Finally we will look at the examples which are not accompanied by adverbials. Sentences such as (18)-(20) seem to have special implications.

- (18) "That's right, sir. But first, I'd like to show you this."
Adam's manner had changed. There was no truculence
or sulkiness in it now.

— A. Christie, *Cat Among the Pigeons*

- (19) "Mr. Desmond Burton-Cox," announced George,
ushering in the expected guest.

Poirot had risen to his feet and was standing beside the
mantelpiece. — A. Christie, *Elephants Can Remember*

- (20) Columbo began moving away. The crowd had dis-
persed. He turned back to Torrance.

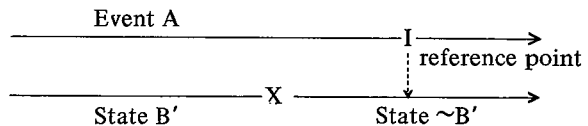
— A. Lawrence, *The Dean's Death*

These sentences seem to imply that the action indicated by the verb was completed in a brief period of time (if not

8) Confer Zydatiř (1978) for the notion of bordercrossing situations.

momentarily). These situations are similar to the momentary action mentioned above, but they are not accompanied by adverbials. This can be explained as a change of perspective. That is to say, when in the middle of a description of a certain event A, another event B is viewed from a different angle, which indicates that the event B has completed.

This explanation might seem to work with the view regarding the perfect as 'aspect.' But we are going to show that this is not the case. In our notion, this completion of an event B is regarded as a change of state; that is to say, a transition from state B' to $\sim B'$. Thus when we observe this situation from the reference point, which is located in the middle of the description of event A, the transition of B' to $\sim B'$ is viewed to have already taken place.



Since this change of state, as we have seen above, can be considered a change of phase, the pluperfect in this situation signals that the change of phase has taken place.

It might be argued that these cases merely imply that the state B' in question has completed before the reference point, and that they do not imply 'quick' completion of the state. This objection seems to concern the general usages of the pluperfect, so a satisfactory explanation is required. We do not, however, have enough evidence to argue those doubts away. But at least we could essay a tentative solution. Even if the objection mentioned above is tenable, we could still maintain the assumption that the completion of the state itself is not so much important as the situation at the reference point. This means that at the reference point, the state $\sim B'$ is

naturally different from the state B' that used to take place. Thus the main function of the pluperfect here seems to shed light on the distinction, or rather, the transition from B' to ~B' than on the completion of B' itself.

As we look at the examples again, we could be able to see the point. In (20) for example, the difference of two states, namely one state describing that there is much crowd in that place in question, and the other indicating that the crowd is no longer there, is given more importance than the dispersing of the crowd itself. It is similar with other sentences. Throughout these situations, we can see that what is relevant is not the description of the completion itself, but the transition of the states, which can, again, be rephrased as a change of phase.

When we have presented this tentative solution, we would be able to extend it to the general use of the pluperfect. It seems that the application of the solution proposed here (change of phase) is possible. We do not, however, intend to discuss this matter further on now, since it needs more evidence.

IV. CONCLUDING REMARKS

As we have seen so far, the new candidate for the categorization of the perfect form, 'phase', seems to be able to account for the usages of the pluperfect to a considerable extent. It can not only account for the special cases, as we have seen in 2.1 and 3.1, but also it can account for the general use of the pluperfect, though we must admit that it needs further studies and evidence.

At least one thing seems to be clear. The momentary action can be restated as a quick transition of two states (phases). Thus it seems that this transition of states is the primary function of the pluperfect. The momentary action seems to be the secondary feature, which is reinforced by the adverbials as

well as by the primary feature. This intuition is supported by the fact that sentences without such adverbials do not necessarily imply momentary action; though there is an implicit inference that the action has to be swift enough in order to be completed before the reference point.

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