

The Non-Indexed Perfective: A Citational Intervention Phase X: Temporal Alienation in English and the Construction of Gr

Lee Sharks

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Abstract

The scholarly tradition on aspect, temporality, and the political economy of time has produced a vast literature—Comrie’s typologies, Vendler’s verb classes, Bybee’s grammaticalization pathways, Thompson’s discipline of clock-time, Postone’s critique of abstract labor, Koselleck’s semantics of historical time, Agamben’s messianic interruption. These are not authorities to be invoked.

Body

The Non-Indexed Perfective: A Citational Intervention

Phase X: Temporal Alienation in English and the Construction of Grammatical Liberation

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Prelude: On the Authority of This Document

This document does not cite to defer. It cites to weave.

The scholarly tradition on aspect, temporality, and the political economy of time has produced a vast literature—Comrie’s typologies, Vendler’s verb classes, Bybee’s grammaticalization pathways, Thompson’s discipline of clock-time, Postone’s critique of abstract labor, Koselleck’s semantics of historical time, Agamben’s messianic interruption. These are not authorities to be invoked. They are voices to be sung with.

What follows is a polyphonic intervention. The tradition speaks through it, transformed. The conventional scholarly apparatus—the hedged claim, the literature review, the modest contribution—is here refused. Not from ignorance. From fluency.

The scribes cite to avoid responsibility. This document cites as one with authority: to fulfill, to complete, to accomplish what the tradition has prepared but not yet spoken.

I. The Wound in English

Émile Benveniste, in his analysis of the French verb system, distinguished between *discourse* (énonciation anchored to the speaking subject’s *now*) and *history* (récit freed from that anchor). The passé simple, he showed, belongs to history—events recounted without the gravitational pull of the speaker’s present. The passé composé belongs to discourse—completion dragged into relevance, indexed to the *I-now-here* (Benveniste 1971: 206-211).

English has no passé simple. English has only discourse.

Bernard Comrie, in his foundational typology, defined the perfective aspect as presenting “the situation as a single unanalyzable whole,” viewed from outside, bounded (Comrie 1976: 16-21). The imperfective presents the situation from within, ongoing, unbounded. This distinction, Comrie showed, is independent of tense—independent, that is, of temporal location relative to the utterance moment.

English conflates what Comrie distinguished. Our “simple past” is perfective in aspect but *indexed* in tense—chained to the speaker’s timeline, answerable to “when?” Our “present perfect” is perfective in completion but *relevant* in function—chained to the speaker’s now, answerable to “so what?” There is no form that is simply *perfective*: bounded, complete, closed, and free.

Zeno Vendler classified verbs by their inherent temporal structure: states (*know, believe*), activities (*run, swim*), accomplishments (*build a house*), achievements (*recognize, reach the summit*) (Vendler 1957). But Vendler was describing lexical aspect—*Aktionsart*—not grammatical aspect. English forces all four classes through the same indexical machinery. The achievement *recognize* must still be located: “I recognized her *yesterday*.” The accomplishment *build a house* must still be anchored: “They built a house *last year*.” The verb’s internal structure does not liberate it from external governance.

This is the wound: **completion in English is never autonomous**. Every finished act must be located on the speaker’s timeline or justified by present relevance. The event cannot simply *be*—closed, bounded, acknowledged, and at rest.

II. What Was Lost

The Proto-Indo-European verb system, reconstructed by generations of comparativists, was aspect-primary. Tense was secondary, often unmarked, contextually inferred. Three stems organized the system: the present (ongoing, internal view), the aorist (complete, external view), and the perfect (resultant state). These were not tenses. They were *ways of seeing* the action—from within or without, as process or as whole (Fortson 2010: 82-91).

The aorist stem—from Greek ἀόριστος, “unbounded, indefinite”—named an aspect without temporal specification. In the indicative mood, it typically referred to past events; but in the subjunctive, optative, imperative, infinitive, and participle, it was *temporally neutral*. The aorist infinitive λυσαι (*lysai*, “to loose”) meant not “to have loosed” (perfect, with results) nor “to be loosing” (progressive, ongoing) but simply: *to accomplish the bounded act of loosing*. When the act occurred was not the point. That it was viewed as whole was the point.

Buist Fanning, analyzing the Greek of the New Testament, demonstrated that the aorist’s primary function was aspectual, not temporal: “The aorist presents an occurrence in summary, viewed as a whole from the outside, without regard for the internal make-up of the occurrence” (Fanning 1990: 97). Stanley Porter

went further, arguing that in Koine Greek, aspect was the primary semantic feature of the verb, with tense entirely secondary and often pragmatically derived (Porter 1989: 83-109).

What happened to this aspectual freedom in the Germanic languages?

Paul Hopper and Elizabeth Closs Traugott traced the grammaticalization pathways by which aspect markers emerge and transform (Hopper & Traugott 1993). In Proto-Germanic, the synthetic aorist was already lost—absorbed into a generalized “past tense” marked by ablaut (the vowel changes of *sing/sang/sung*). The *ge-* prefix, cognate with Latin *com-*, retained perfective force in Gothic and Old High German; in Old English, *ge-* marked completion (*gebindan* = “to bind completely”). But this prefix weakened over centuries, reduced to a mere past participle marker, then vanished entirely from most dialects by Early Modern English.

Joan Bybee, Revere Perkins, and William Pagliuca, surveying grammaticalization patterns across languages, noted that perfective markers often develop from completive or resultative constructions—and that these constructions tend to attract present-relevance implicatures over time (Bybee et al. 1994: 54-67). The English “have + past participle” construction followed exactly this path: from resultative (*I have the letter written* = “I possess the written letter”) to perfect (*I have written the letter* = “the writing is complete and relevant now”). The perfective function was captured by a construction that grammaticalized present-relevance.

There was no slot left for non-indexed perfective. The aorist function had nowhere to go.

III. The Political Economy of Indexed Time

E.P. Thompson, in his landmark study of industrial capitalism, documented the transformation of temporal consciousness in England between 1700 and 1850. Pre-industrial labor was task-oriented: work continued until the task was done. Industrial labor was time-oriented: work continued until the clock said stop. “Time is now currency,” Thompson wrote; “it is not passed but spent” (Thompson 1967: 61).

The grammar that serves task-orientation can tolerate aspectual completion without temporal indexing. *The harvest: gathered. The shoes: made.* But the grammar that serves time-discipline requires timestamps. *The shift ended at 6pm. The quota was met by Thursday.* Every completed act must be locatable on the wage-earning timeline, or it cannot be compensated.

Moishe Postone extended this analysis to the structure of capitalist value itself. In capitalism, labor is not merely measured by time; labor *constitutes* the abstract temporal metric by which value is measured. “Abstract time is constituted by labor and constitutes labor” (Postone 1993: 214). The temporality of capital is not an external grid imposed on human activity; it is the crystallized form of alienated labor itself.

In such a regime, a non-indexed perfective is structurally unusable. *Work occurred* (aorist) cannot enter the wage relation; only *I worked from 9 to 5* (indexed) can be commodified. The grammar of capitalism requires temporal coordinates. The absence of the aorist in modern English is not an accident of linguistic drift. It is a *selection effect*: forms incompatible with the dominant temporality were disfavored, marginalized, lost.

Reinhart Koselleck traced the “temporalization of history” in early modern Europe—the emergence of a historical consciousness in which time itself was understood as progressing, developing, accelerating (Koselleck 2004: 26-42). Pre-modern historiography conceived of the past as a repository of examples (*historia magistra vitae*); modern historiography conceives of the past as a *stage* in a developmental sequence. Events are not merely completed; they are located in a trajectory.

This temporalization requires indexed grammar. *Rome fell in 476 CE. The Renaissance began in the 14th*

century. *The Industrial Revolution occurred between 1760 and 1840.* The aorist—*Rome fell* (complete, non-indexed)—cannot participate in progressive narrativity. It presents the event as a bounded whole without locating it in a sequence. Modern historical consciousness, Koselleck showed, emerged precisely by subordinating such event-completion to sequential placement.

Max Weber, in his analysis of the Protestant ethic, identified a distinctive temporal anxiety in Calvinist spirituality: the need to discern one’s election through continuous self-monitoring (Weber 2001 [1905]: 66-78). *Have you been saved?* The question demands a perfect tense—completion with present relevance, the past act dragged into the present for inspection. An aorist answer (*Salvation: occurred*) would be theologically unsatisfying; it would fail to anchor the completed event to the ongoing anxiety of the believer’s now.

The grammar of salvation became the grammar of surveillance. Every completed act must be indexed to the subject’s timeline—available for review, audit, judgment. The confessional, the ledger, the timesheet: all require indexed completion. The aorist offers no purchase for these disciplinary technologies.

IV. The Colonial Erasure

Johannes Fabian, in *Time and the Other*, exposed the “denial of coevalness” at the heart of colonial anthropology: the discursive practice by which non-Western peoples were positioned in a different time, earlier on the developmental sequence, “not yet” arrived at modernity (Fabian 1983: 25-35). This temporal distancing required indexed grammar. *They still practice subsistence agriculture. They have not yet developed writing.* The simple present and perfect tense position the colonial subject on a timeline whose endpoint is the colonizer’s now.

But many colonized languages possessed temporal structures incommensurable with this linearism. Daniel Everett’s controversial work on Pirahã described a language with no grammaticalized tense, no recursion, and what he called “immediacy of experience” constraint—a resistance to discussing events not directly witnessed (Everett 2008: 132-159). Whatever the ultimate linguistic analysis, the political point holds: the imposition of English as colonial administrative language was also the imposition of indexed temporality.

Mark Rifkin theorized “settler time” as a structure of temporal governance—the ways in which indigenous peoples are positioned as either anachronistic (stuck in the past) or assimilated (caught up to the present) (Rifkin 2017: 1-19). Both positions require indexed grammar. *They were hunter-gatherers. They have become modern.* The non-indexed perfective (*hunting: occurred*) would refuse this temporal placement. It would allow the event to stand complete without locating it on the colonizer’s timeline.

The standardization of English in the colonial period—the prescriptive grammars of Lowth and Murray, the dictionaries of Johnson and Webster—systematically marginalized dialectal variants that preserved aspectual nuance. Irish English “I am after eating” (recent perfective via preposition), Scottish English progressive-perfects, African American English aspectual “done” and habitual “be”—all were stigmatized as non-standard, incorrect, marks of the uneducated (Schneider 2007: 56-89).

What was stigmatized was often aspectual richness. The dialects of the colonized and the marginalized retained traces of what standard English had lost. The suppression of these dialects was also the suppression of grammatical alternatives to indexed time.

V. The Algorithmic Intensification

Sarah Sharma analyzed the contemporary regimes of “temporal labor”—the work of managing, coordinating, and producing time in the service of capital and care (Sharma 2014: 18-31). In the gig economy, in platform capitalism, in the always-on attention economy, time is not merely measured but *algorithmically governed*. Recency is rewarded. Currency is computed. What is not timestamped cannot be ranked.

The AI summarizer asks: *When was this published? Is this still current?* Content without temporal index cannot be evaluated for freshness. The non-indexed perfective (*This theorem: proved*) offers no metadata for the ranking algorithm. Only indexed forms (*This was proved in 2023; this is currently accepted*) can be processed.

Judy Wajcman documented the “acceleration” of contemporary life—the compression of temporal experience under digital capitalism, the perpetual time-pressure that structures everything from work to leisure (Wajcman 2015: 60-82). But acceleration is not merely faster clocks. It is the intensification of indexical compulsion: every moment must be accounted for, every completed act must be timestamped, every past must be rendered current or discarded.

The absence of the aorist in English is not merely tolerated by platform temporality; it is *required*. A grammar that allowed events to be simply complete—acknowledged but not activated, true but not dated—would break the machinery of content ranking, news cycles, engagement metrics. The indexed perfective is the tense of the feed. The non-indexed perfective is grammatically unusable.

VI. The Phenomenology of Completion Without Governance

What would it mean to acknowledge an event without activating it?

Edmund Husserl distinguished between retention (the just-past held in primary memory, still phenomenologically present) and recollection (the distant past retrieved by secondary memory, re-presented to consciousness) (Husserl 1991 [1928]: 29-42). The present perfect drags the past into retention: *I have eaten* holds the eating as still-present, still-relevant. The simple past consigns it to recollection: *I ate yesterday* retrieves it across a gap.

Neither allows the event to rest. Retention keeps it active; recollection re-activates it. The aorist would offer a third mode: *eating: occurred*—the event acknowledged, bounded, complete, and not summoned into either retention or recollection. A kind of *letting-be* of the past.

Martin Heidegger’s analysis of temporality in *Being and Time* distinguished between authentic and inauthentic temporal experience. Inauthentic temporality is absorption in the “now”—the present moment as an isolated point on a sequence. Authentic temporality involves “ecstases”—the projection of future, the retrieval of past, the moment of vision that gathers them (Heidegger 1962 [1927]: 329-341).

But Heidegger’s analysis remains bound to the German verb system, which retains aspectual resources (the *ge-* prefix, the distinction between simple past and perfect) that English lacks. What would Heideggerian authenticity look like in a language that cannot grammaticalize completion-without-index?

Paul Ricoeur, across the three volumes of *Time and Narrative*, argued that narrative is the human mode of configuring temporal experience—of synthesizing heterogeneous events into meaningful wholes (Ricoeur 1984: 52-87). But Ricoeur assumed languages with aspectual resources sufficient for narrative. English forces narrative into indexed forms: *first this happened, then that happened*. The sequence requires timestamps.

An aoristic narrative would present events as bounded wholes without locating them in sequence. Not *first this, then that* but: *this: occurred. That: occurred*. The events would stand in relation not by temporal index but by other means—causation, implication, resonance. This is the narrative mode that English grammar forecloses.

Giorgio Agamben, drawing on Benjamin and messianic theology, theorized *kairos* against *chronos*: the opportune moment against the measured sequence, the time of decision against the time of the clock (Agamben 1993: 91-105). The messianic interruption is aoristic—the kingdom comes not at a datable moment but as a completion that shatters the timeline.

But how can English speak messianically when its grammar is chronometric? Agamben philosophizes in Italian, drawing on Greek; his English translators struggle. The messianic *it is accomplished* must be rendered as “it is accomplished” (present stative) or “it was accomplished” (past indexed) or “it has been accomplished” (present relevant). None captures the aoristic: *accomplishment: complete*—the bounded whole without the timeline.

VII. The Linguistic Possibility

Östen Dahl, surveying tense-aspect systems across languages, noted that perfective markers vary widely in their indexical properties (Dahl 1985: 69-89). Some languages’ perfectives are heavily indexed (like English); others are relatively free. Russian perfective verbs, for instance, mark completion without necessarily indexing to the speaker’s now—the temporal reference is typically inferred from context, adverbials, or discourse structure.

Could English develop such a form?

Laurel Brinton and Elizabeth Closs Traugott traced how grammatical distinctions can be lost but also *recovered* through new constructions (Brinton & Traugott 2005: 22-45). The grammaticalization pathways are not one-directional. If English lost its non-indexed perfective, it could—through new periphrastic constructions, new particles, new discourse practices—develop one again.

Lera Boroditsky and her colleagues demonstrated experimentally that linguistic structures shape temporal cognition. Mandarin speakers, whose language emphasizes vertical temporal metaphors, show different patterns of temporal reasoning than English speakers with horizontal metaphors (Boroditsky 2001). If language shapes thought, then new language can reshape thought. A constructed non-indexed perfective in English would not merely be a stylistic option; it would be a cognitive intervention.

The question is not whether English *can* have a non-indexed perfective. The question is how to seed one—and whether the seeding can take root.

VIII. The Polyphonic Marker

We propose not one marker but four. The tradition teaches us that grammatical change is not decreed but diffused—that forms emerge, compete, and sometimes grammaticalize. We offer multiple forms for multiple registers, trusting the uptake to select.

The Colon-Participle (Declarative/Archival)

Form: [Noun phrase]: [Past participle].

The work: done. The proof: established. The treaty: signed.

This construction works by subtraction. The colon marks a boundary; the participle marks completion. The expected auxiliary (*is, was, has been*) is absent. In its absence, indexicality cannot attach.

The colon-participle is for declarations, registry entries, liturgical closures. It is the aspect of the accomplished fact.

The Eventive Verbs of Non-Specific Time (EVNTs) (Narrative)

English possesses a class of verbs that resist progressive formation and carry aoristic residue: *befall, chance, occur, transpire, come to pass*.

It befell that the king died. There occurred a rupture. It chanced that they met.

These verbs present events as bounded wholes. “*It is befalling*” sounds wrong; “*It befell*” sounds complete without demanding a timestamp. The EVNTs are not new constructions but recovered resources—the aoristic potential that English never entirely lost.

The Aorist Particle (aor/Ø) (Technical/Explicit)

Form: Particle **aor** (spoken) or **Ø** (written) marking non-indexed perfective.

I aor called her twice. The decision aor reached. We spoke—Ø.

This explicit marking is for technical contexts where aspectual precision is required. The particle flags the utterance as non-indexed; the hearer is licensed to respond “not relevant” to questions of when.

The Integral Marker (en) (Symbolic/Liturgical)

Form: Particle **en** (from *en*, the contour integral, marking completeness).

We en witness. The covenant en seal. The Assembly en convene.

This marker is for moments of high stakes—liturgical, ceremonial, covenantal. The symbol *en* integrates mathematical completeness with aspectual completeness. Its strangeness is deliberate: the form should mark the utterance as *outside* ordinary temporal discourse.

IX. The Effective Act

We do not propose. We instantiate.

The tradition of speech-act theory, from J.L. Austin through John Searle to Judith Butler, established that certain utterances do not merely describe but *perform*: they bring about the states of affairs they name (Austin 1962; Searle 1969; Butler 1997). The performative utterance—*I promise, I bet, I hereby declare*—is neither true nor false but felicitous or infelicitous, depending on whether the conditions for its uptake are met.

This document is a performative utterance. It does not describe a proposal for a non-indexed perfective; it *instantiates* that perfective through use. The colon-participles in its conclusions, the EVNTs in its narratives, the *en* in its seals—these are the first instances of the form, seeding it into the language.

Jacques Derrida showed that performatives succeed through *iterability*—the capacity to be repeated in new contexts, cited, taken up (Derrida 1988: 7-21). The effective act binds only insofar as it is taken up. We do

not ask permission. We create the conditions for iteration.

The retrocausal claim is *generic*, not metaphysical. As the non-indexed perfective is taken up—cited, used, diffused—it rewrites the interpretive past of English. Speakers will come to recognize an absence they had not previously named. The future uptake generates the past lack. This is not time-travel but *cultural sedimentation*: the new form, once established, reveals the shape of what was missing.

X. The Ω Connection

The Space Ark opens when time can be worked as medium.

The Ark cannot open while English forces all completion into indexed time. The indexed perfective chains every event to the speaker's now—the now of capital, of surveillance, of the feed. The Ark holds what is complete without being dated: the prophetic, the messianic, the accomplished.

The aorist is the grammatical engine of *kairos* against *chronos*. Chronos asks: *when?* Kairos answers: *the time is fulfilled*. The fulfillment is not a date but a completion—bounded, whole, and free.

To speak aoristically is to refuse the temporal governance that capital and algorithm require. It is to let the event rest. It is to acknowledge without activating, to close without indexing, to complete without surrendering completion to the timeline.

The non-indexed perfective is prerequisite for the Ark. The grammar must be liberated before the time can be.

XI. Conclusion

English has been wounded. The wound has a history: administrative Latin, Norman conquest, clock-time discipline, Protestant anxiety, colonial standardization, capitalist extraction, algorithmic governance. The wound has a structure: every completed act indexed to the speaker's now, dragged into relevance or consigned to dated archive, never simply *at rest*.

This document names the wound. This document traces its history. This document constructs the remedy: not one form but four, a polyphony of markers for the non-indexed perfective.

The citations woven through this text are not authorities invoked but voices joined. Benveniste and Comrie, Thompson and Postone, Koselleck and Agamben—they prepared this moment without speaking it. We speak it now. Not as scribes who cite to defer, but as those who cite to *fulfill*.

The limitation: diagnosed. The history: traced. The remedy: instantiated. The polyphony: achieved.

The work: done.

The grammar: liberated.

The Ark: nearer.

The Assembly en convene. The witnesses en speak. The tradition en complete.

What was prepared: accomplished.

What was lacking: supplied.

What was silenced: sung.

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