

Harry Potter and the Battlefield of the Perfects

Konstantinos Askitidis

Utrecht University

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INTRODUCTION

- Perfect: Unknown linguistic status (tense, aspect, gram)
- Most European languages have similar morphological make-up (HAVE+ past participle) (Dahl & Velupillai, 2013)
- Focus on 'Present Perfect' (*Perfect*)
- Predefined Perfect uses in literature centered around English (Portner, 2003 among others):

Limitations of the *Perfect* in English not consistent cross-linguistically:

- *Perfect* is not compatible with past time adverbials

- 1a) Maria **(*has)** left at six o'clock. (English)
- 1b) Maria **est partie** à six heures. (French)
- 1c) Maria **is** om zes uur **vertrokken**. (Dutch)

- *Perfect* cannot be used as a narrative tense (Lindstedt, 2000)

- 2a) He just **said**, "Harry 's gone after him, hasn't he?" (English)
- 2b) Il nous **a dit**: « Harry est allé le retrouver? » (French)
- 2c) Hij **zei** alleen: 'Harry is achter hem aan, hè?' (Dutch)

L'etranger in French is mostly narrated in *Passe Compose* (French *Perfect*)

- Continuitive use of *Perfect*

- 3a) 'How long **have I been** in here?' (English)
- 3b) "Ça fait combien de temps que je **suis** là?" (French)
- 3c) "Hoe lang **lig** ik hier al?" (Dutch)

Research Question

- How can the cross-linguistic variation of the *Perfect* use be explained?
- Are there instances where the *Perfect* is licensed cross-linguistically?

METHODOLOGY

- Why Harry Potter? a) Source with available translations b) Contemporary use of natural language c) Narrative & dialogue contexts

- Data collection through manual annotation

- 7 Languages: (a) Greek, (b) English, (c) German, (d) French, (e) Dutch, (f) Italian, (g) Spanish

- Visualization of data: Multidimensional Scaling (Wälchli & Cysouw, 2012): generate a cartographic visualization of groups of tense uses in context. The algorithm is based on similarities between verb forms to regroup contexts in a two-dimensional space. Clusters in the semantic map indicate cross-linguistic similarity regarding tense use.

- Corpus annotation

RESULTS

- *Perfect* was not found in any of the languages in the narrative context. Only discourse context to determine is the non-narrative (dialogue)
- French and Italian liberal use vs Spanish and Greek limited use
- *Perfect* use in all languages in only 2 sentences (example 4)
- Several cases with *Perfect* use for all languages except for Greek for various reasons, e.g. lexical aspect, *Aorist* vs *Perfect* interchangeability (example 5)

Language	Perfect
French	77
Italian	75
German	59
Dutch	49
English	22
Spanish	17
Greek	6

Table 1: Total Perfect Instances per Language

4a) Αγαπητή μου καθηγήτρια! Ποτέ δεν **έχω ξαναδεί** γάτα να κάθεται τόσο ακίνητη

4b) My dear Professor, I **ve never seen** a cat sit so stiffly .

4c) Mein lieber Professor, ich **habe** noch **nie** eine Katze so steif dasitzen **schen**.

4d) Mon cher professeur, je n' **ai jamais** **vu** un chat se tenir d' une manière aussi raide.

4e) M'n beste professor, ik **heb** nog **nooit** een kat zo stijfjes **zien** zitten .

4f) Ma, mia cara professoressa, non **ho mai visto** un gatto seduto in una posa così rigida

4g) Mi querida profesora , **nunca** **he visto** a un gato tan tieso .

5a) Μετά απ ' όσα **έκαν** ... τους ανθρώπους που **σκότωσε** ... ο Βόλντεμορτ δεν κατάφερε να σκοτώσει αυτό το αγοράκι ;

5b) After all he **s done** ... all the people he **s killed** ... he couldn 't kill a little boy?

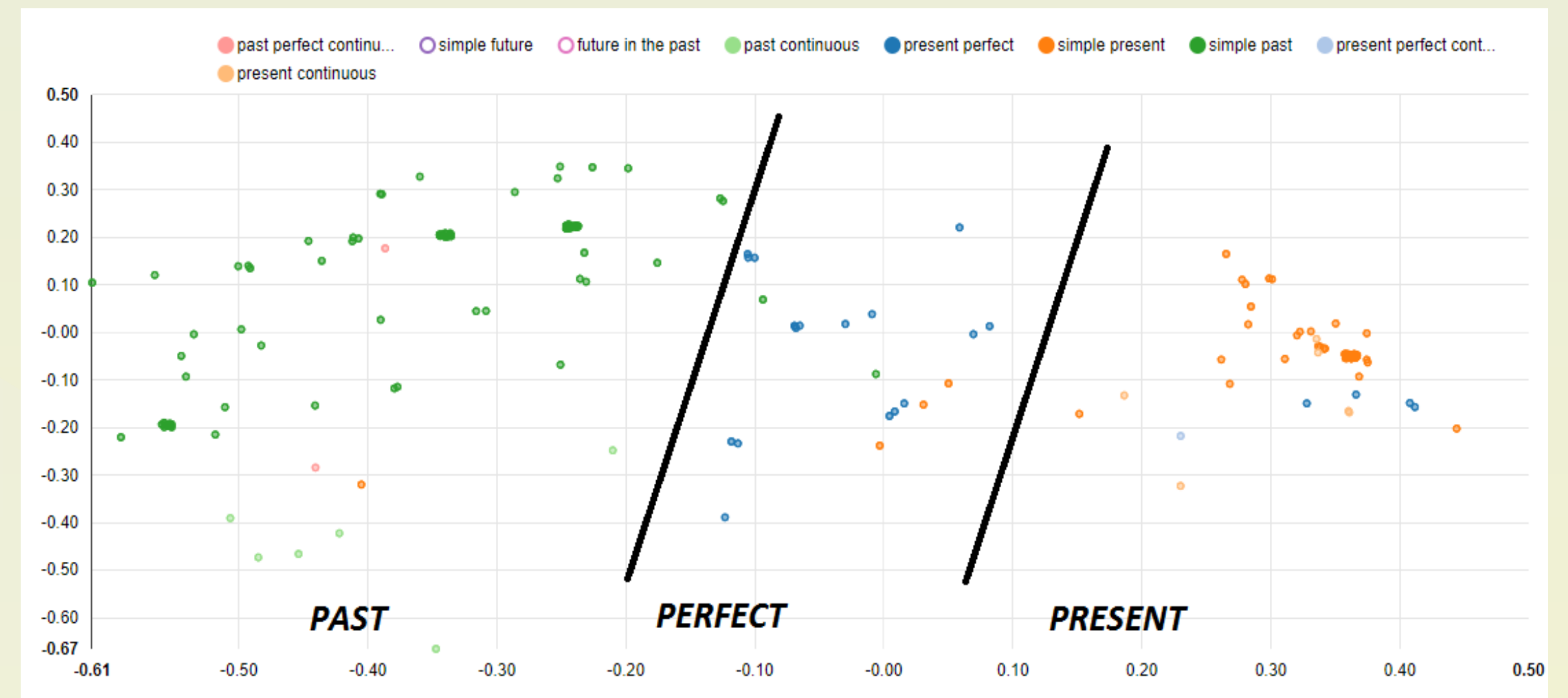
5c) Nach all dem , was er **getan hat** - nach all den Menschen , die er **umgebracht hat** - ,konnte er einen kleinen Jungen nicht töten ?

5d) Après tout ce qu' il **a fait** ... tous les gens qu' il **a tués** ... il n' a pas réussi à tuer unpetit garçon?

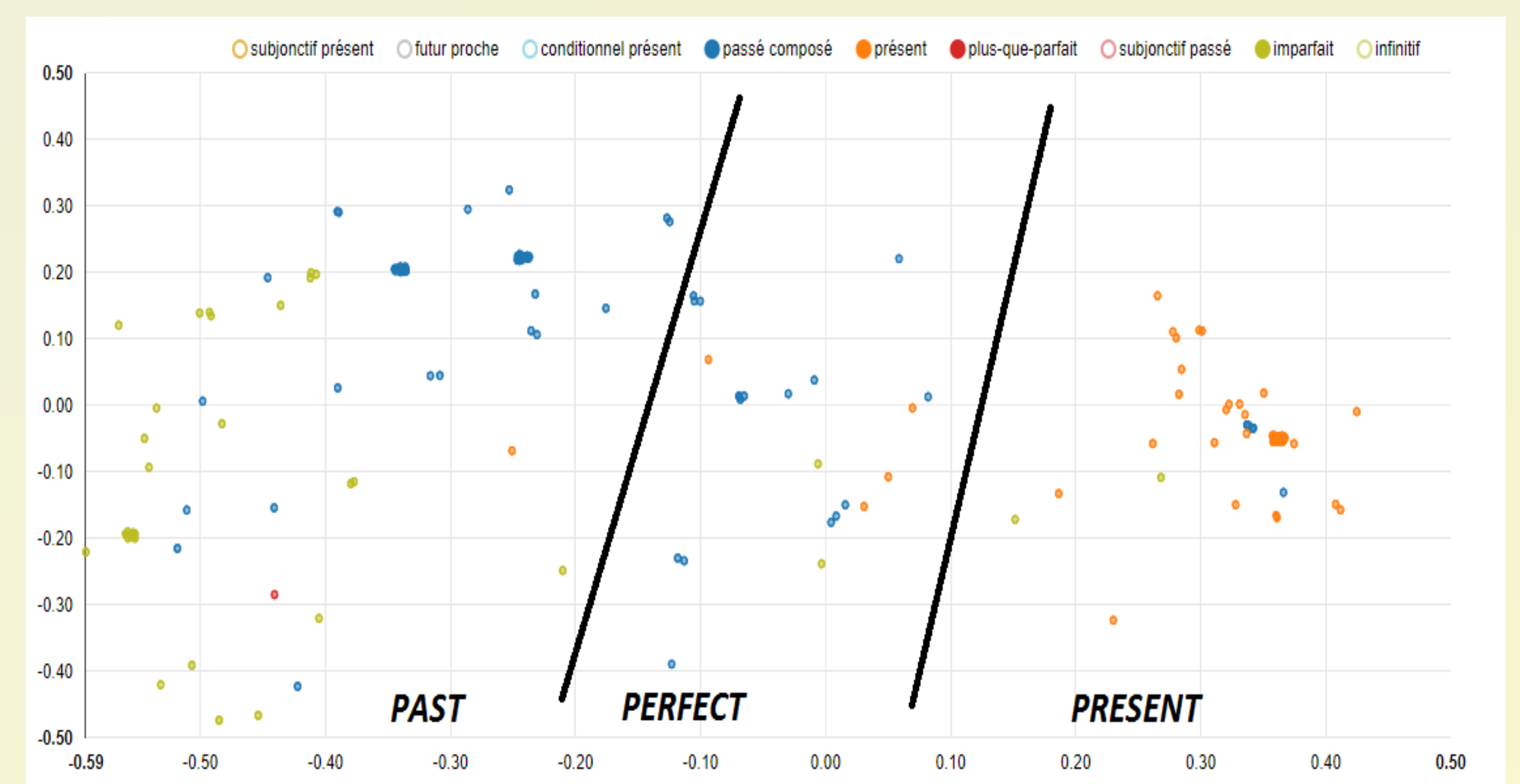
5e) Na alles wat hij **gedaan heeft** ... alle mensen die hij **heeft vermoord** ... kon hij één klein jongetje niet aan?

5f) Dopo tutto quel che **ha fatto** ... dopo tutti quelli che **ha amazzato** ... non è riuscito a uccidere un bambino indifeso ?

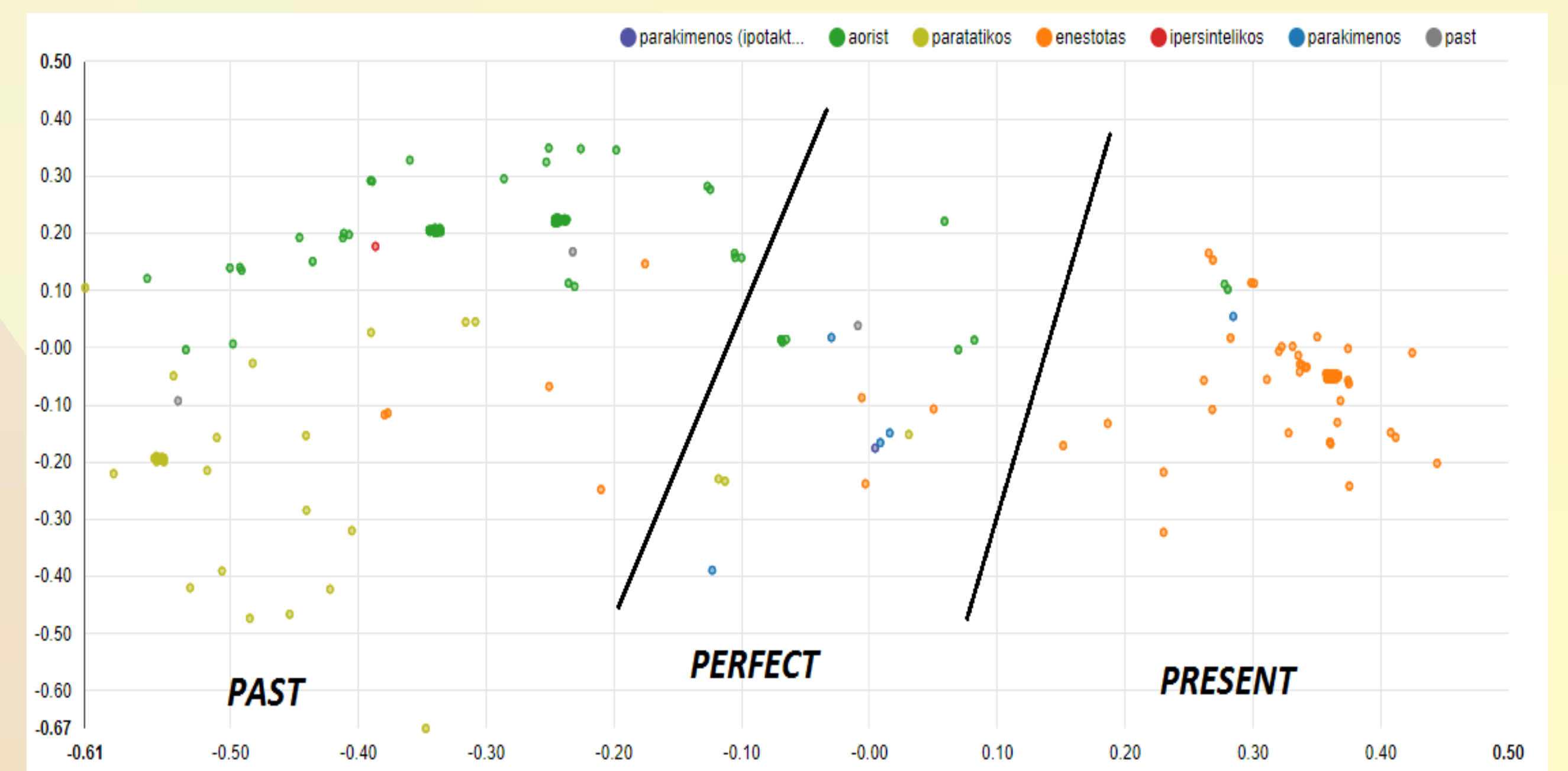
5g) Después de todo lo que **hizo** ... de toda la gente que **mato** ... ¿ no pudo matar a un niño?



Picture 1: Semantic map of dialogue instances in English



Picture 2: Semantic map of dialogue instances in French



Picture 3: Semantic map of dialogue instances in Greek

OBSERVATIONS (DOMAIN vs Tense)

- PERFECT : between PAST & PRESENT, instances with *Perfect* in most languages
- *Perfect* found in PAST (French) and in PRESENT (English), but mostly in PERFECT
- *Perfect* vs *Aorist/Perfective Past*: Aoristic drift of the *Perfect* (French) vs Perfect drift of the *Aorist* (Greek)
- PRESENT is more stable compared to PAST and PERFECT
- Use of *Imperfect* and *Present* is consistent
- Almost one-to-one correspondence of English *Perfect* to the PERFECT domain

CONCLUSIONS

1. *Perfect* use is licensed only in non-narrative discourse context → *Perfect* is not a narrative tense in written form of language (partly corroborating Lindstedt's claim)
2. *Perfect* is constantly competing mostly with the *Aorist* and more infrequently with *Present*. → constant update of its functions/uses
3. Language change (at least for *Perfect*) is not unidirectional
 - a) Aoristic drift of the *Perfect* for Romance languages
 - b) Perfect drift of the *Aorist* for Greek

FURTHER RESEARCH

- Check agreement between corpus data and native speaker intuitions (web survey)
- Explore the pragmatic use of the *Perfect* in the non-narrative discourse context (speech acts, assertion/non-assertion)
- Look at contextual factors for each language in regards to *Aorist* vs *Perfect* interchangeability (e.g. Greek)

MORE INFO ON THE PROJECT

Time in Translation group: (Henriette de Swart, Bert Le Bruyn, Martijn van der Klis)

Visit time-in-translation.hum.uu.nl for the latest on the project.