

The Perfective Aspect

Definition:

The Perfective consists of an aspectual contrast between Past and Perfect. The Past is used to express the concept of an action or state occurring during a period of time which the speaker sees as complete. By contrast, the Perfect is used when the period of time is regarded as incomplete. In English the categories Past and Perfect are not usually interchangeable.

Comparison with German:

In German Past and Perfect are interchangeable in many contexts, the difference between the two tenses being mostly stylistic. Whereas in English the Past is used both in formal and informal context and in written and spoken language, German prefers the Perfect for spoken and informal language, but the Past for formal and written language. In German the difference is also partly regional.

Rules:

As mentioned the Past describes an action or state taking place during a completed period of time which is regarded as separate from the present.

The Perfect indicates an action or state in the past which is seen as linked to the present.

Signal words:

The Past is used with the following adverbials of completed time:

ago	on Monday
at Christmas, at Easter...	once (=einst, mal)
at 4 pm, at 6 o'clock	the other day
earlier this week	until recently, until yesterday

The Perfect is used with the following adverbials of which mainly express the idea of a link between past and present:

hitherto	since (as preposition)
until now	lately
so far	up to now