VEDIC PLUPERFECT = INTRANSITIVE IMPERFECT?  
(TRANSITIVITY AND TENSE IN RIGVEDA)

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0. Introduction.

There exist a strict dependency between tense stems and sets of personal endings in Vedic Sanskrit. There are three principal ("primary") verbal stems associated with three main tense systems: PRESENT, PERFECT, and AORIST. The first one includes present proper, imperfect and present injunctive. The term present being ambiguous, I use below capital letters (PRESENT) for referring to the present system (including present proper, imperfect, and injunctive) on the whole. The following rules govern the derivation of main tense forms:

(a) present = present stem + so-called primary ending, cf. tan 'stretch' - tanó-ti 'stretches';
(b) imperfect = augment + present stem + so-called secondary ending, cf. tan - á-tano-t ‘stretched’;
(c) present injunctive = present stem + secondary ending, cf. tan - tano-t; ¹
(d) perfect = perfect stem + perfect ending, cf. tan - tatán-a ‘has stretched’.

There are, however, some enigmatic forms derived from perfect stems by means of secondary endings and henceforth violating the rules (a-d) - the so-called pluperfect and perfect injunctive:

(e) pluperfect = augment + perfect stem + secondary ending, cf. drh ‘be/make firm’ - á-dadṛh-anta ‘became firm’;
(f) perfect injunctive = perfect stem + secondary ending, cf. tan - tatán-anta.

The position and function of this forms in the verbal system is not clear, although they seem to be similar to the imperfect forms in their tense meaning.

In the present paper I will try to explain the rise of such anomalous forms as pluperfect; I will demonstrate that at least one of the reasons for creating such forms may be related to syntactic properties of several tense forms. Thus, a brief digression to the problem of relationship between tense
and syntax of Vedic verbal forms is needed.

1. Transitivity and tense in Rigveda.

1.1. Data. The relationship between syntactic characteristics and tense properties is one of the least investigated problems of RVic verbal system. Some scholars noticed several irregularities in syntax of certain tense forms such as intransitivity of perfect forms as opposed to forms belonging to the PRESENT system (L. Renou, J. Haudry). The question under consideration was touched upon by S. Jamison (1983: 160-168) who demonstrated that for some Vedic verbs transitive-causative on -āya- is opposed to a perfect and not to PRESENT intransitive counterpart, cf.: cit: cetáyati ‘makes perceive’ - cikéta ‘has appeared, appears’; dī(p): dīpáyati ‘makes shine’ - dīdáya ‘has shone’, etc. It may be shown that this correlation (PRESENT: transitive VS. perfect: intransitive) is attested not only for -āya-causatives but also for some primary present stems. Below I give an approximate rate for three RVic verbs; for each verb number of occurrences of perfect and PRESENT forms in intransitive and transitive constructions is indicated:

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tan ‘stretch’ ū ‘go, send’ randh ‘be/make subject’

cf. for instance the following examples demonstrating syntactic use of the verb tan:

(1) ágne ... brhát tatantha bhánúnā
    Agni: VOC high stretch: PF ray: INSTR
    ‘o Agni, you have stretched high with your ray’
    (RV VI.16.21)

(2) ráétr̂ vásas tanute
    night: NOM clothes: ACC stretch: PR
    ‘the night spreads [her] clothes’
    (RV I.115.4)

The phenomenon described above may be referred to as "split causativity", by analogy with split ergativity:

(R) Perfect forms are mostly intransitive while their PRESENT counterparts are transitive-causative.

Of course, there exist some exceptions from this rule, cf. the transitive use of perfect tātāna:
(3) satyam tataha suryo
truth: ACC stretch: PF Sun: NOM
'the Sun has stretched the truth' (RV I.105.12)
However, such occurrences are much more rare, as it may be seen from the tables above.
It should be emphasized that not all the verbs but only a rather delimited class of verbs (although well-attested in RV) obeys the split causativity rule (R); besides, even the verbs belonging to this class may violate it.
An exhaustive investigation of this problem does not exist as yet. Unfortunately, I cannot touch upon it in this paper in a more detailed way, so I confine myself to the above data.

1.2. Typological explanation.
The correlation described above may seem to be rather strange: it is not clear why perfect forms are not quite syntactically similar to present ones being mostly intransitive. Nevertheless, recent typological studies throw light on this question. As it was been demonstrated by Hopper and Thompson (1980), Tsunoda (1981) and other typologists, there exist various correlations between transitivity and other features of a sentence, such as tense and aspect of verbs, volitionality, definiteness of noun phrases, etc. In particular, stativity (as opposed to punctuality, activity) is one of the intransitivity features (Hopper, Thompson 1980: 266ff.). Taking into account that stativity is one of the important properties of perfect in Vedic (and in old Indo-European dialects at all; cf. Neu 1983), we may treat syntactic properties of perfect in the framework of Hopper-Thompson theory. Thus, it seems quite natural that perfect forms of certain verbs are most commonly intransitive. One may assume that language of RV conserves some rests of a more archaic system which existed in some (unattested) Indo-European dialects.

2. "Split causativity" system and its development.
2.1. It is difficult to imagine a language with a strict split causativity (namely, perfect forms are always intransitive, etc.), however, even a verbal system containing some elements of split causativity cannot be quite stable. Really, several combinations of syntactic and tense properties ('perfect & transitive-causative', 'PRESENT & intransitive') can not be expressed in this system, so the verbal paradigm is defective:
(Here and below the notation [PF] or [PR] refers to perfect or PRESENT forms respectively, whereas the notation ‘PF’/‘PR’ refers to perfect or PRESENT meaning. Crossed squares denote gaps in the paradigm.)

The following ways of elimination of such gaps may be used:

(i) One of the oppositions may be eliminated: ‘intransitive ~ transitive’ (table 2) or ‘perfect ~ PRESENT’ (table 3):

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The first way seems the most probable: the tense system on the whole remains while correlations with transitivity disappear. This is the case of Late Vedic and Post-Vedic Sanskrit.

The second way is also possible: formal distinctions between tense forms remain, however their basic function is transformed: perfect markers become markers of intransitivity, while PRESENT ones indicate transitivity (causativity). Only some traces of such development may be observed in Early Vedic. This way of evolution could be one of the reasons of the "erosion" of boundaries between different tenses noticed by many grammarians (cf. for instance Whitney 1955 on present use of perfect). It may be expected that such "erosion" phenomena are proper to verbs obeying the rule (R) and henceforth showing paradigmatic gaps to be filled (like ‘PRESENT & intransitive’). Perfect forms with present meaning of such verbs could serve as intransitive counterparts of transitive PRESENTS, etc. Really, present use of perfect forms is especially well attested for the verb *cikt* (Grassmann 1976: Sp.448) cited above as an evidence for split causativity. Cf.:

(4) sā ciketa sāhiyasā
this appear: PF stronger: INSTR