How did complex tenses like the English perfect – e.g. "I have eaten" – come about? An examination of Gothic reveals how it could have developed from an expression of passive voice.

The Gothic language is the oldest Germanic language with a large corpus. It is unique because it is the only Germanic language to retain a synthetic passive, an inheritance of the Indo-European middle voice. This synthetic passive, however, has an incomplete paradigm that includes only present-tense forms. To supplement, two periphrastic passives developed. One links the past passive participle with a form of "to be" and the other with a form of "to become."

I show that variation in the way the periphrases are distributed reveals differences in how they interpret Greek structures. I do this by utilizing a framework that applies change-of-state semantics to certain entities, including past passive participles in Gothic. Within this framework, I show how the compositionality of tense and event-boundedness provide for the emergence of a result-state perfect.