Ingressive and Egressive Verbs in English

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A Cognitive-Pragmatic Approach to Meaning

By

Daniele Franceschi

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CHAPTER ONE

GENERAL INTRODUCTION

The aim of this book is to describe the workings of ingressive and egressive verbs in English through the analysis of the semantic-pragmatic and cognitive factors responsible for their sub-categorization frame, i.e. the number and type of syntactic arguments they take. Past studies have primarily focused on the investigation of the language-internal dynamics regulating the behaviour of these predicates, generally disregarding the language-external mechanisms involved in their meaning construction. We thus intend to improve on functionalist approaches, by showing that form-meaning pairings embedding ingressive and egressive verbs are in fact cognitively motivated.

These two categories of verbs belong to the wider class of lexical aspectual verbs, which have been variously called in the linguistic literature: Newmeyer (1975) referred to them as "aspectual verbs", but Longacre (1976) and Noonan (1985) spoke of "phasal predicates"; Comrie (1976) introduced the term "aspectualizer", to distinguish them from aspect auxiliaries, and so on. In subsequent studies these definitions have often been used interchangeably.[1] This verb class includes those predicates that convey information about aspect, i.e. the internal temporal organization of a situation (Comrie, 1976)[2], such as *begin*, *continue* and *stop*, for instance. They have been recently defined as lexical verbs, "which [are] placed before a non-finite clause and which [express] the situation described by this clause as beginning, ending or ongoing" (Declerck et al., 2006: 763). We feel that this definition has to be reformulated to account also for those cases where the verb introduces elements other than clauses. Although aspectual verbs canonically subcategorize a non-finite infinite and/or a gerund (e.g. *I started to cry*, *He finished writing the book*, etc.), they may also be followed by noun phrases (*He finished the cake*), prepositional phrases (*He started towards the door*), pronouns (*The car started itself*) and adverbs (*The story moves quickly and the book finishes easily*). Therefore, an aspectual verb needs to be more precisely defined as "a lexical verb conveying information about

the beginning, continuation or termination of occurrences, which may or may not be explicitly indicated, i.e. lexically coded, in the utterance".

Aspectual verbs are viewed as constituting a secondary system of aspect marking in English: ingressivity and egressivity cannot be expressed by means of prefixes or suffixes added to basic verb forms, as in the case of the progressive and the perfect; it is necessary to use a "full verb" to provide information about the stage of development of a certain situation, which may be conceptualised as being about to unfold, as unfolding or concluding/concluded. Dictionaries of English suggest that ingressive and egressive verbs are often synonymous with respect to their aspectual meaning, only with minor differences in terms of style and register: Latin-based verbs, for instance, would be more formal and/or used in specific language domains, e.g. legal discourse (*The criminal proceedings commenced*) or scientific writing (*Doctors have initiated a series of tests to determine the cause of the problem*). But the dynamics of use appear to be more complex than what dictionaries say. The fact that *start* and *begin* or *stop* and *end*, for instance, may alternate in certain contexts is due to the existence of different ways of conceiving events (e.g. *He started/began to sneeze*)[3] or of giving prominence to some features of meaning at the expense of others (e.g. *A little before he got to Grand Island civilization stopped/ended*)[4]. Certain mental representations of events, however, may constrain the choice and structure of verbs, which can no longer be used interchangeably (e.g. *She stopped/*ended/ *finished/*terminated the car, got out and waved at him*)[5].

The present study analyses eight high-frequency aspectual verbs in English, four of which are ingressive, i.e. *start*, *begin*, *commence* and *initiate*, and the other four egressive verbs, i.e. *stop*, *end*, *finish* and *terminate*, with exemplifications taken from the British National Corpus (BNC), the Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA) and the Corpus of Global Web-Based English (GloWbe). In addition, several examples have been chosen after conducting Internet searches through Google and Google Books: these occurrences have then been checked by competent native speakers of English in order to verify their correctness. The decision to resort to online resources other than the well-established corpora was made as a result of the impossibility of the latter to provide the whole picture of how conceptual representation and cognitive processes map onto language. Despite their large size, corpora are often still a limited resource to account for the many different uses of lexical items and of the constructions in which they may appear. For example, there is no evidence in the three corpora we have queried of the intransitive use of *terminate* in association with subjects describing natural

processes, as in *The rain terminated*. Although this is an infrequent pattern, because the verb *terminate* naturally collocates with agentive subjects, it does exist in English. Similarly, we could not find any corpus occurrences of the "X finished Y with Z" construction, e.g. *That finished me with the Roman Catholic Church forever*. This is because corpora are not always representative of the many instances of language use in real communicative contexts. Corpus linguists (e.g., among others, Kilgariff and Grefenstette, 2003; Renouf, 2003; Bergh, 2005; Bergh and Zanchetta, 2008) have, therefore, recently acknowledged the importance of using the Internet as a better source of authentic data.

The book is structured as follows. Chapter two revises the existing literature on aspectual verbs in English, starting from the early studies to the most recent developments, with the idea of grouping the various analyses proposed so far on the basis of the prevalent approach followed in them. The first section is an introduction to the topic, which considers how aspectual verbs have been dealt with in the main grammars of contemporary English, i.e. Quirk et al. (1985), Biber et al. (1999) and Huddleston & Pullum (2002); the following sections instead provide succinct summaries of the well-known contributions on this verb class, in order to present different analytical viewpoints and theoretical perspectives. The ultimate aim of the chapter is to direct the discussion to those aspects that linguistic research has generally neglected. Chapter three illustrates the theoretical foundations of the study. In addition to delineating the basic tenets of Cognitive Grammar and Construction Grammar, ample space has been given to the illustration of metonymic and metaphoric processes and the role they play in determining linguistic representations. Most studies of how cognitive mechanisms impact lexical-syntactic projections have prevalently focused on logical metonymy, thus overlooking the structural repercussions of metaphoric thinking. Chapter three also reviews some fundamental notions in pragmatics, which are necessary for a better understanding of the differences among ingressive and egressive verbs in terms of inferencing procedures and consequence relations. Finally, chapters four and five, which represent the core of the book, propose an analysis of the eight predicates selected through the identification of the language-external factors, namely metonymic and metaphoric mapping operations, underlying their use. This is only an initial attempt to systematize the various configurations of these predicates in terms of the conceptualization processes that trigger them. More fine-grained research in this area is called for and should also be extended, on the one hand, to other ingressive/egressive verbs (e.g. *cease*, *halt*, *quit*, etc.) and, on the other

hand, to continuative verbs, as well. Chapter six briefly summarizes the results of the study and suggests possible avenues for future work.

Notes

[1] Throughout this book we will refer to these verbs as "aspectual verbs".
[2] A thorough description of the category "aspect" is beyond the scope of the present study. Cf. Brinton (1988/2009), Binnick (2012) and references therein for detailed discussions on the topic.
[3] Cf. section 4.2.2.
[4] Cf. section 5.1.2.
[5] Cf. section 5.3.1.1.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.0 Introduction

This chapter provides an overview of past research on English aspectual verbs by focusing on different, albeit often overlapping, strands of analysis. Because of the breadth of the topic, it has not been possible to review in detail the many important studies that have appeared over the years. An in-depth analysis of the extensive literature on this verb class would have required more space than a single chapter. The aim here instead is to illustrate the developments in the study of aspectual verbs with reference to the various approaches followed, i.e. primarily syntactic, semantic-pragmatic or cognitively oriented.

We will firstly examine the general grammars of contemporary English in which these verbs have been analysed to a reasonable extent, namely Quirk et al. (1985), Biber et al. (1999) and Huddleston & Pullum (2002), since they provide important introductions to the topic, and then the most relevant and specific studies will be reviewed and discussed, starting from the first analyses to more recent investigations, with the goal of describing the advances made throughout the decades, but also to highlight what still needs to be done in order to further develop linguistic theory.

The bulk of the discussion started in the late 1960s/early 1970s within the generative tradition, although several linguists had already addressed the topic in the first half of the 20th century. Their main concern, which to a certain extent is still at the centre of the debate today, was that of assigning a specific grammatical status to aspectual verbs. Some viewed them as auxiliaries, while others treated them as lexical verbs. A third group argued that they occupy an intermediate position. Kruisinga (1932), for instance, distinguished between completely subordinated forms from those, which, albeit subordinated, have "an independent meaning of their own" (1932: 222); Poutsma (1926) regarded them as "auxiliaries of aspect" (1926: 297), etc. When the position that aspectual verbs had to be considered as main verbs was maintained, the other issue that arose and was discussed at length concerned their transitive and intransitive uses.[1]

Generally speaking, a verb taking a *to*–infinitive or an *–ing* form as a nominal object (e.g. *start*, *continue*, *stop*) was considered as transitive. By contrast, intransitive verbs were said to be the ones that could only take a present participle as predicative adjective (e.g. *proceed*, *go on*, *remain*). Curme (1931) argued that *begin*, *commence*, *start*, *cease* and *stop* occur "with an infinitive or gerund as objects", while *remain*, *keep (on)*, *go on* and *continue* with "a present participle as predicate after an intransitive, and an infinitive or gerund as object after a transitive" (1931: 373-382). Similarly, Jespersen (1933) distinguished between those verbs that take an infinitive with *to* as object, thus grouping *begin*, *continue* and *cease* together with predicates belonging to other semantic classes, such as *wish*, *want*, *prefer*, *promise* and *pretend*, and verbs working as copulas (e.g. *keep (remain, continue) quiet*)[2], etc.

The debate over classificatory choices was not just about whether aspectual verbs should be treated as auxiliary or full verbs, but also concerned class-internal distinctions. Although there was general consensus about the three main categories that aspectual verbs fall into, namely ingressive, continuative and egressive verbs, there was less agreement concerning a fourth group including iterative verbs. While Poutsma (1926) and Curme (1931) considered *keep on*, *go on* and *continue* to belong to a separate set of verbs, others regarded them as overlapping completely with continuative verbs. In addition, Bennett & Partee (1978) proposed the category of "presumptive" verbs, including *presume* and *recommence*, arguing that unlike other predicates they express the new beginning of a certain past situation. For other linguists, these verbs simply had an ingressive interpretation.

Aspectual verbs have typically been analysed within broader studies on semantics (e.g. Wierzbicka, 1988; Dixon, 2005), complementation (e.g. Mair, 2009), verb classes (e.g. Levin, 1993; Faber & Mairal Usón, 1999) or aspectuality (e.g. Brinton, 1988; Verkuyl, 1993). Therefore, the number of verbs examined in depth has been fairly limited. Even those linguists who have specifically focused on them (e.g. Perlmutter, 1970; Newmeyer, 1975; Freed, 1979; Bailey, 1993; Tobin, 1993; Duffley, 1999; Egg, 2003; Fukuda, 2007, to mention a few) have given a lot of attention to highly frequent verbs, e.g. *start*, *begin*, *keep* and *stop*, while generally disregarding, or only minimally addressing, their Latinate counterparts and the less common ones. In addition, a lot has been written about their transitive and intransitive configurations and about the two main types of complements that typically follow them, i.e. the *to*–infinitive and the *–ing* clause, but little has been said about the other types of constructions embedding them or about the extra-linguistic factors that license or block

their use. The latter two aspects will thus be the focus of chapters 4 and 5 in this book.

Before delving into the past literature, however, let us first take a look at the three grammars of contemporary English mentioned above for a preliminary examination of the topic. They possibly represent the major and most comprehensive as well as influential reference texts on present-day English.

2.1 The grammars of contemporary English

Quirk et al. (1985) classify aspectual verbs primarily from a structural syntactic perspective, through the observation of the constructions that more frequently embed them. A relatively large number of verbs is taken into consideration, including *begin*, *cease*, *commence*, *continue*, *go on*, *finish*, *keep (on)*, *quit*, *resume*, *start (out)* and *stop*, but very few exemplifications of their use are provided or examined. The analysis has many shortcomings. Only three of the verbs listed above, for instance, i.e. *start out, go on* and *keep (on)*, are viewed as being able to enter concatenated sequences of non-finite constructions (1985: 147):

(1) *Our team seems to manage to keep on getting beaten*.

In fact, it is possible for the other verbs to behave in the same way too (e.g. *[…] the Tajik authorities seemed to want to stop anybody crossing into Afghanistan*).[3] Quirk et al. (1985) focus exclusively on the differences brought about by the alternation between *to*-infinitive and *–ing* complement clauses. Quite innovatively, however, such a contrast is discussed with respect to the concept of "potentiality" versus "performance"[4], which is used for the first time in a grammar to explain the behaviour of aspectual verbs not just on syntactic grounds (1985: 1192):

(2) a. *He started to speak, but stopped because she objected*.
b. *He started speaking, and kept on for more than an hour*.

The two examples are used to show that grammar is symbolic and a reflection of the way in which we conceptualise our experiences of the world. Since *start* is followed by the *to*-infinitive construction in (2a), it indicates a potential or only the initial unfolding of the activity of speaking. On the other hand, *start* occurs with the gerund in (2b), because

what needs to be highlighted is the uninterrupted continuation of the act of speaking. A broader and finer-grained investigation of the connections between the potential meanings of aspectual verbs and their repercussions at the level of syntax is however missing.

Biber et al. (1999) undoubtedly represents a significant improvement. First of all, the analysis is conducted on data retrieved in a 40-million-word corpus of authentic English texts and is not based on the authors' examples and intuitions as native speakers, as is prevalently the case in Quirk et al. (1985). Secondly, both written and spoken English data is analysed, making it possible to consider how grammatical features vary across genres. Thirdly, different contexts of occurrence are examined, i.e. conversation, fiction, newspaper language and academic writing, and statistical information is provided concerning the distribution of linguistic items across domains. This has resulted in a comprehensive picture of real language in use.

According to Biber et al. (1999), aspectual verbs are the least frequent of all predicates, if compared to the ones belonging to the other six categories, i.e. activity verbs, communication verbs, mental verbs, verbs of facilitation or causation, verbs of simple occurrence and verbs of existence or relationship. They only represent 3% of all common verbs in the corpus queried and are mostly common in fiction and newspapers "where they typically report the state of progression for some process or activity" (1999: 713):

(3) *Harry was beginning **to think that Bill was obsessed with Sandy***. (FICT)
(4) *He continued **to stare at her***. (FICT)
(5) *Even ambulance staff not suspended are beginning **to feel the pinch***. (NEWS)
(6) *He maintained that ambulance crews were continuing **to answer 999 calls**, even though they were suspended*. (NEWS)[5]

Among the five verbs under investigation, namely *start*, *begin*, *continue*, *keep* and *stop*, *start* is the only one that occurs over 200 times per million words in all the four registers, i.e. conversation, fiction, newspapers and academic texts. *Begin* is also very frequently used, but less so in spoken English where it appears less than 200 times per million words. The opposite scenario concerns *keep*, which is instead extremely frequent in conversation, occurring over 500 times per million words, but not as much in academic writing, with less than 200 occurrences per million words.

Stop shows a similar behaviour to *keep*, even though there are fewer occurrences in conversation and in newspapers, whereas *continue* emerges as the least frequent and widespread of the five verbs. It only appears over 300 times in the news.

Biber et al. (1999) identify three main types of syntactic patterns for aspectual verbs: *begin*, *continue*, *start* and *stop* are said to occur in both transitive and intransitive constructions, whereas only *keep* would enter copulative constructions (1999: 436):

(7) *I've just got to drink loads of coffee to* ***keep*** *awake.* (CONV)

Among the verbs controlling *–ing* clauses, *keep* is recognized as the most common verb in conversation and fiction.

Despite the fact that Biber et al. (1999) provide important evidence of the frequency and distribution of various grammatical features in authentic written and spoken English, it does not adequately explain the correlations between forms and meanings. The primary aim of the analysis is to "photograph" the features of contemporary English at the surface level. Therefore, the study remains essentially syntactic: aspectual verbs are examined only with respect to their most common formal configurations.

Huddleston & Pullum (2002), instead, also take semantic and pragmatic aspects into consideration, while still providing a detailed account of the syntactic behaviour of aspectual verbs. Their frequencies of occurrence and those of the various constructions in which they appear are not provided, as this is beyond the scope of the analysis. The main syntactic feature they analyse is that of subject raising and its relation to agentivity. The latter is considered in terms of its repercussions on syntax. Three main properties are investigated, in addition to the inability of aspectual verbs to take finite complements, namely their insensitivity to voice (8), the restrictions that they impose on the subject (9) and the nature of the subject itself (10) (2002: 1197):

(8) a. *His behaviour began to alienate his colleagues.*
b. *His colleagues began to be alienated by his behaviour.*

(9) a. *Jill began to unwrap the parcel.*
b. *#The parcel began to be unwrapped by Jill.*

(10) *There began to be some doubt in our minds as to whether he was trustworthy.*

Example (8) shows that an active sentence embedding an aspectual verb may be passivized, with no difference in terms of truth conditions, when its subject is non-agentive. This is due to the fact that the syntactic subject is not semantically related to the verb.[6] In other words, what begins in (8a) is not this man's behaviour, but the process of alienation of his colleagues, instead. This active-passive alternation does not work as felicitously in the presence of an ordinary agentive subject, as in (9), even though it is indeed possible to find instances of an aspectual verb with an agentive infinitival in active-passive pairs:

(11) a. *They began to sell the shares at a discount.*
b. *The shares began to be sold at a discount.*

Huddelston & Pullum (2002), however, do not motivate or discuss this difference in detail. They only argue that "voice neutrality does not require that the two alternants be equally likely and acceptable […], only that they be truth-conditionally equivalent" (2002: 1197). Lastly, example (10) above is provided in order to show that aspectual verbs also allow semantically empty subjects. Huddelston & Pullum (2002) observe that most aspectual verbs have raised subjects relating to the whole situation described in the sentence, rather than just to the subject-argument. Only a few appear to have ordinary subjects with an agentive interpretation, namely *discontinue*, *finish*, *quit* and *resume*. Hence, the unplausibility of sentences in which these verbs appear with dummy subjects (2002: 1228):

(12) **It discontinued raining.*

The illustration of the syntactic differences continues with the observation of the possibility or otherwise of replacing an *–ing* participial clause with a predicative complement.[7] While *keep* allows such alternation, licensing the use of an adjectival phrase (13), the other verbs block such substitution (14):

(13) a. *He kept staring at them.*
b. *He kept calm*.
(14) a. *He stopped staring at them.*
b. **He stopped calm*.

Once again, Huddleston & Pullum dismiss the importance of investigating the reason why such constraint exists, saying that it is "irrelevant, as is the

fact that *keep* and *stop* license a NP object while *go on* does not […]" (2002: 1221).

Aspectual verbs are also said to impose a "doubl-*ing* constraint", which refers to the impossibility for them to occur in the gerund-participle form when their complements also consist of *–ing* clauses:

(15) **They are starting quarrelling.*

Furthermore, the ability that certain aspectual verbs have to occur with the ellipsis of the complement is briefly considered (2002: 1527):

(16) A: *Have you finished your assignment yet?* B: *I haven't even started.*

It is argued that only a limited number of verbs, such as *begin*, *start* and *finish*, may be used without the object, which can be left unexpressed if it is anaphorically retrievable. In other words, *I haven't even started* in (16) stands for "I haven't even started my assignment". The NP object here is seen as encapsulating the notion of "doing/working on" (an assignment) and is thus pragmatically equivalent to a gerund clause. This important consideration draws upon studies conducted within the field of cognitive linguistics (e.g., Langacker, 1987, 1990, 1991, 1999, 2008, 2009a, 2009b and Jackendoff, 1997, to name just a few of the most influential ones), which will be discussed at some length later in the chapter.

Differently from the other two grammars of English examined, Huddleston & Pullum (2002) introduce important information concerning the implicit meanings associated with some aspectual verbs and the constructions from which these meanings emerge. *Stop*, for instance, is analysed with respect to the two distinct senses yielded by the use of a personal pronoun followed by an *–ing* clause (2002: 1238):

(17) a. *We must stop him coming back tomorrow.*
b. *They stopped us playing before we had finished the first set*.

While in (17a) the meaning of *stop* is that of "not allowing/preventing", in (17b) the verb stands for "made us stop". It is observed, in support of such claim, that the preposition *from* could only be inserted in (17a) but not in (17b) (*We must stop him from coming back tomorrow* vs. **They stopped us from playing before we had finished the first set)*. This is because *stop*

in (17b) entails a causative component, which ultimately produces a different interpretation.

Finally, Huddleston & Pullum (2002) consider the (in)compatibility of aspectual verbs with the different "Aktionarten" of the complement clause, alongside the presuppositions resulting from such combinations. They suggest that while process expressions are normally compatible, the same cannot be said for achievements (2002: 121):

(18) a. *He began to work/write a letter. He stopped snoring/ reading it.*
b. **He began to reach the summit. *He stopped finding the key.*

In addition, they contrast the implicatures emerging from the use of *stop* and *finish* with accomplishments and activities:

(19) a. *He stopped/finished painting the house.*
b. *He stopped/finished eating.*

With accomplishments, *finish* implicates that the action described is complete, whereas *stop* does not. This is an implicature, because *stop* may indeed coincide with *finish* (e.g. *I won't stop until I've finished*). The difference between the two sentences in (19b) is less sharp instead, in that they both entail the act of eating. *Finish*, however, is viewed as quasi-telic, as can be better observed in (20a), due to the fact that what had to be said was said, which is not the case with *stop* (20b):

(20) a. *He finished talking.*
b. *He stopped talking.*

Huddleston & Pullum's analysis, however, is not very fine-grained and also entails some contradictions. It is not always true, for instance, that aspectual verbs cannot be found in combination with telic-punctual events:

(21) *As she began to reach the top of the stairs the air began to thicken.*[8]

Reaching the top of the stairs is indeed an achievement, but the sentence is perfectly plausible. Still, among the general grammars of English Huddleston & Pullum (2002) include the most comprehensive treatment

of aspectual verbs due to its joint analysis of syntactic, semantic and pragmatic aspects.

2.2 The syntactic debate

Syntactic issues are nearly always at the centre of the debate in studies on aspectual verbs regardless of the framework of inquiry, which may cut across different linguistic traditions. Certain works, however, remain primarily descriptive, rather than explanatory, and confined to the analysis of the formal behaviour of aspectual verbs. A number of studies have developed out of generative-transformational approaches to grammar and are aimed at determining under what node the various forms appear and what deviations from their core deep structure they allow. Others offer traditional syntactic evaluations of the constructions into which aspectual verbs can or cannot enter. We will start with a review of these latter studies and with the discussion concerning the classificatory issue.

2.2.1 Traditional accounts

The reason why it is complicated to assign a precise grammatical status to aspectual verbs is because they show features of both auxiliary and lexical verbs. On the one hand, they satisfy certain syntactic conditions for auxiliary membership, while, on the other hand, they also appear to behave like non-auxiliaries. Just like *be*, *have* and modal verbs, for instance, they allow passivization (Garcia, 1967: 862-3; Palmer, 1974: 42, 99, 169, 186-7, 204; Peterson, 1974: 4-5):

(22) a. *John {began/continued} to address the crowd = The crowd {began/continued} to be addressed by John.*
b. *John {will/may} visit Susan tomorrow = Susan {will/may} be visited by John tomorrow.*
c. *Bill has eaten the cake = The cake has been eaten by Bill.*
d. *Mary is writing a novel = A novel is being written by Mary.*
e. *John wanted to see a movie tonight* vs. **A movie wanted to be seen by John tonight.*

In addition, they function as operators for the complement clause that they introduce, i.e. they show subordination to a full verb (Visser, 1969), and they are "defined in terms of the surrounding verbs" (Anderson, 1968:

394-6). Therefore, if an aspectual verb combines with a full verb requiring an agentive subject, for instance, it will end up having an agentive interpretation too and vice versa:

(23) a. *He began to grow begonias in this room.*
b. *He began to grow faster than the other children of his age.*

In (23a) *begin* is agentive because "growing begonias" is, while in (23b) it is not agentive due to the fact that "growing fast" does not presuppose intentionality. This consideration, however, opens up a discussion about semantic aspects, so for the time being it will not be developed any further.

At the same time, aspectual verbs do not meet all syntactic criteria in order to be classified as real auxiliaries. Unlike modals, for instance, that admit both paired positive and negative forms, they require the addition of a particle in negative sentences (Palmer, 1974: 17):

(24) a. *I can come.*
b. *I can't come.*
(25) a. *He began to cry.*
b. **He begann't to cry.*
c. *He didn't begin to cry.*

They do not impose restrictions in terms of word order, which is instead fixed in the presence of an auxiliary verb:

(26) a. *I want to begin.*
b. *I begin to want*.
(27) a. *I ought to begin.*
b. **I begin to ought*.

Moreover, they have the possibility of combining with an auxiliary verb, whereas two auxiliaries cannot occur together. This would be a further indication that aspectual verbs are not auxiliaries:

(28) a. *I ought to begin*.
b. **is shalling*; **has would.*

Because of their contradictory behaviour, some linguists have considered them as belonging to a separate, "in-between" category and called them

"quasi-auxiliaries" (Joos, 1964) or "'aspectual' semi-auxiliaries" (Garcia, 1967), etc. Garcia (1967) suggests that we should recognize the existence of a linguistic continuum ranging from tense inflections, to *be* and *have*, to modal auxiliaries, to aspectual verbs and finally to full verbs. This is because the many syntactic tests used to distinguish between the various categories, she argues, fail to lead to clear-cut distinctions.

Palmer (1974), however, classifies aspectual verbs as full verbs. They are made to belong to a sub-group of lexical verbs known as "catenatives" (Twaddel, 1965), which also includes predicates belonging to other classes (Fig. 2-1).

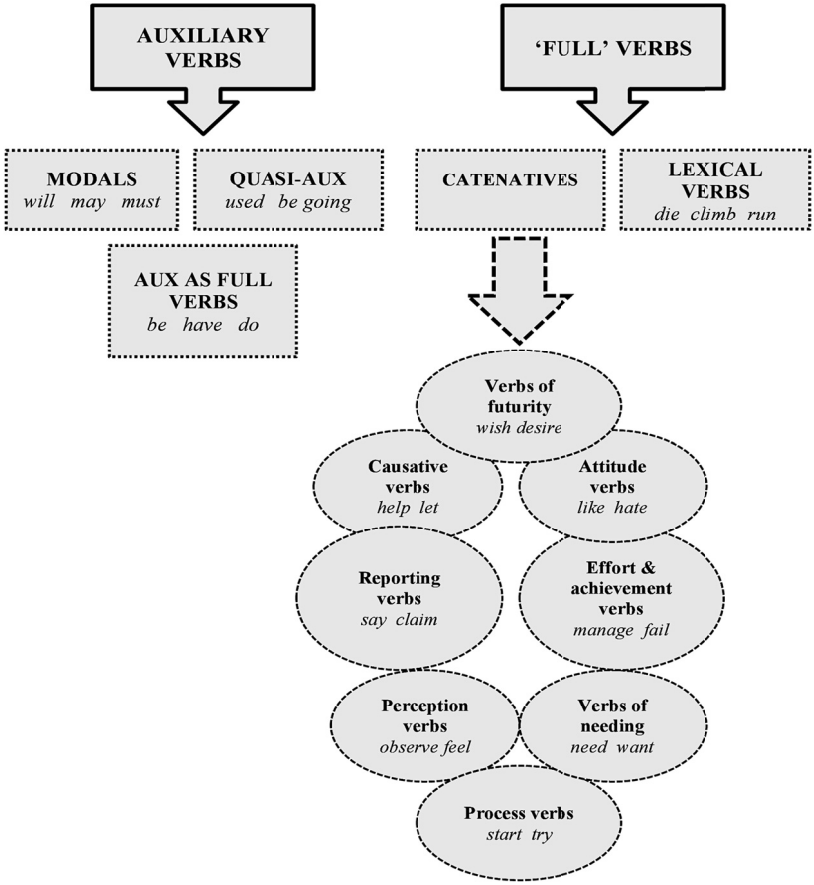

Fig. 2-1. Palmer's classification of verb types (1974)

Aspectual verbs would be part of a specific group of catenatives called "process verbs". Out of the twenty-five verbs belonging to this category, however, only a few among them entail an aspectual meaning. Palmer (1974) himself argues that "process verbs" (Fig. 2.2) are not part of an obvious group and that the reason why they are lumped together is because, formally, they all occur with the *–ing* form (even though they must be kept distinct from "sensation" or "attitude" verbs).

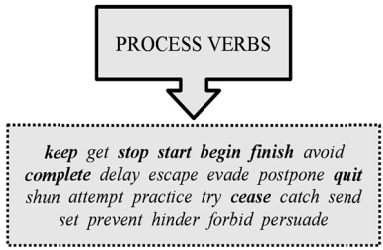

Fig. 2-2. Palmer's "process" verbs (1974)[9]

The main syntactic difference between lexical verbs proper and catenatives would be that the former can appear as last in a sentence, whereas the latter can not (Palmer 1974: 172):

(29) *I don't want to have to be forced to begin to try to make more money.*

Palmer (1974), however, fails to realise that a certain situation may in fact remain implicit and be recoverable in the context of the utterance, thus making it possible for a sentence to end with a catenative verb, too. Consider, for instance, the following sentence, which is a reformulation of the example above:

(30) *I don't want to have to be forced to begin to try to make more money. But if you spend so much, I will have to begin.*

The aspectual verb itself could also be ellipted here, because it is anaphorically recoverable in the context of the utterance:

(31) *I don't want to have to be forced to begin to try to make more money. But if you spend so much, I will have to.*

Palmer's analysis (1974) does not take pragmatic aspects into consideration, despite their obvious repercussions at the formal level. He simply provides a general classification in terms of the basic structures in which verbs occur. As for aspectual verbs, he identifies four distinct syntactic patterns. The first subgroup includes *keep* and *stop*, which can occur with or without a NP when followed by an *-ing* form, in addition to allowing main clause passivization. Unlike *stop*, *keep* may also appear with a NP and a past participle having adjectival function:

(32) a. *He kept/stopped talking.*
b. *He kept/stopped them talking.*
c. *They were kept/stopped talking.*
d. *He *stopped/kept his mouth shut.*

Start and *begin* are said to behave like *keep* and *stop* with respect to the possibility of allowing an *–ing* clause, but they also license a *to*-infinitive clause which is instead not possible after *keep* or *stop*.[10] Therefore, they belong to a different subgroup. Only *start*, however, seems to be likely to occur with main clause passivization:

(33) a. *He started/began talking.*
b. *He started/began/*kept to talk.*
c. *They were started/*begun talking.*

A third subgroup of verbs includes *finish*, *complete* and *quit*, which can only occur without a NP if complemented by an *–ing* form:

(34) a. *He finished/completed/quit talking at four.*
b. **He finished/completed/quit him talking at four.*

Finally, *cease* is considered to behave in a similar way, but since it also appears with the *to*-infinitive it is made to belong to a fourth subgroup:

(35) *He ceased worrying/to worry me, when he became older.*

In fact, *finish* too can be followed by a *to*-infinitive clause. The following sentence, for instance, would be perfectly plausible:

(36) *He finished to talk at four.*

It can be said, in conclusion, that Palmer's contribution (1974) is merely a description of the prevalent syntactic structures that verbs can be found in. Since large electronic databases and easily searchable corpora of English were still not available when he carried out his study, he had to rely primarily on his intuition as a native speaker in order to find examples in support of his claims. Yet, he often ignored the existence and the plausibility of certain constructions. With respect to passivization, for instance, he maintains that certain uses would not be allowed, e.g. **The book began to be read by John*, even though they are in fact possible, as can be very easily proved today by querying a corpus or simply conducting an ad hoc Internet search for a similar occurrence:

(37) *The book began to be read by people all over.*[11]

In addition, although the use of the *–ing* and *to*-infinitive clause in combination with aspectual verbs is discussed, the reason why the two types of complements can or cannot be used is not adequately motivated, other than saying that a different form is associated to a different sense (Palmer 1974: 212):

(38) a. *He stopped talking.*
b. *!He stopped to talk.* (a different sense)

Sometimes it is even claimed that no obvious explanations are possible for unacceptable uses, as in (39) below (Palmer 1974: 212):

(39) **He kept to talk*.

However, the reason why (38b) instantiates a different sense of *stop* and (39) is not grammatical resides in the internal semantics of *stop* and *keep*, respectively. Palmer (1974) simply limits his observation to the surface level of grammar and does not investigate the links between meanings and forms.

Palmer (1974) is sharply criticized by Huddleston (1976), who maintains that clear-cut divisions between auxiliaries, catenatives and full verbs are arbitrary. In particular, he points out the unnatural distinction between auxiliary and certain catenative verbs, e.g. *be* V-*ing* and *keep* V-*ing* or *be* V-*ing* and *continue*/*cease* V-*ing*, etc., arguing that "catenatives and auxiliaries are alike in determining whether the following non-finite [clause] [should] be a *to*-infinitive, a bare infinitive, an *-ing* form or an *-en* form" (1976: 339). Huddleston (1976) focuses on establishing parallels

between catenatives and the aspectual operators *be* and *have* in terms of time relations. His main point is that both catenatives and aspectual markers constrain the choice and interpretation of adverbs in the complement clause. The use of definite time adverbials, for instance, would always be determined by the element indicating aspectual meaning, be it a catenative or an auxiliary verb (1976: 343-4):

(40) a. *It was raining at noon.*
b. *It began raining at noon.*

In other words, *at noon* would be "anchored" to the aspectual elements, i.e. *was* and *began* respectively, rather than to the verb in the complement clause. He further argues that aspectual verbs like *start*, *begin*, *continue*, *keep*, *cease*, *stop* etc. should be regarded as temporally inseparable from the process they are associated with.

Another important study on syntax, which also includes an examination of aspectual verbs, is Levin (1993). The primary aim of this analysis is not that of discussing the auxiliary or non-auxiliary properties of predicates, but rather that of providing a classification based on the different types of constructions that verbs allow or do not allow. In spite of the fact that Levin (1993) groups verbs according to their semantic content, her work remains predominantly syntactic. Aspectual verbs are subdivided into "begin" and "complete" verbs.[12] The former, including *begin, cease, commence, continue, end, finish, halt, keep, proceed, repeat, resume, start, stop,* and *terminate*, are said to differ from the latter, i.e. *complete*, *discontinue*, *initiate* and *quit*, due to their ability to allow the causative alternation (1993: 274-275):

(41) a. *I began the meeting at 4 p.m.*
b. *The meeting began at 4 p.m.*
(42) a. *Wilma completed the assignment.*
b. **The assignment completed.*

This is the only distinction made with respect to this verb class, which at closer examination even proves to be inaccurate. *Initiate,* for instance, actually appears to behave like "begin" verbs (Franceschi, 2014: 317-318):

(43) a. *They initiated the erection of a town hall […].*
b. *America's jet project was initiated under the tightest possible secrecy*.

Although *initiate* is normally used with the overt indication of an agentive subject (43a), it can also occur in a non-causative, passivized form (43b) that only retains an implicit reference to agentivity, owing to the non-direct expression of the semantic subject.[13] It is only a strictly inchoative use that would be perceived as odd:

(44) *#America's jet project initiated under the tightest possible secrecy.*

Furthermore, there are other differences in behaviour among aspectual verbs that Levin (1993) does not address. Since her work is concerned with showing the many existing interrelations among verb classes and subclasses, it cannot provide a more fine-grained picture of the various possible structural configurations of aspectual verbs.

2.2.2 Generative-transformational analyses

Generative-transformational studies usually agree that aspectual verbs are full verbs that take either *to*-V or V–*ing* sentential complements. The disagreements concern the role played by the complement clause with respect to whether it should be treated as a VP or NP.

Rosenbaum (1967) argues that aspectual verbs are followed by VP complements, based on the fact that they cannot appear in passive or pseudo-cleft constructions, which are instead possible with NP-complementation (1967: 11):

(45) a. **To cry was begun by her.*
b. **What she began was cry.*

(46) a. *The book was begun by me in August 1838 […].*[14]
b. *What I began was a story my mother told about the "woods' people".*[15]

Perlmutter (1970) criticizes Rosenbaum's position (1967), saying that the tests based on passivization and clefting fail in the case of *begin*. He supports his argument by showing that the verb has two distinct deep structures, i.e. a transitive and an intransitive one, thus justifying its use both with a NP and VP complement.[16] Transitive *begin* would require animate subjects (47), it may appear in the imperative form (48) and be a complement of verbs like *try* (49) and *force* (50):

(47) *Zeke began to work.*
(48) *Begin to work.*
(49) *I tried to begin to work.*
(50) *I forced Tom to begin work.*

Example (47) shows the existence of a like-subject constraint operating on certain transitive uses of *begin*, according to which the subject of the matrix clause and that of the complement clause must be the same. This constraint does not always apply though. In (50), for instance, the subject of the complement clause corresponds to the object of the matrix clause. By contrast, intransitive *begin* requires the use of an inanimate subject, also in the form of a sentential nominalization (51) or of a dummy subject, such as *there* (52) and *it* (53), and it retains a similar meaning in both active and passive sentences (54):

(51) *The doling out of emergency rations began.*
(52) *There began to be a commotion.*
(53) *It began to rain.*
(54) a. *The noise began to annoy Joe.*
b. *Joe began to be annoyed by the noise.*

The central point that Perlmutter (1970) makes is that aspectual verbs are ambiguous with respect to raising and control. He believes that this phenomenon is quite widespread and also concerns the other verbs in the category, such as *start*, *continue*, *keep* and *stop*. Ross (1972) confirms Perlmutter's (1970) position, saying that *stop* is also both transitive and intransitive. However, he claims that *finish* is only transitive and *cease* only intransitive. Not all aspectual verbs are thus considered as retaining mixed features.

Generative grammarians have typically explained the different structures of aspectual verbs in terms of their raising and control properties. When verbs have raising properties, they do not impose thematic and selectional restrictions, which is instead the case with control verbs. In other words, raising verbs may take a dependent that is not their semantic argument. Despite Perlmutter's (1970) view that aspectual verbs are ambiguous with respect to the raising/control distinction, they have generally been regarded as raising predicates in subsequent studies.

Newmeyer (1975), in particular, argues that aspectual verbs cannot be control verbs and that the selectional restrictions that they seem to impose are in fact only local (1975: 33-34):

(55) a. *John asked him to listen/#hear.*
b. *John began to listen/hear.*
c. *John asked him to begin.*
d. *John asked him to begin to listen/#hear.*

The infelicity of *hear* in (55d), for instance, is not due to a coercion mechanism triggered by *begin*. If this were the case, the use of *hear* would also be infelicitous in (55b). These examples show that the conflict is in fact between *ask* and *hear* (55a) and that such a conflict continues to have its effects in (55d). In other words, it is not the use of *begin* in the sentence that causes a clash with *hear*, but rather the presence of *ask* in combination with *hear*.

Newmeyer (1975) continues his critique of Perlmutter's (1970) position with other examples disconfirming a control interpretation of aspectual verbs. Perlmutter (1970) maintains that an aspectual verb may be substituted by an anaphoric element only when it is a control verb (1970: 114):

(56) a. *Warren tried to begin to work and Jerry tried to do so too.*
b. **Oil began to gush from the well and water did so too.*

However, Newmeyer (1975) explains that the unacceptability of (56b) would only be due to the non-definiteness of the arguments (1975: 31). As a matter of fact, the insertion of the article *the* would produce a correct sentence:

(57) *The oil began to gush from the well and the water did so too.*

While on the one hand Newmeyer's (1975) analysis represents a step forward in the examination of the syntactic structures associated with aspectual verbs, it also presents some limitations from a wider linguistic perspective. *Start* and *begin*, for instance, are considered as "semantically indistinguishable" (1975: 51). This is a pretty rash statement that was disconfirmed in subsequent studies.

It was later unanimously concluded that the various uses of aspectual verbs should be treated as expressions of their raising properties. The confusion was due to a wrong analysis of nominal phrases in complement position, which should always be seen as presupposing a verbal projection