Symposium:
The Pragmatics of Aspect in Varieties of English

Programme

Date: 16 to 17 April 2012
Place: University of Innsbruck, Main Building (Museumsraum Archäologie, 3rd floor)
Convener: Prof. Gabriella Mazzon (Department of English, University of Innsbruck)
### Monday, April 16, 2012

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| 11.00 – 12.00 | **Keynote address:** Bernd Kortmann (University of Freiburg)  
The pragmatics of aspect in varieties of English – the WAVE perspective |
| 12.00 – 14.00 | Lunch break                                                        |
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*He’s only gone and gone out, hasn’t he?*  
The rise of the narrative perfect in contemporary English – an aspect becomes a tense |
| 14.30 – 15.00 | Valentin Werner  
The present perfect in World Englishes – overlap or divergence? |
| 15.00 – 15.30 | Manfred Markus  
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| 15.30 – 16.00 | Coffee break                                                      |
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| 16.30 – 17.00 | Lieselotte Anderwald  
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| 17.00 – 17.30 | Solveig Granath & Michael Wherrity  
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| 19.30 –     | Dinner                                                            |

### Tuesday, April 17, 2012

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| 9.30 – 10.30 | **Keynote address:** Raymond Hickey (University of Duisburg-Essen)  
Aspect configurations in varieties of English |
| 10.30 – 11.00 | Coffee break                                                        |
|             | **Session 3** (Chair: Gerhard Pisek)                               |
| 11.00 – 11.30 | Robert Fuchs  
The choice between present perfect and simple past in Nigerian and British English |
| 11.30 – 12.00 | Philip Herdina  
Can cognitive grammar throw a new light on the use of aspect in English? |
| 12.00 – 12.30 | Leona Florence Cordery  
The devil lies in the detail – how teaching English highlights the complexities of aspect |
| 12.30 – 13.00 | Closure                                                            |
Abstracts

Lieselotte Anderwald
University of Kiel, Germany

“*I’m loving it*” – marketing ploy or language change in progress?

Since the introduction in 2003 of the world-wide marketing slogan of a global fast-food chain (including 11 local translations) the use of *love* in the progressive seems to have become more frequent in English, or perhaps more noticeable. According to textbook wisdom, verbs of attitude like *love* cannot as a rule occur in the progressive (cf. Leech 2004). Surprisingly, there are no corpus-based studies of this phenomenon to date, and reference grammars are mostly silent on this development (for a one-line exception cf. Huddleston & Pullum 2002).

Based on the huge new resources of COCA and COHA (the Corpus of Contemporary and Historical American English, respectively, both compiled by Mark Davies at Brigham Young University), my talk will investigate quantitatively the grammatical and semantic constraints of this construction, and try to answer the following questions: Are we dealing with realtime language change, or is this construction indeed just a marketing ploy? Did McDonald’s originate this trend, or did they just jump the bandwagon? Is it a specifically American construction, or can it also be encountered in British English? Is it a variant of the simple form, or do usage and meaning differ? Is this development lexeme-specific, or are other static verbs also affected? Finally, we should be able to answer the question whether this development is an instance of the wider use of the progressive with static verbs in varieties of English world-wide, or whether it should be interpreted along different lines.

References:

Leona Florence Cordery
University of Innsbruck, Austria

“The devil lies in the detail” – how teaching English highlights the complexities of aspect

One of the greatest language learning challenges for students of English, particularly nowadays, is the correct use of aspect. While many are able to recite the grammar rules governing aspect, the carryover into productive language skills, both oral and written, is often problematic. Particularly oral competence, i.e. the instinctive and spontaneous use of language, is a good indicator whether students are able to master aspect.

Aspect is above all a question of expressing concept and meaning, consequently requiring language flexibility, while alternative aspect forms and especially the possibility of interchangeability heighten confusion.

Pinpointing problems:

- Students need to be sensitised that language is based on the expression of concepts and meaning.
- Oversimplified understanding and use of so-called stative and dynamic verbs.
- Contemporary English, whether conversational or written, frequently “breaks the rules” of aspect for descriptive purposes, effect etc.
- Time vs concept > change of lexical meaning – I think vs I’m thinking. What do you do? vs What are you doing? Will vs going to. The different meanings of present perfect. Present perfect vs past simple etc.
- Interference L1 > L2 – often a lack of awareness or helplessness.
- The avoidance of complex aspect forms in writing.
- The use of aspect with reference to register and text type.
- Interchangeability – as future teachers of English, proofreaders, etc. students need an awareness of what is correct/incorrect or rather acceptable/unacceptable.

I want to address these points and attempt a solution.
Robert Fuchs
University of Münster, Germany

The choice between present perfect and simple past in Nigerian and British English

In English, both present perfect (PrP) and simple past (SP) can be used to refer to past events. The use of the PrP in different varieties of English has recently been the subject of a number of corpus studies (e.g. Hundt & Smith 2009, Davydova 2011). Aspects addressed include co-occurrence with time adverbials and the frequency of the PrP, particularly relative to the SP. Spoken language and the pragmatic functions of the PrP, however, have so far rarely been investigated.

This paper compares the usage of the PrP and the SP in Nigerian English (NigE) and the present-day version of its colonial ancestor, British English (BrE), based on POS-tagged versions of the British and Nigerian component of the International Corpus of English. The latter is currently being compiled and so far comprises 750,000 words of spoken and written NigE.

Results show that the usage of the PrP and SP is surprisingly similar in both varieties, despite the differences found by Hundt & Biewer (2007) among other varieties. In order to develop a deeper understanding of what drives the choice between PrP and SP, a random subsample from both corpora is analysed with respect to the pragmatic functions of the PrP commonly mentioned in the literature, leading to a critical evaluation of these concepts.

References:

Solveig Granath & Michael Wherrity
Karlstad University, Sweden

“I’m loving you – and knowing it too”: Aspect in so-called stative verbs

English verbs are generally classified as either stative or dynamic, where one of the main differences is said to be that stative verbs cannot be used in the progressive aspect. Cases where such verbs do occur in the progressive are often explained as involving a change in verb meaning (see e.g. Quirk et al. 1985: 198ff; Huddleston & Pullum 2002: 166ff). Another approach to verbs in the progressive is that the form as such is said to convey a range of meanings (see e.g. Núñez-Pertejo 2004: 185). Kranich (2010) makes a major distinction between progressives with aspectual meaning and progressives with subjective meaning. In the present paper we take a functional-semantic approach and argue that all so-called stative verbs can potentially be used in the progressive.

We further argue that -ing has a synchronically invariant core meaning which can be pressed into service via the progressive construction to evoke a variety of messages – aspectual and expressive – depending on the context and the communicative needs of the speaker. We hope to show that all messages evoked by the progressive are ultimately answerable to the basic meaning of the construction and that whether or not a verb can appear in the progressive cannot be predicted on the basis of the stative/dynamic classification.

Our data are from a larger diachronic and synchronic survey of about 50 verbs, classified as stative in the literature, from four semantic categories. In this paper we will draw on approximately 120 instances of BE loving and 60 instances of BE knowing, the latter according to Miller (2011: 153) “the most stative of stative verbs”, covering the time period 1820 to the present and taken from the Corpus of Historical American English. Our results suggest that one reason this construction is often referred to as ungrammatical may be because it is primarily a feature of spoken language, occurring as it does for the most part in fiction and quoted speech.

References:
Can cognitive grammar throw a new light on the use of aspect in English?

The question of aspect and the criteria governing its use have always presented themselves as a thorny problem for both descriptive and prescriptive grammars. The use of aspect seems to be patterned and regular yet specifying exactly which criteria govern its use has so far proved an insurmountable problem for grammarians.

We shall first provide an analysis of the use and definition of the term aspect and then survey the established criteria assumed to determine the aspect such as the stative/dynamic verb distinction, the conception of duration (cf. Bergson’s notion of durée), the identification of text types “commentaries” etc. These criteria are shown to lack the necessary discriminatory precision to provide a useful basis for decisions on progressive/simple distinction. There is furthermore the question in how far aspectual decisions are dependent on specification of tense to be used.

Assuming that in contrast to tense, aspect is generally used to express speaker perspective on an event it seems reasonable to assume that cognitive grammar can contribute valuable insights into the use of aspect in present day English. Obviously this presupposes that aspect can be clearly distinguished from meaning and the significance of event and situation type can be clearly identified in determining the use of aspect.

The paper forms part of a long term project to create what is most appropriately called an Epistemic Grammar of English and forms one chapter of a book to be published soon.

Aspect Configurations in Varieties of English

In the diversification of varieties of English one of the permanent threads has been the development of aspeuctual distinctions. These have a contents and a realisational facet to them. The realisational side of aspect involves tracing the routed which varieties of English took in the colonial period, chiefly between 1600 and 1900 (Hickey ed. 2004). This is a story of dialect input, founder effects, interdialictal and language contact. The contents side of aspect is different as it involves the types of distinctions made in the complex of aspect in specific varieties and also related to tense distinctions also found in these varieties.

The purpose of this presentation will be, firstly, to look at the historical development of varieties of English with special focus on the rise (and demise) or aspectual varieties among vernaculars in the colonial period. Secondly, the linguistically important question of what kinds of aspect configurations arose during the diversification will be examined. The presentation will be backed up by data from a range of varieties of English and by a consideration of the theoretical literature on the development of aspectual systems in general.

References


Bernd Kortmann
University of Freiburg, Germany

The pragmatics of aspect in varieties of English – the WAVE perspective

In this lecture I will try to shed light on the pragmatics of aspect in English on the basis of a new research tool, namely WAVE – the World Atlas of Varieties of English. This new tool comes in two formats. That format which will primarily be drawn upon for the purposes of the symposium is eWAVE – the open-access electronic World Atlas of Varieties of English available for the public from late 2011 onwards. eWAVE is the largest-ever interactive database on grammatical variation in spontaneous spoken English mapping 235 morphosyntactic features in 48 varieties of English (traditional dialects, high-contact mother tongue Englishees, and indiginized second-language Englishees) and 26 English-
based Pidgins and Creoles in eight Anglophone world regions (Africa, Asia, Australia, British Isles, Caribbean, North America, Pacific and the South Atlantic). It was compiled between 2008 and 2011 from descriptive materials, naturalistic corpus data, and native speaker knowledge by a team of 70 contributors, all leading experts in their fields. The second format is the print version of WAVE (pWAVE), which will be published in late 2012 by De Gruyter Mouton, offering additional material, perspectivizing accounts of individual of the 74 data sets in eWAVE as well as large-scale comparisons across the individual variety types and Anglophone world regions.

The basis for the Innsbruck talk will be the distribution of the more than 30 tense and aspect features covered by WAVE across different Anglophone world-regions and variety types, focusing on those features, examples and discussions in chapters pertinent to the variational pragmatics of aspect, in particular, and variational pragmatics, offer some general thoughts on promising avenues of research to be pursued under the pragmatics of progressive, perfect, completive and habitual markers. The talk will also types, focusing on those features, examples and discussions in chapters pertinent to the heading of the variational pragmatics of aspect, in particular, and variational pragmatics, in general – and the kind of data necessary for such studies.

References:

Manfred Markus, 
University of Innsbruck, Austria

The Survival of Aspect Expressed by the Prefix a- in Late Modern English Dialects (Based on Wright’s EDD)

The historical development of the so-called expanded form of verbs in English (to be + -ing) is closely connected with the gerund, which is itself a nominal syntagm, but may, on occasion, be embedded in a verb phrase (e.g. in [to be fond] of singing). In addition to this fairly subtle syntactic difference (too subtle for dialect speakers?) between the two grammatical categories, their proximity is also a formal one: they are both based on the suffix -ing, which is interpretable as a participial marker in the case of the expanded form and as a nominal suffix in the other case of the gerund.

Originally, i.e. before Late ME, -ing was, like its allomorph -ung, only a nominal suffix (for nouns of action, however). The verbal suffixes for participles were, depending on the dialect involved, -ende, -inde or -ande. In Late Modern English, when standardisation was in common demand and morphology lost ground in favour of syntax, the nominal suffix -ing was functionally generalised and the originally verbal suffixes became obsolete.

English dialects did not quite share this standardisation. They clearly accepted the formal simplification -ing, mostly in the further simplified form -in’, but they widely stuck to the gerund for which this form was originally used, by marking the nominal quality of -ing constructions. The all-purpose marker was the prefix a- as a phonologically reduced allomorph of prepositions such as on or in. While a construction like he was a-shaking, from a present point of view, may look like a mere variant of the modern expanded form, it is, from a historical point of view, a phonologically simplified gerundial construction he was on shaking. There is a similar construction in German (Ruhr area) dialects: er ist am Zittern. Though this construction works with the infinitive, whereas English dialects use the old nominal suffix, the function of temporary or progressive aspect is to be found in either case. The present paper will, on a corpus linguistic basis, study the occurrence of the a- prefix for aspectual purposes in English dialects as available in EDD Online. I will also retrieve the less frequent but more original on -ing and in -ing constructions. Moreover, allophonic variants, e.g. o-*ing instead of a-*ing and -in’ instead of standardised -ing, will be grasped.

Finally, the prefix a- is also frequently used in the EDD for participial adjectives (such as a-masked for “masked”), the meanings of which imply a temporary state. This adjectival formation is clearly more productive in dialects than in the English standard. I will retrieve and study these words in detail and, on this occasion, raise the question of how their “manner of action” or “Aktionsart”, as a lexicalised semantic distinction, is related to what we generally mean by the grammatical term aspect.

References:
"I am going to the office every day": The -ing construction in Black South African English

Recent accounts of the morphosyntax of Black South African English (BSAE), the variety of English used by speakers of South Africa’s indigenous African languages, have remarked on the tendency of BSAE speakers to use the progressive -ing construction in contexts where Standard English usually favours the non-progressive (cf. Buthelezi 1995; Gough 1996; Mesthrie 2004). In particular, it is often claimed that BSAE speakers frequently combine the progressive with stative verbs such as be and have. The progressive also appears to be a frequent choice when it comes to expressing past habits (cf. Mesthrie 2004; Wade 1997). The relative frequency of progressive constructions in spoken BSAE ranges between 9.76 (de Klerk cited in van Rooy 2006), 11.23 (Minow 2010) and 13.74 (Siebers 2007). BSAE thus does show a higher frequency of progressives than inner as well as other outer circle varieties investigated by Collins (2008). The question is how we can account for this higher frequency.

The present paper reports on an analysis of the usage of progressive construction in a corpus of circa 85,000 words of spoken BSAE. The analysis of the progressive tokens in these data shows that truly stative verbs like be occur infrequently with the -ing form. However, BSAE speakers do exhibit a tendency of choosing -ing constructions to express individual types of states, habits and recurring activities, as in the following examples:

1) “So now what I’m doing there I’m just hanging the doors I’m doing a carpentry job there.”
2) “Most black families are actually speaking only English at home (...) and losing out.”

Hence, the results of the present analysis support van Rooy’s (2006) earlier tentative findings that the -ing construction in BSAE is used to express not only progressive aspect, but also other types of imperfective aspect such as the continuous or the persistitive.

References:

Jim Walker
Université Lumière Lyon 2, France

He’s only gone and gone out, hasn’t he? The rise of the narrative perfect in contemporary English – an aspect becomes a tense

There has recently been interest shown in what appears on the face of it to be a relatively recent phenomenon in contemporary British English, which has been called variously (and somewhat jocularly) the footballer’s perfect (Walker 1998), because of its prevalence in interviews with footballers, and the narrative perfect (Fryd, forthcoming). This refers to the use of the periphrastic HAVE perfect to refer past events, and often a sequence of past events, without any of the connections to present time that are so often thought to be a prerequisite for the grammaticality of the PP. For instance, in the following extract, taken from the BBC comedy series The Fast Show, the PP is clearly being used to narrate past events:

So he’s bought himself one of those dirty great roadcruisers, you know the sort I mean, six wheels on it, radar, roofracks, all that. He’s stocked up with food, and he’s bought himself a lovely little fridge, and he’s stocked it up with beer, and off he’s gone. One day into the desert, and what’s happened?

This phenomenon is to be distinguished from, though may well be related to, the oft-commented use of PP with past time adverbials, which some have seen as a growing phenomenon (Trudgill 1978)

In this talk, I shall attempt to trace the parallels between this narrative PP and the (ONLY) GO AND construction, evidence in examples such as:
References:
Fryd, Marc, forthcoming. "The Narrative Present in English". In Selected Papers from the 4th Colloquium on Modality in English, held at the University of Madrid (Complutense), September 9-11, 2010. Cambridge Scholars.

Valentin Werner
University of Cambridge/University of Bamberg, England/Germany

The present perfect in World Englishes – overlap or divergence?

Past time reference represents one of the notorious areas of English grammar. The present perfect (HAVE + past participle) in particular seems to defy grammatical categorization and was given various labels such as ‘tense’ (Declerck 2006), ‘aspect’ (Quirk et al. 1985), ‘phase’ (Meyer 1992) or ‘status’ (Bauer 1970, cf. Kortmann 1995). Yet, a consensus among scholars still seems to be out of reach, especially with regard to a semantic description. It has to be noted, however, that in-depth quantitative analyses (Elsness 1997, 2009; Schlüter 2002) could partly contribute to solve the issue.

This is where this empirical project ties in and extends the previous findings beyond the established British versus American English paradigm to a World Englishes perspective (cf. also Davydova 2011; Werner 2011). It is based on data from a number of components of the synchronous International Corpus of English (ICE), both from L1-varieties (such as Irish, Australian or New Zealand English) and L2-varieties (such as Singapore or Philippine English). Samples of present perfect occurrences across certain text types (e.g. dialogues, monologues, letters, reportage, etc.) are automatically identified and extracted and each occurrence is manually coded according to different factors such as Aktionsart, semantics and preceding tense. Subsequently, a measure of similarity between the different components of the corpus is established applying cluster analysis.

Findings suggest that patterns of present perfect usage vary along the dimensions variety type, geographical or social-cultural proximity (‘areoversals’/’varioversals’; cf. Szmrecsanyi/ Kortmann 2009) and text type. In addition, it is argued that varieties overlap to a considerable extent as was shown for another aspectual domain (cf. Hundt/Vogel 2011) and thus a statement about the conservative or innovative nature of present perfect usage in World Englishes can be made, including some notes on the frequencies of more “exotic” forms such as medial object perfects, BE-perfects, etc.

References:
Organising committee: Gabriella Mazzon, Gerhard Pisek, Reinhard Heuberger, Philip Herdina, Christine Kreinig

Selection committee: Gabriella Mazzon, Philip Herdina, Manfred Kienpointner, Gerhard Pisek

Department of English
University of Innsbruck
Innrain 52
6020 Innsbruck - Austria

Faculty of Humanities 2 (Language and Literature)
University of Innsbruck
Innrain 52
6020 Innsbruck - Austria

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