A Logical Classification of English Aspects

Including the interrelation of aktionsart and aspect within the language.

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ABSTRACT: This paper seeks to provide an overview of the aspectual systems of modern English. It includes historical context regarding the development of the study of aspect and in particular the understanding of tense and aspect structure in English including historical developments of usage of aspect within the language. Further, a system of classification of Aspectual forms in English based on this body of knowledge is proposed.

A Logical Classification of English Aspects

A Logical Classification of English Aspects is the third in a series of five papers dealing with the basic grammatical structure and behavior of verbal constructions in modern English. These five works: *Voice in English: Semantic Implications of the Passive-Active Paradigm* (2007), *Word Order & Syntactic Hierarchy in English* (2007), *A Logical Classification of English Aspects* (2007), *Structural Classification of English Modals* (2009), and *An Inventory and Discussion of English Futurity* (2009) are intended to provide a holistic overview of the core functions of the language and their inherent interactions so that a better understanding of modern English grammar may be attained.

Introduction

In years of teaching English and sitting in classes trying to learn other languages, one thing that has become evident to me is that most people do not understand the role of Aspect in language. This is quite obvious when language learners are used as a thermometer against which to measure native speaker production errors. There are quite well-known instances of widespread misuse of tense/aspect combinations. North American English speakers are known to use forms such as 'I saw' when 'I have seen' is called for. Likewise British speakers tend to use 'I have seen' nearly universally, even when 'I saw' or 'I had seen' would be the ideal forms. It's difficult to classify such happenings as error because grammar guides generally lack a clear explanation of the features, purpose, and usage of these many forms. Those that do attempt to provide guidance, do so with a slew of competing 'rules' based on traditional prescriptive guidance or misperceived standards of usage.

The role of aspect in English is the one key attribute of the language which separates it from most other tongues, especially other Germanic languages. The dynamics of aspect as both semantic and syntactic systems within English are complex and understanding of these processes are integral to fully understanding the grammar of the language. It is my hope that this paper provides the historical and general linguistic background to understand the aspectual system of English, and that the proposed classification system for Aspect within the language may lead to a greater understanding and easier method of explaining the grammar and nature of the various forms of English conjugations.

Historical Development of Aspect as a Field of Study

In considering the various attributes of aspect in English, it is necessary to first consider the history of the study of aspect in general. Tense and aspect have long been a topic of debate and research among linguists with philosophical debate on these fronts long predating linguistics as a separate field of study. Much of the meaning currently assigned to aspectuality had been seen originally as the domain of tense, with tense being an all encompassing term for anything involving time. The study of tense has not always been as clearly defined as is currently ,with tense dealing with temporal

reference within the utterance (the relevance of T_{UTT} to T_{AST}, T_{COM}, or T_{EVL} – *see section on Tense below*) as being within the range of present, past, or future. Study of tense began in earnest with declined languages of learning such as Latin and Greek in which tense is marked with affixes and declensions. The original function of these tense markings in many Indo-European languages was not that of temporal reference (present, past, and future) but one of aktionsart or aspect.[3]

The study of aspect as independent of tense began to develop in the early 20th Century, mostly through the work of Russian linguists studying Slavic languages. These early proponents of a separate grammatical category dealing with the circumstances of the verb, or more precisely as they saw it, its viewpoint as independent from true tense focused primarily on languages (Russian, Latin, Greek) in which aspectual characteristics tend to occur in opposing pairs. The roots of this system are still quite obvious today with binary systems such as perfective versus imperfective (not to be confused with perfected), telic versus atelic, etc. In attempting to apply these more clear-cut assessments of aspect into other languages, German linguists found they did not effectively convey the aspectual happenings of Germanic languages. They recognized that just as aspectual characteristics of the language had been shown to be separate but related to tense, that there existed an even further differentiation within many languages between nature of the action inherent in the meaning of a verb and that inherent in the utterance itself. Their solution was the proposal of a dual system in which the temporal nature of the action itself, which they named aktionsart (literally translated as action-type) operated as separate yet complimentary to the temporal nature of the utterance in which it appeared – for this, they retained the term aspect.

Aktionsart vs. Aspect

Aktionsart refers to the kind of action – particularly, the temporal nature inherent within the verb itself. This lexical aspect as it is also called, is a characteristic of the lexeme (verb) itself, and operates independently of the grammar of the utterance so that aktionsart of a verb remains consistent regardless of use or the structure of the utterance in which it occurs. Aspect on the other hand (specifically grammatical aspect, as opposed to lexical aspect) deals with the temporal nature of the utterance (or a phrase within a larger utterance). It is a characteristic of the verb phrase and does not alter the semantic properties (including aktionsart) of the verb or verbs within that phrase.

Vendler (1957) proposes four aktionsarten – states, achievements, activities, and accomplishments. These types of action are further described with attributes of temporal nature inherent to them. Comrie (1976) takes an approach less semantically based, and more purely temporal defining actions as semelfactive – those which occur at a particular point in time, and durative – those which occur over a range of time. These are only a couple of the vast variety of classification schemes for classifying verbs by their temporal nature. Others further create a system based on telicity – a type of semantic completeness in which verbs are classified as telic and atelic depending on whether the action can be considered to have an inherent end. It is not important to adhere to any specific aktionsart scheme, as each can be seen as beneficial and challenging as not all verbs fit into each of the categories of any of the proposed systems. Some fit in no category, while others seem to operate across the boundaries of entire systems. Much as aktionsart was developed in opposition to previous systems

of aspect that could not effectively describe the actions of German, the rigid nature the concept of aktionsart does not fit well with the more semantically fluid verbs of English. What is important with regard to aktionsart is that just as there is more to the time-qualities of the utterance than tense, there is also more to quantifying the temporal nature of an utterance than the behavior of the verb within the utterance – that much of the temporal nature of an assertion draws from that same nature as is inherent in the meaning of the verb itself.

The roots of the concept of aktionsart in German, and the problem in effectively applying it to English reflect a core difference between the two languages that is easily observed in comparing semantically identical utterances. The most noticeable difference between English and German utterances is the appearance in German of having only one aspect. What would be expressed in English as *'I am riding my bike,'* is seen as syntactally expressed in German as *'I ride my bike.'* The effects of aktionsart explain this difference, and actually show that the two utterances are in fact not only semantically identical, but syntactically so as well. In German, the aktionsart of the verb RIDE maintains an inherent durational quality, so that durative nature does not have to be reflected in the aspect of the utterance overall because aktionsart of the verb is already performing that task. In terms of aktionsart, English is much more flexible than German in that the aktionsart of English verbs is rarely set, and generally is not a strongly governing factor in a verb's usage. Some English verbs do tend toward certain aktionsarten over others, and historically most verbs have been inherently prone to expression of state or of activity (or telic or atelic, or semelfactive, and so on). Because aktionsart in English is not an overriding governing feature, it means that the aktionsarten of verbs are not set. Verbs can and do change, and historically have changed with ever greater frequency their aktionsartig characteristics. This is indicative of the ability and tendency of English to change its nature and usage with the needs and intent of its speakers. This metamorphic tendency of English is primarily the domain of its lexemes and thus makes the aktionsarten of its verbs more fluid than set. Because temporal nature is not wholly set for specific verbs in English, expressions of a durative nature require the utterance itself to be structured so as to express duration. With the temporal nature of utterances being the realm of aspect rather than lexical-level aktionsart, English is left with a system of two aspects performing the same role as one aspect in German.

Tense

Along with aktionsart and aspect, English has a third time-relevant grammatical category – that of the more familiar tense. While aktionsart may be a rather unfamiliar term to many, aspect and tense tend to be fairly common, especially in grammar texts and within the context of language learning. Aktionsart is by far the most complex of these concepts as it deals with the internal mechanisms of the verb and expresses the temporal nature inherent in its lexical meaning. As aktionsart is internal to the verb, aspect is external, expressing the temporal nature of the verb as it is used to assert the proposition of the utterance. Both aspect and aktionsart deal with temporal nature, which is to say, they deal with the interaction with time as a quantifiable attribute of communication with the aktionsart of the verb describing the temporal nature of the verb itself as being inherently prone to expressing action of a particular character or another, and the aspect of the utterance determining the nature of the quantification of time within the scope of that utterance.

Tense, as part of this temporal trifecta of English, is by far the most simple of these concepts as there is no embedded semantic component inherent in tense. Rather, tense is merely a temporal reference of one or more points within the timeline of the utterance. Formulaically, tense is a comparison of temporal reference between the Time of Utterance (T_{UTT}) – the point in time that the utterance is spoken or written or read, and the Time of Assertion (T_{AST}) – the time in which the assertion occurs or is occurring, the Time of Completion (T_{COM}) when a need exists to know when an action is finished or to be able to measure its duration to a specific point, or in the case of certain propositional modal assertions the Time of Evaluation (T_{EVL}) – the point in time at which the assertion is evaluated as having become true or not.[4] Tense references these points of time without respect to the information conveyed. The nature and type of temporal information of an utterance is governed instead by its aspect.

Understanding of Aspect in English

Tense, particularly time has long been an attribute of language that has been studied in depth. While the notion of aspectuality is attested to in writings as early as those of Roman philosophers[5], aspect as we know it, has for much of the history of language study been considered as a component of tense rather than a separate attribute itself. As discussed above though, it has been only recently that study of aspect itself has developed, and even more recently that the modern concepts of aspect and aktionsart have been devised to describe the temporal nature of languages like English. In fact, this dual concept of internal and external temporal nature only dates back to the works of Agrell who proposed the separate usage of the two terms in 1908.

Traditional classification of the temporal nature of verbal constructs in English far predates even these early modern understandings of aspect, aspect as separate from tense, and aktionsart as independent of aspect. Perhaps the first of the modern English-language grammars, that of Brightland's Grammar of the English Tongue, first published in 1711 distributes tense across a range of not only 'simple tense' (present, past, and future), but also of perfect, imperfect, and pluperfect. Interestingly, constructions using the present participle form (-ING) are not even attested to in this text. This possibly reflects a still rare usage at this time. A scan of the text of the book only finds the modal construction be + going, throughout the entire work. Likewise, Act I of Shakespeare's Romeo and Juliet, published a century and a half earlier in 1595 contains over fifty instances of verbs ending in –ING as either gerunds of adjectives based on present participles, yet only two instances of actual BE + PRESENT PARTICIPLE utterances. In a later version of Murray's grammar from 1867, tense is expanded to include imperfect, perfect, pluperfect, future I and future II, yet present participle forms are given little more than a mention as an expressive alternative to standard forms. The increasing need over time to expand the range of tense while lacking necessitation for a second aspect seems to reflect the possibility that aktionsart perhaps played a stronger role in English grammar in the past than it does today. By the publication of Bain's Higher Grammar in 1891 this tense system is further revised to include indefinite, progressive, perfect, and continuous, which although structurally identical to the modern groupings, still considers all temporal attributes as components of tense. The manifestation of clearly marked

durational forms however, does signal a change over previous grammars and perhaps also signifies a weakening in the governing quality of aktionsart as, although not named as such, grammatical aspect has become a stronger factor expressing the temporal nature of the utterance, a function assigned to the inherent lexical aspect of the verb in previous grammars.

The outline of English verb conjugations as consisting of four forms, declinable for person, number, and tense, as described in Bain's grammar is basically the same system in use today, albeit with often different names and a more dual organization with Bain's indefinite being labeled in modern grammars as the simple; complemented with, as he proposed, the perfect; and the progressive complemented with what Bain called the continuous, which is most commonly called the perfect progressive. The aforementioned terminology is not universally accepted nor a standard use of it universally employed, but it does represent the consensus view of tense and aspect in most modern studies of English grammar. The problem with this classification is, as demonstrated by the timeline presented above, that the current scheme of English tense and aspect had developed long before the study or understanding of tense, aspect, and aktionsart as separate temporal attributes of the language. This is evidenced even today with the accepted classification scheme being referred to as tenses, as aspects, as combinations of tense and aspect, and even sometimes as moods. This demonstrates a lack of logical design within this system based on the lack of understanding of its components that existed at the time of its original inception.

Proposal

The confusion over the nature of the traditional system of classifying aspect as to what it actually is, is further shown to be troublesome in the fact that most speakers, students of the language, and even scholars of English often cannot clearly convey the meaning and purpose of the four categories within this scheme. This signals an inherent flaw in the adoption of a system based on traditions of classical grammars of Latin and Greek over one based on usage and understanding of the unique attributes of English itself. A logical classification of aspect – separate from tense and aktionsart of the verb, is proposed in this paper. It is a scheme of classifying aspect in English with regard to the unique attributes of the language that is presented below. It is not a prescriptive classification as has been carried over from classic grammars into modern analysis of the language, but rather a descriptive classification focused on modern usage and behaviors of the verb with specific attention given to organization of the system into a holistic grammar which accounts for that three-prone temporal analysis of tense, aktionsart, and aspect. Little credence is paid to traditional notions of perfective versus imperfective, definite versus indefinite, and the various other universals of aspect drawn from study of morphologically rich and heavily inflected languages that have been forcibly impressed into English linguistics. As the German linguists who originally proposed the dual paradigm of aspect and aktionsart realised, what works for one language may not work for another. And as they saw, while these systems of binary opposition function well to define the realm of aspect in Greek, Latin, or Slavic

languages, they do not well serve the needs of scholars of Germanic tongues. Likewise, the differing role of aktionsart means that classifications which function well for German do not effectively convey the operation of utterances in English. Thus, the classification scheme to follow will ignore many of these historic categorizations of aspect and provide instead a fresh, logical system based only on the function of aspect in modern English. This classification of English aspect based only on English aspect shall provide a framework which greatly simplifies the understanding of the relation of forms and clarifies the meaning and proper usage of those forms while providing a solid base of understanding for comprehending the root of many conventions of prescriptive grammar which have their base in aspect. This classification scheme for aspect follows:

Aspect in Modern English

Aspect as a grammatical category of English is often confused with tense, even in modern assessments of the grammar. This is of course incorrect as tense is a comparison of temporal reference between the Time of Utterance (T_{UTT}) – the point in time that the utterance is spoken or written or read, and the Time of Assertion (T_{AST}) – the time in which the assertion occurs or is occurring, the Time of Completion (T_{COM}) when a need exists to know when an action is finished or to be able to measure its duration to a specific point, or in the case of certain propositional modal assertions the Time of Evaluation (T_{EVL}) – the point in time when the assertion is evaluated as having become true or not.[1] Tense references these points of time without respect to the nature information conveyed. As has been stated above, the nature and type of information of an utterance is governed instead by its aspect.

This confusion of tense and aspect has it roots in the fact that the modern system of classifying these categories in English aspectual precedes the recognition of aspect as a separate category by several decades. Basing a system for classifying aspect in English on a system designed without knowledge or understanding of aspect as a separate category is of course very illogical. This is however where the current status of classifying aspect in English stands. The effects of a system built on inherent ignorance of its components are seen even among modern grammarians who often describe aspects as tenses and differing forms of a single aspect as separate aspects within a larger system. Lost within the conundrum of this ill-designed system is also a number of problems with comprehension of aspectual attributes and roles with many speakers failing to recognize the actual purpose, semantic limitations, and component grammars of the various aspectual forms.

Classification

A logical classification of English aspects must first reflect back to that concept of aspect as relates to English discussed in the first part of this paper. In English aspect is the primary governing force of overall structure with regard to temporal nature of the utterance. It functions as an independent attribute of the utterance, expressed independent of tense and separate from any temporal nature expressed by the aktionsart (lexical aspect) of the verb itself. Tense expresses the temporal relevance of various references along the timeline of an utterance. Aspect on the other hand,

expresses the nature of those references. It is that temporal nature of time references that complicates the classification of aspects in English. Structurally, there are only two sets of aspectual forms, but those two sets of forms express ideas with more than two different temporal natures. As the traditional aspectual classifications of perfective and imperfective have been shown as inadequate in covering the gamut of temporal nature in English, and as classifications such as telicity lie within the realm of aktionsart in the language, a system which is specific to the role of aspect in English is necessary.

The primary schemes of aspect for language in general involve either pairs of polar opposing classes, or systems of classification based on certain semantic characteristics of the utterance. Of this first type, the most common are that of stative versus active, perfective versus imperfective, durative versus non-durative, linear versus punctual, and process versus action. Each of these divisions attempts to classify aspectual expression as falling into one of two categories which are polar opposites of each other. These types of classification do function acceptably well within certain languages in which such polar dynamics do exist. However, as the progenitors of the aktionsart/aspect split realised over a hundred years ago, they fail to adequately describe the properties of aspect in Germanic languages. They absolutely fail in English, as they do not account for the ability of single syntactic forms to be capable of multiple, disparate semantic expressions, and likewise of multiple syntactic forms being used for a single common semantic expression.

As to the meaning of these classifications, there is quite a bit of similarity among them. *Stative versus Active* classifies situations as states, which do not involve a change in time (be, know, seem, etc), and active situations such as processes, activities, or actions (blossom, hit, run, etc).[10] *Perfective versus Imperfective* similarly classifies situations based on their terminal nature. It compares perfective situations – those consisting of a single discernable event, from imperfective – those event which are seen as being in the process of unfolding at time of utterance. A nearly identical classification is that of *durative versus non-durative* which classes constructions into those which have duration and those which do not. Another divides aspect between process and actions with its divisions as unclear as the precise meanings of its terminology. These systems all attempt to create comparison in which utterances can be grouped into categories of polar opposites, but fail to recognize that not all utterances can be fit into the individual classifications prescribed. Another similar idea is that of linear versus punctual aspect. This attempts to classify aspect not by the nature of the action itself, but by its behavior when plotted on a timeline of the utterance. This scheme has merit which will be explored below, but still fails to fully grasp the variety of English expression.

The second type of aspectual distinctions is based not on temporal qualities of the utterance, but instead relies upon certain semantic characteristics of the utterance. As with aktionsart categories such as states, achievements, activities, and accomplishments, aspects are also sometimes arranged based on the purpose of the utterance – that is, the type of information being conveyed. Much of these classification schemes rely on the same types of groupings as aktionsart. They are more on the semantic qualities of the utterance as relates to its temporal nature. This is often expressed as complimentary to the aktionsarten of the verbs employed in the utterance, but can also function independently with a stative verb (by its aktionsart) being used in an activity construction (its aspect). This type of

classification has advantages over the previously discussed systems which rely purely on expressed temporal qualities, but in English a system of this type still fails to express the purpose and role of aspect, especially as separate from aktionsart.

Both types of systems above fail to provide a method for effectively classifying all English utterances. Generalizations and habitual actions and behaviors tend to be the most difficult to classify within the constraints of such schemes. The timeline based system mentioned above of linear versus punctual holds the most promise for being able to provide a framework for classifying aspect in English into which all utterances could be effectively organized. But this one too, fails to allow for habitual actions or generalizations. The challenge with these two types of utterances is that they express a temporal nature that is neither linear like an action (I was eating), nor punctual (John sneezed). In fact, these two types of utterances have no inherent temporal scope for the assertion which can be placed on the timeline. They instead utilize a time of evaluation, a point in time at which the assertion is evaluated as true. Because the assertion in a generalization is just that – general, and lacking specified place on the timeline of the utterance, it is the time of evaluation TEVL and not the undefined time of assertion TAST that is referenced to the time of utterance TUTT to establish tense. The same is true for habitual actions. This differentiates these forms from other types of utterance in that for the others, tense is a reference of specified time (either time of assertion TAST or time of completion TCOM) with the time of utterance TUTT. Tense as a comparison of temporal reference will be discussed in more depth below.

While tense is the temporal reference of points along the timeline of an utterance, aspect is a quantification of the nature of those references. Or more plainly, tense is about where things are on the timeline as compared with the utterance as a whole, while aspect is about what those things on the timeline actually are. In reference to aspect in English, the temporal nature (the time quality) of these references is the single key attribute differentiating the aspects. This linear versus punctual classification comes close to surmising these properties, but while linear works well, punctual does not. Again, the desire for polar opposition creates an impossible situation for English. Within this approach however, linear is fine, as when considering an utterance as diagrammed against its timeline, many English utterances do contain an assertion which exists not in a single point on that timeline but occupy a linear portion of it corresponding to the duration of that utterance.

Durational Aspect

Utterances which occupy such linear space along the timeline are said to be durational in nature. That is, they consist primarily of activities and other forms which express duration either as a reported length of time, or as an inherent quality of the verb that is further backed by the structure of the utterance. Historically such utterances have been called active, progressive, continuous, durative, imperfective (erroneously), or as mentioned above, linear. While the nature of their references is linear in regard to timeline, speakers generally don't think or speak in terms of timeline. The intent behind these naming conventions has merit, and linear is key the character of such utterances, but none seem ideal names. Rather, durational, as the descriptive name for such an aspect is much more opportune. In regard to the timeline, the references of this aspect have duration, and from an ability standpoint, this

aspect allows speakers to express measurably duration, a feature lacking or heavily restricted in other forms. Thus, the Durational Aspect (A_{DUR}) consists primarily of activities which exist in forms which are capable of expressing and specifying duration.

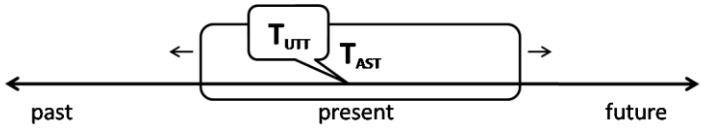
Durational Aspect Defined:

The Durational Aspect is used in expressions that require reference to duration or continuous nature of the assertion involved particularly for activities. The Durational is also used to express repeating actions which may be seen as habitual but only when attention toward the activity nature of the action is required.

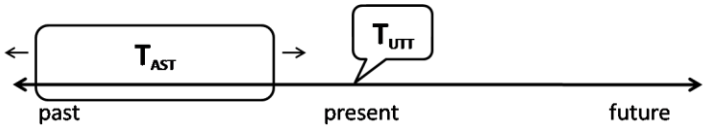
i. **Annotation:** Aspects are annotated with a capital A for aspect with the name of the aspect abbreviated and attached in subscript so that the Durational is annotated: A_{DUR}

ii. **Structure:** Durational aspect utterances are formed using the present participle form of the content verb with the strong auxiliary BE expressing agreement for tense, number, and person. Diagramed below are positive statement active voice forms in present, past, and modal tenses:

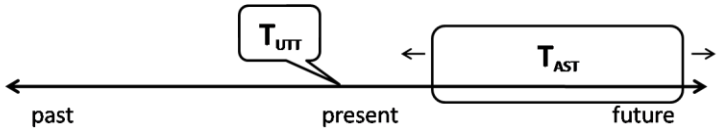
1. Present: I_S $am_{Verb\ aux}$ $\underline{drinking\ wine}_{Assertion}$.



2. Past: I_S $was_{Verb\ aux}$ $\underline{drinking\ wine}_{Assertion}$.



3. Modal: I_S $shall_{Verb\ modal}$ $be_{Verb\ aux}$ $\underline{drinking\ wine}_{Assertion}$.



The diagrams above show that while T_{UTT} remains a single point, that T_{AST} is shown as a range within the timeline. T_{AST} is given as a range because assertions in this aspect have inherent duration and thus cannot occupy only a single point in time. This is not to say that every Durational Aspect utterance must specify duration, but that it is possible to do so and that even when a duration (for two hours, from noon to night, etc.) is not

specified that inherent duration, as a natural characteristic of activity, is implied by the form. Thus, the Durational is characterized its ability to express duration.

Informational Aspect

Whereas the durational aspect consists of forms which express a linear reference on the timeline, the informational aspect consist of all non-linear forms. The durational aspect utilizes its aspectual structure to express a sense of duration which may or may not be inherent in the aktionsart of the verb itself. The durational exerts a temporal nature that is structurally durational for all verbs. As discussed in the section on aktionsart above though, some verbs maintain an inherent temporal nature that is semantically durational. Whether a verb is semantically durational or not, it can be made to express duration through use in the durational aspect which uses its structure to express duration independent of aktionsart. It is this difference between structural duration as expressed by the durational aspect, and semantic duration inherent in the aktionsart of the verb itself that sets English apart from other languages, and particularly from other Germanic tongues. This concept of structural aspect is a fairly new innovation in English, having become prominent only since the middle of the nineteenth century. Prior to the appearance of the durational aspect, expression of duration in English, as in modern German, lie purely in the realm of aktionsart – the lexical aspect, as semantic quality of the verb itself.

The rise of the durational aspect in English has been met with an inverse weakening of aktionsart as a governing factor within the language. Prior to the durational becoming a prevalent form though, all utterances (durational or not) appeared only in the informational aspect. This was, and till is, English's do-it-all aspect. It could very well be termed the general aspect because while the durational is a specialized aspect, the informational is not. It provides no structural aspect which could override the aktionsart of the content verb of the utterance, instead relying on the inherent lexical aspect of the content verb to determine the temporal nature of the utterance. In other words, whereas the Durational Aspect produces a structure which expresses duration regardless of the temporal nature of the verb itself, the informational uses a structure which further asserts that the temporal nature of the utterance is that inherent in the verb – basically, the aspect of the utterance matches the aktionsart of the verb. Thus, the Durational Aspect consists of utterances which are structurally expressed in terms of linear position on the timeline (occupying a range equivalent to duration) while the Informational Aspect consists of all other utterances – those which are not structurally expressed in terms of linear position. One thing to remember though is that the assertion of a durational utterance will always have duration because the structure of the utterance requires it. The assertion of an informational utterance may have duration, seeming very similar to a durational form if the aktionsart of the verb expresses duration. But usually, informational utterances include punctual assertions (those occurring at a single point in time), or more often, possess an assertion with no defined temporal nature. This latter group, consisting of generalizations and habitual actions establishes temporal reference not between the time of the utterance (T_{UTT}) and time of the assertion (T_{AST}), but as the exact time and temporal nature of the

assertion is not given, contrasts T_{UTT} with T_{EVL} – the time of evaluation, or time in which the generalization or habitual observation can be considered valid or true.

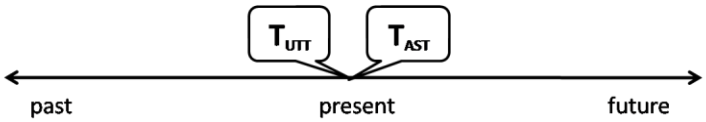
Informational Aspect Defined

The Informational Aspect in English is used to express information that requires no reference to duration or continuous nature of the assertion involved. The informational is also used to express habitual actions.

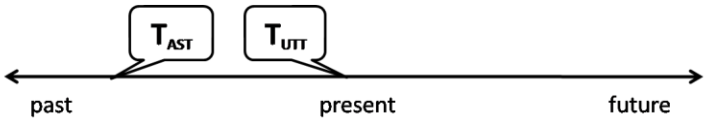
i. **Annotation:** Aspects are annotated with a capital A for aspect with the name of the aspect abbreviated and attached in subscript so that the Informational is annotated: A_{INF}

ii. **Structure:** Informational aspect utterances are formed using the finite form of the content verb (unless subordinated by a modal requiring the infinitive) with the weak auxiliary do expressing agreement for tense, number, and person. See the positive statement active voice forms below in present, past, and modal tenses:

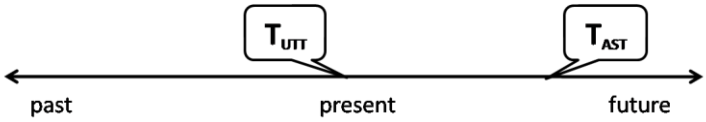
4. Present: I_S $do_{Verb\ aux}$ $\underline{drink\ wine}_{Assertion}$.



5. Past: I_S $did_{Verb\ aux}$ $\underline{drink\ wine}_{Assertion}$.



6. Modal: I_S $shall/will/can_{Verb\ modal}$ $\underline{drink\ wine}_{Assertion}$.



Note in the diagrams above that T_{UTT} and T_{AST} as both given as single points in time. T_{UTT} is by nature a single temporal point as it's merely a reference to the time at which the utterance is made and that always happens and passes. If the utterance were to be repeated the T_{UTT} moves forward to that new time; likewise, if dealing with reported speech or an utterance that occurred in the past, then that T_{UTT} as the point of reference for tense is moved accordingly. T_{AST} however, is given as a point in time not because the assertion only occurs at a given moment (although this is possible), but instead because

the informational aspect does not afford the capability of expressing duration. Thus, the informational is characterized less by what it can express than by the limits on what it cannot express. Remember also that when diagramming non-punctual utterances such as generalizations and habituals, that T_{AST} is replaced by T_{EVL}, but with the behavior being the same as that of T_{AST} above.

Perfected Forms

The following section deals with perfected forms of the Informational and Durational aspects. Note that the term perfected forms is used rather than perfect aspect or aspects. This is because they are not separate aspects, but rather only perfected forms of the two aspects. The term perfect in grammar or linguistics simply refers to the terminal nature of the verb as completed (finished, ended) or not. In raw forms of each aspect, the terminus of the verb is unknown whereas perfected forms yield an inherent sense of completion. Traditional terms such as present perfect are herein avoided in favor of more accurate terminology which describes the true nature of the combination of aspect, perfection, and tense of an utterance with forms such as the perfected informational in the present. The perfected forms of the informational and durational aspects are as different in meaning and usage as their raw forms. These forms are described below:

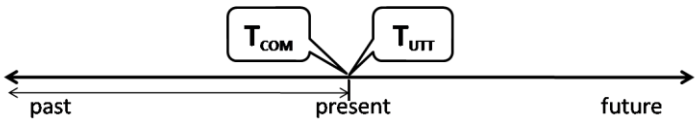
Perfected Informational Aspect

The Perfected Informational Aspect in English is not a separate aspect, but rather the perfected forms of the Informational Aspect. It is used in much the same ways as the raw informational (A_{INF}) to express information that requires no reference to duration or continuous nature of the assertion involved and to express habitual actions. In perfecting the aspect however, it becomes possible to specify a point of completion for the assertion – something that is not possible in the raw informational.

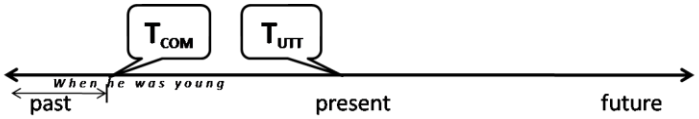
i. **Annotation:** As with raw forms, perfected aspects are annotated with a capital A for aspect with the name of the aspect abbreviated and attached in subscript, this is followed by a superscript P for perfected so that the Perfected Informational is annotated: $\mathbf{A_{INF}^{P}}$

ii. **Structure:** Perfected Informational Aspect utterances are formed using the past participle form of the content verb with the strong auxiliary HAVE expressing agreement for tense, number, and person. Consider the positive statement active voice forms below in present, past, and modal tenses:

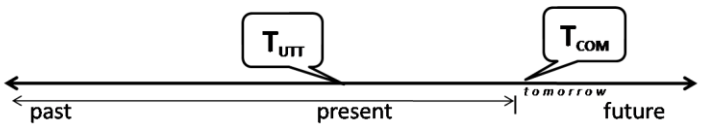
7. Present: I_S $have_{\mathbf{Verb\ aux}}$ $\underline{drunk\ wine}_{\mathbf{Assertion}}$.



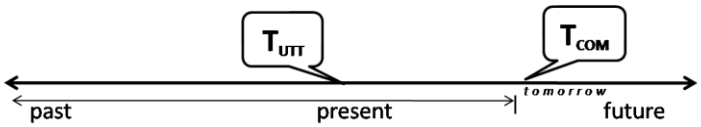
8. Past: I_S $had_{Verb\ aux}$ $\underline{drunk\ wine}_{Assertion}$.



9. Modal: I_S $shall_{Verb\ modal}$ $have_{Verb\ aux}$ $\underline{drunk\ wine}_{Assertion}$.



10. Modal: I_S $ought_{Verb\ modal}$ to $have_{Verb\ aux}$ $\underline{drunk\ wine}_{Assertion}$.



Note that T_{AST} is missing from the above diagrams. This is because perfected constructions do not concern themselves with the time at which the assertion occurs, but rather only with the time by which the assertion is completed. Note also from the arrows that without further qualifying information within the utterance, the exact point of completion is unknown as well. What is known is the time by which the completion had occurred, that is to say that it may not be known exactly when the assertion is completed, but what is know is that *as of* a given time that completion has occurred.

As of is the key phrase for perfected constructions and in the perfected informational aspect the information conveyed is that as of a given point in time the assertion is completed. For the perfected informational aspect in the present, no time phrase is ever allowed as the time of completion always coincides with the time of the utterance or [*as of* T_{UTT}, T_{COM}]; this provides the rule: perfected forms in the present tense can never have a specified time qualification as the only acceptable time is the time of the utterance (which is always now).

Perfected Durational Aspect

The Perfected Durational Aspect in English is, like the Perfected Informational, not a separate aspect, but rather the perfected forms of the Durational Aspect. It is used in much the same ways as the raw durational, for referencing the duration or continuous

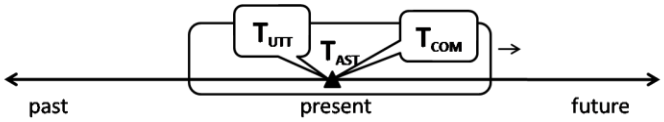
nature of the assertion involved. In perfecting the aspect, it becomes possible to specify a point of completion for the assertion – something that is not possible in the raw Durational, and to then measure the duration of the assertion up to that point in time.

The Perfected Durational Aspect differs from the Perfected Informational Aspect in that while the perfected Informational is only concerned with the relation of T_{UTT} to T_{COM}, perfected Durational retains reference to T_{AST} and allows for relation of T_{UTT} to T_{COM} within the durational scope of T_{AST}.

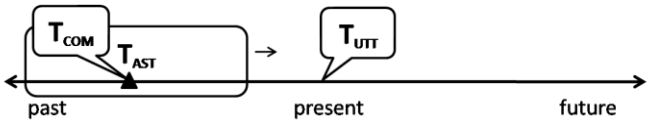
i. **Annotation:** As with raw forms, perfected aspects are annotated with a capital A for aspect with the name of the aspect abbreviated and attached in subscript, this is followed by a superscript P for perfected so that the Perfected Durational is annotated: $A_{DUR}{}^{P}$

ii. **Structure:** Perfected Durational Aspect utterances are formed using the present participle form of the content verb, the aspectual strong auxiliary BE in past participle form BEEN preceding, with the strong auxiliary HAVE expressing agreement for tense, number, and person. The positive statement active voice forms are diagrammed below in present, past, and modal tenses:

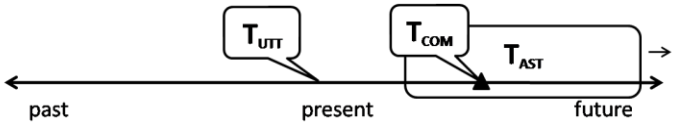
11. Present: I_S $have_{perf\ aux}$ $been_{apect\ aux}$ $\underline{drinking\ wine}_{Assertion}$.



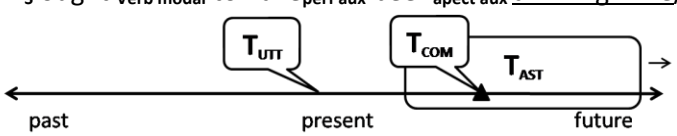
12. Past: I_S $had_{perf\ aux}$ $been_{apect\ aux}$ $\underline{drinking\ wine}_{Assertion}$.



13. Modal: I_S $shall_{Verb\ modal}$ $have_{perf\ aux}$ $been_{apect\ aux}$ $\underline{drinking\ wine}_{Assertion}$.



14. Modal: I_S $ought_{Verb\ modal}$ $to\ have_{perf\ aux}$ $been_{apect\ aux}$ $\underline{drinking\ wine}_{Assertion}$.



Note that unlike with the perfected informational, T_{AST} is present in perfected durational forms because the duration of the assertion is key to the function of and semantic need for the durational aspect. Beyond the raw durational, the perfected forms integrate the added T_{COM}. Unlike T_{COM} in A_{INF}^{P} (perfected Informational Aspect) which clearly marks a terminus of the assertion, T_{COM} in A_{DUR}^{P} (perfected Durational Aspect) represents only a single point of completion within the whole of the duration of the assertion. T_{COM} in the perfected Durational is often referred to as interrupting the assertion as regardless of whether the assertion continues beyond T_{COM}, the duration of the assertion is measurable up to that point. The Perfected Durational Aspect is most often used to measure the duration of an assertion up to a given point of completion so that by knowing how long something has been occurring up to a specified point in time, the start point of that assertion is thus known.

What should be noted is the differing functions of T_{COM} between the Informational and Durational aspects. T_{COM} in perfected Informational forms always coincides with the terminus of the assertion with the overall T_{AST} being irrelevant and the duration of the assertion being unknown entirely. In perfected Durational forms T_{COM} merely represents a known reference point up to which the duration of the assertion can be measured thus retaining the T_{AST} as an integral item. T_{COM} may occur at any time during T_{AST} or at the terminus of it; whether the assertion continues beyond T_{COM} is irrelevant to the purpose of the form as no matter where T_{COM} is within the range of T_{AST}, the duration of the assertion up to that point can be measured and reported.

Summary of Aspects

To summarize, English differs from many languages in that it has two mechanisms for expressing aspect – semantically via the aktionsart of the verb, and structurally through aspectual constructions. There are only two structural aspects in English – the Durational Aspect which denotes the durational nature of the utterance through its structure, and the Informational Aspect which relies on the temporal nature expressed by the aktionsart of the verb to set the nature of the utterance overall. Both aspects occur in raw and perfected forms. The temporal nature of an utterance (regardless of aspect) is the same in raw and perfected forms with the only difference being that the perfected form allows the speaker to describe a point of completion for the verb.

Defense of Terms

Some of the terminology employed in this paper is not standard to the fields of linguistics or grammar and most concepts discussed do not use the traditional terminology assigned to English grammar discussions. This is done entirely on purpose. The vocabulary proposed herein is utilized not for the novelty of or need for new forms, but rather due to the failings of existing terms. In some cases terminology seen to be more accurate is proposed, while in others, specific forms have been used to prevent confusion with terminology used for other, unrelated meanings.

Aspect in English provides a framework which allows or disallows certain types of information from being expressed by the utterance either explicitly or inherently. This idea is actually reflected in the more traditional names of the English aspect – **simple** and **progressive** or **continuous**. Simple refers not to the simplicity of forms of the aspect (which can actually be among the most semantically complex in the language) but to the more simple nature of the information conveyed by the forms. This paper uses the term **Informational Aspect** in lieu of simple to reflect this standard purpose of the aspect in that it is generally used to express general information yet it lacks the ability to express duration (excluding semantically active verbs), a key attribute of activities. Activities have implied duration inherent as an activity does not just happen at a single point in time, but instead occurs over a range. That range can be quite short or very long but regardless activities occupy a range of time that reflects their duration. This range of activity is the driving force behind names such as **progressive** (the verb progresses over a range of time) or **continuous** (the verb continues over a range of time). Because even in the informational aspect the assertion can progress or continue, these names are inherently flawed. This paper instead uses the term **Durational Aspect**, as duration is the key distinguishing element within the aspect and expressing a measure of duration, while possible in the informational, is not universal as it is in the durational. Thus, the choice of these terms Durational and Informational in part reflect their function in establishing structurally-based aspect, but also primarily reflect the usage of the two aspects – one always to express the durational nature of the utterance, and the other more often than not just to inform without regard to duration.

The two English aspects occur in **raw** and **perfected** (completed) forms. The term **perfected** is used in order to maintain continuity with traditional educational and linguistic conventions of discussing such forms in language. Raw refers to forms which would traditionally not be marked as **perfect**, while perfected is used in much the same way as terms such as perfect, and the perfect are employed elsewhere but with perfected (an adjective modifying the aspect) being the more precise usage. This raw versus perfected comparison should not be confused with **imperfective** versus **perfective** which deals with the nature of verbs themselves in languages with systems of lexical aspect as discussed above.

Conclusion

In defining the aspectual system of English I have taken the liberty of introducing the Durational Aspect first and then following with the Informational. This is generally counter to traditional approaches yet seems to me the more logical flow. The Durational Aspect as a prominent form

expressing the active nature of utterances is unique to English. While other languages may have such a form and aspect (Spanish for example which is identical to English in this respect), the dichotomy of activity utterances versus all other utterances is never as strongly demarcated or heavily governing as it is in English. The ability and need of speakers to mark active forms is perhaps the primary attribute of English that sets it apart from other widely spoken languages, and which marks a particular differing course of development from other Germanic tongues. The Durational aspect is an extremely powerful and regulating attribute of English, and language change over the past two hundred years shows a growing trend toward prominence of the form.

Grammars of the language, and in particular, texts intending to teach English, have normally placed an impetus on the informational aspect, using its traditional moniker of 'simple aspect' as justification for this approach. The fact is that the informational aspect is far from simple and is in fact immensely more complex in meaning, usage, and underlying structure than the durational. The analyses above have shown that the Durational is in fact the more simple of the aspects, as it simply provides a framework through which the speaker can express duration of the assertion – a specific characteristic usually in the realm of activities. The Informational however does pretty much everything else. Although the aspect lacks the ability to express duration outside of the durative qualities of the aktionsart of the content verb, it does provide an enormous versatility in what it can express – something that would be absent in a purely oppositional system. The informational aspect is extremely complex and represents a unique sort of communicative shorthand that is unique to English. Its forms often use few words to express complex ideas which involve much more than the individual morphemes involved. These complexities and attributes are discussed at length in *Voice in English: Semantic Implications of the Passive-Active Paradigm* (Ward, 2007), but for the purposes of this conclusion I will limit myself to saying that, the Durational Aspect is in fact the more clear cut of the two; it has the most easily grasped semantic properties, and its syntax provides a more clear representation of the underlying meanings of the utterance than does that of the informational. It is thus discussed first, and it is the author's belief that with greater understanding of the roles and forms of the two English aspects, that in time, it may in fact become the greater focus in teaching of the language as well.

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