

Motivating English Aspect

Günter Radden, Hamburg

English aspect has been studied extensively. However, very little is known of the motivation that determines aspect. The Simple and Progressive Aspect of English distinguish complete situations from incomplete ones. Their form and meaning can be understood more generally in terms of Langacker's (2016) dimensions of *baseline* and *elaboration*. The Simple Aspect describes a complete situation and represents an autonomous baseline; the Progressive Aspect describes an incomplete situation and represents a dependent elaboration. The elaboration of a situation by means of the Progressive can be seen in its augmented form and its unique meanings of ongoingness, limited duration and inferred endpoints. These properties are characteristic of heterogeneous situation types, i.e. Events.

Homogeneous situation types have no phases and hence are not compatible with the Progressive Aspect. If the Progressive is used with a stative verb, it elaborates the State into an Event. Thus, the sentence *He is being obnoxious* is understood in the event-like sense of deliberate behaviour.

Habituals conflate recurrent events with a homogeneous, state-like situation. The use of the Progressive makes us perceive an indefinitely lasting series of events as occurring simultaneously. Sentences such as *She is always asking for new clothes* are usually interpreted as conveying "emotional colouring". This evaluative assessment is motivated as an elaboration of peoples' normal behaviour.

References

Langacker, Ronald W. 2016. Baseline and elaboration. *Cognitive Linguistics* 27(3): 405-439.