

OTTO JESPERSEN OM PROGRESSIV OG PERFEKTIV

af
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1. *Introduktion*

Otto Jespersens status som en af de største – hvis ikke den største – af alle engelske grammatikere er uantastet også i nutiden. For nogle år siden omtalte Randolph Quirk ham som 'the giant on whose shoulders we stand'. Hans ry som grammatiker skyldes først og fremmest den monumentale *Modern English Grammar on Historical Principles (MEG)* i syv bind (1909-1949) og *The Philosophy of Grammar* (1924). Hans lærebog *Essentials of English Grammar* (1933) har været brugt i mange lande.

Jespersens grammatiske indsats omfatter dels abstrakte og generelle overvejelser om grammatiske relationer, især det han kaldte 'rank', 'junction' og 'nexus', dels mere specifikke undersøgelser af bestemte grammatiske kategoriers udvikling og betydning. Hertil kommer snesevis af publikationer om mindre emner, helt ned til enkeltstående former og udtryk. Eftertidens syn på de overordnede begreber er ypperligt behandlet af Nelson Francis i *Otto Jespersen: Facets of his Life and Work* (1989). Her vil jeg diskutere Jespersens fremstilling af to grammatiske kategorier som har vist sig problematiske i den forstand at der stadig ikke er konsensus om hvilken betydning eller status man skal tillægge kategorierne, nemlig progressiv og perfektiv. I begge tilfælde har Jespersens bidrag spillet en stor rolle for senere forskere.

2. *Progressiv*

Progressiv, skellet mellem de simple former *walks* og *walked* og de udvidede former (Jespersen: 'expanded tenses') *is walking*, *was walking*, behandles af Jespersen både i *MEG* og *Philosophy of Grammar*. I sidstnævnte bog hedder det:

The purport of the expanded tenses is not to express duration in itself, but relative duration, compared with the shorter time occupied by some other action. (...) We may represent the relatively long duration by means of a line, in which a point shows the shorter time, either the present moment (which need not always be indicated) or some time in the past, which in most cases has to be specifically indicated: He is writing (now), he was writing (when I entered). (Jespersen 1924: 278-80)

Og videre:

It is a natural consequence of the use of the expanded tenses to form a time-frame round something else, [so] that they often denote a transitory as contrasted with a permanent state which for its expression requires the corresponding unexpanded tense. The expanded form makes us think of the time-limits within which something happens, while the simple form indicates no time-limit. Compare then "he is staying at the Savoy Hotel" with "he lives in London", or "What are you doing for a living? I am writing for the papers" with "What do you do for a living? I write for the papers". Habits must generally be expressed by the unexpanded tenses (...). (ibid.)

Som man ser, knytter Jespersen de progressive formers betydning sammen med to begreber; dels relativ varighed i forhold til en

anden handling (og det er denne betydning som eftertiden henviser til med 'Jespersen's frame-theory'), dels afgrænset varighed, i kontrast til de simple formers momentane eller uafgrænsede varighed. Den diskussion der har været om progressivens funktion eller betydning, kan kort siges at være knyttet sammen med spørgsmålet om hvorvidt disse to betydninger er to sider af samme grundbetydning.

Jespersen's rammeteori ses tydeligt i det ovennævnte eksempel *He was writing when I entered*. Den handling som udtrykkes i den progressive form *was writing* danner en tidsmæssig ramme om den handling som omtales af *entered*. En alternativ formulering (som ikke er Jespersens) er at den progressive form eksplicit angiver samtidighed med en anden handling. At samtidighed eller 'temporal frame' også er en god forklaring på det andet eksempel *He is writing (now)* er mindre oplagt. De fleste præsensformer udtrykker vel en 'samtidighed' med nu'et, og at *is writing* danner en tidsmæssig ramme omkring 'now', er ikke indlysende. De fleste grammatikere i eftertiden har lagt større vægt på Jespersens anden hovedbetydning, den afgrænsede varighed, end på rammeforklaringen, således som det vil fremgå nedenfor.

K. Schibsbye kritiserer i sin disputats fra 1936 Jespersens rammeteori på flere måder. Det er ikke let at se rammefunktionen i *He is always thinking about other people/She is always speaking of her fine family* sammenlignet med de tilsvarende eksempler i simpel form, og Jespersens forklaring til eksemplet *All the time I was trying to get his love I was only poisoning my own*, nemlig at 'either action may be considered the "frame" of the other' mener Schibsbye, efter min mening med rette, er dårlig 'for det skulle jo blot kunne føre til, at den ene eller den anden Handling kunne komme i udv. Form' (Schibsbye 1936: 26).

Med udgangspunkt i de eksempler hvor rammeteorien er dårligst, opstiller Schibsbye sin egen hoved- eller grundbetydning, ifølge hvilken de progressive former udtrykker handlingens (tilstandens)

afgrænsede varighed, på engelsk 'limited duration'. Denne forklaring har vundet stor udbredelse (se nedenfor) og kan med rimelighed betragtes som den førende i dag, om end den ingenlunde har unddraget sig kritik.

Schibsbye 1936, p. 41:

Som et fælles Grundbegreb for de udvidede Former kan da opstilles: Verbalbegrebets ("Handlingens") afgrænsede Varighed; en Betydning, der i de forskellige Tempora og under Indflydelse af Sammenhængen antager lidt forskellig Værdi, som det er vist i det forudgaaende.

Schibsbye 1965, p. 66:

On the basis of the examples hitherto given we may take the central concept of the expanded tenses to be an action of limited duration. As against this, simple tenses express: 1) information about a fact, 2) unlimited, or 3) momentary action: *your dog snores heavily | the sun rose at six | darkness has fallen | these pears ripen early | we worked like mad | now I break this egg and proceed to beat it | the string snapped | the ladder has fallen.*

Leech 1971, p. 15:

1. The Progressive Form indicates *duration* (and is thus distinguished from the non-durative 'instantaneous present').
2. The Progressive form indicates *limited duration* (and is thus distinguished from the 'unrestrictive present').
3. The Progressive Form indicates that the *happening need not be complete* (and is again thereby distinguished from the 'instantaneous present').

p. 17:

The Progressive Aspect generally has the effect of surrounding a particular event or moment by a 'temporal frame', which can be diagrammed simply: ...That is, within the flow of time, there is some point of reference from which the temporary eventuality indicated by the verb can be seen as stretching into the future and into the past.

p. 17:

In both Past and Present Tense narrative, the Progressive often forms a 'temporal frame' around an action denoted by a non-progressive form; in this case, whereas the relationship of meaning between two neighbouring Simple Past forms is usually one of *time-sequence*, the relationship between a Progressive and a Simple Past form is one of *time-inclusion*. The contrast can be studied in these two sentences:

When we arrived she *made* some fresh coffee.

When we arrived she *was making* some fresh coffee.

Joos, 1964, p. 107:

The temporary aspect [dvs. the progressive, the expanded form, SS] does not necessarily signify anything about the nature of the event, which can be essentially progressive or static, continuous or interrupted, and so on; instead it signifies something about the validity of the predication, and specifically it says that the probability of its validity diminishes smoothly from a maximum of perfect validity, both ways into the past and the future towards perfect irrelevance or falsity.

p. 127 (narrative):

Specifically, the result is that there are two different sets of habits for choosing whether or not to use temporary aspect. When the speech refers to the things going on at the time of speaking, the choice is made as previously described. But when it instead refers to things that happen in the authentic past (when the aspects are chosen for normal past-tense narration) there is a notable alteration in the habits of choice.

This can be stated as a simple transformation rule, thus: Every generic aspect [dvs. non-progressiv, SS] of here-and-now reference remains generic with real past reference; but the temporary aspect is changed to generic aspect *for each event that advances the plot* of the narrative and remains temporary for each event that is rather *background to the plot-advancing events* without itself advancing the plot.

p. 130:

Temporary aspect, process verbs: temporary validity, background or not (narrative): temporary aspect, process verbs: temporary validity serving as background

R. W. Zandvoort 1957, p. 37:

This construction ... is known as the PROGRESSIVE: it usually denotes an action or an activity as in progress. (Footnote: What R.A. Close, *English as a Foreign Language*, p. 32, calls 'uncompleted process').

Leech & Svartvik 1975, p. 69:

The progressive aspect refers to activity **in progress**, and therefore suggests

- (A) that the activity is **temporary** (i.e. of limited duration)
- (B) that it **need not be complete**

D. Biber et al. 1999, p. 460:

The **perfect aspect** designates events or states taking place during a period leading up to the specified time. The **progressive aspect** designates an event or state of affairs which is in progress, or continuing, at the time indicated by the rest of the verb phrase.

p. 470:

The progressive aspect is used to describe activities or events that are in progress at a particular time, usually for a limited duration. The present progressive aspect describes events that are currently in progress or are about to take place in the near future: the past progressive aspect describes events that were in progress or about to take place at some earlier time.

Quirk et al. 1985, p. 188:

The term **aspect** refers to a grammatical category which reflects the way in which the verb action is *regarded* or *experienced*. (...) For some purposes, the two aspect constructions of English, the perfective and the progressive, can be seen as realizing a basic contrast between the action viewed as complete (perfective), and the action viewed as incomplete, *ie* in progress (imperfective or progressive). But this is an oversimplified view, as is clear as soon as we observe that the two aspects may combine within a single verb phrase (*eg: I have been reading* is both perfective and progressive). In fact, aspect is so closely

connected in meaning with tense, that the distinction in English grammar between tense and aspects is little more than a terminological convenience which helps us to separate in our minds two different kinds of realization: the morphological realization of tense and the syntactic realization of aspect.

p. 197-198:

As its name suggests, the progressive aspect (also sometimes called the durative or continuous aspect) indicates a happening in progress at a given time. Compare:

- (1) Joan *sings* well
- (2) Joan *is singing* well

These two sentences have the same tense, but different aspects. Notice the difference this makes to the meaning: (1) refers to Joan's competence as a singer (that she has a good voice – a relatively permanent attribute); (2) refers to her performance on a particular occasion or during a particular season. The same formal contrast could be made for the past tense:

- (3) Joan *sang* well
- (4) Joan *was singing* well

But in this case, the semantic contrast (assuming a 'past event' interpretation of (3)) is different: the simple past makes us see the event as a whole, while the past progressive makes us see it as an activity in progress. The different effect of the progressive in 1-2 and 3-4 can be explained as follows.

The meaning of the progressive can be separated into three components, not all of which need be present in a given instance:

- (a) the happening has **duration**
- (b) the happening has **limited** duration
- (c) the happening is **not necessarily complete**.

Som man kan se af ovenstående, er Jespersens rammeteori ikke blevet accepteret af hvad man kan kalde engelsk grammatiks mainstream. Den er så at sige blevet udkonkurreret af 'afgrænset varighed', en forklaring som for Jespersen blot var en biomstændighed. Imidlertid er der en mindre gruppe grammatikere som har argumenteret for en rehabilitering af Jespersens rammebegreb, 'samtidighed', i overensstemmelse med Leech (1971: 17) og Joos (1964: 127), citeret ovenfor. Disse grammatikere skelner mellem en narrativ eller sekventiel sprogbrug, hvor Jespersens rammeteori præcist udtrykker progressivens indhold, nemlig den eksplicitte samtidighed, og en non-sekventiel eller ikke-narrativ sprogbrug, hvor forskellen mellem progressiv og non-progressiv er en anden; den viser ikke 'afgrænset varighed', men fungerer som en markør af en særlig talehandling, 'strict description'. At fx *Emma is writing for the papers* tolkes som et udtryk for midlertidig aktivitet, skyldes ikke at dette er den progressive forms grundbetydning, men forklares som en pragmatisk følgeslutning. Hvis man vidste at det var Emmas vane, disposition eller faste beskæftigelse at skrive til aviser, ville man sige *Emma writes for the papers*. At man kun forpligter sig til hvad der kan verificeres her og nu (*is writing*), kan derfor naturligt ses som et fravalg af den stærkere implikation, og et sådant fravalg må selvfølgelig have en begrundelse. Denne pragmatisk funderede forklaring kan fx ses hos Andersen et al. (1978) og Conrad & Schousboe (1995).

3. Perfektiv

Der har i europæisk grammatisk tradition været stor uenighed om hvordan de latinske og græske perfektumsformer og den tilsvarende

germanske nydannelse, de perifrastiske former med *havel/haben*, forholder sig til tempusformerne præsens, præteritum/imperfektum og futurum. I engelsk grammatik kan spørgsmålet formuleres som følger: udgør de perfekte former en del af tempussystemet, som altså både udtrykker tidsmæssig placering og rækkefølge, eller udgør de en selvstændig kategori som er forenelig med tempus, men altså ikke er en del af denne kategori? Man kan, som Quirk i citatet ovenfor (1985: 188), være i tvivl om hvor store konsekvenser dette spørgsmål har for den praktiske beskrivelse af verbalformernes betydning og anvendelse, men det spiller en vigtig rolle for langt den største del af de videnskabelige arbejder om engelsk tempus og aspekt siden Jespersen.

I dette spørgsmål tager Jespersen meget klart stilling. I det skema hvormed han i *The Philosophy of Grammar* illustrerer det engelske tempussystem, har han ikke plads til de perfekte former. Han begrundet det således:

Jespersen 1924/1968: 269:

The system of tenses given above will probably have to meet the objection that it assigns no place to the perfect, *have written*, *habe geschrieben*, *ai écrit*, etc., one of the two sides of Lat. *scripsi*, and in Latin often called perfectum absolutum or "perfect definite". This, however, is really no defect in the system, for the perfect cannot be fitted into the simple series, because besides the purely temporal element it contains the element of result. It is a present, but a permansive present: it represents the present state as the outcome of past events, and may therefore be called a retrospective variety of the present. That it is a variety of the present and not of the past is seen by the fact that the adverb *now* can stand with it: *Now I have eaten enough*. *He has become mad* means that he is mad now, while *He became mad* says nothing about his present state. *Have you written the letter?*

is a question about the present time, *Did you write the letter?* is a question about some definite time in the past.

Både Jespersens overordnede synspunkt, at perfektiv udgør en selvstændig kategori, og hans forklaring på de perfekte formers grundbetydning, har sat sig vigtige spor i den efterfølgende grammatiske tradition. Nogle få eksempler:

Schibsbye 1957, p. 89:

Perfektum betegner samtidig noget fortidigt og noget nutidigt: hvis verbet har durativ eller iterativ association, udtrykkes med perfektum, at en i fortiden påbegyndt handling eller tilstand endnu vedvarer, resp. kan ventes gentaget i nuet: *I have stayed here for a week // there have been times in my life when I required soothing, and then I have felt that a whiff of tobacco stills and softens one like a kiss of a little child.* – Hvis verbet har perfektiv association, udtrykkes, at den fortidige handling (ændring) har eftervirkninger (resultat) i nuet: *Evidently it has thawed during the night/ I have written a letter to my father.*

p. 90:

Som det ses i de hidtil anførte eksempler på brugen af imperfektum og perfektum er de til disse tidsformer knyttede begreber ofte implicerede: *What happened?* Nemlig "ved den pågældende lejlighed"; *what has happened?* d.v.s. "jeg skønner, at der er sket noget: hvad er det?"

Leech 1971, pp. 30-34:

The Present Perfect, as distinct from the Simple Past Tense, is often described as referring to 'past with present relevance',

or 'past involving the present'. There is a great deal of truth in this description, but on its own it is too vague to tell us exactly when and when not to use the Present Perfect. There are two distinct ways in which a past event may be related to the present by means of the Perfect: (a) it may involve a **time period** lasting up to the Present, and (b) it may have **results** persisting at the present time. Moreover, there are not just two, but four different senses of the Present Perfect, one of them occurring with 'state verbs' and three with 'event verbs'. We begin with the former.

- (1) **State-up-to-the-present.** With 'state verbs', present involvement means that the state extends over a period lasting up to the present moment: *We've lived* in London since last September (...)
- (2) **Indefinite past.** With 'event verbs', the Present Perfect may refer to some indefinite happening in the past: *Have you been* to America? (...) At first glance, it looks as if there is no element of 'present involvement' in this use of the Present Perfect, any more than there is in the Simple Past. But in fact, a more precise definition of the indefinite past use must indicate that a period of time leading up to the present is involved here, just as in the state use of the Present Perfect. Once again, the 'indefinite past' definition must be revised, and more exactly formulated as: 'at-least-once-in-a-period-leading-up-to-the-present'. This longer wording, when applied to the preceding examples, adds nothing material to the more concise label 'indefinite past'. But consider these other examples: *Have you visited the Gauguin exhibition?* (i.e. 'while it has been on') / *The dustman hasn't called at our house* (i.e. 'to-day').

The first of these sentences implies that the Gauguin exhibition is still running, whereas the Simple Past (*Did you visit...?*) would

have made it clear that the exhibition is over. In the same way, the second sentence is spoken with a special time period (probably a day) in mind: it does not mean that the dustman has not called at least once in the past; it means rather that the dustman has not called during a period in which his regular visit is expected. (...)

- (3) **Habit-in-a-period-leading-up-to-the-present.** The habitual or iterative use of the Present Perfect with 'event verbs' is illustrated by: *Mr. Phillips has sung in this choir for fifty years. I've always walked to work (...)*
- (4) **Resultative Past.** The Present Perfect is also used in reference to a past event to imply that the result of that event is still operative at the present time. (...) *The taxi has arrived* (i.e. 'The taxi's now here'). In other examples, the resultative inference is still there, even though it is not quite so obvious from the verb's meaning: *I've had/taken a bath* ('I'm now clean')

p. 42:

In discussing the Past Perfect, it is useful to distinguish between the ordinary past point of orientation 'then' and the previous point of time 'before then'. (...)

The house had been empty for ages (state-up-to-then)

Had they been to America before? (indefinite past-in-past)

Mr. Phipps had preached in that church for fifty years (habit-up-to-then)

The goalkeeper had injured his leg, and couldn't play (resultative past-in-past)

Joos 1964, p. 139-40:

So much for current [dvs. non-perfektiv, SS] phase: the principle effects are in phase with the specified event, their cause. Now consider the very first appearance of the *perfect* phase in *Trial*:

The high-backed chair *has been pulled, helped* forward, the figure *is seated, has bowed*, and the hundred or so people who *had gathered* themselves at split notice to their feet **rustle and subside** into apportioned place.

This is not simply a narration of events in sequence; instead, certain of them (*is seated, rustle and subside*) are presented as effects (or at least the possibility of their occurrence is an effect) of the earlier-in-time events stated in the perfect phase. Their presentation as effects is not marked in their own verbs; that marking is done by the perfect marker on the verbs for the preceding events. The perfect-marked verbs are there specifically *for the sake of the effects* of the events they designate, and that is the essential meaning.

Leech & Svartvik 1975, p. 66:

Four related uses of the present perfect may be noted:

- (A) **State leading up to the present time** (*That house has been empty for ages*)
- (B) **Indefinite event(s) in a period leading up to the present time** (*Have you (ever) been to Florence?*)
- (C) **Habit in a period leading up to the present time** (*He has attended lectures regularly (this term).*)
- (D) **Past event with results in the present time** (*The taxi has arrived* (i.e. 'it's now here') *Her doll has been broken*)

(i.e. it's still not mended). Compare: *Her doll was broken, but now it's mended.*

Biber et al. 1999, p. 460:

The **perfect aspect** designates events or states taking place during a period leading up to the specified time.

p. 467:

Both the present perfect and the simple past tense are used to refer to an event or state in the past. (...) The primary difference in meaning between the two is that the present perfect describes a situation that continues to exist up to the present time, while the past tense describes a situation that no longer exists or an event that took place at a particular time in the past.

Zandvoort, p. 61:

The perfect tense usually denotes an action that falls within the time-sphere of the present. Its uses are mainly three: (a) the **continuative perfect**; (b) the **resultative perfect**; (c) the **perfect of experience**.

(We've known each other for years / I've bought a new car / When I have asked a London policeman the way, I have invariably received a polite answer)

Quirk et al., p. 189:

The overlap of meaning between tense and aspect is most problematic in English in the choice that has to be made between simple past and present perfect: *John lived/has lived in Paris for ten years.* (...) This kind of difference, although

by no means invariable, is often summarized in the statement that the present perfective signifies past time 'with current relevance'.

In order to appreciate why 'current relevance' is a common implication of the present perfective, it is as well to begin with the most general definition of the perfective aspect. In its broadest possible interpretation, the perfective indicates ANTERIOR TIME; i.e. time preceding whatever time orientation is signaled by tense or by other elements of the sentence or its context.

p. 192:

The examples in 4.18 have given evidence that 'past with current relevance' is not an adequate description of the meaning of the perfective aspect. Yet when we concentrate on the present perfective, there is indeed reason for such a description: the present perfective differs from the simple past in relating a past event/state to a present time orientation. Thus in situations (which are not unusual) where either the present perfective or the simple past can be appropriately used, it is generally felt that they are not interchangeable, but that the present perfective relates the action more directly to the present time. Compare

- (1) *Where did you put my purse?* / (2) *Where have you put my purse?*

The purpose of both these questions may be to find the purse; but in (1) the speaker seems to ask the addressee to remember a past action; while in (2) the speaker apparently concentrates on the purse's present whereabouts.

Leaving aside such virtual equivalences, we may now focus on the difference between the two constructions, contrasting the

meanings of the simple past given in 4.14 with the following meanings of the simple present perfective:

- (a) state leading up to the present
- (b) indefinite event(s) in a period leading up to the present
- (c) habit (i.e. recurrent events) in a period leading up to the present

Opsummerende kan man sige at Jespersens overordnede synspunkt, nemlig at perfektiv – valget mellem verbalformer med og uden *have* – udgør en selvstændig kategori, har vundet bred anerkendelse i den engelsksprogede verden. Dette har naturligvis konsekvenser for beskrivelsen af tempus, idet denne kategori så også bliver binær (præsens-præteritum), idet futurum af de engelske og amerikanske mainstream grammatikere relegeres til modalitet. Et fåtal af engelske grammatikere - og ganske mange kontinentale fagfæller – er imidlertid uenige og betragter perfektiv som en del af tempuskategorien. Samme mindretal (i den kontinentale tradition muligvis flertal!) opererer ofte også med en eller flere futurumsformer i engelsk.

Med hensyn til den grundbetydning som Jespersen tillægger de perfekte former, det resultative, er billedet mere broget. Der er ikke generel enighed om at dette er den eneste eller blot den vigtigste betydning, men kun få grammatikere betragter denne betydning som uvæsentlig. Jespersens behandling af denne kategori spiller en rolle for næsten alle senere diskussioner.

4. Afslutning

Jeg har ovenfor givet mit syn på den rolle som Jespersens tanker om progressiv og perfektiv har spillet i eftertiden, og jeg håber at det vil være klart at hans videnskabelige betydning har været særdeles

stor. Jeg kan ikke modstå fristelsen til at hylde en anden side af hans grammatiske forfatterskab og overlader ordet til Nelson Francis (1989: 96), som om MEG siger:

'Its great virtues, in addition to the profusion of illustrative citations, are originality and perceptiveness of approach and modesty and clarity of style. Few grammar books make such good reading.'

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