

Aspectuals between Control and Raising: A View from the History of German

It is a well-known observation that aspectuals like *beginnen* ‘begin’ occur in two types of structure, i.e. raising and control structures (Perlmutter 1970). Based on historical data from German from the 15th century onward, we show in the present paper that both structures are in fact available already in the 15th century, that word order properties suggesting a distinction between a restructuring and a non-restructuring version of *beginnen* ‘begin’, however, are established much later in the history of German.

In Present-Day German aspectuals pattern with typical raising verbs like *scheinen* ‘seem’, when they combine with infinitival complements, in that they do not assign a thematic role to their subject, and it is the non-finite verb which provides the subject of raising constructions, restricting its form as well as its meaning. Classical diagnostics include the embedding of predicates with particular argument structures such as weather verbs, verbs of propositional attitude and idioms which require expletives (1-a), clauses or chunks of idioms in subject position, respectively. Predicates which do not select a subject at all like *schwindeln* ‘be dizzy’ may be embedded as well (1-b). Following Wurmbrand (2001), we assume that aspectuals are functional restructuring verbs appearing in the functional layer of the the clause, i.e. the Aux layer.

- (1) a. Draußen hatte es bereits zu dämmern begonnen.
outside had it already to dawn begun
‘Outside, it began to dawn already.’
b. Ihn begann erneut zu schwindeln.
him began again to be.dizzy
‘He began to feel dizzy again.’

The occurrence of so-called long passive constructions as in (2-a), on the other hand, points to the assignment of a thematic role to the subject of *beginnen* ‘begin’, thus a control verb structure. It furthermore provides evidence that *beginnen* ‘begin’ is a lexical restructuring verb in the sense of Wurmbrand (2004). Since lexical restructuring is optional, we expect aspectuals to also occur in non-restructuring control constructions, cf. the extraposition structure in (2-b).

- (2) a. Der Wald wurde zu roden begonnen.
the forest got to clear begun
‘They began to clear the forest.’
b. Man hat kürzlich begonnen, den Wald zu roden.
one has recently begun the forest to clear
‘One has begun recently to clear the forest.’

Furthermore it has been shown that selectional restrictions regarding the subject are not a sufficient condition for the distinction between the raising and the control variant of *beginnen* ‘begin’, since raising constructions can also involve AGENTS subjects. A widely discussed selectional requirement has thus been formulated as follows (Gunkel 2000, Reis 2005): Complements denoting a deliberate action trigger a control verb reading, cf. (2), otherwise a raising interpretation is prompted (1).

As regards Present-day German, the distinction between non-restructuring control and restructuring raising structures systematically relates to word order properties of the respective infinitival complement: While infinitival complements in raising structures are either intraposed or split between a pre- and a postverbal position (= 3rd Construction), control structures favor the extraposition of the infinitival complement, even if intraposition is possible as well. Intraposition is illustrated in the first example, extraposition in (2-b). The example below exemplifies scrambling out of the extraposed infinitival complement (= 3rd Construction).

- (3) weil es stark begonnen hatte zu regnen.
because it heavily begun had to rain
‘Because it began to rain heavily.’

Drawing on corpus data from different stages of German (Potsdam Treebank of Early New High German and additional narrative texts; a subcorpus of the German Text Archive, DTA, for the New High German period and the DWDS-Kernkorpus 21 for Present-Day German), the present study shows that *beginnen* ‘begin’ is attested with expletives and/or non-deliberate actions already in ENHG (4), underpinning Jędrzejowski (2015) finding that the raising variant is an old one. However, based on the selectional requirement as defined above, control structures are also found in the ENHG period (5) and in fact they outnumber the raising variant in ENHG. We consider these facts to be counterevidence to the proposal that the control variant is younger than the raising variant (Jędrzejowski 2015).

(4) da is begunde zu dagen
 when EXPL began to dawn
 ‘When it began to dawn’ (PontusSid 2366)

(5) Als sie nun begunden zu graben
 when they now began to dig
 ‘When they began to dig’ (Eulenspiegel 71)

Although raising and control structures are both attested with *beginnen* ‘begin’ in ENHG, they pattern alike with respect to word order. They both show a clear preference for extraposition of the infinitival complement. This is not surprising, as it has been shown in previous studies that extraposition was more productive in older stages of German. It is only later that the well known correlation between raising and intraposition and control and extraposition is observed (see Figure 1). The 3rd Construction, which is still attested to a fair amount in ENHG, gradually decreases in frequency for both variants. Taken together the diachronic development shown in Figure 1 is in line with that affecting typical raising and control verbs and thus supports the existence of the two variants as well as the generalisation for the distinction of the two.

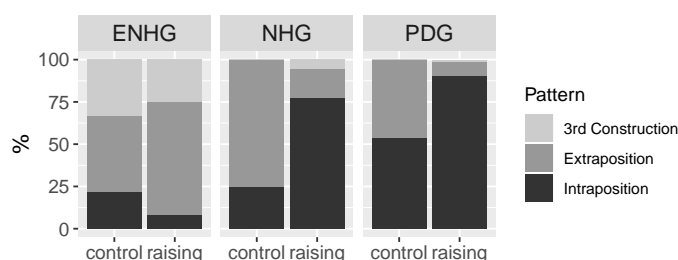


Figure 1: Word order patterns for the aspectual verb *beginnen* ‘begin’ in German

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