Abstract

This study divides the Norwegian progressive forms into two groups according to the Aktionsart they combine with. In one group the forms predominantly combine with atelic predicates. They yield an interpretation similar to that normally ascribed to English progressive atelic sentences. In the other group the forms combine with telic predicates. These forms refer to a period prior to the end point described by the main verb. In this paper the distributional restrictions are correlated with the differences in meaning between the two groups. The forms’ distribution and semantics are furthermore related to their low degree of grammaticalization.

1 Introduction

In the present paper I report from a corpus study of the Norwegian pre-grammaticalized progressive forms. The study reveals patterns and properties of these forms that are novel compared to well-studied aspectual systems, such as the system of English and the Romance languages.

The forms and meanings of the Norwegian progressives are here presented with a small set of examples drawn from the corpus (see list of sources). The study shows that the progressives should be grouped into two subgroups, according to their combinatorial and semantic properties. The two groups of progressives are described in some detail. The Norwegian forms are furthermore contrasted with the English progressive. Similarities and differences in the role of the simple verb form of the two languages are elucidated, and related to the differences of the progressives in the two languages. Finally, the Norwegian progressives’ level of grammaticalization is discussed and connected to their distribution and meaning. In this paper I recapitulate only the main points from my corpus study. See Tonne (2001) for further details, and for a proposal for a formal semantic analysis.
2 Singling out the Norwegian Progressives

The Norwegian Reference Grammar (Faarlund, Lie and Vannebo 1997) divides the Norwegian progressive forms into several types according to differences in aspectual meaning. Here, I delimit the investigation to two of these groups. One group consists of a variety of forms often called "pseudocoordination" (e.g. Johannessen 1998) due to their apparent coordinated structure (with the conjunction og). They nevertheless have many syntactic properties that are typical of subordination. Pseudocoordinations are held to have a process meaning, they describe a situation as extended in time without any delimitation, where the agent is in the midst of the described situation. There are some conditions on the use of the pseudocoordinations, or at least a tendency in the way they are used. For example, the subject referent must be such that it can serve as the subject of posture verbs like ligge ('lie') and sitte ('sit'). Furthermore, the forms are less frequent in formal than in colloquial contexts (Tonne 2001). These tendencies of use are correlated with the forms' degree of grammaticalization, discussed in section 5.

Examples of pseudocoordination are given in the a-sentences in (1) and (2) below. The b-sentences show their simple verb counterparts, which have an ambiguous interpretation with regard to aspect, as reflected in the English translations:

(1) a. Barna satt og leste.
    children-the sat and read
    'The children were reading.'

   b. Barna leste.
    children-the read
    'The children read/were reading.'

(2) a. Ungene dreiv og samla sammen papir og treull ...
    kids-the DRIVE-PAST OG collected together paper and wood-wool
    'The boys were gathering up the paper and string …'

   b. Ungene samla sammen papir og treull ...
    kids-the collected together paper and wood-wool
    'The boys were gathering up/gathered up paper and string ...'

(3) below is a further example from the corpus, showing the use of the pseudocoordination as a background type of information, a typical use of an imperfective form:
The forms of the other group of progressives, that I here call the *prospec* group, do not include the conjunction *og*. Examples of these forms are shown in (4)-(6) below:

(4) a. Han holdt på å dø.  
   he HPÅ die  
   'He was dying.'

b. Han døde.  
   'He died.'

(5) a. Han var i ferd med å frakte materialene opp til balkongen ...  
   he was IFMÅ carry materials-the up to balcony-the  
   'He was carrying / was about to carry the material up to the balcony ...'

b. Han fraktet materialene opp til balkongen ...  
   'He carried the material up to the balcony ...'

(6) a. Disse var på vei til å bli blant byens verste forbrytere.  
   These were PVTÅ become among town's worst criminals  
   'These were about to become some of the worst criminals in town.'

b. Disse ble blant byens verste forbrytere.  
   These became some of the worst criminals in town.

The main word of each periphrastic progressive form in this group is a word that, when used in other contexts, either describes continuity (the verb which means 'hold', see example (4) above), movement (the noun which means 'journey', see example (5)) or path (the noun which means 'way', see example (6)). They include prepositions (*på* ('on'), *med* ('with') and *til* ('to'), and an infinitival structure that carries the main lexical content of the sentence. The members of this group are held to have two types of imperfective meanings (see e.g. Faarlund et al. 1997), reflected in the translation of (5a) above. Either the interpretation appears to be similar to that of the pseudocoordination, i.e. the subject referent is in the midst of a situation, or the interpretation is that the subject referent is in progress towards a point of change of state that is described
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by the infinitival structure. In the latter case, they have what here will be called a prospective reading; that is, the subject referent "looks" ahead towards a certain point. I claim, however, as will be seen in the discussion of the distributional pattern, that this latter reading, the prospective reading, is the only reading for the prospec group. I hold that the important information carried by the forms is that there is an orientation towards the mentioned point.

In the set of extracted occurrences of the progressives, I found a pattern: the pseudocoordinations, exemplified in (1)-(3) above, combine almost exclusively with atelic predicates. The atelic predicates are mostly activities, like those we see in the examples (1)-(3), but there are also combinations with various types of statives, like the one we see in (7):

(7) Jeg satt som sagt og var fascinert av det yrende vinduslivet
I sat as said and was fascinated of the teeming window-life-the
'As I mentioned, I was observing with fascination the teeming life
in my window'

The prospec forms, on the other hand, exemplified in (4)-(6) above, almost exclusively combine with telic predicates, i.e. accomplishments and achievements. The prospec forms are not well-formed with statives:

(8) #Nicolas var i ferd med å sitte ved bordet.
N. was IFMÅ sit by table-the

The degree to which the mentioned distributional pattern holds is overwhelming; more than 95% of the pseudo forms occur with atelic predicates, and more than 95% of the prospec forms extracted are combinations with telic predicates.

Some so-called activities are ambiguous between an activity and accomplishment reading (e.g. modne ('ripen') and utvide ('expand')), and others still are ambiguous between activities and ingressives (i.e. a kind of change of state into an activity, therefore differing from activities, e.g. le ('laugh'), smile ('smile'), see also Santos 1996 and what she calls "acquisitions"). Interestingly, these are the few cases of activities that are found to combine with the forms in the prospec group (see example (12) below).

My corpus confirms the widely held view about divergence in imperfective meanings between the two groups of progressives in Norwegian. Importantly, the new insight drawn from my corpus study, is that such a difference in meaning corresponds closely with the difference in distribution. The prospec forms need a point towards which they are oriented. I therefore claim that the prospec forms have one interpretation, i.e. the prospective interpretation, and do not have the option of a process interpretation. The understanding that the prospec forms in some cases may have either a process reading or a prospective
reading, I hold to be due to *vagueness* (with regard to the start of the event), not *ambiguity*. The difference I then take to lie within the same, prospective, meaning. This explains the impossibility of combining a prospec form with a stative predicate: The lack of a point towards which it can be oriented makes the result impossible to interpret.

### 3 Contrasting the Norwegian Progressives

In addition to the monolingual study described above, I have undertaken a Norwegian-English contrastive study, by way of investigating a parallel corpus. The study consists of Norwegian original texts compared with their English authentic translations, as well as English original texts compared with their Norwegian authentic translations. The goal set for the contrastive study was to gain a better understanding of the meaning and extension of the relatively unknown Norwegian forms by way of a contrast with a well studied aspectual form like the English progressive.

#### 3.1 The Pseudo Group and the English Progressive

The contrastive study shows that there is an overlap between pseudo-coordination and the progressive in English. However, the Norwegian pseudo-coordination is more often translated with an English progressive than the other way round. The progressive in English is used as translation of the Norwegian pseudocoordination in as much as 50% of the cases. (2), repeated here, is one example of such a translation pair:

(2) Ungene dreiv og samla sammen papir og treull ...

kids-the DRIVE-PAST OG collected together paper and wood-wool

(2’)

The boys *were gathering* up the paper and string and cardboard boxes ...

The pseudocoordination is found as a translation of the progressive only in 11% of the cases. In the vast amount of the cases where the English progressive is not translated by a Norwegian pseudocoordination, the translator has chosen a simple verb form in Norwegian. An example is seen in (9):

(9) all the streams of the forest *were tinkling* happily

(9’)

alle bekker *klukket* og lo

all streams gurgled and laughed
The reason for not choosing pseudocoordination in the Norwegian translation may be related to the conditions on its use, mentioned above. The subject would be odd for a posture verb, in the imagined case where a pseudocoordination were forced as translation.

The study furthermore shows that many of the English progressives in the translation of the Norwegian texts stem from a simple verb form in the Norwegian original, like we see in (10):

(10) Kjerringa ... gikk langsomt hjemover med kørja på armen ...
    woman-the walked slowly home-wards with basket on arm-the

(10') Mrs. Pepperpot ... was walking slowly home with her basket on her arm ...

A detailed study of the concordances of the English original texts with Norwegian translations shows that several of the pseudocoordinations stem from a locative or postural expression in the English original, like in (11):

(11) Piglet was lying on his back, sleeping peacefully.

(11') Nøff lå på ryggen og sov trygt.
    N. lay on back-the and slept safely

In general, one can observe how the specific meaning of the Norwegian pseudocoordination restricts the contexts in which it is used. When going from a progressive to the posture-sensitive pseudocoordination, information about posture and position, if not included in the English original, must be added. If it is difficult to deduce such posture information from the context, pseudocoordination is not chosen in the translation. The relatively specific posture or locative meaning of pseudocoordination restricts its distribution compared to the English progressive, but gives it a match in other types of locative constructions like we see in (11) above. The progressive in English, which has no restrictions with regard to information about location or posture, and no restriction connected to colloquial context, is therefore more frequent than the Norwegian pseudocoordination.1

3.2 The Prospec Group and the English Progressive

The difference in frequency between the Norwegian prospec forms and the English progressive is also rather great. In the corpus, there are a total of 2570

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1 The frequency of the English progressive found here in this study confirms the figures in Biber et al. (1999).
occurrences of the English progressive, whereas there is a total of 170 occurrences of the Norwegian prospec forms. The restricted distribution of the prospec forms is due to their limited Aktionsart-combinatorial possibilities, as revealed in the monolingual study. The prospec forms never combine with statives, and usually do not combine with activities. The few activity combinations found describe a period prior to the start of the activity. (12) is an example from the (monolingual) corpus:

(12) Også jeg var i ferd med å danse. Jeg kjente den gamle lengselen i meg.
'I was about to dance, too. I felt the old longing inside.'

For an activity verb like *dance* with a progressive in English, we therefore do not get a direct translation into a Norwegian sentence with a prospec form, illustrated in (13):

(13) He was dancing. ≠ Han var i ferd med å danse.

The contrastive study shows a low degree of match between the English progressive and the Norwegian prospec forms. Like we saw with the pseudo group, the prospective forms find an English progressive match much more often than the other way round. Only 2.2% of the English progressives in the corpus have a Norwegian prospective correspondence in the authentic translations. 30-40% of the Norwegian prospectives found in the corpus, on the other hand, correspond to an English progressive. The incompatibility of the two expressions in (13) is part of the explanation of the modest match between the English progressive and the Norwegian prospec forms. The matches that are found, involve accomplishments and achievements.

The English progressives that are combined with accomplishments (e.g. *He was eating an apple*) get an interpretation where the subject referent is in the midst of the accomplishment event. A Norwegian counterpart with a prospec form gets a prospective interpretation. The orientation towards a point in such a prospective interpretation means that the described period is prior to the end point, i.e. most likely within the accomplishment event itself. The vagueness mentioned earlier with regard to the understanding of these prospective-accomplishment combinations, refers to whether there is a possibility that the period described is prior also to the starting point of the accomplishment event. As mentioned, I believe that this question is a matter of vagueness, the important thing being that the described period lies before the end point of the accomplishment event. But since it is likely that such a period lies within the accomplish-
ment event itself, we may say that the Norwegian prospec-accomplishment means more or less the same as the English progressive-accomplishment:

(14) He was eating an apple. \( \approx \) Han var i ferd med å spise et eple.

When the progressive in English is combined with an achievement (e.g. He was reaching the top), the interpretation of the English sentence is prospective, and a Norwegian prospec form suits perfectly as a translation:

(15) He was reaching the top. = Han var i ferd med å nå toppen.

In accordance with (15), I found in the parallel study that progressive achievements in English are often translated by a form from the prospec group, as in the parallel example shown below:

(16) But now I daren't, because my conscience is killing me.

(16') Men nå våger jeg ikke det, fordi samvittigheten min holder på å ta livet av meg.

3.3 Summing up the Contrastive Study

In the contrastive study it is found that the progressive in English is far more frequent than the Norwegian pseudo and prospec forms. Furthermore, the simple verb form in Norwegian is often translated into the English progressive, and the English progressive is often translated into a Norwegian simple verb form. For the English progressive to be translated into a Norwegian pseudocoordination, it must be an activity and include information about place or posture. When a pseudocoordination is used in Norwegian, it corresponds felicitously with the English progressive. An English progressive achievement has the same interpretation (i.e. prospective) as the corresponding Norwegian prospec achievement. An English progressive accomplishment has approximately the same interpretation as the corresponding Norwegian prospec accomplishment. Finally, an English progressive activity does not have the same interpretation as the corresponding Norwegian prospec activity.

This study of the correlation between the Norwegian forms and the English progressive partly confirms and partly complements other contrastive investigations. Nordset (1996), for example, investigates the Norwegian translation equivalents of the English progressive. Some of the generalizations I find in my study are not recognized by Nordset (1996), however. She shows that 54.9% of the "double-verb" constructions (i.e. all the progressive forms) are
combinations with activity predicates, 32.4% are combinations with accomplishments and 11.3% are combinations with achievements. The generalization is missed that the pseudocoordinations and the prospec forms are close to having a complementary distribution with regard to Aktionsart.

Since the simple verb form is more frequent in Norwegian than in English, the roles played by the progressive forms are correspondingly different (viz. 'grammaticalization of zero', Bybee 1994). In the following I look more into the role of the simple verb form and how it interacts with the progressive forms.

4 The simple verb form and its interaction with the progressive

In English the verbal suffix -ed in the simple verb form means past. Often, like with entered, it also has perfective meaning, but at other times, like with the verb lived, it does not, it rather has an imperfective meaning (see e.g. Boogaart 1999). The simple verb form is used for both perfective and imperfective meaning in Norwegian, too. But the simple verb in Norwegian can have an imperfective meaning even with non-stative verbs, for instance lese ('read'). Imperfectivity by way of pseudocoordination was expressed with this verb in the Norwegian sentence (1a), and imperfectivity by way of a simple form was shown in (1b) (as one of its aspectual interpretations), and is also seen in the small discourse in (17):

(17) Barna leste da jeg kom inn.
    children-the read when I came in
    'The children read/were reading when I entered.'

When the context does not explicitly say otherwise, the first part of (17) conveys imperfective meaning. This contrasts with English. The children read has (unambiguous) perfective meaning, and needs an immediate context which matches this reading, for example a direct object, or a subordinate sentence like when I entered in (17). Barna leste, in (17), may also have perfective meaning in Norwegian. Given the right context, (17) can mean that the children started to read when I entered, i.e. have an ingressive type of meaning (recall the "acquisitions" mentioned earlier). Hence, the Norwegian sentence (17) with a simple verb form is ambiguous with regard to aspectuality.

Not only simple verb activities are ambiguous in Norwegian. Barna leste en bok in (18) below is an accomplishment (i.e. telic) due to the direct object (compare with (17)), but an interpretation similar to that of (17) is still possible:
(18) Barna leste en bok da jeg kom inn.
children-the read a book when I came in
'The children read/were reading a book when I entered.'

The English translation reflects the ambiguity of the Norwegian sentence (18); it may mean that the children were already reading a book when I entered, or it may mean that they started to read a book when I entered, depending on the context. In contrast, the English simple verb counterpart to (18) has only the latter, perfective, interpretation.

We see that the lack of imperfectivity/progressive-marking in a sentence has different implications in English and Norwegian. In different ways in the two languages, verb-grammatical marking interacts with other parts of the sentence, like the lexical semantics of the verb and the arguments. Depending on the nature of this interaction, we get a final aspectuality interpretation of the sentence.

An important function of the progressive forms in Norwegian is to disambiguate aspectually ambiguous predicates, selecting the imperfective reading. With the “extreme” Aktionsarten, the aspectuality is clear, that is, a Norwegian simple verb achievement sentence is unambiguously perfective, and a Norwegian stative simple verb sentence is unambiguously imperfective. However, around the telic/atelic borderline, i.e. the border between accomplishments and activities, the aspectuality is ambiguous. By invoking a progressive marker, the aspectual interpretation of such an utterance becomes unambiguously imperfective.

A great part of previous work on these Norwegian forms is concerned with their grammaticalization status. The study of their degree of grammaticalization furthermore reveals additional information about their form and meaning. In the following I discuss some of the grammaticalization issues that are relevant for the Norwegian forms.

5 The Grammaticalization Status of the Norwegian Progressives

In the literature, the Norwegian progressive forms are claimed to be pre-grammaticalized. They are not pure function words, void of descriptive, lexical content. Yet, the form-bits are stripped of some of their normal descriptive meaning. A case in point is (1a) in the beginning of this paper. For (1a) to be true, not only must the children be reading, but they must also be sitting. But the verb satt is not the main content word in (1a), leste ('read') is. Andersson (1979) notes both similarities and differences between the pseudocoordination and auxiliary constructions, indicating the intermediate grammaticalization position.
of the pseudocoordination. Similarly, Digranes (2000: 206) concludes in her study of the grammaticalization of the pseudocoordination in Norwegian that on a grammaticalization scale, it falls in the middle between the two extreme points (totally lexical and totally grammatical). Hence she considers it somewhat, but not fully, grammaticalized.

Even less of the original lexical meaning remains in the other Norwegian progressives, the prospec forms, exemplified in (4)-(6). For these, the agent is not usually in a concrete sense on a journey, say, or physically holding something. Rather, the nouns ferd (‘journey’), vei (‘way’, ‘road’) and the verb holde (‘hold’) are used in an abstract sense. They are also not fully grammaticalized; they are much less frequent than the English progressive, and they, too, overlap in meaning with the simple verb form.3

As mentioned, the relatively low frequency of each of the Norwegian progressive forms is connected to there being restrictions on their use and therefore also connected to their grammaticalization status. The posture verbs of the pseudocoordinations are not pure function words, and therefore their semantics restricts the usage. They are also less frequent in formal than colloquial contexts (although this distributional pattern is not found to be connected to any linguistic feature of the forms). Furthermore, as has been emphasized here, all the forms are almost complementary distributed according to Aktionsart.

The low degree of grammaticalization of the forms gives us new insight into the various aspects of imperfectivity and progressive meaning. For, as one often finds with pre-grammaticalized forms (see Ebert 2000), the Norwegian forms make up a set of several forms. The two groups split between them the pool of sentences to which they can combine. These combinatorial restrictions are correlated with differences in meaning between the two groups, namely a process meaning and a prospective meaning. It is possible to tease apart these two progressive meaning facets due to the progressives’ difference in combinatorial possibilities.

6 Conclusion

The corpus study discussed here has shown that there is a division of labor among the Norwegian progressive forms, in terms of what Aktionsart they combine with. The "pseudo group", consisting of various instantiations of pseudocoordination, preferably combines with atelic predicates, mostly

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2 He studies the Swedish pseudocoordination, which is very similar to the Norwegian.
3 For additional details about the grammaticalization status of the Norwegian progressives, and a related discussion of the comparison between the Norwegian pseudocoordination and the Spanish progressive, see Tonne (1999).
activities. On the other hand, the "prospec group", for example the *ifed med å-*construction, mostly combine with telic predicates. The combinatorial restrictions of the forms are found to be connected to a difference in meaning. Atelic predicates do not have an inherent end point, but the telic predicates do. The pseudo group of progressive forms does not need an end point for their interpretation, while the prospec progressives do.

The pseudo group consistently conveys a "process interpretation" (in the midst of the main verb event) while the forms in the prospec group may be vague with regard to the start of the event. The common denominator for the interpretation of the prospec group is that they have a prospective interpretation with regard to a point, or culmination, of the main verb event.

The simple verb form in Norwegian is often aspectually ambiguous. An important effect of the progressive forms in Norwegian is that they disambiguate aspectually ambiguous predicates in the imperfective direction.

To sum up, the pervasiveness of "ambiguous aspect" with the simple verb form, the progressives' division of labor correlated with different meaning facets are all shown here to be distinct properties of an aspectual system like the Norwegian.

The reported study may throw new light on the phenomenology and theory of aspectuality as known primarily from studies of English. For example, the study of the prospective achievements in Norwegian suggests no process reading, but rather a prospective interpretation with regard to the end, or culmination, of the main verb event. Such information may support and extend general theories of aspectuality, especially those concerned with the interaction between progressive forms and Aktionsarten.

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Sources

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