

From aspect to voice: The descent of the passive light verb in English

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We discuss three changes that took place in English in the late 18th C, arguing that they all derive from a single source: the reanalysis of a resultative Aspect head as a passive light verb. 1: The construction in (1a), which was the normal way of expressing imperfective passives, largely disappeared. 2: It was replaced by the progressive passive (1b), which had previously been ill-formed. 3: Contemporaneously, the *be*-perfect (1c), which had co-existed with the *have*-perfect (1d) for centuries, fell out of use.

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| (1) a. <i>The house is building.</i> | (2) a. [ASP:RES, PASS] <i>The house was built.</i> |
| b. <i>The house is being built.</i> | b. [ASP:PROC, PASS] <i>The house was building.</i> |
| c. <i>She is arrived.</i> | c. [ASP:RES] <i>She was arrived.</i> |
| d. <i>She has built the house.</i> | d. [ASP:PROC] <i>She was {arriving / building the house}.</i> |

McFadden & Alexiadou (2006, 2010) argue that in the pre-OE period, both the *be*-perfect (which typically occurred with unaccusatives) and the *have*-perfect were purely resultative, and lacked the temporal meaning of anteriority carried by the PDE perfect construction. The *have*-perfect subsequently acquired the anteriority reading, and thereby expanded its contexts to include past counterfactuals (which, *per* Iatridou 2000, require double marking of anteriority). Verbs that took the auxiliary *be* in the resultative appeared with *have* in past counterfactuals and other contexts requiring temporal anteriority. This pattern persisted for several hundred years, with unaccusatives taking either *be* or *have* depending on the particular meaning being expressed. McFadden & Alexiadou (2010) propose that the resultative *be*-perfects are copular clauses with a resultative Aspect Phrase (Embick 2004) complement, while the *have*-perfects include a higher Perf head, which carries the semantics of anteriority, above a more general AspP. Both Aspect heads are spelled out by the participial morphology, and the Perf head is spelled out by *have*. The puzzle that McFadden & Alexiadou (2010) leave open is why, after co-existing with the *have*-perfect for several hundred years, the resultative *be*-perfect essentially disappeared around the end of the 18th C.

Another change that happened around the same time was the loss of what Visser (1973) called the *passival* (1a). This construction was common since at least the 13th C, persisting as the preferred expression of an imperfective passive clause until the early 1800s, when the progressive passive (1b) began to take over. There are three further puzzles here: why did the *passival* fall out of use, why had the progressive passive previously been unavailable, and how did it become grammatical?

We propose that these changes followed from a reanalysis of the resultative Aspect head (ASP:RES). Prior to the late 18th C, this head was the marked member of a pair of Asp heads, with the unmarked head, spelled out by *-ing*, bearing the feature Process rather than Result (ASP:PROC). In addition, Asp heads could optionally bear a feature [PASS], deriving a passive structure, with a suppressed external argument. Following McFadden & Alexiadou (2010), we assume that ASP:RES was (and is) aspectually incompatible with transitive argument structure. We thus have the four Asp heads shown in (2): a resultative passive (2a), a processual passive (the *passival*, in (2b)), an intransitive active resultative (2c), and a (transitive or intransitive) active processual (2d). The ungrammaticality of (1b) at this stage is accounted for by the fact that *-ing* and *-en* realize two versions of the same Asp head, and are thus in complementary distribution.

Around the end of the 18th C, ASP:RES and ASP:PROC split into two functional projections, with ASP:RES obligatorily carrying the PASS feature, and ASP:PROC becoming a purely aspectual head with no argument-structure properties. ASP:RES thus became what is commonly known as the passive light

verb, while ASP:PROC became a viewpoint aspect head encoding imperfectivity. An imperfective passive would now have ASP:PROC and PASS on separate projections, and would thus be spelled out as in (1b) rather than (1a), with *-en* realizing PASS and *-ing* realizing ASP:PROC. The concomitant disappearance of the non-passive ASP:RES likewise made (1c) unavailable, and so the replacement of the *be*-perfect by the *have*-perfect was completed.

References

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