

Changes in inner and outer aspect

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In this talk, I explore changes in a verb's meaning, in particular where inner aspect and theta-roles are concerned. I also look at the role of outer aspect in possibly facilitating these changes.

The inner aspect of a verb and its argument structure change in predictable ways and provide an interesting perspective on the faculty of language and on how humans conceptualize events. Assuming three aspectual verb types, durative, telic, and stative, I show that telic unaccusatives (e.g. *drop*) are reanalyzed as causatives or copulas, due to the importance of the Theme with telic verbs, and that durative unergatives reanalyze as transitives (e.g. *climb*) because the Agent is central. I then chronicle other changes in the meanings of verbs, e.g. object experiencers to subject experiencers (e.g. *fear*) and causatives to ditransitives (e.g. *bring*), and how that affects the inner aspect and theta-structure.

Argument structure is directly tied to the conceptual structure, as argued by Jackendoff in various publications (e.g. 1997) and handed over to the syntax in some form and then manipulated by the latter. Grammatical or outer aspect can thus emphasize the inner aspect or change/coerce it. Outer aspect has changed in a major way in the history of English. The prefixes on verbs (and some auxiliaries) indicate perfectivity in Old English but imperfective is not specially marked. At the end of Old English, definite articles start to appear, as well as telic adverbs, as the prefixes and special cases disappear, taking over the boundedness (perfectivity) marking. However, these never become obligatory and it isn't until the 19th century that the progressive *-ing* becomes obligatory with durative verbs. A second aim in this talk is therefore to examine the role of outer aspect in the changes in verb meaning. An example of such a role is that, as *fear* changes to a subject experiencer, it is frequently disambiguated by telic markers and when *stun* changes from a agentive durative to a telic causative, the use of past tense is frequent.