On the Semantics of Aspectualizers in English

The paper offers a study on aspectualizers in English, focusing especially on the semantics of these verbs. Aspectualizers can be considered a secondary system of aspect marking in English, besides the primary system of the progressive, perfective and perfect aspect markers. (Brinton 1991). Over the years, according to the grammatical status contributed to them, aspectualizers have been given several names. They have been considered "auxiliaries of the aspect" (Poutsma (1926), Kruisinga (1931)), "verbs of temporal aspect" (Edmonds (1976)), "aspectual complement verbs" (Dowty 1979)) "modality verbs" (Givon 1973)). According to their meaning and function they have been classified in three main groups (expressing ingressive, continuative and respectively egressive aspect); additional groups have also been suggested, like that of "iterative aspectualizers", "resumptive aspectualizers" and "habitual aspect". In their turn, iterative aspectualizers overlap with continuative aspectualizers and resumptive aspectualizers with that of ingressives, as a consequence they are usually included in these groups.

The paper is made up of two main parts. The first part gives a brief account of the treatment of aspectualizers in literature (traditional and transformational accounts, formal logical semantics), concerning their grammatical status and function; the second part presents the semantic value of aspectualizers within the framework of presupposition and consequences represented mainly by A. Freed (1979).

With respect to their grammatical status aspectualizers are characterized by great complexity. One important question is whether they are to be considered fully developed auxiliaries, regular lexical verbs or something intermediate. Syntactically, they do not meet the tests for auxiliary membership (negation, inversion, code, emphasis, also called as the NICE tests); because of this, traditional accounts have assigned them main verb status. Transformational theories also view the function of aspectualizers as full verbs taking sentential complements of the form to *V or V-ing*. An interesting approach is that of Palmer (1981) who included aspectualizers in the group of catenatives (a large group of verbs appearing in complex phrases).

Semantically and functionally aspectualizers can be said to share common features with auxiliaries rather than main verbs, shown especially by the passivization of aspectualizers (when aspectualizers behave very much like modals, auxiliary *be* an *have* in that the subordinate clause and not the entire clause is passivized) and also their feature of transparency. Aspectualizers, just like auxiliaries are transparent to certain verb restrictions and can be defined in terms of the surrounding verbs. The examples below show that the verb *ask* imposes a restriction on the complement verb (that it must be agentive) see sentence (1), but as the aspectualizer "begin" is transparent to this restriction, it is skipped over. As a result, the restriction will operate on the verb following it. (2)

    (1) Ask him to listen. / *Ask him to hear
    (2) Ask him to begin to listen / *Ask him to begin to hear

The second part of the paper deals with the semantics of aspectualizers. After briefly presenting the different approaches to the semantics of aspectualizers (change-of-state calculus approach (Von Wright's approach (1963)), the abstract predicate approach (a variant of the change of state calculus, with aspectualizers being analyzed as atomic predicates (the approaches of Dowty (1979), Lipka (1982), Cook (1976))) the paper gives a comparative analyses of aspectualizers by adopting the presupposition and consequences approach. This approach takes as basics the term

presupposition (referring to the prior initiation of the event) and consequence (the subsequence occurrence of the event). Taking *begin* and *start* as example, we can say that the two aspectualizers expressing ingressive aspect are different in this respect: while *begin* always entails subsequent occurrence of the event, *start* may also entail non-occurrence (one can start something and then not do it). Other differences between *start* and *begin*: according to Freed (1979) the main difference between the two is that while start refers to the onset of an event, begin refers to the first temporal segment of the nucleus. Then, start is specified as causal, while begin is usually not. (There are also some cases when begin is marked for causality, consider (3) *Someone began the show late*, meaning Someone caused the show to begin late.) Start has altogether a larger use than begin. There are many cases where the use of start is good and that of begin is awkward; the following sentence is a good example of this: (4) He started the car/* he began the car.

The paper gives a rather detailed description of the semantics of the other aspectualizers expressing continuative and egressive aspect as well (continue, keep, repeat, resume, and respectively stop, cease, finish, end, quit, complete). The aim of this study is to show the interaction of aspectualizers with aspectual verbs, the other aspect markers (the progressive, perfective and simple forms), and complement structures (*to V* or *V- ing*) and also to account for the underlying semantic motivation. (Some of the aspectualizers, like *repeat* or *end* can only appear with noun forms as complements). According to the test of eventuality types, activity verbs can appear with a variety of aspectualizers (they however do not appear as complements of finish); accomplishments can also appear with most of the aspectualizers (except for aspectualizers like keep, resume). Achievements have a more restrictive use with aspectualizers. Because they consist of one phase they usually do not allow the use of aspectualizers; if they do they are recategorized as series (an aspectual verbal type introduced by Freed 1979); in this case they can appear as complements of stop, finish, keep and continue. States also appear with some of the aspectualizers, like begin and start, also continue and cease (in case they are followed by *toV* –form) and stop. Concerning the appearance of aspectualizers with the simple, perfect and progressive form, it can be stated, that while aspectualizers occur freely with the simple and perfect form, their occurrence with the progressive is restricted: they rarely appear in the progressive and when they do they are followed by *toV*. One reason for this is that except for continue (which is more frequently used in the progressive than the other aspectualizers) aspectualizers denoting beginnings and endings are usually considered punctual situations which are not really used in the progressive: when they are, they indicate that the beginning or ending of the situation is approaching. The reason why aspectualizers in the progressive cannot be followed by a progressive form is explained syntactically by Ross (1972) as a filter on output, also called as the double –*ing* constraint. The appearance of aspectualizers with complement structures is different: while some of the aspectualizers can appear with the *Ving* form only (like keep), others may take both the *Ving* and the *toV* form. Though the choice between the *toV* and *Ving* form is usually considered a stylistic matter, the paper will try to give a semantic motivation for this (following Freed's explanation in this aspect). Finally, the paper also shows which of the aspectualizers presuppose the features of intentionality, agentivity and also volition.