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The Triad „Tense – Aspect – Aktionsart"

Problems and possible solutions

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. It has almost become a commonplace in studies on members of the triad "tense-aspect-Aktionsart" (henceforth short: TAA), especially in those on aspect, to begin with statements deploring the terminological confusion and the uncertainty about definitions, subdivisions and delimitations in this area.[1] Typical for this are statements like Mitchell's (1979: 159):

> If there is one thing that emerges from perusal of a large and heterogeneous literature on Aspect in many languages [...] it is that no two linguists agree on the subject [...] For most scholars, however, Aspect is used in close contrast with Tense. The whole conceptual area of Aspect is further bedevilled by the notion and term of Aktionsart.

Or compare similarly Spitzbardt's discouraging verdict that – translated into English – "Presumably nowhere in modern linguistics there is such a muddle as in the area of research on Aktionsarten and aspect" (1954: 56). This verdict is anticipated already by the title that Spitzbardt chose for his article, viz. " 'Aspekte und Aktionsarten' – ein Tummelplatz ('a playground') der Terminologie". Even worse, it seems that from the early 20th century to the present day the situation has not much improved. If one considers recent publications in this field, attempts to come to grips with problems of terminology still appear to be indispensable and often take up no little room. Sometimes one can even detect traces of resignation and, almost, fatalism in view of the difficulties to come up with clear-cut definitions and conceptual distinctions that stand a good chance to be widely accepted by the community of linguists. As a result, definitions are in some cases not even attempted at all. Everything taken together, one can hardly be satisfied with the situation as it stands.

Now, Zandvoort (1962) has blamed part of the problem on the Germans, saying that the distinction between aspect and Aktionsart is a German one and that of the difference between the two "so much has been made by Germanic scholars" (1962: 8). And he is surely right in so far as it was, first of all, Karl Brugmann who coined the term *Aktionsart* in 1885, that term which even for a completely neutral observer must qualify as the odd one out in the English version of the triad TAA (due to the peculiar mixture of English and German).[2] Secondly, it was Wilhelm Streitberg who in 1889 transferred the perfective/imperfective distinction from Slavic to a Germanic language (Gothic). And, thirdly, Zandvoort makes a valid point in that the discussion of aspect and Aktionsart, and the importance of these two notions in aspectology was very much a German preoccupation in the first half of the century. Well, but if the Germans are meant to carry a fair share of responsibility for the confusion and uncertainty surrounding the triad, why should not a German try to clear the ground and provide a re-evaluation of this triad in its present form for future studies on tense and aspect?

1.2. In the following, I will first give a sketch of the problems which the triad TAA has caused and still causes with regard to definitions of its members and the delimitations between them. In addressing this issue I will focus on English, where publications on tense, aspect, and Aktionsart probably outnumber the literature on any other area of grammar, and where pertinent problems of this triad become most obvious from such well-known questions as "How many tenses are there in English?", "Is the perfect to be treated as an aspect, a tense, or neither?", or remember Zandvoort's (1962) question, taken up by Dušková (1983), "Is 'aspect' an English verbal category?". Against this background I will, in a second step, outline some proposals that may help minimizing, if not resolving many problems besetting the triad.

A last introductory remark: By concentrating on English I hope to keep the potential of controversy inherent in this paper to a minimum. However, this should not be taken to suggest that only a single-language approach offers a profitable way of looking at tense, aspect, and Aktionsart. Quite to the contrary, if these three are meant to stand for formal categories signalling certain conceptual categories, then what we mean by these conceptual categories must apply cross-linguistically, irrespective of all differences in their coding (cf. already Koschmieder (1929: 53) on English and Slavic aspect). Especially towards the end of the discussion, I will therefore widen the perspective to include arguments provided by comparative studies.

2. ASPECT IN ENGLISH

Aspect represents the natural starting-point in a discussion of the role that the triad TAA has played in English grammar, as the central problems of this triad still concern the delimitation of aspect from tense and, secondly, aspect from Aktionsart. As a matter of fact, keeping distinct the two latter categories has caused great difficulties from the very moment that the term *aspect* appeared on the scene of British linguistics in the middle of the 19th century. This becomes clear from a brief look at the terminological history of *aspect* and *Aktionsart.*

2.1. ASPECT AND AKTIONSART

2.1.1. About 1830 the term *aspect* first appeared in a French translation of Grec's grammar of Russian. The translator, the slavicist C.P. Reiff, used this term to render the Russian *vid* 'appearance, view, form, shape' (itself a loan-tranlation of Greek *éidos*), which stood both for the signalling of imperfective/perfective action and action with respect to its beginning, duration or end by means of verb morphology. Thus French *aspect* was used in a twofold sense right from the start, capturing both what most of us would now relate to as aspect, on the one hand, and Aktionsart, on the other. In this twofold sense, Reiff in 1853, according to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, introduced the term *aspect* also into English slavistics.

Now, for the same phenomena that *aspect* stood for in 19th century French and British linguistics, Brugmann, in 1885, coined the term *Aktionsart* in his comparative grammar of the Indo-European languages distinguishing amongst others an imperfective from a perfective from a perfect(ic) Aktionsart. He saw this term in close contrast with tense "Aktionsart ist, im Gegensatz zu Zeitstufe, die Art und Weise, wie die Handlung vor sich geht" (1970: 493). The term *Aspekt*, one should note in passing, does not occur once in Brugmann's grammar. The fact however, that Brugmann's *Aktionsart* captured at least two different things which had better be kept separate was not pointed out in detail before, in 1908, Agrell in his doctorate thesis on the Polish verb distinguished Aktionsart and aspect along the following lines. *Aspect* in Slavic has solely to do with the completion or incompletion of an action; *Aktionsart* stands for semantic functions of verbal compounds more exactly for the different ways in which an action may be carried out:

> Unter Aktionsart verstehe ich [...] nicht die beiden Hauptkategorien
> des slawischen Zeitwortes, die unvollendete und die vollendete

Handlungsform (das Imperfektivum und das Perfektivum) – diese nenne ich *Aspekte*. Mit dem Ausdrucke *Aktionsart* bezeichne ich bisher fast gar nicht beachtete – geschweige denn klassifizierte – Bedeutungsfunktionen der Verbalkomposita [...], die genauer ausdrücken, *wie* die Handlung vollbracht wird, die Art und Weise ihrer Ausführung markieren.

To summarize: (i) Neither of the terms *aspect* and *Aktionsart* originates in the study of Germanic; especially *aspect* was designed to denote certain phenomena in Slavic languages. (ii) Both terms were used nearly parallel – in something like complementary regional distribution – in a twofold sense for several decades. Or, perhaps it is more appropriate to say: The same semantic space that was covered by *tense* and *aspect* in, e.g., Anglo-American linguistics was covered by *tense* and *Aktionsart* in the German tradition.

This background is important to keep in mind if one considers current uses of the term *aspect*. It helps understanding why this two-fold sense is still very much alive. Smith (1983: 480-481), for instance, distinguishes *viewpoint aspect* (marked in English by simple or expanded form) from *situation aspect* (states, events, habitual acts, etc.). Ljung (1980: 27-28) regards as the primary aspectual subdivision the one between stative and dynamic verbs, and as a further subdivision of the latter the one of perfective and imperfective aspect marked by simple and expanded form respectively. Far more influential is, of course, Comrie's (1976: 6-7) treatment of aspect:

In the present book we shall speak of semantic aspectual distinctions, such as that between perfective and imperfective meaning, **irrespective of whether they are grammaticalised or lexicalised** [my emphasis, B.K.] in individual languages.

Thus, Comrie's conception subsumes both aspect as a grammatical category and as a lexical semantic category. In the latter case, Comrie (1976: 41) discusses contrasts like punctual/durative, telic/atelic, or static/dynamic under the heading of "inherent aspectual (i.e. semantic aspectual) properties of various classes of lexical items". The helplessness which such a wide conception of aspect may leave the linguistic profession with can be seen from the terminological convention that Brinton (1988: 4) adopts in her study on the historical development of aspectual systems in English: "I will use *aspectual* in this inclusive sense [i.e. covering both aspect and Aktionsart, B.K.], reserving *aspect* for the simple category."

2.1.2. Of the many more definitions that could be discussed here, let me sketch the two, as I believe, least controversial views on aspect and Aktionsart, followed by my own position. First of all, there seems to be widespread agreement that aspect and Aktionsart are, indeed, categories to be kept strictly separate (e.g. Brinton 1988: xi). The lines along which they can be distinguished are typically the following:[3]

aspect	*Aktionsart*
grammar	lexicon
completion vs. incompletion	manner of action (semantic verb/predicate classes)
syntactically or inflectionally signalled	lexically (specific particles) or derivationally signalled, if at all

This still leaves room for wide and narrow conceptions of the two categories. I am arguing in favour of narrow definitions, such that aspect boils down to the grammaticalized perfective/imperfective contrast, with the progressive as a special case of the imperfective (cf. Dušková (1983: 16, 22) for English; Comrie (1976: 25) and Dahl (1985: 92-93) from a cross-linguistic perspective). *Aspect* thus relates to the fact that any situation,[4] whether static or dynamic, telic or atelic, can be described either as a completed whole, or as something "ongoing, in progress" or simply "existent" for a given point in or period of time (Kortmann 1985b: v-vi). *Aktionsart*, on the other hand, has nothing to do with grammar but relates solely to the semantics of verbs and predicates, more exactly to those semantic properties having to do with time. The intrinsic temporal make-up of verbs may, but need not be signalled by special particles (e.g. *up*, *off*, *down*) or derivational (!) morphemes. The Aktionsart of predicates is, of course, compositional. In exceptional cases, Aktionsart may even be a feature of a whole clause or sentence (Verkuyl 1972, Declerck 1979: 764, Brinton 1988: 31).

2.1.3. Let me elaborate a little bit on my conception of Aktionsart. It is a narrow one in that I wish to exclude everything in the semantics of verbs and predicates that has nothing to do with the temporal structure of situations.[5] Notice that German *Aktionsart* has a much wider meaning: You can modify actions/events in many ways that are not related to time, at all (cf. also Pollak 1967: 412). However, if we discuss Aktionsart along with tense and aspect as members of a triad, the reason for this is that there exists a common denominator which can be captured in two words: "verb" (or "predicate") and "time". Therefore, all modications of events lacking temporal significance

necessarily fall out of the scope of consideration. In sum, I am very much in favour of a definition as suggested by Pollak (1967), who defines Aktionsart as the manner in which some event is integrated into the imagined stream of time:

> Aktionsart ist die Art, wie das durch die betreffende Sprachform ausgedrückte Geschehen in die Vorstellung des Zeitstroms eingefügt wird.

What centrally falls under Aktionsart from this point of view are the well-known *Phasenaktionsarten* (ingressive, progressive/continuative, egressive) as well as the telic-atelic distinction, but not, e.g., causative (*you make me laugh*), factitive (*they chose him president*), or intensive modifications (*he did frighten me*) as one finds them described in some publications (e.g. Deutschbein, quoted in Raith 1962: 187). Sure enough, one must reject the polemic way in which Bodelsen (1951: 259-260) argues against the notion of Aktionsart as a whole:

> there is no more reason why we should establish special categories of verbs according as they denote completeness or incompleteness, beginning or end, etc., than why we should establish categories according as they denote something hard or soft, or something pleasant or unpleasant (*he patted her cheek*: soft aspect; *he smacked her face*: hard aspect!).

However, in view of such Aktionsart categories as the three last-mentioned ones it must be admitted that there is some truth in Bodelsen's stating that in this area one may get easily lost "in a chaos of infinite possibilities of distinction".

So much for a definition of Aktionsart, its sub-categories, and how it is to be distinguished from aspect. Before I continue my account of aspect and its treatment in English grammar, a brief look at the third member of the triad.

2.2. ASPECT AND TENSE

There can hardly be doubt that tense is the most established and least controversial category of the members of the triad. That it is the most established category can be seen, for instance, from the fact that in school grammars and pedagogically oriented publications one usually only finds tenses, i.e. a Present Tense, a Present Progressive Tense, a Present Perfect Tense, etc., in accounts of grammatical categories marked on the English verb. No mention of aspect or aspects, let alone

Aktionsart(en). This inflation of tenses is simply a matter of convenience, grammatical terminology in this area being chosen "solely with the goal of immediate intelligibility in mind" (Leech 1971: vii). However convenient and appropriate this practice may be for learners of the language, for more specialized accounts, e.g. for discussions in linguistics classes, this all-encompassing conception of tense is not tolerable.

What is commonly agreed on, instead, is that tense does not relate to the internal temporal structure of situations, but that it grammaticalizes the location of some situation on the time line relative to some anchor time. Thus, as Comrie (1976: 5) puts it, tense has to do with situation-external time while aspect is concerned with situation-internal time. That much, I believe, can truly be regarded as uncontroversial. Opinions differ, however, with respect to the nature of the anchor point: Should it be restricted to the moment of utterance (or: coding time), or may some other reference time serve as anchor point, as well? The question therefore is whether one should only allow for absolute tense, i.e. tense as a truly deictic category, or for both absolute and relative tense (and combinations of the two, e.g. the pluperfect as an absolute-relative tense in Comrie 1985). Another controversial issue is whether one should give a strictly form-based account of tense, i.e. regard as tenses only what is morphologically and not syntactically (periphrastically) marked. All these issues are familiar to us from grammar courses when discussing the question how many tenses there are in English.

My own conception of tense is, similar to the ones I have advanced for aspect and Aktionsart, one that is function-based, not based on form, and a narrow one at that. Thus tense is a deictic grammatical category that temporally locates a situation with regard to coding time.[6] As soon as we also admit a concept like relative tense we run danger of mixing different verbal categories, like tense and perfect or, for that matter, tense and aspect (as the perfect is traditionally often treated as an aspect – a view that will be challenged below). As a consequence, one would have to agree with Dahl (1985: 25) that, after all, "the distinction between tenses and aspects is by no means clear, although everyone knows what the typical cases are".

2.3. PROPOSALS FOR ASPECTUAL SUBDIVISIONS

Having made clear what I regard as the most fruitful conceptions of tense, aspect and Aktionsart, and along which lines they can be most easily kept apart, I now want to turn briefly to some proposals that have been made in English grammar for subdivisions of the category

aspect. I will particularly make some critical remarks on one proposal, which will lead me on to a discussion of the English perfect.

Even if one considered just the last thirty years or so, it would be an evening-filling task to discuss all the subdivisions that have been proposed for English aspect and the abundance of terms going with them (see Kortmann 1985a: 6-17). Besides views confirming my own conception, viz. that there is only one aspectual opposition whose members may be called perfective/imperfective, there are proposals of up to three aspectual oppositions, and of a three- or even fourfold subdivision of aspect. Consider only W.S. Allen's (1974[5]: 75-76) distinction of "Aspect of Time" (present/past/future), "Aspect of Action" (simple vs. progressive contrast), and "Aspect of Fact" (perfect vs. non-perfect contrast), or Deutschbein's (1939: 146-148) "retrospective/introspective/prospective/(emphatic) aspect". There are even proposals to the effect that such a well-established category like voice should be given up in favour of aspect, so that, as Beedham (1982, 1987) suggests, English possesses not only a progressive and a perfect aspect but also a passive aspect. This view follows from a general misconception of aspect, which unfortunately also shows up in the standard reference grammar of present-day English once it comes to a discussion of the two undoubtedly most widely recognized aspectual oppositions in English grammar, viz. the progressive/non-progressive and the perfect/non-perfect contrasts:

> For some purposes, the two aspect constructions of English, the perfective [(!) signalled by a form of *to have* + past participle, B.K.] and the progressive [...] can be seen as realizing a basic contrast of aspect between the action viewed as complete (perfective), and the action viewed as incomplete, i.e. in progress (imperfective or progressive). But this is an oversimplified view, as is clear as soon as we observe that these two aspects may combine within a single verb phrase [...] In fact, aspect is so closely connected in meaning with tense, that the distinction in English grammar between tense and aspect is little more than a terminological convenience which helps us to separate in our minds two different kinds of realization: the morphological realization of tense and the syntactic realization of aspect. (Quirk et al. 1985: 188-189)

This account, which originates in Leech (1971: vii), is problematic in more than one respect. For a start, the perfect and the progressive should never be presented as instantiating the opposition between perfective and imperfective aspect. Although this is, of course, less obvious if one misleadingly terms the *"have* + past participle" construction *perfective. Perfect* and *perfective*, as Dahl (1985: 138-139) has shown in his cross-linguistic study, are completely different categories even if

interaction between them is not precluded (cf. also Maslov 1988: 67). My major problem with this particular view of aspect in English is, however, that it turns out to be essentially form-based. The perfect and the progressive are regarded as aspects because both are periphrastic and not, like present and past tense as the only two English tenses recognized by Quirk et al (1985: 176), marked by verb inflection. This form-based approach to aspect also seems to underlie Beedham's proposal to classify the English passive as an aspect. This emerges from his description of aspect in English as being realized "via auxiliaries and participles" (1982: 83-84), or a statement like "I simply want to assimilate the passive to the category of Auxiliary + Participle aspect, making it three such aspects, the perfect, the progressive and the passive" (1987: 4). Turning again to Quirk et al., one may speculate that this purely form-oriented point of view is also responsible for the attempt to give the perfect and the progressive a common notional basis where there is none. This is something one must be highly concerned about in what is and will certainly continue to be the most influential reference grammar of English.

Beyond these points of criticism, there is another fundamental question that must be raised, namely whether the perfect/non-perfect contrast represents an aspectual opposition, at all.

3. THE ENGLISH PERFECT

Among the scholars (e.g. Leech, Quirk et al., Hirtle, Comrie) who classify the perfect/non-perfect contrast in English as an aspectual one, Comrie (1976: 52) is the only one who voices doubt as to the appropriateness of doing so:

> Aspect [...] has been concerned with different ways of representing the internal temporal constitution of a situation. The perfect is rather different from these aspects, since it tells us nothing directly about the situation in itself, but rather relates some state to a preceding situation. [...]
>
> This difference between the perfect and the other aspects has led many linguists to doubt whether the perfect should be considered an aspect at all. However, given the traditional terminology in which the perfect is listed as an aspect, it seems most convenient to deal with the perfect in a book on aspect, while bearing in mind continually that it is an aspect in a rather different sense from the other aspects treated so far.

In view of the narrow definition of aspect that I advanced above, it will not seem surprising that I rather agree with those who do not consider

the perfect an aspect at all. The defining characteristic of the perfect is not that it provides grammatical information about situation-internal time, but that it is essentially concerned with situation-external time. This may give rise to the assumption that the perfect should perhaps better be viewed as a tense category (as it is common in many traditional grammars and also argued in, e.g., Declerck 1991). However, as in this paper tense was defined as a deictic category, thus allowing only for absolute, not relative tense, this assumption immediately turns out to be untenable. Although the perfect has to do with situation-external time, it does not relate some event time to coding time but to some reference time following the event time. In other words, it indicates no more than the anteriority of some situation relative to some reference time which may or may not be identical with coding time.

If the perfect qualifies neither as an aspect nor as a tense, there is just one other possibility left, namely that it represents a category of its own. The perfect interacts with tense and aspect, but it is conceptually different from both. Indeed, this is the position that is almost unanimously defended by all scholars that investigated the perfect, especially the present perfect, in detail, whether these studies were language-specific (e.g. Bauer 1970, Joos 1964, Palmer 1974[2], McCoard 1978, King 1983, Fenn 1987 on English) or comparative/ typological in character (Dahl 1985, Bybee 1985). Consider only the following quotations on the present perfect in English and as a cross-linguistic category:

> the perfect should therefore be regarded as a phenomenon distinct from both tense and aspect. In this respect I concur with Bauer (1970), Joos (1964), and others, who place the perfect in a category of its own. However, I feel that names such as 'phase' and 'status' (or McCoard's term 'inclusion') are ill-chosen. [...] I can offer no alternative suggestions as far as nomenclature is concerned. But the recognition that the perfect is a verbal category separate from tense and aspect seems to me to be an important one, and deserves emphasis. (Fenn 1987: 249)

> I regard it as one of the major results of this investigation that it is now possible to postulate with some confidence such a cross-linguistic category of PERFECT [...] (Dahl 1985: 129)

It is difficult to see why the results of all these specialized studies should be brushed aside any longer. Recognizing, however, the perfect as an independent category necessarily raises the question how this can be accommodated with standard assumptions concerning the triad TAA.

4. EVALUATING AND RECASTING THE TRIAD

So far a lot has been said about the problems caused by the triad and very little about possible ways to remedy them. Finally, therefore, I will reconsider the triad in the light of my earlier criticisms and offer proposals for a more helpful alternative organization of its members.

4.1. DISENTANGLEMENT

What is necessary in order to give the triad TAA a sound basis is, first of all, a disentanglement of its members by giving a clear-cut, narrow definition for each of them. Even if one allows for a shading off between categories (Crystal 1967), to use for once an alternative expression for the all-pervasive "fuzziness of category boundaries" in current linguistic literature, what is needed in the first place is a clear conception of what lies at the heart of each category. The definitions required must be notional or, as linguists in the Slavic tradition (e.g. Schwall 1991 following Bondarko) may prefer to call them, semantic-functional definitions. In other words, when studying tense, aspect and Aktionsart, we have to answer the question what they express and what makes them semantically distinct from each other before we can look for the various ways in which languages formally signal these notions.[7] Notional definitions would have to include the following attributes:

TENSE: grammatical category; deictic; concerned with situation-external time; location of some situation on the time line relative to coding time;

ASPECT: grammatical category; non-deictic; concerned with situation-internal time; presentation of some situation as incomplete/in progress/existent ("from within") or complete ("from without") at a given point/period in time;

AKTIONSART: lexical category; non-deictic; concerned with situation-internal time; temporal constitution inherent in the meaning of the verb (whether simplex, complex, or verbal syntagm) or predicate.

In East European and German publications, one increasingly encounters the terminological convention that the equivalents of tense, aspect and Aktionsart are exclusively employed for the formal categories, while – translated into English – *temporality, aspectuality*, and *actionality* (or *temporal constitution*) designate the corresponding notional categories (e.g. Andersson 1989, Francois 1985, Schwall 1991:

97-103). Following this convention, the above definitions would of course relate to the latter set of terms.

What we gain by adopting these narrow definitions is, first of all, that an inflation of aspects and tenses in English is prevented. We will no longer have to busy ourselves with finding the common notional denominator of, e.g., the progressive, the perfect, and the passive categorized as aspects, or the present and the perfect categorized as tenses. Secondly, by bringing down the number of tense and aspect distinctions and by distinguishing, on the one hand, Aktionsart from aspect and, on the other hand, the perfect from both tense and aspect, this whole area of verbal grammar can be organized much more consistently.

4.2. FROM TRIAD TO TETRAD

4.2.1. What does this mean for an evaluation of the triad TAA? Here it should be recalled that advocates of this triad regard these conceptual categories as capturing all facets related to the temporal constitution of what is denoted by predicates. This, however, cannot accommodate the perfect, which in a series of detailed studies, especially on the present perfect in English and other languages, has consistently been argued to qualify neither as a tense nor as an aspect. Consequently, we need to add an independent fourth category with defining properties as sketched below, and thus arrive at a tetrad:

PERFECT   : grammatical category; non-deictic; concerned with situa-
(ANTERIOR) tion-external time; relates some situation to a succeeding
             reference time which may or may not be identical with
             coding time.

There is a great temptation to identify the perfect exclusively with the present perfect, as is often done for terminological convenience, instead of viewing the latter as a special instance of the former (along with the past perfect and the future perfect). For this reason I shall henceforth refer to this category, following Bybee (1985: 163), as *anterior*.

4.2.2. With this fourth category the whole network of categories becomes much more symmetrical and allows to bring out closer affinities between pairs of this tetrad. These pairs we can further take as the endpoints of continua which can be argued to be relevant both from a comparative and a historical point of view. As a side effect, arranging the four categories on these continua visualizes their disparate nature and thus, too, the complex problems that had to result from conflating them in a triad.

Continuum 1: Situation-external time

tense _____ anterior

Continuum 2: Situation-internal time[8]

aspect _____ Aktionsart

If one includes historical information as well as information from languages other than English, these continua are particularly useful descriptive tools in two respects. On the one hand, it is well-known that each of the four categories as expressed in different languages exhibits a considerable degree of heterogeneity, so that different languages would occupy different positions on the continua. Furthermore, on examining (i) the nature of the formal devices individual languages possess for the signalling of any of these four categories and (ii) the various uses made of them, it may turn out that, from a cross-linguistic perspective, what in descriptive grammars of language A is labelled "perfect" rather qualifies as a tense, or what grammars of language B call "aspect" rather qualifies as Aktionsart. On the other hand, the two continua mirror paths of historical development from one pole to, or at least in the direction of the other. Such developments have been documented for a number of languages. Much less frequently, one would predict, will there be a development from a category expressing situation-internal time to one expressing situation-external time, or vice versa. In other words, historical developments will overwhelmingly take place between the endpoints of each of these two continua respectively, not between the continua. Some brief illustrations of such cross-linguistic variation and historical developments shall suffice.

4.2.3. There is, first of all, the notorious case of the German present perfect which, especially in Southern dialects, has almost completely replaced the simple past tense. It has thus undergone a development from the right half of Continuum 1 to the left pole, where it now assumes the diametrically opposite position of the (British) English present perfect. This historical process is far from being an isolated one, as is pointed out by Anderson (1982: 243): "This retreat of the Preterite and advance of the Perfect is observed quite commonly." Yiddish, French or Semitic languages are cases in point. Notice that the opposite development, i.e. a tense taking over many characteristic functions fulfilled by a subtype of anterior, can be observed in American English. Possibly under the influence of Irish English (cf. Vanneck, quoted in McCoard 1978: 243), American speakers prefer the simple past tense in a number of environments where British English still demands the use of the present perfect. There is still unison, though, as regards the ungrammaticality of using finite forms (!) of the latter with time adverbials identifying a definite past interval.[9]

The present perfect in Classical Latin, to give a last example relating to Continuum 1, also lacks many typical properties of this kind of anterior compared with other languages. In fact, its position on the continuum is probably closer towards the tense pole. It resembles the Greek aorist in that it can most appropriately be characterized as a past tense with many properties of the perfective aspect (cf. also Dahl 1985: 139, Comrie 1976: 53). Thus it is the present perfect which serves the narrative, plot-advancing function; the *imperfectum,* which should be assumed to represent the Latin equivalent of the simple past tense in English, fulfils only the secondary function of locating in time background information relative to some reference time. The well-known description of this division of tasks by classical grammarians is "perfecto procedit, imperfecto insistit oratio" ('with the perfect the narrative proceeds, with the imperfect it comes to halt'). On the whole, the *perfectum-imperfectum* contrast in Latin is primarily an aspectual (perfective vs. imperfective) one in the past time sphere, as e.g. felt by the grammarian Priscian (in Pinkster 1990: 222), rather than one between different poles on a continuum relating to situation-external time.

With regard to Continuum 2, the perhaps most striking case to be advanced for variation across languages is aspect in Slavic. Against all expectations – considering that modern aspectology had its origins in the study of Slavic aspect – it can certainly not be located at the left pole of the continuum. First of all, the perfective and imperfective subcategories are not inflectional categories but rather derivational, possibly even, as Dahl (1985: 89) points out, grammaticalized lexical categories. From this point of view, the perfective/imperfective contrast in Slavic indeed qualifies as an Aktionsart distinction more than anything else (Dahl 1985: 27). On top of that, Dahl (1985: 71-72, 84-89) established further differences between aspect in Slavic and other languages, which, too, make the former rather an exceptional breed from a typological perspective.

At present, I can say only very little about the significance of Continuum 2 concerning the historical dimension. It seems, though, from the few attested cases I am familiar with that here the historical development is largely unidirectional, i.e. from Aktionsart to aspect, which would correspond to the fact that grammaticalization is a far more frequently observable process than degrammaticalization. Thus the results of the research conducted by the Cologne working group on grammaticalization all point into the direction of Aktionsart markers as an important source of aspect markers (see Sasse 1991). Provided one acknowledges the status of the aorist as an aspectual (perfective) category, as e.g. Comrie (1976: 71-73) and Dahl (1985: 81-83) do, it may also be appropriate in this context to recall Brugmann's assumption

regarding the development of the aorist in Indo-European languages (1970: 507, 559-560). He puts emphasis on the reinforcing effect of what is traditionally called punctual verbs, or what Vendler (1967: 102) would refer to as *achievements*, on this process.

4.3. PROSPECTIVE AND RETROSPECT

4.3.1. The tetrad as outlined above cannot account for all facets of tense and aspect systems. The question may justly be raised, for example, where on the continua and, in the first place, on which continuum the English *"be going to* + infinitive"-construction and its equivalents in Afrikaans or Romance languages would have to be located. In many publications, constructions of this kind are referred to as instances of *prospective aspect* (e.g. Deutschbein 1939, Anderson 1973, Comrie 1976: 64-65). This would immediately suggest placing them somewhere near the left pole of Continuum 2. On the other hand, the notion of aspect was narrowed down to the perfective/imperfective contrast and, above all, defined as a notion that is exclusively concerned with situation-internal time. This can hardly be appropriate for the constructions under consideration as "prospection is solely a relationship of posteriority [...] in which the predicated event is linked to a reference point **anywhere** [my emphasis, B.K.] in present [...], past [...], or, less commonly, future [...] time" (Fleischman 1982: 19). Relevant examples for the latter two cases would be *John was going to write the essay last night but then he broke his leg* and *When will he be going to write that letter?* (Jespersen 1931: 363). Thus more properly, these constructions are to be treated as representing a category of situation-external time, more exactly one that is closely related to anterior and not to tense, as the somewhat misleading term *go-futures* (Fleischman 1982: 17) may suggest and has indeed variously been argued for English (e.g. Joos 1964: 134; McIntosh, quoted in Wekker 1976: 9, 123). As a matter of fact, these constructions have nothing to do with aspect, at all, but are the (expectable) posterior counterpart of the category of anterior. This has been illustrated in some detail already by Jespersen (1931: 360-363). Both anterior and *posterior*, as we may call this new category from now on to keep things simple, are not deictic but relate a situation to just some (!) reference time (R) which may or may not be identical with coding time (C). For anterior, R generally follows the event time (E); in the case of posterior, R generally precedes E:

$$E \quad \overset{\frown}{(R \ (C))} \quad E$$

$$\underbrace{}_{\text{anterior}} \quad \underbrace{}_{\text{posterior}}$$
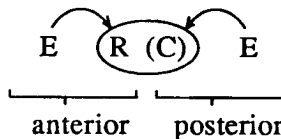
A useful cover term for the two categories may be *orientation*, a term proposed by King (1982: 126) and originally intended to relate exclusively to the category labelled *anterior* in this paper. But terminology is only of minor importance here. What is crucial is to acknowledge anterior as only one of two subcategories of a superordinate category with the function of relating an event time to some reference time, which in the absence of a time adverbial will solely be provided by a tense. This superordinate category may be regarded as the proper one at the opposite pole of tense on the continuum for situation-external time:

Continuum 1': Situation-external time

<u>tense</u>   .   <u>orientation</u>

It should be noted, though, that the subcategories anterior and posterior are sufficiently distinct for their formal representations to be capable of combining with each other, as in *He's been going to write this book for years*. Also, the constructions expressing these two categories are grammaticalized to a different extent. Overall it seems justified to say, both from a cross-linguistic and a single-language perspective, that constructions expressing the category posterior are still considerably less grammaticalized than anterior-constructions, even if the former are increasingly developing into established parts of verbal grammar (as a future tense though, not as true posterior-constructions; e.g. Fleischman (1982: 82, 101-102) on Romance languages, Romance-based creoles, and informal spoken (American) English). In English, for example, all other constructions for the expression of posterior besides "*be going to* + infinitive", i.e. *be (about) to do sth., be on the point/verge/brink of doing sth.*, can hardly be said to have achieved a similar degree of grammaticalization, if one can postulate grammar status for them at all.

4.3.2. There is one final point I wish to make. It is, of course, not always necessary to jointly consider all five categories discussed here, i.e. tense, anterior, posterior, aspect, and Aktionsart, if one is interested only in one or a subset of them. Trivial as this may seem, it forms part of the required disentanglement in this area. Considering all categories in relation to each other is necessary only if one is interested in the compositionality of the predicate and the categories which interact in determining the internal and external temporal properties of the denoted situation. It suffices to consider subsets whenever adopting any of the following restricted viewpoints concerning categories that play a role in the morphological, syntactic, and semantic analysis of verb phrases:

- grammatical categories relating to time:
tense, aspect, anterior, (posterior)

- categories relating to situation-external time:
tense, anterior, posterior

- categories relating to situation-internal time:
aspect, Aktionsart

Looking back, it may seem that what the title of this paper promised, viz. solutions, was a bit of a mouthful in view of what I had to offer. It was my wish to go beyond a (necessarily very superficial) review of this most delicate and much belaboured field of linguistic research, and to give this article a more positive and constructive note by sketching what may serve as a fruitful basis for future studies in this area. I am fully aware, of course, that a number of interesting questions have not been raised, at all, and that some of the ideas and arguments put forward here need to be fleshed out and even then may remain controversial. They may provide, however, stimulating food for thought, which is all they were meant to be at this stage. Basically, what I wanted to demonstrate in this paper was that I still believe, with Brinton (1988: 1), that "the study of aspect in English is a possible, and rewarding endeavour", and that indeed the same goes for tense, orientation and Aktionsart in English as well as in other languages.

NOTES

(1) This is an extended version of a talk given in Louvain-la-Neuve (Belgium) at the International Symposium on Tense-Aspect-Aktionsart in December 1990. I would like to thank all participants in the ensuing discussion, especially Renaat Declerck, Hans-J. Sasse, and Christopher Beedham.

(2) Various proposals for English equivalents of *Aktionsart* were made, e.g. *character/kinds/modes of action* in various traditional grammars, *aspectual character* (Lyons 1977: 706), *procedurals* (Forsyth 1970: 20), but none of them reached the same degree of acceptance as Brugmann's term.

(3) In a number of publications since Hermann (1927) and Jacobsohn (1933), the distinction between the two categories is drawn along the lines of subjectivity (aspect) and objectivity (Aktionsart). This criterion, however, is far from uncontroversial (cf. Pollak 1967: 411-412, Bache 1982: 66-71, or Schwall 1991: 111, 427-428). For a most critical view on the very possibility of making a distinction between aspect and Aktionsart in English, see Ota (1963: 105).

(4) Following Comrie (1976: 13), and Quirk et al. (1985: 177), I will use *situation* in the technical sense as general cover term for everything that can be denoted by predicates. A roughly equivalent term – *state of affairs* – is increasingly gaining ground within the Functional Grammar framework of Simon Dik (e.g. Pinkster 1990: 16, 214-215).

(5) Aktionsart has an even narrower definition in the Slavic tradition (e.g. Isačenko 1962 on Russian) and part of the literature on German (especially Steinitz 1981; cf. also Francois 1985: 233-234). Relevant for Aktionsart under this approach are only verbs having undergone derivational processes, i.e. affixation or the formation of verbal syntagms yielding the so-called *Funktionsverbgefüge*, e.g. G. *schwitzen* → *ins Schwitzen kommen* (cf. Schwall 1991: 172-237). Trost (1977) tries to reconcile this approach with the one that assigns Aktionsarten also to verb stems by distinguishing between *Ausgangsaktionsarten* (for the latter) and *Aktionsartenneubildungen* (for derived verbs or verbal syntagms).

(6) If coding time and reception time do not coincide, it is of course also possible that the latter may serve as anchor point. *Coding time, reference time* and *event time* are employed in the sense of Reichenbach's (1947) S, R and E respectively.

(7) In a number of publications, the crucial difference between a notion-/function-based and a form-based use of these terms is blurred. A simple way of identifying form-based uses is the plural with these terms, i.e. *tenses, aspects, Aktionsarten* (similarly Comrie 1976: 7).

(8) Other proposals that have been advanced for the notional category subsuming aspect and Aktionsart are *actionality* (Andersson 1972: 25) and *aspectuality* (Schwall (1991: 101) following Bondarko). Both are problematic as they are typically employed in their autohyponymic senses (see 4.1).

(9) As already pointed out by Comrie (1976: 55) and elaborated by Stump (1985: 220-235), non-finite perfect constructions (e.g. "*having* + past participle") may very well be used with definite past time adverbials, thus serving a typical past tense role. This leads Comrie to state that "in such constructions the distinction between perfect meaning and relative past time reference is not made overtly (is neutralised)", and Stump to a new definition of the function of the English per-

fect. Dismissing McCoard's "extended now"-theory as wrong, he states: "the real function of the perfect is to locate an event within a perfect interval", i.e. "any interval which begins earlier than some interval i and lasts no later than i " (1985 228). Notice that in this definition Stump employs the term *perfect* for what I have preferred to call *anterior*, and that his conception of a perfect interval corresponds exactly to the last part of my notional definition of this category.