

ON SOME ASPECTS OF THE QUANTIZATION OF ACTION IN THE PROGRESSIVE

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This paper addresses certain aspects of the use of the progressive. Its aim is to demonstrate that (a) there are principled connections between internal compactness of the verb's meaning and the applicability of the progressive, and that (b) the segmentation of an event into individual quanta can be effected with the proviso that each quantum of an internally compact event represent the event type, not its proper part.

As is well known, the progressive grasps an event as being in progress and, in doing so, it foregrounds the internal quantization of the event. In other words, the progressive expresses the progression from one quantum to another.

The segmentation into individual quanta is made possible in events whose representations involve inherent processuality. This aspect of meaning can be illustrated in the progressive in the sentences of the *John was running to the store* or *John was walking towards the store* type. The motion situations expressed in these sentences do not involve sharp transition between two locations. They involve progression from one quantum to another, which means that the path must allow for graduality of the movement. It is important to realize at the same time that, in such a case, the path must have a homogeneous character. By this it is meant that the path cannot have a simple bipolar structure (on the concept of the bipolarity of the path see esp. Kaufmann, 1989 and Beavers, 2002) – hence the restricted usability of the progressive in *John was walking into the store* or *John was running out of the store*. The progressive presents the movement as a gradual process, which is directed against the nature of the motion rendered as

a (dis)appearance of the moving figure. As observed in our former publication (Kudrnáčová, 2006:91), (dis)appearance is a markedly contrastive semantic concept because its semantic value is constituted as a bipolar change of its opposite. This fact also has implications for the theory of functional sentence perspective – cf. Firbas (e.g. 1992) and Adam (2009:92 – 94) significantly elaborating on the phenomenon of (dis)appearance in relation to the functional perspective of sentences in poetic biblical texts.

Although it is commonly assumed that the telicity of the movement correlates with the end-boundedness of the path and the atelicity of the movement correlates with the end-unboundedness of the path (cf., e.g., Tenny, 1994), telic motion (i.e. that which is aimed at achieving a spatial goal) does not necessarily involve temporal boundedness. As has been shown above, motion events with a *to*-path phrase, which expresses a spatial boundedness of the event, can be captured by means of the progressive. The potential temporal unboundedness of a telic motion event can be instantiated by means of the following example from the British National Corpus:

(1) She turned from him in despair. His desire to possess her was rooted in the world of ambition, not the heart. *They were running to the car*. Everyone clustered round them, calling greetings. Suddenly, Rachel turned to throw her bouquet. In a flash, she saw Jenny's blaze of red hair, Jamie beside her, and she threw the bouquet above the heads of the others, straight at Jenny, who gasped and caught it. Jamie stared down at her, and Rachel turned away, sliding into the car.

This example aptly illustrates the capacity of the progressive to take “a snapshot of an event in progress whose temporal boundaries are not in view” (Pustejovsky 1995:101). In this connection it is not without interest to mention that this ‘internalizing’ aspect of the progressive (cf. Langacker, 1982:282) is one of the factors that determine the applicability of the progressive in various variants of English. In legal English, for example, the progressive is not very common. As observed by Bázlik and Ambrus (2008:58), the low occurrence of the progressive in legalese “is consistent with the fact that legal texts provide for relatively permanent rather than momentary or short-term events”.

Coming back to the events of the type *John was walking into (/out of) the store*, it is evident that the restrictions imposed on the applicability of the progressive are underlain by the bipolarity (i.e. inherent telicity) of the path. It should be noted in this connection that the bipolar character of the path also excludes the use of unbounded (non-delimited) path phrases. Consider, e.g., the verb *bring*. Due to the combination of inherent telicity and internal compactness as present in the semantics of this verb, the progressive can only be accompanied by bounded (delimited) path phrases:

(2) He was bringing the tray to the sitting room.

(3) *He was bringing the tray towards the sitting room.

Admittedly, the event exemplified in (2) requires a specific context, e.g.: *When I saw him, he was bringing a tray to the sitting room* (this type of event

will be described in greater detail below). In the absence of a path phrase, the boundedness of the path may be conveyed by the context. Consider the following two examples from the British National Corpus:

(4) The man reappeared, picked up something and then moved from sight again. *Patrick guessed he was bringing a tray into the sitting room*, which gave him a few moments. Bent almost double, he darted towards the kitchen, pressing himself against the wall. His heart was throbbing painfully /.../.

(5) As Rostov watched, the lieutenant dropped his weapon and pitched forward out of the hatch. Rostov froze. *Kubitsky was bringing his rifle to bear on a target* which lay somewhere in the direction of the grove of trees on the river bank to Rostov's rear, but before he could open fire three more arrows took him in the chest and he fell over backwards without a sound.

A closer look at the progressive in the above two examples reveals that, due to the verb's internal compactness, the progressive with *bring* presents each quantum of the event of 'bringing' as bearing reference to the final quantum. That is, each quantum of the action incorporates reference to a built-in goal (the same semantic structure is displayed by, e.g., the verb *cross*). From this follows that the event can be segmented into individual quanta only with the proviso that each segment (each quantum) have an absolute value. To put it differently, each quantum must express the *qualitative* aspect of the event. By this it is meant that the segmentation into individual quanta can only be effected with the proviso that each quantum of an internally compact event represent the event *type*, not its proper part. This is consistent with the fact that, for the event to retain its nature (i.e. for the verb to be what it is meant to be), the verb in the progressive must bear reference to the last quantum. In such a case, the progressive is deprived of the capacity to present the quanta of a given event as autonomous units.

To explain the point in greater detail, let us consider the event encoded in the predicate *write a letter*. This type of event is telic, too, but the telicity is of an accomplishment, not of an achievement (i.e. bipolar) type. (Since Vendler's (1967) seminal work the classification of situations into states, activities, accomplishments and achievements has been the subject of numerous writings; see, e.g., Dowty, 1979). For example, in the sentence *John was writing a letter*, each quantum represents an appropriate portion of the event of 'writing a letter'. That is, each quantum of the event corresponds to a certain quantum of the letter that has been written. The sum total of the quanta, then, represents the entire event (on the relation between the event and the object (/the path), commonly referred to as the 'event-object (/event-path) homomorphism', see esp. Jackendoff, 1996 and Krifka, 1992 or 1998). A closer look reveals that the event-object homomorphism as expressed in 'writing a letter' is based on quantitative aspects of the relation between the event and the object. In concrete terms, the progressive is endowed with the capacity to present a quantum (or a sequence of quanta) as the event's proper part. In other words, the progressive encodes the cumulative character of the process (it is interesting to note in this connection that cumulateness as a lexico-semantic feature is encoded in one of

the Slovak translations of the lexeme “progressive“, namely in “postupujúci“, cf. Böhmerová, 1997:17). This explains why it is possible to say

(6) John was writing a letter for 10 minutes (/for quite a long time).
and why it is not possible to say

(7) *John was bringing a tray to the sitting-room for 2 minutes (/for quite a long time).

As opposed to the event in (7), the event in (6) “is viewed as limited to a period“ (Kubišová, Bázlik and Votruba, 2009:23).

Coming back to examples (4) and (5), it is obvious that (a) even an internally compact event such as the one encoded in *bring* can be presented as a process and that (b) the progressive is not deprived of its capacity to present the event as unfolding in time, i.e. it does not lose its capacity to segment the event into individual quanta. That is, these two, in a way competing, features, namely the internal compactness of the event (underlain by the event’s intrinsic telicity) and the internal segmentation of the event profiled in the progressive (i.e. the foregrounding of the processual character of the event), can both be expressed in a single clause. In such a case, however, the last quantum of the event (the one involving the actual reaching of the terminus) must be mapped onto the rest of the quanta in a way which ensures that each quantum stand for the event as a whole. It is important to realize that only in this way is it possible for the event to retain its internal compactness. Therefore one can say

(8) When I saw him, he was bringing a tray to the sitting room.
but one cannot say

(9) He was bringing the tray to the sitting room for 2 minutes (/for quite a long time).

In example (8), the progressive profiles one quantum of the event (the one corresponding to one quantum of time expressed by the clause *when I saw him*, which can be paraphrased as “at that moment“). In this case, however, the quantum in question encompasses (in a qualitative, not a quantitative sense) the last quantum and, in doing so, it spans the entire event.

Generally speaking, example (9), based on the incorporation of the whole in its parts, may be evaluated as a special case of *pars pro toto*. To repeat, this argumentation is consistent with the fact that if the progressive is used to denote an internally compact event, it has to incorporate reference to the last quantum, which is essential for the preservation of the event’s identity.

In example (9) the progressive extracts a quantum (or, rather, a series of quanta) out of the event and presents it on the scene, too. In this case, however, the quanta cannot stand for a whole because they do not encompass reference to the last, terminal quantum – note that the event is presented as not completed, i.e. as an event whose terminus has not been reached. In example (8), by contrast, the onlooker safely assumes (or knows for sure) that the event encompasses the last quantum, i.e. that it includes (or will include) reaching the desired spatial goal – note in this connection the wording “Patrick *guessed* that someone was bringing a tray to the sitting room“ in example (4). This aspect of meaning,

however, is not implied in example (9), which explains why a given event loses its identity and why the verb cannot be used in the progressive. Consistent with the above is the fact that the sentence in (9) cannot be rescued by adding information about the reasons why the goal has not been reached. Consider, e.g.:

(10) *John was bringing the parcel to the post-office for several minutes (/for about 5 minutes) when he realized that he had left the money at home and so he returned and /.../.

This argumentation can be substantiated by appealing to the fact that this type of information can be (even if exceptionally) adduced in motion events including a *to*-path phrase:

(11) John had been walking to the post-office for several minutes (/for about 5 minutes) when he realized that he had left the money at home and so he returned and /.../.

The formation of this type of sentence is licensed by two factors: (a) a given type of path is not bipolar and, hence, involves graduality of motion, and (b) the onlooker knows (or safely assumes) that the executor of the motion has the intention of reaching the location in question (on this see also Kudrnáčová, 2008:98).

We may conclude that, in the light of the facts discussed thus far, the oft-cited claim that the progressive does not include the last phase (the last quantum of the event) is valid only with respect to the actual temporal progression of the event, i.e. only with respect to the fact that the progressive captures the event as 'unfolding in time'.

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Resumé

Článek pojednává o některých aspektech kvantizace události, jak je vyjádřena v anglickém progresívu. Dokládá, že míra použitelnosti progresíva je mj. závislá na interní kompaktnosti významu slovesa a dále že kvantizace události ve smyslu její segmentace na jednotlivá kvanta je uskutečnitelná za předpokladu, že každé jednotlivé kvantum interně kompaktní události vyjádřené v progresívu představuje typ události, nikoli její pravou část.