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## Aspectual Verbs – aspect constructions in the making

### Abstract

This paper offers a corpus-based investigation of aspectual verbs, a set of semi-auxiliary aspect constructions that influence the aspectual construal of predicates with which they combine. Broadly grouped by their re-construing function, these constructions have been classified as inceptive constructions (e.g. *begin to VERB*, *start to VERB* (*start VERB-ing*), *commence VERB-ing*), terminative constructions (e.g. *stop to VERB*, *quit VERB-ing*, *cease to VERB*, *finish VERB-ing*), continuative constructions (*continue to VERB*, *keep VERB-ing*, *keep on VERB-ing*) and others, such as resumptive and completive constructions. These constructions have partially been the target of corpus-based investigations, which have shown that seemingly near-synonymous constructions illustrate different syntactic behavior and in part different semantic preferences (cf. Schmid 1993). In addition, their aspectual differences have received discussion in various places (cf. Wierzbicka 1988). This paper offers an extension to previous work in that it provides a fine-grained analysis of the aspectual meaning of a selected set of said constructions based on tokens extracted from the British National Corpus (BNC).

The study consists of a range of distinctive collexeme analyses (cf. Gries and Stefanowitsch 2004) that show subtle semantic distinctions between a selection of members of these broad sets of constructions and also between alternations of the same construction in combination with either a *to*-INFINITIVE or participle complementation, for those verbs where such alternations exist, e.g. *start to VERB* vs. *start VERB-ing*. More detailed investigation of distinctive collexemes illustrates that the seemingly near-synonymous constructions come with slightly different aspectual meaning, as apparent in the construal that predicates receive in these constructions. It is argued that in part these results reflect the semantics of the lexical verbs out of which these contemporary semi-auxiliary aspect constructions have developed.

### References

- Gries, Stefan Th., Anatol Stefanowitsch (2004). Extending collocation analysis: a corpus-based perspective on 'alternations'. *International Journal of Corpus Linguistics* 9.1:97-129.
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- Wierzbicka, Anna (1988). *The Semantics of Grammar*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.