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The simple and the progressive with single-phase body part movements

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THE SIMPLE AND THE PROGRESSIVE WITH SINGLE-PHASE BODY PART MOVEMENTS

The present paper analyzes the reasons that underlie the prevailing use of the simple and the infrequent occurrence of the progressive with a semantically coherent group of verbs denoting single-phase body part movements. By a single-phase movement I understand a movement without an implied reversal of direction in its course, i.e. a movement during which the body part follows a more or less linear course. For example, *raise one's head* designates a single-phase movement, *nod one's head* a two-phase movement, and *wave one's hand* a multi-phase movement (the progressive with verbs denoting two-phase and multi-phase movements has an iterative meaning). Of verbs designating single-phase movements, the following groups of verbs have been excluded from the present analysis:

a) verbs denoting "permissive" movement downwards (*fall, sink, sag* and *droop*)

b) verbs denoting impulsive movements (e.g., *shoot one's head up*, *fling out one's hands*, *jerk one's finger*, *toss one's head*)

c) the verbs *put*, *hold* and *bring* (e.g. *put one's head down*, *hold out one's hand*, *bring one's face down*)

d) verbs denoting physical contact (more specifically, the bringing together) of those body parts that conceptually belong together (e.g., *cross one's legs, close one's eyes, clench one's teeth*).

As shown in Kudrnáčová (1996, 2000, 2001, and 2005), these sets of verbs represent distinct groups not only with respect to their specific lexico-semantic content, but also with respect to their specific grammatical behaviour, including their use with simple and progressive forms.

The analysis is based on the British National Corpus (the bracketed symbol after each example indicates the respective text sample) and on my material (each example is followed by a bibliographical specification of the respective book, with the relevant page).

The simple form

The factors that motivate the prevaling use of the simple form with these verbs must be sought in the specific physical nature of the movements they designate.

The primary factor underlying the use of the simple form with the verbs under discussion is their boundedness, which is of a very specific kind. It is underlain by the conceptual pre-determination of the extent of the movement. In concrete terms, the end-point of the movement is determined by the operational radius of the body part(s). This means that body part movements are naturally telic (telic verbs denote actions with an inherent terminal point, see Garey 1957: 106), in spite of the fact that a final localization of the body part in space is not, or rather does not have to be, explicitly specified (cf. *he extended his hand, he bowed his head, he tilted his head, he spread his arms, he twisted his head, he held out his hands,* etc.). The body part simply resumes a position different from the one at which it started, and the length of the path traversed is given by the operational radius of the respective body part.

From the conceptual predetermination of the path it does not, however, follow that a body part invariably traverses the whole course enabled by its physical possibilities. The simple form always designates a bounded movement, irrespective of the concrete localization of the end-point of motion on the (maximal possible) path. Put another way, any point on the path (determined, as previously stated, by the operational radius of the body part) can represent a terminal point of motion, i.e. such a point as represents the point of its accomplishment. For instance, the movement as expressed by the following examples is always telic, no matter where exactly (i.e. no matter how far from the starting point of motion) the body part resumes its final position:

> *He inclined his head to one side.*
> *He bent (lowered/raised/lifted/turned/tilted/hung/twisted/bowed/averted/cocked/ducked) his head.*
> *He tipped his head back.*
> *He leaned his head to the right.*
> *He poked his head out of the window.*
> *He popped his head through the door.*
> *He spread his hands.*
> *He extended his arm.*
> *He stretched out his hands.*
> *He reached out his hand.*
> *He arched his eyebrows.*

A closer look reveals that the specific type of the conceptual pre-determination of the path of motion under discussion presents the path not as a sequence of changes in the relative positioning of the moving entity (as is the case in, e.g., *he ran to the store*), but as a gradual accumulation of the space traversed, i.e.

as extent (as in *he raised his head*). In this case, the path represents the amount of space covered by the moving entity. In other words, the path has the characteristics of magnitude and can, by virtue of its nature, be specified in absolute, not relative, terms. The path, determined by the operational radius of the body part, equals, roughly, its length. By contrast, the path which is presented as a sequence of relative positions cannot be specified in absolute terms (i.e. cannot be defined in terms of its magnitude or length) precisely because the position of the end-point of motion (just as all the other positions on the path) is given only relatively, via its localization with respect to the starting point of motion (which does not have to be stated explicitly). In other words, motion along such a path cannot be specified in absolute terms, which means, among other things, that one cannot run to the store *a fraction* (*slightly, a little, a little further*, *a bit,* etc.).

By contrast, motion along the path presented as 'extent' can be specified in terms of its magnitude. This means that each position of the moving entity on the path can be specified in absolute terms, as the subtotal of all the preceding positions. The motion along the path is thus specifiable in terms of the degree of the "consumption" of the path. This is precisely the reason why movements under discussion can be modified by expressions of the *slightly* type, which designate the appropriate "portion" of space covered by the respective motion. Consider the following examples:

(1) *She tilted her head slightly, indicating the warrant card he still held in one hand.* (GUG)

(2) *The horror in her voice was almost ludicrous, and Briant raised his eyebrows slightly.* (AN8)

(3) *The old lady raised her head a little, her face bright with interest*. (AD1)

(4) *His interlocutor raised his eyebrows a fraction, but remained seated.* (H84)

(5) *He stood up and bent his knees slightly to take out the stiffness*. (FP1)

(6) *Ling lowered his head slightly*. (G04)

(7) *Nan Ho lifted his chin fractionally*. (G04)

(8) *Maggie LeMan lifted her shoulders slightly and smiled as she said* […] (CFY)

(9) *Athelstan turned his head slightly to one side*. (H98)

(10) *She cocked her head slightly to one side, staring at Corbett, a slight smile on her lips as if he was telling her some merry jest or interesting tale*. (H9C)

(11) *He twisted his head slightly to look up at her.* (HA9)

(12) *Herzog* […] *averted his face slightly as he prepared to listen, a tendency in-hereted from* […] (Saul Bellow: *Herzog*. Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1971, p. 232).

Let us now have a closer look at the semantics of the verbs under discussion in terms of the kinetic structuration of motion as implied by them. Owing to the magnitudinous nature of the path, each kinetic quantum of motion can potentially have an absolute value. This means that a single kinetic quantum can express the nature of the whole movement, i.e. it can represent the movement in its entirety (as one unit of motion). In *raise*, for example, each kinetic quantum refers to a position of the entity that can be worded as "higher than the entity's position attained in the preceding quantum (quanta)". In other words, the meaning component 'higher than' is contained in each kinetic quantum, which can, therefore, represent the motion as a whole. It is clear that this semantic interpretation is an outcome of the single-phase character of the movements under discussion. By the same token, the verbs *turn* and *lower*, e.g., denote movements whose individual kinetic quanta designate positions roughly specifiable as "further on the path around an axis" and "lower than the entity's position attained in the preceding quantum (quanta)", respectively. Note, in this connection, the explicit use of *further* and *higher* in examples 13 and 14:

(13) *He lowered his head further, until he was drinking* […] (H84)

(14) *"Get your hand higher up," he commanded, tapping the boy's knuckles with the cane. The boy raised his arm a few inches higher.* (G3P)

It must be added that the single phase must be of a more or less homogeneous character, i.e. the quanta making up the motion must be the same so that each quantum can, potentially, stand for the whole motion.

   The function of indicating the appropriate portion of the maximal length of the path, determined by the actional range of the body part, can also be fulfilled by expressions such as *low, wide* or *enough*, cf.:

(15) *The old female bent her head low and nodded.* (FP3)

(16) *A he-dryad waiting at the stairs spread his arms wide and grinned woodenly at the figure hurtling towards him* […] (HA3)

(17) *'No!' He stood straight and his brow lifted enough so we could see his eyes.* (Ken Kesey: *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest.* London: Picador, 1978, p. 214)

If a more precise final localization of the moving body part is needed, it must be specified via reference to the position of an entity external to the moving body part:

(18) *Mr Malik lowered his nose until it almost touched the bails.* (HR8)

It must be noted, however, that in movements in which the body part does not come into contact with an external entity, the reference to the precise final localization of the body part or to a more concrete indication of the "amount" of the path traversed is not relevant because the aim of the movement is its occurrence *per se*. In other words, the movement is not executed to get the body part(s) into a precise position in space. This typically happens when the movement functions as an outward manifestation of the person's mental/physical state or as a signal (for example, one can bend one's head in shame or raise one's hand to stop the oncoming car). However, even in such cases it is possible to use expressions indicating that only a certain portion of the maximal possible path was traversed, cf.:

(19) *He spread his hands wide in a gesture of incomprehension and* […] (ADS)

(20) *Oblivious to these thoughts, he went on. 'You're a very beautiful young woman.' He lowered his head a fraction. 'And Peter's such a boy.'* (JXU)

(21) *Jezrael tilted her head fractionally to indicate mild surprise and indifference.* (FP0)

(22) *'Oh?' His brows rose fractionally. 'What's up with the fellow?* […]' (HHA)

(23) *Polly tilted her chin a little higher, determined not to let the woman see her hurt and fury.* (H7W)

In the above set of examples, the expressions *wide, a fraction, fractionally* and *a little higher* have an iconic status: they express the idea that a fraction of the path correlates with a "fraction" of emotion, i.e. that there is a correspondence between a given amount of motion and a given intensity of emotion.

Needless to say, there are movements in which the exact final position of the body part is relevant (one can, for example, turn one's head towards the door to see who is coming), but even in such cases the localization of the moving body part in space does not have to be stated precisely (cf. example 24), or can be indicated via reference to an entity external to the body part (cf. examples 25–29).

(24) […] *Michel Tardieu* […] *extends a bare arm from beneath his duvet to lift the telephone* […] (David Lodge: *Small World.* Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1985, p. 97)

(25) […] *he had his head turned in the direction of the dark blur standing out against the night* […] (CFY)

(26) *He poked his finger at her*. (FAB)

(27) *She leaned forward* […] *just as he turned his head slightly in her direction, as though he sensed her watching him*. (HH1)

(28) *His head was poked towards her*. (HWE)

(29) *She watched as Rourke bent his head closer to his companion*. (HA6)

To conclude this section dealing with the semantics of the simple form, let me add one more remark. We have seen that the magnitudinous character of the path and the potentially absolute value of individual kinetic quanta making up the single-phase movement in question are those factors that enable the simple form to designate a telic, bounded movement, irrespective of the precise localization of the moving entity at the end of the motion. This fact has quite an interesting ramification. The simple form may, under specific circumstances, designate a body part motion carried out in degrees, not as one motion continuum. Consider:

(30) *Nodding, he raised his head, his chin rose at every sentence, he touched his neat beard, his lenses glittered* […] (Saul Bellow: *Herzog*. Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1971, p. 60)

Here the explicit *his chin rose at every sentence* indicates clearly that the simple form *he raised (his head)* denotes the movement carried out gradually, as a sequence of autonomous, accomplished motion units.

The progressive

It is traditionally held that the progressive form presents the action as being in progress, i.e. that it profiles the action as going through successive stages. Quirk et al. (1985: 197) state that the progressive "indicates a happening in progress at a given time". With the verbs under analysis, the progressive designates a gradual progression from one kinetic quantum to another. However, owing to the specific type of boundedness of the movements in question, such a use of the progressive is quite exceptional. The reasons are the aforementioned conceptual predetermination of the final localization of the moving entity (the body part) and the magnitudinous character of the path, which ensure that single-phase movements under discussion represent a special class of accomplishments (see Vendler's 1967 classic categorization of verbs into states, activites, accomplishments and achievements). As stated above, each kinetic quantum can, theoretically, have an absolute status in that it can designate the motion in its entirety. Therefore, the explicit segmentation of motion into individual kinetic quanta is, under standard circumstances, not needed.

When a gradual progression from one kinetic quantum to another is to be explicitly presented, the simple form with the adverb *slowly* is resorted to. Cf.:

(31) *He stretched out his right arm and slowly bent it, feeling the muscle.* (Katherine Mansfield: *Bliss and Other Stories*. Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1977, p. 37)

(32) *Slowly I raised my head and saw myself in the mirror opposite*. (Katherine Mansfield: *Bliss and Other Stories*. Harmondswoth: Penguin Books, 1977, p. 65)

(33) *Adam slowly lifted his left wrist and looked at it*. (FPB)

(34) *The Doctor lowered his head slowly until his chin was resting on his chest*. (F9X)

It must be pointed out that the compatibility of the verbs with the adverb *slowly* is connected with the internal semantic structuration of the verbs in question, more specifically with the possibility of segmenting the movements designated by them into individual kinetic quanta. Such a possibility is, however, barred for the verbs *poke/pop/cock/duck/twist (one's head)*. These verbs have an evaluative force because they refer to the specific circumstances under which the motion is executed (such as quickness and/or suddenness of motion, a close connection with the agent's state which triggers the motion, or with the general situation in which the motion occurs). The evaluative perspective brings about the back-grounding of the kinetic quantization of the movements.

There is yet another factor underlying a rare occurrence of the progressive, namely the shortness of the path of single-phase body part movements (and, con-sequently, of the span of time needed for its traversal). However, in order to present movements covering a relatively longer period of time, the combination of the simple form with the adverb *slowly* is resorted to (cf. examples 31–34), which attests to the fact that the decisive factor underlying the rare occurrence of the progressive is the boundedness of the motion, not the shortness of the path.

Let us now have a closer look at the factors motivating the use of the progres-sive with single-phase movements under discussion.

As pointed out above, the progressive is, under standard circumstances, not needed because each kinetic quantum (and, accordingly, each sequence of kinetic quanta) can, theoretically, designate a motion as an accomplished unit of mo-tion. From here it is only a step to the fact that the progressive may be used if the onlooker wishes to present the motion not as a definite fact. In other words, the progressive can indicate that the onlooker is not sure whether the motion he sees is really the motion that the executor wishes to execute. By contrast, the simple form, unequivocally encompassing the final kinetic quantum of motion, is used

to refer to a motion as a simple, undisputed fact. This matter-of-fact presentation of the situation is an outcome of the external perspective as implied by the simple form (on the external perspective see, e.g., Langacker 1982). Consider the progressive in the following two examples:

(35) *Stark was caught completely by surprise. For one moment he looked as if he was raising his hands in surrender, then he leapt forward.* (G0P)

(36) […] *except that then O thought that maybe the gesture had another meaning, maybe the man was extending his hand in the hope that some passer-by might take it, grasp it firmly* […] (AR2)

As is well known, the prototypical use of the progressive is to present the action as a background against which some other event occurs:

(37) *However, just as Mungo was lowering his head to clear the opening, something made him turn back.* (ACV)

(38) *Burun was extending a finger to test the edge, but Yuan stopped him.* (FSE)

(39) *Then turn your hips behind a long reverse punch to hit the opponent square in the chest, just as his knee is rising to its full height.* (A0M)

(40) *She knocked loudly on the kitchen door and waited for a moment, aware of the toal silence from within the room. She was lifting her hand to knock again when the door was flung open and she was confronted by the woman she'd seen outside* […] (CKD)

A closer look at the semantics of the progressive in the above set of examples reveals that the progressive does not profile the movement as covering a period of time, but as occurring at a point of time (determined by the moment at which the other event occurs). This is in line with Binnick's (1991: 287) assumption that the progressive asserts a moment but implies a time span. This interpretation is valid also for the following two examples, in which the movements are presented as not completed because they occur at a span of time determined by the moment of the utterance:

(41) […] *the endless business of 'drilling' the beginners bored me into stone. 'What am I doing? I am raising my arm. What is he doing? He is raising his arm. What are they doing? They are raising their arms. Have they raised their arms? They have raised their arms.* (G13)

(42) *A more marginal case is where the defendant is seen to be raising his fists in anticipation of the fight.* (GVR)

It is known from the vast literature on the English aspect that the progressive presents the action as if from inside. Langacker (1982: 282) , e.g., states that the progressive "imposes an internal perspective". We have to realize that owing to this internal focus the progressive is endowed with a strong expressive force, underlain also by the fact that it has the capacity to foreground the forcible operation of the (emotional) cause triggering the motion (in this way it weakens the role played by the agent's will in the genesis of the movement). The progressive thus offers a more vivid presentation of the situation (on the vividness as implied in the progressive, see Smith 1991: 224). Consider:

(43) *But, instead, she heard herself say, ' I'm terribly sorry.' Then, unable to look at him, she was turning and rushing from the room. Up in her room with the door locked, she stood quivering and shaking* [...] (JXT)

In line with its potentially expressive force, the progressive may also serve to stress the discrepancy between the type of motion and the preceding event (examples 44 and 45). This is in line with Vlach's (1981) assumption that the progressive connotates dynamism and change. From here it is only one step to the possibility of modifying the progressive by means of the punctual adverb *suddenly* (example 46):

(44) *'You hated me as well,' he reminded her wearily. But he was lifting a hand, sliding it beneath the satiny brightness of her curls, long fingers spreading and his thumb brushing gently across her cheek. Unaccustomed to such tenderness from this man* [...] (H9L)

(45) *His tongue stabbed once at her nipple and then he was raising his head. 'I degrade myself with you as you degrade yourself with Jones,' he grated.* (H9L)

(46) *What was he saying? But before Ronni could wonder further, suddenly he was rising to his feet. 'I scared you off, didn't I?'* (JXT)

The compatibility with *suddenly* serves as further evidence of the expressive force of the progressive. The unexpectedness of action as expressed by this adverb rests in the fact that the genesis of the action is, at least in the eyes of the onlooker, determined by factors other than pure reason (or free will). In this way the progressive fosters the connection between the occurrence of the movement and a specific type of its genesis.

* * *

The analysis has shown that the natural telicity of single-phase body part movements in question is an outcome of two factors, namely the conceptual pre-determination of the final localization of the moving entity (the body part) and the

magnitudinous nature of the path. An explanation of the infrequent use of the progressive must be sought not only in this specific type of boundedness of motion but also in the homogeneous kinetic character of the single phase making up the motion, ensuring that each quantum of motion can potentially have an absolute value.

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