The semantics of aspectualizers in English

The dissertation offers a semantic analysis of aspectualizers and their non-finite complement constructions (*to-infinitive* and *–ing*) using the methods of Corpus Linguistics. The aspectualizers and their complements are characterized by a great complexity which is assumed to be contributable to their semantics to a great extent. Contrary to such theories that do not assume any meaning differences between aspectualizers and their non-finite complement constructions (*to-infinitive* and *–ing*) (e.g. Quirk et al. 1985) I assume that there are some subtle differences between the aspectualizers and the constructions they are part of, and that these differences are motivated not only semantic factors, but by pragmatic and sociolingvistic elements as well.

Some of the most important questions the research focuses on are the following:
1. The semantic analysis of the aspectualizers, their complement constructions and the subject of the sentence.
2. The analysis of the eventuality type of the complement verb. I am interested to see what eventuality types (statives, activities, accomplishments or achievements) appear with the greatest frequency in a certain construction.
3. The semantic analysis of the subject also receives a great importance. I assume that the thematic role of the subject (agent, patient, experiencer) also contributes to the meaning of an aspectual construction.
4. The analysis of the possible differences between the constructions having the same aspectualizers but different complement constructions (e.g. between *begin + to infinitive* and *begin + ing*) and also constructions containing different aspectualizers but the same complement construction (e.g. *begin + to infinitive* and *start + to infinitive*).
5. The analysis of the possible factors that influence the semantic value of a certain aspectual construction.

The dissertation follows the line of a constructionist framework (following mainly Goldberg 1995, 1997) also adopting elements from cognitive grammar (Langacker 1990, 1991, 1999, 2009). The approach can be considered constructionist in the sense that the aspectualizers and their complement forms are seen as constructions, they themselves being also part of a larger macro-construction. This macro-construction, containing the meaning of the matrix, that of the complement construction and the subject is assumed to have a meaning of its own which, although motivated to a great extent by the matrix and the other constituents of the sentence, is imagined to be more than the sum of the meanings of each construction.

The analysis of the *to- infinitive* and *– ing* constructions receives a great importance in this study. Following Kleinke (2002) to a certain extent it will be assumed that complement constructions have both a schematic and a prototypical meaning. The two meanings are equally important and present in the meaning of a construction. The difference between them is as follows: while the schematic meaning is based on the notion of schema, representing the more general meaning of the construction, the prototypical meaning depends on the meaning of the construction it is part of. In the latter case the semantic value of the matrix verb plays an important role.

During the research I concentrated mainly on those aspectualizers that appear with both the *to + infinitive* and *–ing* constructions. These aspectualizers are the following: *begin, start*, *continue*, *go on* and *cease*. I was interested to see what possible differences can be detected between the various constructions (*cease + to infinitive*, *cease + ing*, or *begin + to infinitive*, *start + to infinitive* etc.) and how frequent these differences are. Besides these verbs, I also analyse those aspectual verbs that allow only for *–ing* complements, like *keep*, *resume*, *quit* and *finish*.

The semantics of aspectualizers and their complement constructions are analyzed with the metods of corpus linguistics. I have used several corpora for my research (like *Brown, Frown, Flob, Lob* corpora, *BNC* (the British National Corpus) and also the Internet as corpus.

A corpus-based analysis offers several advantages as compared to the traditional approach. An important advantage is that it allows for both a qualitative and a quantitative analysis. A qualitative analysis helps to identify the phenomena that are taking place in aspectual complementation. The quantitative research gives information on the frequency of the data observed and shows the relevance of the observed phenomenon.