

Lexical aspect in English

Frank R. Palmer

University of Reading

f.r.palmer@reading.ac.uk

Abstract: The six verbs BEGIN/START, CONTINUE/KEEP and STOP/FINISH are among J. R. Firth's (1968: 122) 'verbs of aspect' and can be described in terms of three aspectual features (Lyons (1977: 707): Inception (*begin, start*), Progressivity (*continue, keep*) and Termination (*stop, finish*). The difference between *begin* and *start* is subtle, but a study of a number of features indicates that *begin* suggests initiation only, while *start* suggests initiation with progressivity. Both *continue* and *keep* indicate progressivity, but *continue* suggests progressivity with resumption (of a situation already in progress), while *keep* suggests progressivity with iteration. Similarly, *stop* and *finish* both indicate termination, but *stop* suggests termination at any point in a situation, while *finish* relates to termination with completion (of the situation). There is a brief consideration of three more marginal verbs: *commence, cease* and *quit*.

Key words: aspectual features, inception, progressivity, termination, *begin, start, continue, keep, stop, finish*.

1. Introduction

When I accepted an invitation to read a paper, I thought at first that it would be expected that I would talk about the modal verbs in English. But I now feel that I have written about these modals for too long and that I would prefer to talk about aspectual features but in relation to the lexical verbs rather than the grammar of English.

One reason for this is that, a few years ago, I delivered a paper entitled 'Firth's 'verbs of aspect''. My paper is not well known, partly because it is one of only five written in English from among thirteen in a volume published by the University of Granada in Spain, (Lario & Rodriguez-Navarro (eds) 1992) and partly because it is different in its contents for all the other articles or books that I have published. It is concerned with some of the verbs that I called 'verbs of process' in the second edition of *The English verb* (Palmer 1987: 2002), but is better seen as relevant to three of the notions of aspect that are suggested by Lyons (1977: 707): (i) inception, (ii) progressivity and (iii) termination, as exemplified by, e.g., the verbs START, CONTINUE and STOP. I now propose to look again, in more detail into the 'verbs of aspect', because the details show that a number of different aspectual features are involved in their analysis.

I intend to provide numerous examples (some of them slightly modified) taken from the corpus ICE-GB; these will be identified by their corpus reference number. In the discussion, other forms will be discussed: those that are unacceptable marked with an asterisk and those that are doubtful marked with a question mark.

2. 'Verbs of aspect'

The verbs to be discussed are not wholly identical with those proposed with Firth. The most central ones (with the more peripheral ones in brackets and discussed later) are:

- (1) Inception – BEGIN, START, (COMMENCE)
- Progressivity – CONTINUE, KEEP,
- Termination – STOP, FINISH, (CEASE, QUIT))

There are two central verbs of each of the three types listed above and there are differences between the verbs of each pair, all of which involve notional features of aspect. In addition to inception, progressivity and termination, Lyons (1977: 707) lists:

(2)stativity, completion, habituality, iteration and, momentariness.

Several of these are relevant in the description of the ‘verbs of aspect’. In fact, there are considerable clear differences in the aspects associated with the verbs of progressivity (CONTINUE and KEEP) and the verbs of termination (STOP and FINISH), but the differences with the verbs of initiation (BEGIN and START) are much more to characterize.

But there are four points that I would make:

- (i) it *must be emphasized* that, since the aspects are features of the lexicon rather than the grammar, they are largely notional and not so clearly defined;
- (ii) the whole topic cannot be fully explored in a short lecture;
- (iii) far more detailed research is required;
- (iv) it would be useful if a study were made of similar verbs in other languages.

Most of these verbs appear in a variety of constructions. With START, for instance, the possibilities are exemplified by:

- (3)(i) start simple intransitive
- (ii) start to talk catenative with *to*
- (iii) start talking catenative with *-ing*
- (iv) start work transitive plus object with no article
- (v) start the match transitive plus object with article

Examples of START taken from the corpus ICE-GB are:

(4)Are we ready to start now? (s1b-017 003)

Well before we start to talk about finances which’ll occupy a lot of this programme ... (s1b-022 014)

Once you start using terracotta tiles or even thin marble tiles, you can make the profile of the roof less sharp (s2a-924 76)

I hope she’s coming down ... because I start work on Thursday (1a-030 312)

They chose to start their daunting trek from the Canadian Arctic (s2b-024 042)

The two most important constructions are (ii) and (iii) which have catenatives (The term ‘catenative’ is long established for the sequences of verbs plus either the infinite (*to*) or the present participle (*-ing*) such as those above.) But there are other constructions that will be briefly mentioned later, though not discussed in detail).

There are two important features of such catenative structures.

One is what I once referred to as ‘identifying relations’ (Palmer 1987:178), but is better described as ‘same subject’ (SS) – the subjects of the catenative itself and the following *-ing* form are the same – in *Mary started talking*, it is clear that it was Mary who started and Mary who did the talking.

The other is that all of the verbs to be discussed (except, possibly, COMMENCE) occur with the *-ing* form (structure (iii)), e.g.

- (5) He began talking
 He started talking
 (?) He commenced talking
 He continued talking
 He kept talking
 He finished talking
 He stopped talking
 He ceased talking
 He quit talking

This frequent use of *-ing* is not surprising, for, these constructions have much in common with the progressive forms of English (with *-ing*) in that they express continuity or duration. Compare:

- (6) He was talking
 He continued talking.

But, as the list above shows, the *-ing* form is used with verbs of all three types – of initiation, progressivity and termination, and it seems that even with the verbs of inception and termination (as well as those of progressivity) there may be an implication of progressivity.

However, not all of the catenatives occur with *to* – KEEP, FINISH and STOP do not. We cannot say *He kept to talk* or *He finished to talk*. Nor can we say *He stopped to talk*, except in the different sense and grammatically different construction of ‘He stopped in order to talk’, where STOP is not a catenative.

I should add here that construction (iv) (e.g., *started work*), which has a transitive verb plus object with no article, is also relevant, though it seems to be more restricted; The most obvious examples are:

- (7) He started work
 He finished work
 He stopped work
 He quit work.

Less likely are:

- (8) ?He began work
 ?He commenced work
 ?He continued work
 ?He ceased work

Quite impossible is:

- (9)*He kept work

Although this construction is less frequent, it is very like that of (iii) Thus *Mary Started work* is very like *Mary started working* and, although *work* is not a verb here, both can be regarded (notionally) as SS – in both Mary was the one who started and the one who worked.

Similarly, construction (v) (with a direct object preceded by the definite object with *the* is important, especially in relation to BEGIN and START in view of:

- (10) The mechanic started the engine
 *The mechanic began the engine

3. Initiation, Progressivity and Termination

We must now look in more detail at the three types of verbs suggested -- those of inception, progressivity and termination.

3.1 Initiation: BEGIN and START

The two most used verbs of initiation are BEGIN and START. Often they appear to have exactly the same meanings, but that is most improbable, since, if they were exact homonyms, it is unlikely that both would have survived. A glance at the corpus (ICE-GB) shows that both are quite common but that there are more than twice the number of examples with START than the examples with BEGIN.

It is slightly unfortunate that these verbs of initiation are the first to be discussed, because the difference between them is not as clear as it is for the verbs of progressivity (CONTINUE and KEEP) or the verbs of termination (STOP and FINISH). The contrast between START and BEGIN is more difficult to identify because it is not absolute but relative – there are only tendencies towards aspectual features.

I suggest that the difference between the two verbs is that BEGIN tends to suggest simple initiation of the situation (activity or state), while START tends to suggest initiation plus progressivity. For the simple initiation associated with BEGIN I shall use the term **origination**, so that the aspectual features with BEGIN are initiation + origination and, with START initiation + progressivity.

There are four issues that may support this difference.

First, as was hinted earlier, *-ing* suggests progressivity, and with BEGIN, the *to* construction is more common than the *-ing* construction. There are many examples of the lexical verb BEGIN with *to* (in the forms *begin* and *began*), such as:

- (11) You pick it up and begin to sing on the chord (s1a-026 122)
 I love talking but if I talk for three days flat without a longish period of solitude I begin to feel ill (s1b-046 020)
 I begin to have thoughts and ideas that I didn't have before (02a-027 073)
 People began to doubt if the police force was really theirs (s1b-033 035)

But there are fewer examples of BEGIN with *-ing*, especially with the form *begin* (less so with *began*). With the form *begin*, I found only one example:

- (12) A night to begin packing possessions acquired during more than a decade in the office (s2b-003 099)

There were a few more with *began*, such as:

- (13) Maintenance crews have worked on them every day but this morning they began loading bombs and sweeping snow off the planes' wings and fuselage (02b-005 014)
 Mr Major and Mr Hurd began campaigning in earnest today (02b-011 160)
 The company began grounding its planes last night (02b-015 069)
 Without power and in heavy seas the vessel began taking on water (02b-016 014)

A brief count shows that there are nine examples of BEGIN plus the *-ing* form, but forty-one of BEGIN with *to* (four times as many).

In contrast with the examples for BEGIN, there are many examples of both START (the forms *start* or *started*) plus *-ing* and of START with *to*. Examples with *to* are:

- (14) Well before we start to talk about finances (s1b-922 014)
 And again the Soviet Union can start to build deep from the back (02a-001 084)
 And then even though I'd started to do some sort of basic homework on a subject
 I know nothing about ... (s1a-064 019)

Examples with *-ing* are:

- (15) Tried twice to start reading that and couldn't get interested at all (s1a-016 214)
 I suppose because it gets light now and ... the birdies start singing (s1a 019 298)
 And so I started applying for jobs in that field journalism and in publishing and
 just anything like that (s1a-034 179)

A brief look at the corpus shows that the number of examples of START with *to* is roughly the same as that of START with *-ing*. Nevertheless, it is clear that, overall the *-ing* form is favoured much more by START than by BEGIN.

In the examples of START with *to* as in Ex. (14) it seems that it is the initiation of the situation that is more salient – not its progressivity. This is particularly clear with the first and third in (14): in the first, *before we start* simply sets the time of the start and the third similarly indicates the time with *even then* (and then refers to starting on a *new* subject). By contrast, in the examples of START with *-ing* as in Ex. (15) there may be an implication of progressivity. In the first, for instance, it was not the just the start of reading that failed to interest the speaker, while in the last it is clear that applying for jobs continued for some time.

Secondly, it is also noticeable that there is only one example of BEGIN WORK but four examples of START WORK. (though all except one are from written texts). Notionally these are all SS (same subject—the person identified as the subject is the person who works):

- (16) The Frenchman began work in 1175, but at the beginning of his fifth year,... the scaffolding collapsed under him and he fell fifty feet (w1b-027 103).
- (17) We do not wish to press you to start work during February, while the weather is wintry (s1a-010 312)
 I hope she's coming down because I start work on Thursday (w1b-027 103)
 In this case the automatic period of interruption of employment will end the day you started work (w2d-004 101)
 You cannot include a young person ... even if Child Benefit is still in payment for him or her and they have not yet started work (w2d-005 107)

WORK, of course, suggests progressivity and is mostly associated with START. I am tempted to ignore the single example BEGAN WORK – I would almost certainly use *started work* here. That would confirm my earlier suggestion (see Ex. (8) that START WORK is the norm).

Thirdly, it is almost certainly relevant that there is the verb RESTART and (see below) RECOMMENCE, but no verb *REBEGIN. For, if BEGIN suggests simple initiation (without

progressivity) it makes little sense to suggest that a situation has more than one beginning. But if START implies progressivity, the situation may have more than one start.

Fourthly, there is a difference between BEGIN and START when the verbs are followed by direct objects (nouns preceded by the definite article *the*) that suggest some progressivity. Consider:

- (18) The player began the match
The player started the match

These suggest ‘began to play’, ‘started to play/playing’.)

- (19) ??The referee began the match
The referee started the match

The first is unlikely and the second is different from (17) – the referee does not play in the match, but is the one in charge of it. Although *the match* is grammatically the direct object, notionally (but not grammatically) the first two (with both BEGIN and START) are ‘same subject’ (SS) in that they mean that the player started/began to play/playing in the match. The second pair are notionally ‘different subject’ (DS) in the sense that the referee does not play in the match, even though he is responsible for its initiation. But the third example is very unlikely—initiating an activity such as a match is likely to be signalled by START rather than BEGIN.

I found some similar examples in the corpus by looking for BEGIN plus *the* and START plus *the* with direct objects that suggest progressivity. I found only three with BEGIN:

- (20) When taxonomists begin the identification of a fungus, they look at the size, shape and colour of the above ... (w2b-030. 025)
It was here in nineteen seventy-seven that they began the national celebrations of twenty-five years of Her Majesty's reign with a service of thanksgiving (s2a-020 084)
The Soviet Union has expressed regret that the coalition forces began the land war without allowing more time for peace negotiations (s2b-014 090)

Only the first of these clearly suggest ‘same subject’ (the taxonomists were the people who made the identification), it may be argued that, even with the second two, the people who ‘began’ the activity were, in part involved in carrying it out. (Yet, I find all of these to be unusual – I would greatly prefer START).

There are far more examples of START with an implication of progressivity (about twenty-five in all) but a smaller number of them are clearly ‘same subject’ notionally, e.g.,

- (21) We don't want them to be injured just before they start the match, do we? (s 1a 020- 267)
I'm now about to start the second project (w1b-919 172).
I started the course thinking that I'd do the full seven years (s1a-034 014):

In fact, as was seen earlier (Ex. 19), there are a few (doubtful?) examples of BEGIN with a direct object that suggests some progressivity. But BEGIN cannot be used, if the

direct object does not suggest progressivity, although START can, as shown by (repeated):

- (22) The mechanic started the engine
*The mechanic began the engine

It may be that the reason is that the implication of progressivity is part of the meaning of START but not of BEGIN: START, but not BEGIN, CAN suggest the subsequent operation of the engine.

However it should be mentioned that another verbal form is START OFF. Most of the examples are not followed by another verbal form, though there are three that are followed by *-ing*:

- (23) Well I started off applying for jobs ... in architecture (s1a-034 160)
So I started off doing that and I just realised ... there's just not any point (s1a-034 175)
But as I say I started off analysing s1a-082 072)

START OFF is not directly entirely relevant to the discussion for three reasons. First, it is not a catenative – it cannot be followed by *to*. Secondly, the *-ing* form is not closely associated with START but is more like an independent participle (compare *I started quite happy*). Thirdly, the appearance of OFF shows it is a phrasal verb and it is such adverbs that largely determine the meaning.

Consideration of the four arguments may lead to the conclusion that three types of aspect are involved. One is initiation, but from the comparison of the two verbs and of the *to* construction and the *-ing* it seems that there is a potential contrast between (i) initiation with origination and (ii) initiation plus progressivity. But, since this distinction is not an absolute one – we cannot simply assign initiation + origination to BEGIN and initiation + progressivity to START, nor can we assign these to the *to* construction and the *-ing* construction, what can be stated is that absence of origination and lack of progressivity is more associated with BEGIN and with *to*, while initiation plus progressivity is associated with START and *-ing*.

3.2 Progressivity: CONTINUE and KEEP

Both CONTINUE and KEEP were described as verbs of progressivity but there are differences between them. The most obvious is that CONTINUE usually suggests the continuation of a situation that is already in progress, but KEEP does not. (For 'continuation' of a situation I suggest the term **resumption**. There are four issues to be considered:

First, CONTINUE may be followed both by *to* and by *-ing* but KEEP can be followed only by *-ing*:

- (24) He continued to talk
He continued talking
He kept talking
*He kept to talk.

There are plenty of examples in the corpus of CONTINUE plus *to* and of KEEP plus *-ing*:

- (25) The allied air forces have continued to bombard key military targets in Iraq and Kuwait during the night. (s2b-015 04025)
Flowers continued to arrive at Downing Street this morning (02b-020 037)

Imports have fallen while exports in some sectors ... cars have continued to grow strongly. (02b-041 100)

- (26) I keep watching the film over and over again (s1a-016 037)
 Oh yes I keep thinking you're chairperson but you 're not (s1a-074 343)
 They keep swapping places like musical chairs and at the end of it only one of them will be left sitting down (s2a-007 107)

But there are only five examples of CONTINUE plus *-ing* (with three of them from a written text). Three examples are:

- (27) Moore theorises that he continued owning those cells following their removal from his body (s2b-046 041)
 Generally I continue painting if I'm enjoying it (s1b-008 145)
 John and Elizabeth Dickens wanted their son to continue working in the blacking ware-house (w2b 006 073)

It is, perhaps, surprising that the regular pattern of CONTINUE is with *to* rather than with *-ing*, because CONTINUE is clearly a verb of progressivity. Paradoxically, it may be this fact that accounts for its use with *to*: with that progressivity is an intrinsic feature of CONTINUE (but not of KEEP).

Secondly, CONTINUE usually refers to an action already in progress, while KEEP does not. Compare:

- (28) Please continue talking to us about your experiences
 Please keep talking to us about your experiences

The first (with CONTINUE) implies that the person addressed had been talking about his/her experiences, but the second (with KEEP) does not. Similarly, all the examples with COMMENCE-in Ex. (25) and (27), with either *to* or *-ing*, suggest that the activity had already been in progress – *continued to bomb* in the first example of (25) indicates that there had been bombing before, and *continue painting* in the second of Ex. (27) indicates that the speaker had been painting previously.

In some contexts CONTINUE and KEEP appear to be interchangeable – but this depends on the context. Consider:

- (29) I advised Sue to be quiet but she continued to talk
 I advised Sue to be quiet but she kept talking

The first of these (with CONTINUE) strongly suggests that Sue had been talking when I advised her to be quiet, but the second (with KEEP) does not suggest that she had been talking, but the context (in which I advised her to be quiet) may allow that she had.

But there is a clear difference with:

- (30) After the treatment, Sue continued to feel ill
 After the treatment, Sue kept feeling ill

In the first, CONTINUE still suggests that Sue had been ill before (in spite of *after the treatment*, but in the second, the implication (with KEEP) is that her feeling of illness started after the treatment.

Thirdly, CONTINUE, but not KEEP, occurs as an intransitive verb and, more importantly, may occur with direct objects that suggest or, at least imply, progressivity, though KEEP may occur, in a different (but possibly related) sense, with other objects:

- (31) Please continue the lesson
 NOT *Please keep the lesson
 BUT Please keep the book

Examples from the corpus are:

- (32) She didn't want to continue the relationship (s1a-072 200)
 Is it in order for a member ... to continue the debate after that vote is taken?
 (s1b-051 014)
 The Soviet leadership is still maintaining it's not too late to continue diplomatic efforts (s1b-014 098)
 But the Soviet President nonetheless had continued his campaign of high-level diplomatic activity (s2b-014 094)

Fourthly (a minor point), KEEP does not occur (in the sense of progressivity) with *work* and CONTINUE is unlikely in such a construction:

- (33) *The men kept work
 ??The men continued work

There are no examples of either in the corpus, but it may still be significant that KEEP is quite impossible here, but CONTINUE is possible, if unlikely.

There is, however, another, but different and important issue -- that, KEEP often suggests iteration (repetition of the activity), as is clear from two examples of Ex. (26) and the second example of Ex. (30) (repeated here):

- (34) I keep watching the film over and over again (s1a-016 037)
 They keep swapping places like musical chairs and at the end of it only one of them will be left sitting down (s2a-007 107)
 After the treatment, Sue kept feeling ill

Over and over again, the reference to musical chairs and Sue's repeated feeling of illness clearly suggest iteration.

It should be added that iteration is more clearly indicated by KEEP ON:

- (35) He kept on complaining
 He kept talking about them

Examples from the corpus are:

- (36) I keep on asking people to believe that there really is something wrong and they just don't ... (s1a-062 043)
 But I kept on feeling wobbly all day you know and I kept on feeling really miserable (s1a-043 022)

There is even the colloquial:

(37) Don't keep on

This might be a request or an order to stop continual complaints or other undesired behaviour. This is not wholly relevant; KEEP ON is a phrasal verb and phrasal verbs display a variety of aspect-like features. But, as with the discussion of START OFF, KEEP ON can be seen as an intensifier of KEEP and so support the evidence of iteration as an aspect associated with KEEP.

From the discussion in this section it may be seen that:

- (i) CONTINUE signals the continuation of events or states that are already in progress, but KEEP does not. Although both verbs signal progressivity, CONTINUE suggests resumed progressivity – the aspectual feature of resumption.
- (ii) CONTINUE signals progressivity in relation to situations, not only with *-ing* forms, but also with nouns that indicate activity, while KEEP indicates progressivity only with *-ing*.
- (iii) Iteration is, an aspectual feature associated with KEEP (but not with CONTINUE).

3.3 Termination: FINISH and STOP

Although STOP and FINISH are both listed here as termination verbs (i.e., as terminative in terms of aspect), they differ, in that both refer to an activity (or state) in that period, but STOP suggests termination during or at the end of the period, while FINISH suggests **completion** of that activity.

However, neither STOP nor FINISH occur with *to* – we cannot say **The striker finished to play* or *!The striker stopped to play*. (The latter sentence can be used in the different sense of 'He stopped in order to play'.)

There are plenty examples of STOP with *-ing* in the corpus,

- (38) They have stopped abolishing wages councils (s1b-055 0028)
 I stopped dancing ... six, seven years ago (s1a-002 063)
 He stopped drinking, stopped smoking (s1a-058 043)
 As soon as I stopped concentrating hard ... (s1b-026 052)

I noticed only one example of FINISH with *-ing*:

(39) Can't you wait until everyone's finished having their lunch? (s1b-049 039)

It may be asked if there is any reason why the verbs occur only with the *-ing* construction. A possible explanation is that progressivity is relevant to the interpretation of both of them. With FINISH it is stated that the striker continued to play until the end of the game and with STOP that he ended his playing within the duration of the game. But it may be that there is no explanation – it is simply an accident of grammar.

There are three points to be made. First, consider the potential contrast of:

- (40) The men stopped working at midday
 The men finished working at midday

These two may have the same sense – simply indicating the time at which the working terminated. But there is a potential difference: with STOP, the sentence might suggest that the workers went on strike or that they were advised to stop because of some

problems whereas with FINISH there is a clear indication that they worked until the normal ending of their work. This suggests that there are two kinds of termination: with STOP, the termination can be abrupt and on purpose, while with FINISH it indicates termination at the end of an activity or state. Yet with both verbs progressivity is a feature relating to the (final) period of time. With STOP, then, there is simply termination but with FINISH, we might say that there is the aspectual feature of completion as well as termination.

Secondly, both verbs occur with *work*:

- (41) The men stopped work at midday
The men finished work midday

Their meaning is very little different from that of Ex. (37) (with *-ing*). Examples from the corpus are (though there is only one with FINISH):

- (42) British and Irish nurses at a Baghdad hospital have stopped work in protest at not being allowed to leave Iraq (s2b-018 007)
You got the message that the Scott Coopers wanted you to stop work until their surveyor had inspected ... (s1b-009 151)
Now it's quite clear that the pain was not sufficient at that time to cause him to immediately to stop work (s2a-007 173)
The house lights have now been rewired and as far as I am aware, the contractors have finished work. (w1b-021 142)

Thirdly, both verbs occur with direct objects (with *the*) as in:

- (43) The striker finished the match
The striker stopped the match

The difference is not always apparent but there may be different interpretations: with FINISH it is that the striker continued playing until the end of the match ended, whereas with STOP it may be that, either voluntarily or involuntarily he ended his playing at some time in the match (or, perhaps, in his life-time). This difference rather suggests that we should be considering FINISH to be completive rather than progressive like STOP. The difference is more obvious with one change of subject:

- (44) The striker finished the game
The referee stopped the game

The sense of the second is now clearly not that the referee stopped playing the match but that he brought the match itself to a (temporary?) close. This is similar to the difference with START and BEGIN (see Ex. (18)), except that start allows the sense of 'started to play' as well as 'caused the start of the match'. (Notionally, because there is no second verb, the first sentence (with FINISH) is still SS but the second is DS ('different subject').

There are corpus examples of both FINISH with direct objects where it is clear that some progressivity is implied:

- (45) I haven't finished the form yet (s1a-078 209)
Since I finished my degree (s1a-084 045)

The implication here is that of writing the form and working for the degree. There are also examples of STOP:

- (46) Mr Gorbachev said the Soviet leadership would do everything to stop the war as soon as possible (s2b-008 063)
I feel it is necessary to take formal legal action to protect my own property and to stop the nuisance (w1b-016 110)

Here some activity is still implied (fighting in the war and being a nuisance) so that FINISH could be used – *finish the war, finish being a nuisance*. But, if the direct object does not imply progressivity, only STOP can be used:

- (47) stop the engine
NOT * finish the engine

In this respect STOP is like START:

- (48) start the engine
NOT begin the engine

Examples are:

- (49) So it should be the parliamentary members that stop the Government (s1b-011 172)
These enable you to slow down and stop the machine (s2a-054 022)
This is an infallible way to stop pickpockets. (w2a-009 070)

Both FINISH and STOP occur as intransitives:

- (50) Did you feel satisfied when you'd finished? (s1b-048 069)
Finally finished the week before (s1a-940 175)
And plenty of horses finished (s2a-005 251)
- (51) I know he stopped years ago (s1a-015 117)
En route for here, we stopped at Tullés, Bourges, and Albi. (w1b-014 022)

3.4 An overall pattern?

Perhaps we should suggest, it would seem, the possibility of an overall pattern for the three types of verbs.

As has been suggested, the difference between FINISH and STOP is rather similar to that of BEGIN and START. BUT a more important similarity is that of (i) initiation + origination for BEGIN and initiation + progressivity for START and (ii) termination + completion for FINISH and termination + progressivity for STOP. For origination and completion indicate the beginning and end points of an activity, so that both might be indicated by a common term. For this I suggest '**punctuation**' (a term used by Lyons (1977: 65) in a different, but related context and also by mathematicians).

Moreover, the situation with the progressivity verbs KEEP and CONTINUE can be seen in a similar way, though this is easiest seen if we think of a time of duration involved with progressivity rather than progressivity itself. For KEEP, like BEGIN and FINISH does not suggest any action or event at any point within that period (duration), while

CONTINUE, like START and STOP, suggests the possibility of action at a particular point (within that period). So START, CONTINUE and STOP may suggest the relevant action at any point during the period of progressivity, but BEGIN (generally), KEEP and FINISH do not. (Notice, in particular, that one can start, continue or stop the relevant action (initiation, progressivity or termination) more than once, but not, normally, begin, keep or finish performing the action.)

4 Peripheral verbs

4.1 COMMENCE

COMMENCE is clearly another verb of initiation, There are seven examples in the corpus, but six of them are from written texts. Most are simple intransitives but three have direct objects, all of them suggesting progressivity:

- (52) The base was provided for the cutting head to commence operations (w2a-031 107)
 When the Council of State asked John Milton to refute it, he commenced his reply (w2a-006 023)
 Betws Colliery commenced production operations in the South Wales anthracite field in 1978 (w2a-031 010)

There are no examples of COMMENCE with either *to* or *-ing* (though neither seem completely ruled out).

In all the examples COMMENCE can be replaced by START with little obvious difference of meaning. The difference is, almost certainly, one of formality.

4.2 CEASE

I deal with CEASE next because it too suggests an interpretation in terms of aspect.

First, CEASE suggests a completely final (in medical terms ‘terminal’) end, as can be seen in:

- (53) She stopped breathing
 She ceased breathing (or to breathe)

With the first it might be possible to add *but the doctors succeeded in getting her to breathe again*, which is unlikely with the second, where it is implied that she died.

It is relevant to add that *a cease fire* usually indicates the end of a war, so that, in what the military call a ‘scheme’, soldiers would be given the order *Stop firing* rather than *Cease firing*.

Consider the following examples:

- (54) She’d obviously ceased to work ... because of the need to attend to the hernia (s2a-062 040)
 The northern kingdoms ... ceased to exist (w1a-001 058)
 Once these had been exhausted, he ceased making reflecting telescopes (w2a-040 077)
 But after a while the weekends in Yorkshire became less frequent and eventually ceased altogether (w2f-011 079)

I confess that I do not have a label for this in terms of an aspect – perhaps ‘final termination’?

There is another point to notice – the use of the construction with *to*. Since both verbs are terminative, why does CEASE occur with *to*, while STOP (together with FINISH) does not? Consider:

- (55) She ceased to breathe
 ! She stopped to breathe (except in the different sense of ‘in order to breathe’)
 * She finished to breathe

There is a possible explanation. If CEASE indicates a final (terminal) end, the duration of the previous events is not relevant in the sense that it is for FINISH and STOP. So there is no requirement that the *-ing* form must be used. There is, perhaps a further point. With a verb such as exist, the *-ing* form is unusual with the progressive (see above). So the *to* form will be used with CEASE, as in the example (54) above:

- (56) The northern kingdoms ... ceased to exist (w1a-001 058)

This, of course, means that we cannot use CEASE with STOP or FINISH – there is no:

- (57) *The family stopped existing/to exist
 *The family finished existing/to exist

This is hardly surprising – it would make little sense to say that the family stopped existing during its duration (STOP) or that it continued to exist until its end (FINISH). But it makes good sense to say that the family (finally) ceased to exist.

4.3 QUIT

QUIT is another verb of termination, but there is only one example (of an intransitive) in the corpus:

- (58) Ben Elton and Richard Curtis who wrote it ... quit while they’re ahead (s1b-043 141)

However it can be used with *-ing* with roughly the same meaning as STOP (but more colloquial) and with a direct that implies progressivity:

- (59) Quit talking.

It can also be used in the rather different sense to mean ‘leave’. Both with a noun that suggests progressivity such as the match and with a noun that signals a location:

- (60) He quit the game
 They quit the premises

4.4 Other forms

Another verb that might be discussed is END, which seems to be similar to FINISH, but I found no examples in the corpus. But there is also END UP:

- (61) Why have I ended up quoting you this? (w1b-006 039)

There are other forms that, like END UP, are phrasal verbs – (verb + adverb) and could also be considered. START UP and KEEP ON have already been discussed – they are intensifiers. GIVE UP is another possible terminative:

(62) I've given up reading *The Times* (w2f-018 195)

There is no time here for a detailed discussion of phrasal verbs. That is 'another story'.

5. Summary

To conclude, the aspectual features of the verbs discussed seem to be:

START:	initiation + progressivity
BEGIN:	initiation + origination (punctuality)
(COMMENCE:	initiation – formal)
KEEP:	progressivity + iteration
CONTINUE:	progressivity + resumption (punctuality?)
STOP:	termination + progressivity
FINISH:	termination + completion (punctuality)
(CEASE:	termination + completion with finality)
(QUIT	termination with departure)

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