1. Introduction

The effects of contact-induced grammaticalization on the aspectual systems in bilinguals have been the primary focus of recent studies, with a particular focus on unbalanced bilinguals, e.g., heritage speakers; (Silva-Corvalán 1994; Koontz-Garboden 2004; Polinsky 2008; Montrul 2009; Laleko 2010; Shi 2011; Moro 2017). In this research note, we continue this trend by investigating the syntactic and semantic properties of the aspectualizer schaerte ‘to start’ in the Pennsylvania Dutch vernacular spoken in Holmes County, Ohio. Consistent language contact between Pennsylvania Dutch (PD) and English (E) has taken place over the course of centuries, resulting in an L1 Pennsylvania Dutch population that is composed of diglossic bilinguals by the time they finish formal schooling at the age of 14.

The steady borrowing and integration of the aspectualizer schaerte ‘to start’ into PD is widely attested in discourse, while the aspectualizers uffeere ‘to stop’ and aahalde ‘to continue’ from the Palatinate base dialect are also retained. This alone may not be surprising, since lexical borrowing is common in cases of close language contact (Matras 2009). What is perhaps unique about this situation is that not only have PD-speakers adopted the semantics of these aspectualizers as they are commonly used in English (see Section 2), but that the integration of these pseudo-auxiliaries has also had an impact on the complementation (i.e., syntactic) properties of clausal structure immediately following these elements.

To illustrate this point, consider (1), where the complement of schaerte ‘to start’ into PD is widely attested in discourse, while the aspectualizers uffeere ‘to stop’ and aahalde ‘to continue’ from the Palatinate base dialect are also retained.

In (1) we observe that the predicate gucke which appears in the complement clause of the aspectualizer schaerte ‘to start’ can be optionally interpreted as either an infinitive or gerundive. Therefore, on the surface, it appears that the (morpho)syntactic properties of the complement phrases of aspectualizers in PD are ambiguous. Palatinate-based aspectualizers, such as uffeere ‘to stop’, appear to bleed this ambiguous reading, e.g., (2).

(1) a. Er und da Bu schaerte gucke in die boots.
   he and the boy start-PRES look-INF in the boots
   ‘He and the boy start to look in the boots’. (infinitive)

b. Er und da Bu schaerte gucke in die boots.
   he and the boy start-PRES look-INF in the boots
   ‘He and the boy start looking in the boots’. (gerundive)
Interpreting the complement of *uffheere* as a gerundive (2b) is the preferred choice. This situation was noted by Louden (2016, in press), who ascertains that tenseless infinitival forms are the preferred choice of predicate complements that can be licensed by aspectualizers and modal verbs. Louden introduces the following rules to account for this distribution (summarized from Louden, in press):

(3)  

a. Infinitival constructions are introduced with *fer* ‘for’ or are phonologically null *Ø*  
b. The distribution of these two options is dependent on semantically equivalent English expressions  
c. If the infinitival *to* is required in English, *fer* must occur in the Pennsylvania Dutch  
d. If English requires or permits a gerund or bare infinitive, *fer* is omitted

We make the case for the gerundive nature of the complements of *schtaerte* in PD, thus validating Louden’s proposal laid out in (3) above. Of equal relevance and importance, we consider the implications of these findings for theoretical approaches to syntactic change in language contact situation (e.g., Heine 2005; Heine & Kuteva 2005; Matras 2009).

This article adheres to the following structure: In Section 2 we provide a general overview of the syntactic and semantic properties of English aspectualizers, including a discussion on complementation. Section 3 introduces the Ohio PD-speaking community and the methods by which we obtained the primary data for this analysis. We discuss the distributional properties of the aspectualizers *schtaerte* ‘to start’ in Section 4. Here we also mention the relevance of instances of co-occurrence of aspectualizers with the progressive aspect (indicated by the allomorph *an*). In Section 5 we investigate the theoretical significance of these data and point to ways that future research can expand these initial findings.

2. Properties of English aspectualizers

Here we review the most salient syntactic and semantic properties of English aspectualizers, although the general semantic attributes outlined below could easily be extended into analyses of other languages. In doing so, we outline particular structural features that have been borrowed and/or approximated into the grammar of PD. There are four primary classes of aspectualizers introduced below in (4); (a) **ingressive aspectualizers** modify the onset and initial stages of an event (ex., *begin* and *start*), (b) **continuative aspectualizers** focus on the continuation or duration of an event (ex., *continue* and *keep on*), (c) **ergressive aspectualizers** modify the endpoint or completion of an event (ex., *stop*, *finish*, and *cease*), and finally (d) **habitual aspectualizers**, which depict events carried out in a habitual manner.¹ Due to space constraints, our primary empirical focus in this paper is on ingressives.

¹ Proposing a separate classification of aspectualizers that are habituas is controversial; see Binnick (2005) who treats the English quasi-modal *used to* as an anti-present-perfect tense marker.
Primary classes of aspectualizers in modern English (from Brinton 1988 and Nagy 2009):

a. **Ingressives**: Begin to V, V-ing, commence to V, V-ing, start (in/out) to V, (off) V-ing, etc.

b. **Continuatives**: Keep (on) V-ing, go on V-ing, remain V-ing, persist in V-ing, continue to V, V-ing, etc.

c. **Ergressives**: Cease to V, V-ing, finish V-ing, quit V-ing, stop V-ing, desist (from) V-ing, give up V-ing, etc.

d. **Habituals**: Used to V, Make a practice / habit of V-ing, Have a habit of V-ing, etc.

According to Freed (1979), the primary function of aspectualizers is to indicate the onset, beginning, continuation, cessation, or completion of the event of the complement predicate. It is a matter of debate as to whether or not aspectualizers express a temporal reference separate from that of the complement predicate; however, this position would explain how the temporal reference of the aspectualizer provides an anchoring reference time (RT) to the tenseless *to-infinitive* and -ing (gerundive) phrases which function as complements. Therefore, aspectualizers and the events expressed by their complement predicates form a complex event.

The semantic differences between the ingressives begin and start are minimal, yet these subtle differences are a determining factor in their complementation. Interpreting events as consisting of an **onset** (temporal segment prior to the event), a **nucleus** (time segment of the event in progress), and the **coda** (denotes the conclusion of the event), Freed (1979) claims that a key difference between begin and start, is that while begin refers to the first temporal segment of the nucleus, start refers specifically to the onset of an event. Therefore, although both share similar presuppositions, they contrast with respect to their consequence relations; begin always entails the subsequent occurrence of an event, while start may also entail non-occurrence of an event (see e.g., Nagy 2009: Section 5.1 for a detailed treatment).²

There are four primary complementation types in modern English:

(5) Four primary complementation types in English (Fanego, 2004: 5)

a. It is clear he made a mistake.

b. All I did was ask a question.

c. Max wanted to change his name.

d. The best plan would be for them to go alone.

e. Inviting the twins was a big mistake.

² There are other potentially important semantic attributes of aspectualizers that do not receive full attention here. For example, Givón (1993) classifies aspectualizers as a variant of deontic modality.

³ This proposal actually provides a clear explanation of the contrast between (2a) and (2b) in the first section.
3. Ohio PD – community and data collection

For our data collection, we recruited from both sectarian and non-sectarian PD speakers in Holmes County, Ohio. All of our informants were native speakers of PD and had learned E either simultaneously, or when entering elementary school at approximately six years of age. All informants used PD regularly, although the amount varied depending on their church affiliation (sectarian vs. non-sectarian) and age. For initial data collection, we asked participants to tell a picture-book story (Meyer 1969) to elicit free speech narratives. In this paper, we provide data from a subset of 4 native speakers of PD; 1 who is a member of the Old Order Amish Church, and 3 others who acquired PD as an L1 but did not join the church as adults. All speakers report that they continue to speak PD frequently, and even daily with family and friends.

Holmes County, Ohio is home to 42,000 people, including 20,000 Amish (Holmes County Chamber 2019), which currently makes it the largest Amish community in the world (Keiser 2012: 19). The Amish settlements in Ohio were founded in 1809 by four families, who moved to the Midwest from Somerset, PA. Many other families followed and settled in the same area, leading to a wide-spread community. While migration from Somerset to Holmes County was common, only few settlers from Lancaster county moved to Ohio (Keiser 2012: 20). Similarly, the European Amish immigrants who arrived in the US between 1815 to 1860, typically did not move to Holmes County, which is why they make up only 5% of the Amish population here (Keiser 2012: 20).

Contrary to popular belief, many Amish communities are not secluded from the non-Amish population, but do in fact, keep neighborly and business relations to the English-speaking majority. Moreover, while PD is used at home and in the community, E is the language of writing and education, creating a clearly diglossic situation (Huffines 1991: 126). Despite the diglossic communal language use and frequent lexical borrowing from E into PD (Louden & Page 2005), PD has retained its characteristics as a German variety. There is, however, some regional variation in the proportion and properties of borrowing from E. It seems that the Midwestern settlements are more prone to adopt E into their PD (Keiser 2012), although this view has been contested (Louden 1993). Besides the regional variation, differences between Amish vs. Mennonite communities (Anderson & Martin 1976) and sectarian vs. non-sectarian communities’ speech (Huffines 1991) have been described. It was found that non-sectarian native speakers of PD show a more conservative language use with regards to case marking, auxiliary -use and past participle placement, but switch to English as an avoidance strategy, when their language repertoire fails (Huffines 1991: 135). Sectarian communities, on the other hand, show a merging of dative and common case, a change in -auxiliary use and divergence in past particle placement, but do not switch to E when using PD, which indicates an accommodation and convergence to E (Huffines 1991: 136).

4. Distributional properties of schtaerte

The primary challenge in better understanding the syntactic and semantic characteristics of the complementation of aspectualizers in PD involves determining whether or not the complements are to-infinitives or gerundives. Louden (2016, in press) proposes that the syntax of INF-constructions in PD depends on the correlating semantics of the equivalent English expression. Whenever a to-infinitive is mandatory in English, must introduce the tenseless complement phrase in PD (see (3)).

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4 See Costello (1992) for a discussion of observed differences between Sectarian and Non-sectarian uses of periphrastic-do. We thank an anonymous reviewer for bringing this point to our attention.
Der Namber hinnenooch saagt dich welli Verscht fer lese.

The number after tell-PRES you which verse INF-marker read-INF

‘The number after it tells you which verse to read.’

‘S saagt wie fer en besser Lewe havwe nau.

It tell-PRES how INF-marker a better life have-INF now

‘It tells how to have a better life now.’

In (6) and (7), we have two examples in which the INF-reading is clearly expressed by the INF-marker fer. These examples stand in contrast to cases where both an infinitival or a gerundive would be possible. In these cases, we see a bare infinitive and a lack of the INF-marker fer (Louden 2016, in press).

Whenever PD only uses a bare infinitive without the INF-marker fer, either a gerundive or an infinitival complement is possible in English, which indicates that infinitives are syntactically ambiguous in PD. When we look at German continental dialects, similar structures can be found. Brandner (2006: 208) observes for Alemannic that certain verbs select bare infinitives without INF-markers. Among these verbs are glinge ‘succeed’, verschtoh ‘know’, afange ‘begin’, uffhöre ‘stop’ and sich traue ‘dare’. Interestingly, dialectal speakers of Alemannic seem to prefer the bare infinitive in extraposed position (Brander 2006: 207):

Example (8) indicates that we can find dialects of continental German whose syntactic properties of bare infinitives are ambiguous as well. Although geographically close in proximity, it does not appear that Palatinate German lacked infinitival zu-constructions unlike its Alemannic neighbor. PD lost the infinitival marker zu in the course of its historical development.

Returning to our PD examples, consider (9):

Die Ime schtaerte ihn nochgehe.

the bees start-PRES him after.go-INF

‘The bees start going/ to go after him.’

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the bees start-PRES him after.go-INF

‘The bees start going/ to go after him.’

In (9), we observe similar patterns as described for (1). Again, the aspectual verb schtaerte seems to allow an ambiguous reading of the infinitive nochgehe ‘to go after’ as either a bare infinitive or a gerund.

Interestingly, we find one case in which the infinitival verb is marked with an INF-marker, which disambiguates the meaning:

Und er is an schtaerte fer gehe.

the he is-PRES PROG start-PRES INF-marker go-INF

‘And he is starting to go (*going).’

5 Translational option added by the authors.
6 Translational option added by the authors.
7 We thank Mark Louden (p.c.) for bringing this to our attention.
On the surface, example (10) runs contrary to Louden’s (2016, in press) rule for the distribution of *fer* and null complementizers in tenseless phrases in PD, although, admittedly, it represents a unique occurrence in our selected speech sample analyzed in this abbreviated study. Here, we see a clearly marked infinitival reading that differs from all the other instances found in our data. It should be noted here that the structure of this sentence is very E-like: *is* seems to correlate with the auxiliary *is* in an E present progressive sentence, and while *schtaerte* is morphologically marked for progressive\(^8\), the usage of *fer* *gehe* resembles the *E to go*.

In (11), on the other hand, we observe a clearly marked gerundive reading for the aspectualizer accompanied by an infinitival reading for the complementary predicate. Again, the structure of this sentence displays strong semblance to E-like semantics and syntax: *is* is used like the auxiliary *is* in an E present progressive sentence and *schtaerte* is modified with the progressive aspect marker *am* to elicit a progressive reading. Therefore, the verb *reggere* ‘to rain’ can only function as an infinitive:

\[(11) \text{‘S is an schtaerte reggere.} \]
\[
\text{the is-PRES PROG-marker start-PRES rain-INF} \]
\[
\text{‘It Is starting (*to start) to rain (*raining).’} \]

In (11), we observe clear parallels to the E-construction with the auxiliary *is*, a progressive-marked aspectual verb *schtaerte* and the infinitive form *reggere*. Just like in (10), the verb *reggere* cannot be expressed as a gerundive in E, but allows only for an infinitive reading. The aspectual verb *schtaerte*, however, can only be interpreted as a gerund because it is preceded by the progressive-marker *am*. Additional examples with the Palatine-based aspectual verbs *uffheere* ‘to stop’ and *aahalde* ‘to continue/keep’ indicate that a gerundive is preferred, both in combination with a modal verb (12) and expressing a durative event (13) (translations provided by Mark Louden (p.c.), and confirmed by an L1 speaker of PD):

\[(12) \text{Ich habe welle uffheere schmoke.} \]
\[
\text{I have-PRES want-INF stop-INF smoke-INF} \]
\[
\text{‘I wanted to stop smoking (*to smoke).’} \]

\[(13) \text{Er hat aaghalde in die Scheier schaffe der gans Daag.} \]
\[
\text{he have-AUX keep-PAST in the barn work-INF the whole day} \]
\[
\text{‘He kept working (*to work) in the barn all day long.’} \]

Here the E translations of examples (12) and (13) only allow for a gerundive complement, while an infinitival interpretation is not possible. Overall, the usage of aspectualizers such as *schtaerte* allow for varying interpretations, but in the case of bare infinitives, the gerundive complement seems to be preferred, thus confirm Louden’s (2016, in press) rule summarized in (3). In the next section, we highlight the theoretical implications of our data.

5. Theoretical implications and future research

Although a detailed theoretical treatment of the complementation of *schtaerte* and other aspectualizers is beyond the scope of this article, here we point out the theoretical significance of these initial findings. The integration of aspectualizers and their conformity to English syntax and semantics can be interpreted as an instance of pattern replication (Matras 2009; Section 9.2), with the complementization of the sociolinguistically-dominant L2 (American English) setting the frame. Another mitigating factor in the development of the distributional patterns discussed by Louden (2016) and those also found in our data is the fact that the infinitival *zu* marker has been lost in the development of PD. Silva-Corvalán

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\(^8\) Of course, PD does not mark morphologically progressive aspect on the main verb, but the usage of an *am*-marker to express progressive reading is well described (see e.g. Brown & Putnam 2015; Tomas 2018).
(1994) approaches the issue of convergence from the perspective of simplification in a situation of ongoing language attrition; however, we adopt a slightly different view that does not appeal to any sort of attrition process. Following Putnam et al.’s (2018) model of an integrated cognitive architecture of bi/multilingualism, we propose that the development of converging structural patterns such as those discussed above are the result of mutual reinforcement of typologically similar structures. Complements of aspectualizers containing a tenseless predicate (i.e., either an infinitive or gerundive), develop as a default form. Given the documented trend in preference for gerundive complements of aspectualizers in American English (Fanego 2004; Rudanko 2006), the complement structure of [AspP schtaerte [vp V-e]] and its distributional properties can most accurately be classified as a gerundive. If our treatment of the complementation properties of English-origin aspectualizers is on the right track, it tacitly suggests that tenseless phrases that are headed by the preposition/complement fer ‘for’ are of a different nature, and likely represent ‘true’ infinitives.

From a generative perspective, following Fukuda (2012), we adopt the position that aspectualizers are functional heads within the ‘first phase’ (i.e., verbal projection) where event structure is determined (Ramchand 2008), thus adopting the view that the aspectual properties of language are compositional, hence syntactic in nature (Verkuyl 1972). Wurmbrand (2001) and Fukuda (2012) propose that the structural distinction between infinitives and gerundives depends on their position in the ‘first phase’, with the former requiring a Vp-projection and the latter only a VP-projection. Investigating both the syntax and semantics of Pennsylvania Dutch and these documented changes through the lens of generative theory will provide opportunities to investigate these constructions in connection with the entire grammar system. We leave these exciting opportunities for future research.

This initial investigation into the semantic and syntactic properties of complementation in PD in connection with aspectualizers opens the door to interesting open questions moving forward. With respect to its syntactic structure, a more representative sample of environments that license both types of tenseless complements is required to arrive at a more accurate description of the structure of aspectual complementation. Extending slightly beyond aspectual complementation, an important domain that also requires further investigation of the properties of the structure of non-pronounced subjects of tenseless phrases (i.e., PRO-subjects) in both aforementioned environments. The semantic properties of these complement phrases at the moment remains an unexplored domain of the structure of PD that will benefit from future research. Detailed treatment of the semantic attributes of aspectualizers and their complements will serve as the necessary background to development these studies (e.g., Freed 1979; Dirven 1989; Nagy 2009). In conclusion, agreeing with Bylund & Jarvis (2011), there are noticeable effects of the L2 grammar on L1 event conceptualization, and further agreeing with Heine (2005), the syntax of a language can be deeply affected by (sustained) language contact. PD represents a unique language that stands to enrich our understanding about the limits and possibilities of contact-induced syntactic change in the years to come.

References


