

Progressive aspect in Norwegian: a preliminary corpus study

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Extended abstract

The progressive aspect in Norwegian is primarily expressed through two grammatical constructions. The first is the expression *være i ferd med å* ‘be in the course of’ followed by an infinitive, similar to French *être en train de*. Example (1) illustrates this construction.

- (1) *Vårt livsmiljø er i ferd med å ødelegges.*
Our environment is in course with to be destroyed.
Our environment is being destroyed.

A preliminary study was made in NorGramBank, a large and detailed treebank of Norwegian made available through CLARINO (Dyvik et al. 2016).¹ Since the construction *være i ferd med å* is practically a fixed expression, the search expression was all forms of the lemma *være* followed by *i ferd med å*. There were 5928 matching sentences. The most frequent verb by far occurring in this construction is *bli* ‘become’ with 781 occurrences.

The other construction is pseudo-coordination with a quite restricted number of verbs, as illustrated in examples (2–6). These pseudo-coordinations were studied in NorGramBank. In this treebank, verbs potentially carrying an aspectual meaning in coordinations are labeled *VPasp*, as illustrated in Figure 1. A search for all verbs with the *VPasp* category resulted in the frequencies in Table 1.

41609	sitte
40448	stå
16350	ligge
10166	komme
9291	gå
8452	være
1015	drive

Table 1: Verbs occurring as *VPasp* in NorGramBank

¹All examples are taken from NorGramBank; some are abbreviated.

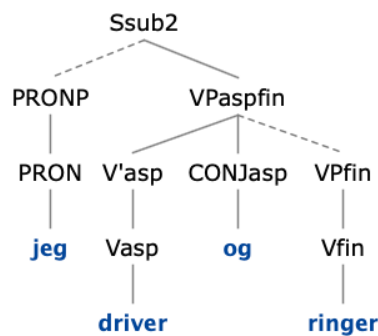


Figure 1: Analysis of a relevant part of sentence (6) in NorGramBank

The the most frequent category is verbs of posture, in particular *stå* ‘stand’, *sitte* ‘sit’ and *ligge* ‘lie’ (cf. Kinn et al. 2018). Example (2) provides an illustration. This progressive use of *stå* ‘stand’ can be compared to the progressive use of *stare* ‘stand’ in Italian, although the latter occurs with a gerund.

- (2) *Jeg visste at han sto og så på meg.*
 I knew that he stood and looked at me
 I knew he was looking at me.

In addition, basic verbs of motion, in particular *komme* ‘come’ and *gå* ‘go’, as in (3), may also express the progressive aspect, in contrast to English *going to*, which expresses the future.

- (3) *Jeg har nå en plan jeg går og overveier.*
 I have now a plan I go and consider.
 I now have a plan which I am considering.

Verbs of posture and motion in this construction are semantically bleached to various degrees. Especially in cases in which the verb has objects or adjuncts, for instance in (4), the semantics of posture or motion tend to be more prominent. The varying level of bleaching makes it difficult to assess algorithmically whether a coordination must be considered a pseudo-coordination in which the verb primarily carries an aspectual meaning, or not.

- (4) *Jeg lå i halvmørket og hev etter pusten.*
 I lay in half-dark and gasped for breath.
 I was lying in the half-dark, gasping for breath.

Some other verbs in pseudo-coordinations are *være* ‘be’ and *drive* ‘be busy’. The verb *være* is nearly always modified, in which case the semantics of the modification are prominent; when it occurs ‘naked’ in a co-ordination, as in (5), it is

often not aspectual, but may convey an implied location or direction. The verb *drive*, on the other hand, clearly conveys the progressive in pseudo-coordinations, but usually also implying a durative or repetitive meaning, as in (6).

(5) *Vårt upartiske praktpoliti har vært og avhørt meg.*
Our non-partisan magnificent police has been and interrogated me.

Our magnificent non-partisan police came and interrogated me.

(6) *Det er derfor jeg driver og ringer, ser du.*
It is therefore I am busy and call, see you.
It is therefore I am calling all the time, you see.

An analysis of verbal predicates occurring as the second conjunct in this construction will be presented. Preliminary data suggest that *være i ferd med å* tends to be used with process verbs relatively more often than the pseudo-coordinations are; the latter tend to be relatively more often used with actions.

References

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- Kinn, T., K. Blensenius, and P. Andersson (2018). “Posture, Location, and Activity in Mainland Scandinavian Pseudocoordinations.” In: *CogniTextes* 18.