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THE DEVELOPMENT OF ENGLISH ASPECTUAL SYSTEMS

Aspectualizers and post-verbal particles

LAUREL J. BRINTON

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Preface

This study had its origins in my doctoral dissertation on the development of aspectualizers in Germanic and in Old and Middle English. During a long period of reworking, the scope of the study was expanded to encompass a greater variety of problems concerning aspect and aktionsart in Modern English and more issues related to linguistic change. As a consequence, the present work explores the development of two different systems of aspectual marking in English, prefixes and post-verbal particles as well as aspectualizers, and pays particular attention to semantic motivations in the grammaticalization of forms within these two systems. Throughout I have considered it important to maintain a strict distinction between aspect and aktionsart and to delimit the contribution of individual items and forms to compositional aspectual meaning; these represent the more important contributions of the current work to a theory of aspect. Otherwise, the theoretical grounds of this work are semantically and functionally based, and there is a strong empirical orientation. Though the data are taken exclusively from the history of English, I believe that many of the ideas presented here have wider, cross-linguistic application, both to synchronic studies of aspect and to diachronic studies of semantic and syntactic change.

Chapter 1 includes some material on states and habits which is also contained in Brinton (1987); my initial ideas about aspectualizers, now substantially revised (Chapter 2), appeared in Brinton (1980); the theoretical framework of Chapter 3 is expressed in abbreviated form in Brinton (1985a), and Section 3.8 is reprinted from Brinton (1983); Chapter 4 is a revision of Brinton (1985b); and the section on OE verbal prefixes in Chapter 5 first appeared in Brinton (1985c). I am grateful to the publishers for permission to use this reworked material.

A number of people have offered stimulation and assistance as well as valuable criticism at different points in the writing of this book: Fred Bowers, Julian Boyd, Ingrid Breznizer, Donna Brinton, Gary Holland,
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