

# Master Thesis

## *Starting at the beginning:*

*a corpus-informed investigation into the verbs start and begin*

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# Abstract

The verbs *start* and *begin* are often thought of as near synonyms in the English language. Indeed, in certain contexts they may be used interchangeably without a significant alteration in meaning. This is because they share a common semantic domain as inchoative aspectualizers. However, as the present thesis shows, there are contexts in which *start* and *begin* do not overlap in meaning and use.

This dissertation uses theories presented by Freed (1979) as a starting point for the investigation into the inchoative verbs *start* and *begin*. Her main theories are that these verbs differ depending on their complementation, and that *start* may be used in contexts that are unavailable for *begin*. For example, *start* with infinitival complement constructions carries a particular connotation of *onset*, and the onset of an event has the unique possibility of being reversed. That is, someone may start to do something, but then not perform the action. Furthermore, she suggests that only *start* may be used about cause, sudden movement and the initiation of machinery.

This dissertation is a corpus-informed investigation testing Freed (1979)'s theories by analyzing translation data from the English-Norwegian Parallel Corpus [ENPC]. Evidence from cross-linguistic translation data supports Freed (1979)'s theories regarding the contexts in which *start* has different meaning potentials as compared with *begin*. Additionally, this dissertation has investigated the effect on usage of the syntactic difference between the cognates *start/starte*, finding that translators use three main ways of dealing with this issue. Interestingly, some Norwegian translations keep the inchoative reading of the source text without the use of an inchoative verb.



Dedicated to Ada, to Paul and to myself.  
Together, we make it through challenging times. Let's start our new  
beginning.





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# Abbreviations and symbols

**A** Agent

**BNC** British National Corpus

**dO** Direct Object

**CA** Contrastive Analysis

**CL** Contrastive Linguistics

**ENPC** English-Norwegian Parallel Corpus

**iO** Indirect Object

**NP** Noun Phrase

**O** Object

**QR** Qualia Role

**QS** Qualia Structure

**S** Subject

**V** Verb

**VP** Verb Phrase

\* Ungrammatical

# Unacceptable on semantic or pragmatic grounds

? Marginal or unacceptable



# Chapter 1

## Introduction

- Where do you wanna start?
- At the beginning, I suppose.
- And what was the beginning?

---

*“Tiger King”, Rick Kirkham  
Netflix 2020*

The verbs *start* and *begin* are generally accepted as synonyms, or at least near synonyms, in the English language. A synonym is defined as “a word or phrase that means exactly or nearly the same as another word or phrase in the same language” by the Oxford English Dictionary. Now consider the following sentences: *The lecture starts at noon; The lecture begins at noon; Shall we begin?; My car won’t begin; From start to end.*

You probably accept the first three as grammatically correct, but the last two might make you pause. This pause indicates that there could be underlying differences between these near synonyms which we attest to unconsciously. The present thesis seeks to investigate these differences by means of a contrastive corpus analysis. Tobin (1993, p. 161) states that *start* and *begin* is probably the lexical pair surrounded by the most linguistic controversy, and based on available research on the topic, it does indeed seem difficult to pin down any exact differences between the verbs in question. The most compelling attempt is presented by Alice Freed (1979) in her book *The Semantics of English Aspectual Complementation*, where she studies aspectual verbs. *Start* and *begin* fall under the semantic subgroup *inchoatives* – words that denote the entering into an event – and her theories on how they differ depending on their complement constructions create the premise for this thesis investigation.

Three main topics are examined in this dissertation: The first is an English monolingual comparison discussing possible factors responsible for any non-interchangeability between *start* and *begin*. The second issue is a cross-linguistic investigation into the claims presented by Freed (1979). Can translation data shed light on the theories in question? The third and last issue became apparent during the gathering and analysis of translation data, and entails questions about the English-Norwegian cognate pair *start/starte*: To what degree are these verbs used symmetrically in the data?

In the initial stages of this investigation, prior to any gathering of data, I had a hypothesis that the cognate pair *start/starte* are not always symmetrical. This thought was brought on by the grammatically incorrect Norwegian sentence *\*starte å gråte*. In English, we have no problem saying *I started to cry*, yet in a Norwegian context we would iterate this as *jeg begynte å gråte*. The data confirm this hypothesis, as the majority of sentences with *start to* are translated into *begyn\* å*. In fact, the Norwegian structure *start\* å* does not appear in the data at all, suggesting that this structure does not exist in Norwegian. What question does this fact raise with respect to meaning, if any?

The following chapters present the theoretical background for the topics discussed in this thesis. Concepts of importance include *inchoativity*, *aspect* and *catenative verbs*. Thereafter are chapters presenting the method used for collecting data, then the data itself is presented before diving into the analysis and discussion. A concluding chapter sums up the findings. First, however, is a section presenting the research questions.

## 1.1 Research questions

The present thesis seeks to investigate three main issues: The first question regards the English inchoative verbs *start* and *begin* and to what degree they overlap in meaning. Are these claimed near-synonyms interchangeable in use? The motivation behind this query is that the aspectual pair oftentimes occur in the same contexts, but does this mean that they are the same in terms of their syntax and semantics?

The second research question seeks to investigate whether Freed (1979)'s hypotheses can be supported by cross-linguistic translation data. This part builds on the idea that translations are (perhaps imperfect) mirrors of meaning distinctions, and thus may serve to support or disprove the presented theories. Can Norwegian translations give insight into linguistic differences between English inchoative verbs?

The third and last question stems from observations made when I collected data for this research project, and encompasses the English-Norwegian cognate pair *start/starte*. While the English verb appears frequently, the Norwegian counterpart does not. This raises questions about how symmetrical these verbs actually are. Are the cognates *start/starte* used in the same way in English and Norwegian?

## Chapter 2

# Theoretical background

This chapter presents central theories and concepts that create the basis for the present research paper. First is a demonstration of how *start* and *begin* are presented in a selection of dictionaries. Brief accounts of terminology like *inchoativity*, *catenative verbs*, *aspect* and *semantic roles* follow, before the next chapter presents the principal theories of this thesis.

### 2.1 Dictionary entries

One of the first things that struck me in the research for this thesis was that *start* and *begin* are defined by each other: In the Oxford English Dictionary [OED], the Cambridge Dictionary [CD], the MacMillan Dictionary [MMD] and the Merriam-Webster Dictionary [MWD], the word *start* has the word *begin* in its definition, and vice versa. Figure 1 and Figure 2 from the CD show the first part of the description of the verbs *start* and *begin* respectively, illustrating that these verbs are construed in terms of one another.

In the detailed descriptions of each verb we also see that *start* and *begin* are described by one another. As an illustration, in the description of *start* we find phrases like “begin to happen; begin to do something; begin a journey” (MMD), “to begin a course or journey; to begin an activity or undertaking” (MWD), “to begin doing something; to begin to happen or to make something begin to happen; to begin a set of activities; to begin; to begin being employed” (CD) and “begin to move or travel; begin to engage

**start**

*verb*

UK  /sta:t/ US  /sta:rt/

---

**start verb (BEGIN)**

Figure 1: Introductory definition of *start* in the Cambridge Dictionary.

# begin

verb [I or T]

UK  /bɪˈɡɪn/ US  /bɪˈɡɪn/

present participle **beginning** | past tense **began** | past participle **begun**

---

## begin verb [I or T] (START TO HAPPEN)

Figure 2: Introductory definition of *begin* in the Cambridge Dictionary.

in; begin one's working life; cause to happen or begin" (OED), to mention a few.

Conversely, in the definitions of *begin* we find the following phrases, among others: "to start happening or existing; to start speaking" (MMD), "to have a starting point" (MWD), "to start to do something" (CD) and "start speaking by saying" (OED). Some of the definitions naturally overlap as they use the same expressions.

Nevertheless, a few individual definitions do not seem to overlap. Only *start* includes the definitions "to make something begin to happen" (CD) (e.g. *police believe the fire was started by arsonists*); "to cause someone to do something" (MMD) (e.g. *what she said started me thinking*); and similarly "cause or enable to begin doing something" (OED) (e.g. *his father started him off in business*). These descriptions arguably contain elements of initiation and causation – notions that will be further discussed in chapter 3 and 6. On the other hand, *begin* stands out because only this verb contains the description "start speaking by saying". Searches in both the English-Norwegian Parallel Corpus [ENPC] and the British National Corpus [BNC] confirm that *start* is not used when referring to the action of speaking. See example from the BNC below.

(1) "[...] or vineyard, in New Zealand", he began, "to ensure that there is the right amount of grape exposed to [...]" (126)

Hence, there is an indication that some elements differ despite the verbs under discussion being defined by one another.

The following section introduces two concepts of importance for the verbs under discussion: *inchoativity* and *ergativity*.

## 2.2 Inchoativity and ergativity

In linguistics, there is a group of verbs called inchoatives. Trotter (1949, p. 96) states that inchoatives denote "the beginning of an action [...] or the development of an action in process". Saeed (2003, p. 120) explains that inchoative verbs describe a change of state, directing our attention to the beginning of a process. Comrie (1976, p. 20) on his part uses the term *ingressives* to denote verbs that refer to "entries into [a] state". Ingressivity is expressed by verbs and provide information about the stage of development of a certain situation, which may be conceptualized as

being about to unfold, or unfolding (Franceschi 2015, p. 2). The two verbs analyzed in this dissertation – *start* and *begin* – are inchoative/ingressive.

In the search for definitions of *inchoative*, the description found in the OED stands out. It reads: “denoting an aspect of a verb expressing the beginning of an action, typically one occurring of its own accord”. The last part raises an interesting question: Is there not an Agent or an initiator in inchoative sentences? Examples like *she began writing her paper* and *he started to knit a scarf* would suggest otherwise. The concepts of Agency and initiation will be discussed in chapters 2, 3 and 6 .

Trotter (1949)’s article titled “Inchoative Verbs” is a catalog of inchoatives with semantic notes, classified according to the grammatical character of the predicatives. He describes four categories, two of which will be presented here. One group denotes inchoatives with prepositional group predicatives (e.g. *to take to (doing) something*) which denotes a new habit, practice or activity, like *he took to chess/ drinking/ riding/ breakfasting in bed*. Another group denotes inchoatives with infinitives, e.g. *I came/ grew/ got to believe/ be fond of/ dislike*, which denotes a later stage of a mental process (contrasting with earlier). The only other common collocation in this group refers to the weather (e.g. *it is coming on to rain*). He furthermore suggests that most of the presented sentences could be rephrased in terms of only three inchoatives, namely *get*, *become* and *begin*. While some might argue that this statement is especially true for *begin*, and that both *begin* and *start* could be substituted for the previously presented verbs without a significant alteration in meaning (e.g. *He took to drinking – He started/began drinking*; and *it is coming on to rain – it is starting/beginning to rain*), there are shades of differences in meaning between these structures: *took to* plus *V-ing* connote the commencement of a habit, while *coming on to* strongly suggest that something is about to happen.

Another group of verbs that need presentation are ergative verbs. In Dixon (1994, p. 1)’s words, “the term *ergativity* is, in its most generally accepted sense, used to describe a grammatical pattern in which the subject of an intransitive clause is treated in the same way as the object of a transitive clause, and differently from transitive subjects”. Put simply, ergative verbs are defined as verbs that can be transitive (i.e. used with an object) or intransitive (i.e. used without an object), with the object of the transitive verb used as the subject of the intransitive verb, as such: *Henrik (S) started (V) the engine (dO)*, as opposed to *The engine (S) started (V)*. In the first sentence, *the engine* is a direct object, and in the second it is the subject.

The next section presents yet another group of verbs relevant for this investigation.

## 2.3 Catenative verbs

An important part of this thesis investigation is verbal complement constructions (*to-* and *-ing-*complements in particular). It is useful to have

one word to describe the first verbal element in these constructions, as linguists refer to this element in different ways.

Catenative verbs combine with other verbs within a single verb phrase forming a chain of verbs – thereof the name catenative (*catena* in Latin) meaning *chain*. The verb that follows the catenative verb usually functions as a dO or a VP complement, and occurs in its infinitive, present participle or base form. Different authors use the term ‘catenative’ in slightly different ways, with different senses. To avoid terminological issues that are not relevant to my research questions, I use it in the same way as Hasselgård, Lysvåg, and Johansson (2012). For them, catenatives are verbal elements that are neither true auxiliaries nor main verbs, and which have aspectual or modal meaning. As a comparison, Huddleston and Pullum (2005, p. 64, 1177) use the term in a slightly different sense. Hasselgård, Lysvåg, and Johansson (2012, p. 171) present the following four sub-categories of catenative verbs distinguished by their semantics.

1. modalizing expressions

- *seem to like, appear to be, tend to occur*
- e.g. “he *seems to be enjoying* his flat”

2. aspectual verbs

- *stop running, get to like, continue to read*
- e.g. “We *started/began walking* at dawn”

3. other uses of *get*

- “We *got to know* them when we lived in Seattle”

4. other catenatives

- “She *tends to avoid* confrontations”

Most relevant for this thesis are the aspectual catenatives, as both *start* and *begin* fall into this category. Some aspectual catenatives can be followed by either the *to*-infinitive or the present participle *-ing* form with little or no change in meaning, as shown in the following two sentences:

- (i) It started/began to rain
- (ii) It started/began raining

In his study on the difference between the infinitive and gerund form, Gramley (1980) states that the distribution of the infinitive and the gerund after the verbs *begin* and *start* is dependent on the intended meaning. His corpus-based study indicates that the basic distinction in meaning is between focus on an act (e.g. *stop to smoke*) [infinitive] and on an action (e.g. *stop smoking*) [gerund]. These example sentences connote a contrast not found with *start* or *begin*. Gramley (1980, p. 159) explains: “In a minority of instances elements of the context would prevent the substitution of the one



form by the other; in most cases, however, inter-changeability is possible without a disruptive change in meaning.”

The next section introduces *aspect* in the English language.

## 2.4 Aspect

In order to classify situations, we identify three dimensions: situation type, tense and aspect. Of these, aspect is the most relevant for the topic of this dissertation. While tense serves to locate an event in time, aspect views the action or state from within, and is hence “regarded as a property or characteristic of events or states” (Cruse 2004, p. 286). In Freed (1979, p. 10)’s words:

Whereas tense makes specific reference to time or to the chronological ordering of events in the real world, in particular with respect to the time of the utterance, aspect describes the temporal quality or condition of an event with respect to itself, in terms of such things as inception, repetition, completion, duration, punctuality, etc.

For example, the English verbal/inflectional system encodes two aspectual distinctions: simple/perfect (*Mary went/has gone*), and progressive/non-progressive (*John sang/was singing*). In his book on aspect, Comrie (1976) explains that one often sees a perfective/imperfective distinction across languages (in addition to various others). It is important to bear in mind, however, that the perfect (as in English) is not the same as the cross-linguistic perfective (Comrie 1976, p. 62).

In addition to her own description of *aspect*, Freed (1979) also presents several other linguists’ definitions: Aspect signifies “the relative duration or punctuality along a time line that may inhere in words or constructions” (Friedrich 1974, p. 1); “Aspect deals with the temporal values inherent in the activity or state itself” and that aspect characterizes “the narrated event itself without involving its participants and without reference to the speech act” (Jakobson 1957, p. 493); Comrie (1976, p. 3) declares quite simply that “aspects are different ways of viewing the internal temporal constituency of a situation”.

Freed (1979, p. 10) herself maintains that in all of the above definitions reference is made to the temporal quality of events (activities, states or processes), and the way in which they are viewed as progressing through time. The events are not viewed in relation to the time of the utterance, to actual moments of time, nor in relation to the speaker, she writes.

When lexical words carry similar meaning distinctions it is called *lexical aspect* or (by some) *Aktionsart*. Lexical aspect is important for this thesis because it analyzes inchoative verbs, and these, together with other aspectual

verbs, refer to temporal boundaries.

Key terms within aspectual features are *change*, *boundedness* and *duration*. Change, first of all, is considered the opposite to remaining constant and unchanging: Thus, when an event or state ‘happens’ or ‘is happening’, change is involved. Second, boundedness is when an event is perceived to have one or more inherent boundaries, such as a beginning or an end. If an event is understood as having a final boundary, e.g. being finished, stopped or completed, it is described as *telic* (e.g. *Oda walked to the park*). If the event is seen as having no such final boundary, it is described as *atelic* (e.g. *Oda walked in the park*). Third, duration concerns whether an event is construed as “taking time to unfold, or as occurring in an instant” (Cruse 2004, p. 286). If the event is (presented as) instantaneous, it is labeled ‘punctual’, whereas an event that is (presented as) spread over time is ‘durative’. In line with this, two more terms need to be mentioned: dynamic and stative situations. The choice of lexical items allow speakers to describe a situation as either static or as unchanging for its duration (Saeed 2003, p. 117). Typically, adjectives and stative verbs like *be*, *have*, *remain*, *know* and *love* are inherently static, as shown in the examples below. Sentence (iv) illustrates the unacceptability of a stative sense of ‘have’ with the progressive.

- (i) Cristian loves pizza
- (ii) The university library is in the Georg Sverdrup building
- (iii) Jon is tall / is tired
- (iv) # Henrik is having green eyes

By contrast, sentences describing dynamic situations imply a change in the action or the event. To illustrate the difference between stative and dynamic situations, Saeed (2003, p. 118) presents the following four sentences where (2a) and (3a) are stative, while (2b) and (3b) describe dynamic situations.

- (2) (a) The pears are ripe
- (b) The pears ripened
  
- (3) (a) The theater is full
- (b) The theater filled up

The inchoative aspect is one of several major aspectual classes of events in grammatical semantics, and as shown in section 2.2, inchoativity refers to the beginning of a new state (e.g. *he started smoking*, *the new arrangements were set up last week*, *as soon as I saw him, I knew he was guilty* (Cruse 2004,

p. 287-288)). Another example is the verb *arrive* in *the guests are arriving*, but a sentence like this highlights a problem: It is not always crystal clear when an event begins and when it ends – the first of which, of course, is the topic of this dissertation. A central question asked in this thesis is whether *start* and *begin* have dissimilar temporal boundaries.

The last aspectual class to mention is semelfactives. Although similar to achievements, they differ in that they do not involve a transition between two states, and hence they are commonly called ‘punctual accomplishments’ (e.g. *the bomb exploded*, *John gulped*, and *Mary tapped John on the shoulder* (Cruse 2004, p. 288)). As will be shown in chapter 6, one aspectual reading of *start* could be argued to belong in this semelfactive aspectual class as well as in the inchoative aspectual class: A sentence like *I started when the phone rang* is clearly punctual and atelic. However, in the usual test where semelfactives get an iterative reading with durative verbs and progressive aspect, it is doubtful whether sentences with *start* are acceptable (e.g. *?I started all night / ?I was/am starting* versus *I coughed all night / I was/am coughing* – the latter two entailing I coughed several times).

The next section introduces the concept of semantic roles.

## 2.5 Semantic Roles

Trask (2007, p. 251) explains that a semantic role is any way in which a person or thing may be involved in an action or state of affairs. “The idea”, he continues, “is that a given entity which is involved in some event must play some identifiable part in that event” (ibid). To illustrate, in the sentence “Lars cut the apple with a knife”, *Lars* is the Agent: the initiator of the action; *the apple* is the Patient: the entity undergoing the effect of the action; and *knife* is an Instrument: the means by which an action is performed or something comes about (Saeed 2003, p. 149-150). Saeed (2003) comments that each semantic role represents a different purpose, although the distinction is not always clear cut.

Up to a point, there is a conventional linkage between semantic roles and grammatical relations, but it is important to keep in mind that Subjects, for instance, are not always Agents. Linguists may use predicted relationships in the interface between semantics and syntax, which may aid, among other things, the classification of participants inherent in a verb’s meaning, and the grammatical relations it supports (Saeed 2003, p. 161). This may prove useful in a contrastive analysis of the verbs *start* and *begin*, as it may uncover differences in their transitive form and use. Furthermore, the question arises of whether *start* and *begin* have the same Patient roles. Dowty (1991, p. 576) suggests that an “inchoative interpretation entails a Proto-Patient property in the Experiencer that is not present in the stative”. He argues that a Proto-Patient role undergoes a (definite) change of state, and so it must be the direct object. Yet, in the following set of examples, this statement is questioned.

- (i) Mona built a house

- (ii) Helle knitted a scarf
- (iii) Fran broke an egg
- (iv) Kathrine began a story
- (v) Class began

All of the above clauses contain a subject (Agent) in first position, followed by the verb. Keeping in mind the definition of Patient role – the entity undergoing the effect of the action – one could argue that the Patients are dOs in the first three sentences. In (iv), however, this becomes more difficult. *Story* does not really fit under the definition of a Patient. The next clause (v) is intransitive because it does not have a dO, nonetheless it contains an inchoative verb, thus challenging the notion of inchoatives as Proto-Patients.

### 2.5.1 Qualia Structure

This section outlines a very influential account of lexical meaning due to Pustejovsky (1991). I include it here because it predicts meaning for coercion cases like *Julie enjoys coffee* and *Adam started the book*. This is helpful for the thesis as both inchoatives are oftentimes used in comparable contexts.

Qualia Structure [QS] is a system of relations that characterizes the semantics of a lexical item or phrase, and consists of four roles (Qualia Roles [QRs]) modeling the potential of such lexical items: 1) **Formal**: what an object is; 2) **Constitutive**: what it is composed of (i.e. the relation between an object and its constituent parts); 3) **Telic**: its purpose (i.e. the purpose or function of the object, if there is one); 4) **Agentive**: its origin (i.e. the factors involved in the object’s origins or coming into being) (Pustejovsky 1991).

In effect, the QS of a noun determines its meaning in much the same way as the typing of arguments to a verb determines its meaning, Pustejovsky (1991) explains. The elements that make up a QS include: *container, space, surface, figure* and *artifact*, also referred to as Qualia Features. The Qualia Features of the noun *coffee* would be as follows: **coffee** [Formal = liquid; Agentive = brew, make; Telic = drink; Constitutive = coffee beans, water,...]. In a neutral context, we will automatically interpret a sentence like “Julie enjoys coffee” to mean “Julie enjoys drinking coffee” because of the QS pertaining to the noun *coffee*, and because the verb *enjoy* selects for an object that denotes an activity. Similarly, in a sentence like “Julie finished her coffee”, the composition of the event-selecting aspectual verb *finish* and its object involves a rule that retrieves a possible event interpretation of “drinking the coffee”, Pustejovsky (1991) continues. These are examples of “type coercion”, he states, where the compositional rules in the grammar make reference to values such as QS, if such interpretations are to be constructed on-line and dynamically.

## Chapter 3

# The semantics of aspectual complementation

In her book *The Semantics of English Aspectual Complementation*, Freed (1979) dedicates one chapter to the detailed comparison of the aspectual verbs *start* and *begin*. She states that there exist semantic as well as syntactic distinctions between these two aspectualizers which native speakers attest to by their unselfconscious and natural use of them, despite the common belief that *start* and *begin* are close synonyms. Freed claims that because different forms of the verbs occur in different contexts, we can conclude that “particular syntactic forms can be correlated with specific semantic features and further that particular verbs, because [of] their associated presupposition and consequence relations, occur in certain syntactic structures and not in others” (Freed 1979, p. 64).

This chapter presents Alice Freed’s theories on the semantics of aspectualizers and their complements.

### 3.1 Aspectualizers and events

Before describing Freed’s analysis, the featured terminology needs to be clarified. Of special importance are the aspectual verbs themselves and the types of complements they take. The following sections present *aspectual verbs* and *events*. Then, Freed’s comparison of *start* and *begin* will be presented. Herein, subjects of importance are *complement constructions* and *causation*. Last, an introduction of Tobin (1993)’s theories are presented.

#### 3.1.1 Aspectual verbs

Aspectual verbs is a group of verbs “which operate on other verbs, sentences, or nouns (i.e. as two place predicates) and which have a consistent semantic effect of a temporal nature on these forms” (Freed 1979, p. 29). Put differently, “the verbs are designated as aspectualizers because in addition to lending aspectual readings to the sentences which contain them, each consistently describes the temporal condition of the verb or noun it operates on, and each has a particular temporal reference (or aspect)

of its own" (Freed 1979, p. 19). The aspectual verbs relevant for this thesis are, of course, the two indicating the onset and beginning of activities or events, namely the inchoatives *start* and *begin*. Freed's book discusses the whole group of aspectual verbs, namely *start*, *begin*, *continue*, *keep*, *resume*, *repeat*, *stop*, *quit*, *cease*, *end*, *finish* and *complete*. Freed maintains that the semantic consistency of these verbs represents periods of time relative to one another. Put differently, the beginning or 'first temporal period' of an event is the beginning relative to the moment just before during which this event had not yet begun. It does not, however, suggest the first or original inception of this particular verbal action, she states (Freed 1979, pp. 21-22). This distinction is important for her hypotheses, and will be further discussed later in this chapter (sections 3.1.2 and 3.2.1), as well as in chapter 6.

Without preempting any discoveries, it has been established that aspectualizers occur awkwardly with concrete objects, with two main exceptions: the verbs *start* and *stop* can readily be used with certain nouns, e.g. *to start/stop the car*; and a verb like *begin* may be used when the verbal portion of the complement is easily inferred [c.f. QS], e.g. *she began the book* from *she began reading/writing the book* (Freed 1979, p. 45).

Freed (1979, p. 25)'s claim is that the semantic and syntactic consistency of aspectualizers does not stop with the verbs themselves – rather it extends to the characteristics of the arguments that they operate on. This will be explained in the following section.

### 3.1.2 Events

The complements of aspectualizers are defined as *activities* or *events*. Freed (1979, p. 29) explains how an activity or an event can be sketched according to its place in time relative to other events, and because of this temporal conditioning they are well suited in a discussion of aspect. Depending with which aspectual verb these events co-occur, they will take various syntactic and semantic forms, she continues. The forms relevant for inchoatives will be of importance in this thesis.

Freed's analysis is a description of the nature and use of various aspectualizers with emphasis on the presupposition and consequence relations associated with the sentences in which they appear, in addition to the interaction of these verbs with an event. In this regard, a definition of 'event' is required. Freed (1979, p. 26) defines 'event' as the activity denoted by the complement of an aspectualizer when that verb is used in an aspectual sense. Complements of aspectual operator verbs can be consistently classified as events-denoting, she writes. However, there are some exceptions, especially related to the inchoatives in question in this dissertation. A small set of simple concrete nouns (e.g. *car*, *truck*, *mower*, etc.) that occur with *stop* and *start*, and certain complements of *begin*, *start*, *continue* and *cease* that occur in infinitival constructions, are among the exceptions that will be considered in this thesis.

Freed (1979, p. 30)'s presupposition is that language treats events as something that take place in a temporally ordered fashion, and therefore

may be segmented into a series of smaller temporal periods consisting of the following time segments: an **onset**; a **nucleus**; and a **coda**. She suggests that an activity is slightly different from an event, and illustrates her claim by presenting the different parts that activities can have: “[...] we may say that an activity is the nucleus of this larger entity called an event, and further that this portion of the event constitutes what has been referred to as the nuclear or characteristic activity of the event” (Freed 1979, p. 34). She presents an argument in which someone is driving to work: If the person stops at a red light and the car stalls, he is still considered to be driving to work. The possibility of an activity being interrupted exists and some may argue that this constitutes a new event, she explains, but the various time intervals are indistinguishable and thus constitute a single activity (i.e. nucleus of an event). In her view, the activity of driving to work does not end even though the car stops at a red light on the way. In other words, an activity consists of different stages. While cases where the activity in the *nucleus* is interrupted will not be considered in this thesis, the interruption of the *inception* stage is important, as will be seen below. Similarly, those events which are not considered completed after the end of the nucleus will not be considered either because they deal with *endings*.

Freed (1979, p. 31)’s notion of onset is of special importance, and therefore a definition is required:

The onset of an event is a temporal segment which takes place prior to the initial temporal part of the nucleus of that event. It is a preparatory stage necessary before the nuclear activity of the event (or action) is actually initiated. It is not an optional segment of the event in that it cannot be passed over or skipped in the temporally ordered sequence of time intervals that make up an event. It is presupposed of any ongoing event in this class of events.

She exemplifies an onset by stating that any event that someone starts to do but does not actually do is an example of an event that has passed only through its onset, because interestingly, the onset can be the only segment of an event that occurs (Freed 1979, p. 31). For example, if a person starts to sneeze, but for some reason does not actually sneeze, that person has experienced the onset of the event called a ‘sneeze’. “When such a situation presents itself,” she continues, “it is understood that the nucleus (or the nuclear activity) of the event has not gotten underway” (Freed 1979, p. 31).

The nucleus of an event, on the other hand, is the time segment during which the event is in progress. Put differently, it is the period during which the nuclear or characteristic activity of the event is taking place (Freed 1979, p. 34). She explains: “For any sentence naming an event, the occurrence of that event (or rather the sentence), is true at the time of the nucleus. For example, *I am leaving* is true at the time of the nucleus of the event called ‘leaving’” (Freed 1979, p. 34).

Something worth mentioning without going into too much detail, are events which do not involve human beings or animates. Examples of this

include the blooming of flowers and the formation of storms. In these cases, it is not easy for the average person to distinguish the onset of such mentioned events. Additionally, in these cases there exists possible confusion between 'onset' and 'cause' – a storm could arguably have both an onset and a cause, depending on how you look at it. Causation will be presented further in section 3.2.2, and discussed in chapter 6.

## 3.2 *Start and begin compared*

Freed starts her analysis by looking at the roots of each verb, showing that *start* and *begin* have dissimilar origins in the English language. Put briefly, the root sense of *start* is 'to rush; to gush out' or 'to set up; to move briskly'. From this we get one modern meaning of *start*, Freed says, as in 'the noise gave me a start' (Freed 1979, p. 69). The root sense of *begin*, on the other hand, is 'to open; to open up', as seen in English sentences like 'open a speech; open fire; open up negotiations', Freed continues. A more detailed discussion of this is presented in chapter 6.

She then presents the shared traits of *start* and *begin*, namely that they both indicate an initiating action – that is, an inchoative action. Furthermore, both verbs can take sentential complements, derived nominals and primitive concrete nouns as their second arguments. In her study, she claims that the difference between *start* and *begin* is to be found in these three structures.

What arguably is more interesting than similarities however, are the features that make the two inchoatives different from one another. In her research, Freed suggests that *start* contains significant semantic features not present in *begin*, and that *start* thus occur in additional contexts. Put differently, *begin* is more restricted than *start*, supporting a common notion of the latter verb as more formal. According to Freed, if the meaning of *begin* is more restricted, then its syntactic distribution is necessarily more restricted as well, and she claims that the data presented in her study substantiate this fact. She states: "*Begin* refers to the first segment of the time period in which the event (named in the complement) takes place. *Start*, on the other hand, refers to the first temporal segment of the event itself" (Freed 1979, p. 77). More details on her data are presented in the following section.

### 3.2.1 *Complement forms: to V and V-ing*

A substantial part of Freed's research is devoted to establishing that *start* and *begin* differ when taking sentential complements in either an infinitive or a participle form. She presents the following four sentences to illustrate her theory.

- (4) (a) Barbara began to study for her exams last week
- (b) Barbara began studying for her exams last week



- (c) Barbara started to study for her exams last week
- (d) Barbara started studying for her exams last week

All four cases have the same presupposition, Freed (1979, p. 70) explains: The event named in the complement of the sentence was not underway prior to the starting or beginning of the event. The two inchoatives thus seem identical with respect to their presupposition. Where we see differences, however, is when the entailment of each sentence is considered. Depending on the context, both sentences with *begin* can have as a consequence (5a) and (5b):

- (5) (a) Barbara is studying for her exams
- (b) Barbara was studying for her exams

In both case (4a) and (4b), the entailment is: Barbara did some studying. The situation for *start* is slightly different however, Freed maintains. In her view, while the entailment of sentence (4d) – *Barbara started studying for her exams last week* – is (6a) or (6b), sentence (4a) containing *start* with an infinitival complement structure does not necessarily have these same connotation. Rather, sentence (4a) entails (6c), but it does not entail (6a) or (6b).

- (6) (a) Barbara was studying for her exams last week
- (b) Barbara did some studying for her exams last week
- (c) Barbara started to study for her exams last week but then she did not do any studying

In other words, Freed's idea is that it may follow from sentence (4a) that only the onset of this event has taken place, and that the characteristic activity of the event named in the complement was not initiated. She sums up her findings in this way (Freed 1979, p. 71):

A significant difference between *begin* and *start* is that while sentences with both [inchoative verbs] presuppose the prior non-occurrence of the event named in the complement of the sentence, only from a sentence with *begin* does it necessarily follow that the nucleus (or characteristic activity) of the event has been initiated; a sentence with *start* followed by a *to V* complement can have as a consequence that only the onset of the event named in the complement has been initiated. We may conclude, therefore, that *start* refers to the onset of an event while *begin* refers to the initial temporal segment of the nucleus of the event.

Another set of sentences is presented to explain her claim. The following set challenges differing degrees of acceptability.

- (7) (a) He started to sneeze but then he didn't sneeze
- (b) ?He began to sneeze but then he didn't sneeze
- (c) \*He started sneezing but then he didn't sneeze
- (d) \*He began sneezing but then he didn't sneeze

The first sentence (7a) refers to the onset, but not the first temporal segment of the nucleus. In Freed's view, it seems natural to claim that someone can *start* to do something but then not do it, as example (7a) displays. *Begin*, on the other hand, refers to the first period during which the nuclear or characteristic activity of the event takes place, giving the possible interpretation of (7b) as (8a). She suggests that it is strange to claim that someone *begins* something that he then does not do any part of. She presents (8b) as a comparison to (7a):

- (8) (a) Henry began to sneeze but quickly regained his composure after sneezing only once
- (b) ?\*Henry began to sneeze but quickly regained his composure without actually sneezing

As has been shown, Freed (1979, p. 72) claims that the onset of an event is prior to its nucleus, thus, 'starting' is, in a sense, prior to 'beginning'. It seems from her analysis, however, that the temporal distinction between *start* and *begin* disappears when these inchoative verbs have participial complement constructions. Hence, the possibility of a reading that entails a non-initiation of the event named in the complement is limited to *start* with an infinitival complement. Freed exemplifies this with an analysis of the participial complement structure and how it relates it to the *be*-progressive form. She concludes that the *V-ing* form is unspecified as to its duration, and that this complement structure is syntactically and semantically related to the *be*-prog operator which carries with it progressive aspect. Moreover, the *be*-prog is an imperfectivizing operator, she suggests, "lending a durative aspect to any form it operates on essentially because it refers us to the nucleus of the event named by the verbal form in question" (Freed 1979, p. 73). In sum, the temporal distinction between *begin* and *start* disappears in the presence of participial complement constructions (Freed 1979, pp. 72-73).

### 3.2.2 Causation

The next part of Freed's theory deals with the notion of causation. She presents a discussion in which *start* still contains a sense of movement

(towards some action) held over from its older meaning (c.f. etymology – presented in chapter 6). Sentence (9a) may be paraphrased as (9c), yet (9b) does not have a paraphrase (9d).

- (9) (a) I started to walk towards the door  
(b) I began to walk towards the door  
(c) I started towards the door  
(d) \*I began towards the door

In the latter case, *begin* can only refer to the first temporal period of the nucleus of an event if the verb (or sentence) which names that event is actually specified, Freed (1979, pp. 77) suggests. *Start*, conversely, can indicate movement towards an unspecified event, and furthermore can do so without indicating the initiation of the nucleus of that event.

In the context cited below (examples (10ab) and (11ab)), there is an implied reference to an initiating action or cause, in addition to a simple temporal initiation. The syntactic form of these utterances is not unnatural for *begin*, Freed (1979, p. 80) states, and therefore it must be the semantic character of these utterances that precludes their occurrence with *begin*. The examples contain *start* and *begin* with noun objects that are either primitive nouns or derived nominals. According to Freed, these examples show that *start*, unlike *begin*, has a causative sense in addition to its aspectual one.

- (10) (a) Investigators tried to determine what started the fire  
(b) \*Investigators tried to determine what began the fire
- (11) (a) If you keep at it, you are going to start a fight  
(b) ?If you keep at it, you are going to begin a fight

The claim of Tobin (1993), however, is that all of the message types – be they semantic (causative) or syntactic (aspectualizer) – are motivated by what he calls a markedness relationship. This term will be explained in the next section.

### 3.3 Process and Result

Tobin (1993) frequently refers to Freed (1979) in his research on aspect in the English language. In his view, the difference between the inchoative pair under discussion lies in the asymmetric markedness relationship contained in their opposed invariant meanings (Tobin 1993, p. 164). Put simply, he makes two main claims: The first one is that *start* – which he calls the

marked member of the aspectual pair – makes a specific claim for Result. He explains that a verb marked for Result is reserved for linguistic and situational contexts where an action, state or event must be perceived ‘resultatively’, i.e. taking its result in the form of a goal, consequence, conclusion, destination, telic endpoint et cetera into account (Tobin 1993, p. 181). The second claim is that *begin* – unmarked member of the pair – is less marked than *start* because it does not make a specific claim to Result. Hence, *begin* is flexible, neutral and open-ended: it allows for any and all kinds of perceptions of actions, states and events, he states.

To explain his view on the difference between marked and unmarked forms, Tobin (1993, p. 182) refers to the collocates in expressions such as *from beginning to end* versus *from start to finish*. He states that idioms and expressions appear with unmarked collocates together, and marked collocates together, as exemplified in (12abc).

- (12) (a) *from start to finish* = marked  
(b) *a beginning, a middle, and an end* = unmarked  
(c) *start and stop* = marked

The notion of movement or the initiation of movement which Freed (1979) claims is only found in *start*, is also presented in Tobin (1993)’s research. He supports this theory by stating: “the marked forms [e.g. *start*] are more suited to imply more ‘punctual’ (and less ‘intentional’) readings as opposed to the more ‘continuous’ or ‘durative’ (and more ‘intentional’) readings, which are better suited to the more activity- and process-oriented or neutral unmarked forms [e.g. *begin*]” (Tobin 1993, p. 182). The way he exemplifies this is not optimal for this thesis as the expressions are phrasal verbs, and these have been excluded from the present thesis due to them being out of the scope for this investigation. However, mentioning them is useful:

- (i) *start for* = go in the direction of  
(ii) *start toward* = move in the direction of  
(iii) *start out* = initiate movement

In sum, Tobin’s research regards the markedness relationship between the members of the aspectual pair: Only *begin*, the unmarked form, implies Process. *Start*, on the other hand, makes a specific reference to onset, which is a “Result of the prior non-activity viewed as an autonomous and independent act whether or not the Process is executed or not” Tobin (1993, p. 166) states.

The next chapter presents the method used in this dissertation.

## Chapter 4

# Using corpora in linguistic research

The systematic use of parallel texts has existed for centuries, but it is only in recent years that multilingual corpora have been compiled and prepared for search and analysis by computer (Johansson 2007, pp. 4-5). This technological advancement increases the validity and reliability of cross-linguistic comparisons. The aim of contrastive analyses [CA] is to account for language systems and for language in use, as corpora indeed reflect language use. In the words of Granger and Altenberg (2002, p. 11): “the task is not only to identify translation equivalents and ‘systematic’ correspondences between categories in different languages, but to specify to what extent and in what respect they express ‘the same thing’ and where similarities and differences should be located in a model of linguistic description.”

Egan and Dirdal (2017, p. 4) explain that for multilingual corpora to be useful as a source of comparable items, they must be parallel in some way. A translation corpus meets this requirement of parallelism as it consists of original texts in one language with translations into one or more other languages. The English-Norwegian Parallel Corpus [ENPC] is one such corpus. Corpora of original texts and their translations could prove useful in the investigation of specific linguistic phenomena such as cognates. For the purpose of this thesis, I am assuming similarity of meaning across translation, like most studies based on parallel corpora (Vandevoorde 2020a, p. 25), while while also exploring differences.

Researchers always need to be aware of possible limitations of their data. A cross-linguistic corpus method can give insight into parts of language use and say something about whether and to what degree something exists. However, according to Vandevoorde (2020a, p. 12), no corpus – irrespective of how careful the compilation process has been carried out – can ever claim absolute representativeness. Vandevoorde (2020a, p. 12) explains:

A drawback of parallel corpora [...] is that all texts labeled as original/non-translated in a parallel corpus [...] have at some point been selected to be translated (since all non-translated

texts in a parallel corpus are a source language text of a translated text in the corpus). This does not alter anything to the 'originality' of the original language of course, but it should be kept in mind that the presence of texts in a parallel corpus can be based on their 'suitability' to be translated (and hence, their absence can be based on their unsuitability).

Through bilingual and multilingual corpora in particular, we can observe patterns – on the one hand, we may observe what languages share and how they differ (an interlingual perspective), and on the other hand, a contrastive analysis may give insight through an intralingual perspective by revealing properties contained in each of the individual languages under comparison (Egan and Dirdal 2017, p. 2). Furthermore, Krzeszowski (1990, p. 15) specifies:

All comparisons involve the basic assumption that the objects to be compared share something in common, against which differences can be stated. This common platform of reference is called *tertium comparationis*. Moreover, any two or more objects can be compared with respect to various features and, as a result, the compared objects may turn out to be similar in some respects but different in others.

To see beyond the structures that are theoretically possible in a language, and gather evidence of how specific structures and elements are actually used, corpora such as the ENPC are arguably key. Johansson (2007) explains that four main questions arise in the study of language, one of which is whether (and to what degree) something is in fact done, actually performed, and what its doing entails. He claims that the use of a cross-linguistic corpus is indispensable in this case, because this method makes it possible to thoroughly map correspondences across languages. Moreover, he states that we may observe patterns which we were previously unaware of, and thus gain linguistic knowledge. In the systematic comparison of two languages as they are actually used in text, i.e. a contrastive corpus analysis, we can reveal what is general and what is language specific, Johansson (2007) explains.

The data gathered for the present thesis is mainly retrieved from the ENPC, and to a lesser extent from the British National Corpus [BNC]. The ENPC contains original texts in both English and Norwegian, as well as translations in both languages. This gives the option to collect texts in a variety of ways (c.f. Figure 3 presented by Johansson (2007, p. 11)).

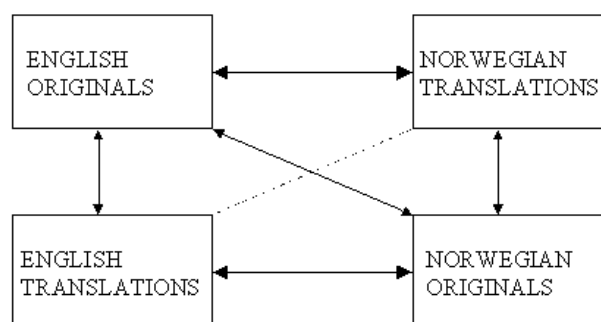


Figure 3: The model for the English-Norwegian Parallel Corpus.

The ENPC started out as a research project at the University of Oslo in 1994, and went through a number of extensions and revisions before it reached its current form in 2002. The texts in the corpus are text extracts from novels and non-fictional books. The data gathered for this dissertation is collected from the fiction part of the ENPC, which consists of 30 original text extracts of 10,000-15,000 words in each language and their translations, amounting to about 2.6 million words (*University of Oslo: The English-Norwegian Parallel Corpus 2019*).

The present thesis has a corpus-informed approach, which means that the ENPC is used to search for specific collocations and constructions. The aims are to find out how the verbs *start* and *begin* are used in English, and if the translations of their complement structures can shed light on meaning distinctions between these inchoative verbs.

To find out how *start* and *begin* are used in English, I search for these words in English original texts. All lemmas are included in the search (*begin|begins|began|begun|beginning* and *start|starts|started|starting*). Norwegian translations are shown in parallel. Cases where these words are used as nouns are excluded by means of analysis: For each search, I go through the full list of examples and omit the examples where *start* and *begin* are nouns.

The ENPC also allows searches for specific word combinations, thus making it possible to search for separate instances of *start* and *begin* with infinitival complement constructions. This is done by writing e.g. “start\* + 1 to” in English, or “start\* + 1 å” in Norwegian. The “\*” -symbol is a wild card, which means all suffixes of the word are included in the search. Unfortunately, the same approach is not possible in searches for participial complement structures, and these thus need to be found through manual scrutiny of concordance lines.

Once all the examples are sorted into categories (*start/begin* as main verbs, with infinitival complement constructions or with participial complement constructions in English original texts and in Norwegian original texts), a representative selection of each group is chosen to be portrayed in this dissertation.

The following chapter presents the corpus data that is included in

the final selection of evidence needed to answer the presented research questions.



## Chapter 5

# Data

In this chapter I present the data that create the basis for my research. The focus is on presenting data that support the investigation into my research questions. To reiterate, the first query regards to what degree the English verbs *start* and *begin* overlap in use and meaning, i.e. are they the same in terms of their syntax and semantics? The second question seeks to investigate whether Freed (1979)'s hypotheses about these inchoatives can be supported by cross-linguistic translation data. The third and last research question encompasses the cognate pair *start/starte*: Are these verbs used the same way in English and Norwegian?

Firstly, I present the data pertaining to English *start* and *begin* with infinitival complement structures. Secondly, I present the data pertaining to the English aspectual verb pair when accompanied by participial complement constructions. The last section of this chapter presents cases where the inchoatives occur as main verbs. Because the scope of this dissertation is limited, only data pertaining to Norwegian *starte* and English *begin* is included in this part, as these prove useful to answering my research questions.

### 5.1 English *start* and *begin* with infinitival complement constructions

The first collection of data contains the English verbs *start* and *begin* with infinitival complement constructions. My investigative goal is twofold: Firstly, I wish to examine whether translation data can shed light on any similarities or differences in the verbs under discussion when the complementation is the same. Secondly, I wish to explore whether Freed's theories regarding the particular notions of *start* plus the infinitival complement construction can gain support from contrastive corpus data. Put differently, are there connotations to be found in *start to V* constructions that are absent in *begin to V* structures?

In the following I present a selection of data from the ENPC.

### 5.1.1 *start to V*

The search “start\* +1 to” resulted in 35 instances (20.5%) of 171 total occurrences of *start*. As seen in Table 1, the translation data shows that *start\* to* is translated into *begyn\* å* in 22 of the 35 cases.

<i>Start* to</i> into <i>begyn* å</i>	<i>Start* to</i> into other	Total <i>start* to</i>	Total <i>start*</i>
22	13	35	171

Table 1: Number of instances of *start* with the infinitive complement form in English original texts, with number of translations into *begyn\** or other structures.

The majority (63%) of English *start* with infinitival complement constructions are translated into *begyn\** with infinitival complement constructions in Norwegian. Some cases are shown in the following examples.

- (13) (a) Evelyn heaved a sigh of relief and started to worry about the pudding. (MD1)  
 (b) Evelyn pustet lettet og begynte å bekymre seg om desserten. (MD1T)  
 (b') [*lit.*] Evelyn [...] began to worry herself about the dessert.
- (14) (a) And that's just about what I'm fixin' to do; Bennett is starting to fray my nerves. (GN1)  
 (b) Og det er nettopp hva jeg akter å gjøre; Bennett begynner å gå meg på nervene. (GN1T)  
 (b') [*lit.*] Bennett begins to go me on the nerves.

In both examples, English *start* and Norwegian *begyn\** function syntactically as catenatives. Semantically, they add aspectual meaning, and in both cases they refer to the inception of an event, namely the *worrying* (*bekymringen*) and *fraying* (*gå på nervene*) respectively.

As anticipated and indeed mentioned in the introduction of this thesis, the Norwegian structure *start\* å* does not appear as a translation of *start to*. Instead, the remaining thirteen cases (37.1%) of *start to V* has different translation structures. A common and rather compelling one is represented in the example below:

- (15) (a) The dog in the cage at the back started to growl and snap and hurl its ferocious little body against the bars. (ST1)

- (b) Bikkja i buret som sto helt bakerst satte i å knurre og glefse og kaste den blodtørstige, vesle skrotten sin mot gitteret. (ST1T)
- (b') [lit.] The dog [...] set in to growl.

The Norwegian monolingual dictionary Det Norske Akademi's Ordbok [NAOB] states that *sette i* is an expression meaning “plutselig begynne med noe” (suddenly start something), and furthermore that if the expression occurs with an infinitive or co-ordinate sentence, it entails a sudden forceful start<sup>1</sup>. This description bears similarity to a particular definition of English *start* which is “jerk or give a small jump from surprise or alarm” (Oxford English Dictionary). This peculiar reading of *start* will be discussed further in the analysis chapter (Chapter 6), together with the notion of sudden onset. The difference, however, is that English *start* in the sense “flinch” is intransitive, while the Norwegian *sette i* requires a complement. For now, we can state that *satte i å knurre* has the same reading here as *started to growl*. The connotation of inception is the same in both English and Norwegian, while the notion of suddenness is compatible with both.

The following set of cases from the ENPC are perhaps even more interesting. All of the English original sentences contain the structure *start to V*, yet all of the Norwegian translations differ in how they present this aspectual reading. Moreover, all of the English as well as the Norwegian cases displayed below imply the onset of an event, without indication that the event is put into action. As will be discussed in chapter 6, the Norwegian translations are perhaps even more explicit on the non-occurrence of the event. In other words, these sentences refer to reversible onset situations.

- (16) (a) He started to move forward... and then stopped. (SK1)
- (b) Han skulle til å styrte frem... men stanset. (SK1T)
- (b') [lit.] He should to start forward... but stopped.
- (17) (a) He started to climb out of the front window, then came back for a moment. (ST1)
- (b) Han gikk for å klatre ut gjennom vinduet; så snudde han og kom tilbake. (ST1T)
- (b') [lit.] He went for to climb out through the window [...].

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<sup>1</sup> “plutselig, kraftig begynne (å utstøte lyd, skrik, hyl, latter e.l.)” (NAOB)

- (18) (a) She started to approach her and ask for directions to the bus station, but she changed her mind. (GN1)
- (b) Hun holdt på å gå bort til henne og spørre om veien til busstasjonen, men ombestemte seg. (GN1T)
- (b') [*lit.*] She held on to go over to her [...].
- (19) (a) Andrew started to laugh, then abruptly changed his mind. (AH1)
- (b) Andrew åpnet munnen for å le hjertelig, men ombestemte seg plutselig. (AH1T)
- (b') [*lit.*] Andrew opened the mouth for to laugh [...].
- (20) (a) Celia started to say, 'Do we have time?' but was unable to finish because Andrew was kissing her. (AH1)
- (b) 'Har vi tid?' ville Celia si, men ble avbrutt av et kyss. (AH1T)
- (b') [*lit.*] [...] wanted Celia say, but became interrupted by a kiss.

These constructions from the ENPC are related to Freed (1979)'s observations, and will be discussed in depth in the analysis chapter (Chapter 6).

Next is the data pertaining to *begin* with infinitival complement constructions.

### 5.1.2 *begin to V*

The total amount of instances with all conjugations of *begin* is 300. Of these, 152 examples had infinitival complement constructions, amounting to 50.7%. One example was excluded because it did not have a translation. Table 2 displays the distribution of translations into Norwegian *begyn\** with infinitival complements versus other constructions.

<i>Beg*n to into begyn* å</i>	<i>Beg*n to into other</i>	Total <i>beg*n to</i>	Total <i>beg*n</i>
119	32	152	300

Table 2: Number of instances of *begin* with the infinitive complement form in English original texts, with number of translations into *begyn\** or other structures.

The data show a symmetric use of the cognates *begin/ begynne* when complemented by the infinitive. In 78% of the cases, *beg\*n to* is translated into *begyn\* å*. Examples of such sentences are presented below.

- (21) (a) Steam began to rise from his jersey and shorts. (MM1)  
 (b) Det begynte å dampe av genseren og knebuksene. (MM1T)  
 (b') [lit.] It began to steam [...].
- (22) (a) He dropped one between his forepaws and began to gnaw the other one. (SK1)  
 (b) Så la han den ene ned mellom forlabbene, og begynte å gnage på den andre. (SK1T)  
 (b') [lit.] [...] and began to gnaw on the other.
- (23) (a) Now you're beginning to sound like The Times. (RDA1)  
 (b) Nå begynner du å høres ut som The Times. (RDA1T)  
 (b') [lit.] Now begin you to sound out like The Times.

A total of 21.2% of the translations differed from the rest. A common translation of *begin to V* is *ga seg til å* – an expression meaning “begynne (med)” (NAOB) (also seen in examples (39) and (40) in section 5.1.2). Thus, it is fair to assume that these structures are similar in meaning as they comprise a symmetrical use of the inchoative verbs *begin/begyn\**. The fact that the expression *ga seg til å* exists as a translation of *start* as well as of *begin* indicates a strong overlap in meaning between these two inchoatives, supporting the use of them as near synonyms. Below are some examples from the data.

- (24) (a) When I began to rock the canoe, they pressed me down with their rough feet and smothered me with their capacious smocks. (BO1)  
 (b) Da jeg ga meg til å gynge kanoen, trykket de meg ned med ru føtter og dekket meg med de vide kjortlene sine. (BO1T)  
 (b') [lit.] When I gave me til to rock the canoe [...].
- (25) (a) Taking paper and pencil, Philby began to rough out the first draft of his reply. (FF1)  
 (b) Philby tok papir og blyant og ga seg til å skrive ned hovedlinjene i første utkast til svaret. (FF1T)  
 (b') [lit.] [...] took paper and pencil and gave himself til to write down [...].

Next is a group of examples where the catenative verb is omitted in the Norwegian translations, and only the main verb is retained. This phenomenon also occur in data sets with *start* (see examples (34) and (35) in section 5.2.1). Whether these translations can be said to have an inchoative reading is questionable - The pragmatics arguably tell the reader that the activity must be beginning, even though there is no linguistic item that encodes inchoativity in the sentences.

- (26) (a) Burden turned away from the front door and began to walk across the stone-flagged plain of this vast courtyard. (RR1)
- (b) Burden gikk bort fra hoveddøren og skrittet over den store hellebelagte gårdsplassen. (RR1T)
- (b') [*lit.*] [...] and strode over the big [...].
- (27) (a) Little by little, he began to feel better. (SK1)
- (b) Litt etter litt kjente han seg bedre. (SK1T)
- (b') [*lit.*] [...] felt him himself better.
- (28) (a) Is your scalp beginning to burn, dear? (RD1)
- (b) Svir det i hårbunnen, elskede? (RD1T)
- (b') [*lit.*] Stings it in the scalp [...].
- (29) (a) Mama returned just as I was beginning to worry that she'd forgotten about supper. (TH1)
- (b) Nettopp som jeg lurte på om hun helt hadde glemte kveldsmaten, dukket hun opp. (TH1T)
- (b') [*lit.*] Just as I wondered about if she totally had forgotten [...].

The next section presents data pertaining to the contrastive analysis of English *start* and *begin* with participial complement structures.

## 5.2 English *start* and *begin* with participial complement constructions

The second collection of data contains the English verbs *start* and *begin* with participial complement constructions. This complement structure appears frequently with inchoative verbs in the English language, but in Norwegian it does not exist. As an illustration, in English a sentence like (30a) is possible, yet the same structure in Norwegian (30b) is not:

- (30) (a) His hands started shaking with fear.  
 (b) \*Hendene hans begynte ristende av frykt.

Consequently, I wished to examine what syntactic structures are used in Norwegian translations of participial complementations. The data is presented in the following sections, commencing with *start*.

### 5.2.1 *start V-ing*

The data show that of all occurrences of *start*, 68 (40%) have a participial complemental construction. Of these, 52 (76.5%) are translated into *begyn\** *å* in Norwegian. The data pertaining to *start* with participial complement structures and affiliated translations is presented in Table 3.

<i>start V-ing</i> into <i>begyn* å</i>	<i>start V-ing</i> into other	Total <i>start V-ing</i>	Total <i>start</i>
52	16	68	171

Table 3: Number of instances of *start* with the present participle complement form in English original texts, with number of translations into *begyn\** or other structures.

Below are examples of English *start* with participial complement constructions being translated into *begyn\** with infinitival complement constructions in Norwegian.

- (31) (a) I would have to get a manager, I thought vaguely, and had no idea where to start looking. (DF1)  
 (b) Jeg måtte få tak i en daglig leder, tenkte jeg vagt, men jeg ante ikke hvor jeg skulle begynne å lete. (DF1T)  
 (b') [lit.] [...] where I should begin to look.
- (32) (a) Then he opened the book and ostentatiously started reading. (AT1)

- (b) Så åpnet han boken og begynte demonstrativt å lese. (AT1T)  
 (b') [*lit.*] [...] and began ostentatiously to read.

- (33) (a) He started breathing through his mouth. (JC1)  
 (b) Han begynte å puste gjennom munnen. (JC1T)  
 (b') [*lit.*] He began to breathe though the mouth.

Data from the ENPC show that the inchoative verb *start* quite frequently takes a participial complement construction, thus functioning as a catenative verb. In the Norwegian translations, neither the present participle form, nor the cognate *starte* are found. Instead, *begyn\** followed by a verb in its infinitive form is seen. In short, where English applies the *start V-ing* form, the majority Norwegian translations (76.5%) adopt a *begyn\* å* form. Nevertheless, the 16 cases that do not use *begyn\* å* are rather interesting. Consider the following examples.

- (34) (a) Mrs Wormwood said to him, 'You should read the label on the tube before you start messing with dangerous products'. (RD1)  
 (b) Fru Wormwood sa: — Du burde virkelig lese hva som står på bruksanvisningen før du bruker sånne farlige greier. (RD1T)  
 (b') [*lit.*] [...] before you use such dangerous things.
- (35) (a) The black man started nodding about halfway through, his knife blade still smoothing the surface of the soap. (SG1)  
 (b) Halvveis i beskrivelsen nikket den svarte mannen. (SG1T)  
 (b') [*lit.*] Halfway in the description nodded the black man.
- (36) (a) We'd got a load of six-inch nails and a few bits of plank for making boats, and we'd been pushing bricks into a trench full of wet cement when Aidan started running away. (RDO1)  
 (b) Vi hadde fått tak i en haug med sekstoms spiker og noen plankebiter til å lage båter av, og vi hadde dyttet murstein ned i ei grøft full av våt sement da Aidan la på sprang. (RDO1T)



- (b') [lit.] [...] when Aidan set going to run/ set running going.
- (37) (a) People started coming in the back, talking quickly in outdoor voices about corn germination, stepping out of boots, and lining up for cups of coffee. (JSM1)
- (b) Karene kom trampende inn på kjøkkenet, snakket med høye utendørsstemmer om maisen som grodde, fikk av seg støvlene og skulle ha kaffe. (JSM1T)
- (b') [lit.] The gents came stomping in on the kitchen [...]
- (38) (a) He hit the reins and the mules started moving. (GN1)
- (b) Han rykket i tømmene, og muldyrene satte seg i bevegelse. (GN1T)
- (b') [lit.] He twitched in the reins, and the mules set themselves in movement.

Broadly speaking, these translations have kept the main verb of the original and omitted the catenative inchoative verb *start*. Yet, there is a sense of inception in Norwegian as well. In example (36) for instance, *started running away* has been translated into *la på sprang*. NAOB's definition of this expression is "sette i gang med å løpe" ([lit.] set running going) – a description that clearly has an inceptive aspect (c.f. example (15) above: *satte i å knurre*). Example (38) is similar in form, and NAOB's definition of the Norwegian phrase *sette [seg] i bevegelse* is "begynne å bevege seg; få til å bevege (seg)". This description, again, has an inceptive aspect: The inchoative verb *begynne* is used to describe the phrase.

One sentence pair in particular stands out in this set of examples. Example (37) in English uses the VP *started coming*, and is translated into the VP *kom trampende*. The difference, of course, is that only the original uses an inchoative catenative verb. NAOB declares that the verb *komme* means "under bevegelse, nærme seg", and when it is put together with the present participle form it describes a manner of moving rather than the inception of the movement. Norsk Referansegrammatikk equally declares that the present participle form is created by the infinitival stem of the verb, but usually acts as an adjective (Faarlund, Lie, and Vannebo 1997, p. 468). Kinn (2014, p. 81) on the other hand, argues in favor of a different analysis of this construction: In his view, *komme* with a 'movement verb' (*rørsleverb*) like *trampende* is to be considered an auxiliary construction (*hjelpesverbkonstruksjon*). In either case, there is a slight discrepancy between the original text and its Norwegian counterpart, despite both using the participle form.

The next set of examples contains sentence pairs where the Norwegian translations use phrases like *ta til å* and *ga seg til å*. NAOB defines these Norwegian expressions as follows: *ta til å* indicates “(med ingressivt aspekt) begynne å” (*ingressiv* meaning “med begynnende handling”); and *gi seg til* portend “begynne (med)”. These expressions encompass an element of initiation. Examples are presented below.

- (39) (a) To start confiscating ceramic statuettes could turn into an administrative nightmare: (BC1)
- (b) Gav man seg til å beslaglegge keramiske skulpturer, kunne det utvikle seg til et administrativt mareritt: (BC1T)
- (b') [*lit.*] Gave one oneself til to confiscate ceramic sculptures, could it develop [...].
- (40) (a) Then he started howling with more laughter. (JB1)
- (b) Så ga han seg til å hyle enda verre enn før. (JB1T)
- (b') [*lit.*] So gave him himself til to howl even worse than before.
- (41) (a) To my father, this was the ultimate expression of the right order of things, so when Ty started visiting us the year after that, my father was perfectly happy to see him. (JSM1)
- (b) Mer som seg hør og bør kunne det ikke bli, syntes far min, og da Ty tok til å komme på besøk til oss året etter, hadde far min slett ikke noe imot det. (JSM1T)
- (b') [*lit.*] [...] and when Ty took til to come visit to us the year after [...].

Despite a lower frequency in the corpus data, these Norwegian constructions seem to retain the inceptive aspectual reading of the original texts. Indeed, we see that the expressions are defined by the inchoative verb *begynne*.

The next section presents the three main uses of the English aspectual verb *begin* with participial complementation constructions.

### 5.2.2 *begin V-ing*

Of the 300 instances of *begin*, 38 cases (12.7%.) have the present participle complement form. Table 4 displays the number of instances where *begin V-ing* is translated into *begyn\* å*, or other syntactical structures.

<i>begin V-ing</i> into <i>begyn*</i>	<i>begin V-ing</i> into other	Total <i>begin V-ing</i>	Total <i>begyn*</i>
26	9	38	300

Table 4: Number of instances of *begin* with the present participle complement form in English original texts, with number of translations into *begyn\** or other structures.

Similar to the section above portraying *start* with participial complement constructions, the majority of instances (68.4%) of *begin* with participial complement constructions are translated into *begyn\** with infinitival complement constructions in Norwegian.

- (42) (a) After a pause, Dorothy controlled herself and began consoling them. (DL1)  
 (b) Etter en pause behersket Dorothy seg og begynte å trøste dem. (DL1T)  
 (b') [lit.] [...] and began to console them.
- (43) (a) Basil began crying. (GN1)  
 (b) Basil begynte å gråte. (GN1T)  
 (b') [lit.] Basil began to cry.

In other words, the cognate pair *begin/begynne* is oftentimes used symmetrically, however with different complement structures due to the participle verb form not co-existing with catenative verbs in Norwegian.

As seen in the previous data sets, it is common for the Norwegian translations to omit the catenative verb and retain the main verb. The same happens with *begin* with the participial complement construction. To reiterate; it is questionable whether the inchoative reading is maintained. The co-text suggests the inception of the activity, yet there is no linguistic item encoding inchoativity itself.

- (44) (a) They were outside Mrs Fletcher's cottage when someone began shouting at them. (MM1)  
 (b) De var kommet til Mrs. Fletcher sitt hus da noen ropte etter dem. (MM1T)

(b') [lit.] [...] when someone shouted after them.

(45) (a) Already, sitting at that table in La Primavera, he had begun struggling with these feelings of antipathy, of positive revulsion. (RR1)

(b) Allerede mens han satt ved bordet i La Primavera, hadde han slåss med denne følelsen av antipati, av direkte motvilje. (RR1T)

(b') [lit.] [...] had he fought with this feeling of antipathy [...].

One possible interpretation of these translations is that they have atelic main verbs, and thus may be interpreted as still in process (more on this in chapter 6).

### 5.3 Inchoatives as main verbs

Both *start* and *begin* occur with complement constructions in the data, but they also occur as main verbs. Due to the limited scope of this dissertation and the presented research questions, I am only focusing on Norwegian *starte* as a main verb and English *begin* as a main verb. Data on Norwegian *starte* is relevant because it provides ground to analyze the cognate pair *start/starte*, and data on English *begin* is relevant because it sheds light on a particular use of this verb not found in *start*.

The first section presents the data pertaining to Norwegian *starte*.

#### 5.3.1 Norwegian *starte*

The topic of the cognate pair *start/starte* arises from the following query: Since the Norwegian verb *starte* does not occur with the infinitive form nor with the present participle form, which syntactic constructions does it appear in? My conjecture was that *starte* is both a monotransitive verb taking a dO in the form of a NP (e.g. example (47)), and an intransitive main verb (e.g. example (52)). To find out which syntactic constructions *starte* appears in, I searched for “start\*” in Norwegian original texts. Three of the 19 cases were excluded because *start* functioned as a noun, resulting in 16 valid instances.

The data show that the Norwegian verb *starte* takes an object (in all cases a noun) in 13 of the 16 cases. This amounts to 81.2%. Thus, the corpus data suggest that *starte* in Norwegian is mainly used as a transitive verb. Some examples are illustrated below.

(46) (a) Det kan passe godt å starte beretninga idet “Sandy Hook” kom til Kvitøya, og så gå litt bakover i tida. (JM1)

- (b) I'll begin the story with the Sandy Hook's arrival at White Island, then go back a little in time. (JM1T)
- (a') [lit.] It can fit well to start the story when [...].
- (47) (a) Det er visstnok et vakkert trekk ved Scott — en avsløring av hans edle karakter, vil noen hevde, at så å si på dagen da sønnen hans blir født, starter han forberedelsene til en ny ferd mot sør. (KH1)
- (b) It reflects to Scott's advantage — to his nobility, some would maintain — that on the day his son was born, he began preparations for another journey to the South. (KH1T)
- (a') [lit.] [...] starts he the preparations for a new journey towards south.
- (48) (a) Det var hett i huset, vinduene hadde vært lukket mens de var ute, og Reber hadde ikke startet luftavkjølingen. (OEL1)
- (b) It was hot in the house, the windows had been closed while they were out, and Reber had not turned on the air-conditioning. (OEL1T)
- (a') [lit.] [...] and Reber had not started the air-cooling.
- (49) (a) Jeg startet en produksjon av engler, og hun kunne hjelpe meg. (CL1)
- (b) I'd begun producing angels, and she'd be able to help me. (CL1T)
- (a') [lit.] I started a production of angels [...].

The data suggest that Norwegian *starte* takes nominalized verbs, e.g. *beretning*, *forberedelse*, *luftavkjøling* and *produksjon*. In the examples above, these nominalized verbs are presented as events.<sup>2</sup>

In seven cases (43.7%) Norwegian *starte* is translated into English *start*. Five of them present *starte* as a transitive verb (as illustrated in examples (50) and (51)), whereas two present *starte* as an intransitive verb (examples (52) and (53)).

<sup>2</sup> It seems that Norwegian *starte* invites a holistic perspective on the event which it expresses the initiation of – a perspective which will be discussed in chapter 6.

- (50) (a) Jeg oppdaget snart at hun var det lille byrået, som hun til tross for sine unge år hadde startet og skaffet betydelig anseelse. (JW1)
- (b) I soon discovered that she was the little agency that she herself, despite her youth, had started and for which she had won considerable respect. (JW1T)
- (a') [*lit.*] [...] that she was the little agency that she despite her young years had started and got considerable reputation.
- (51) (a) Men så hører han en annen lyd også, en maskin som blir startet, rustne tannhjul som griper i hverandre. (LSC1)
- (b) But then he hears another sound too, a machine that is started, rusty gears gripping each other. (LSC1T)
- (a') [*lit.*] [...] a machine that is started, rusty gears that grips each other.
- (52) (a) To fly starter mot nord. (KH1)
- (b) Two planes started northwards. (KH1T)
- (a') [*lit.*] Two planes start towards north.
- (53) (a) Men det kan vere flyet, som ikkje har komme seg opp frå Fornebu flyplass før det vart for seint, eller kanskje også ein feil ved eit skittent hus nede ved Akerselva, [...] der skulle dei starta, med (EH1)
- (b) But it might be that the plane didn't manage to take off in time from Fornebu Airport in Oslo, or maybe there was some problem at a dirty building down by the Aker River [...]. That 's where they should have started, with (EH1T)
- (a') [*lit.*] [...] there should they started, with

A structure that is fairly common in Norwegian but not well represented in the data, is *starte* followed by a preposition such as *med*, *på* and *opp*. Structures like *han startet på studiene i høst*; *mormor started på et skjerf til Ada*; and *de started med fire bikuber* are prevalent in the Norwegian language. Perhaps less typical is *starte opp*, as in *å starte opp en bedrift*. Språkrådet declares that this preposition is cut increasingly in modern day use. One of the few examples of Norwegian *starte* with a preposition in the ENPC is presented in example (54) below.

- (54) (a) Kanskje de skal starte med te-kiosk også; ved skolen, slik at lærere og elever kan kjøpe te i friminuttene. (TB1)
- (b) They may run a tea kiosk too; near the school, so that teachers and pupils can get tea in their free periods. (TB1T)
- (a') [lit.] Maybe they shall start with tea kiosk too [...].

In sum, the data suggest that the syntactic restrictions of the cognates are different, as predicted. While English *start* occurs frequently as a catenative aspectualizer, Norwegian *starte* does not – the latter is mainly used as a transitive verb. A more detailed discussion of this cognate pair is presented in chapter 6.

### 5.3.2 English *begin* as main verb

*Begin* also occurs as a main verb in the corpus data, although with a significantly lower frequency than as a catenative aspectualizer. In about 9% of the cases, English *begin* functions as a main verb.

- (55) (a) That done, he began the time-consuming task of easing the forty smaller stones out of the gold. (FF1)
- (b) Så tok han fatt på den tidskrevende jobben å lirke de førti mindre steinene ut av gullet. (FF1T)
- (b') [lit.] So took he starting on the time-consuming task [...].
- (56) (a) That was where my obsession with the Plague began. (ABR1)
- (b) Det var slik jeg begynte å bli opptatt av Pesten. (ABR1T)
- (b') [lit.] It was so I began to become busy with the Plague.

As will be discussed in chapter 6, a separate type of examples of *begin* is found in the data and stands out because it is not interchangeable with English *start* nor with Norwegian *starte*. This structure contains instances of *begin* used as a main verb in reported speech.

- (57) (a) 'I been thinkin' on this here thing,' he began quietly, without looking around. (GN1)
- (b) 'Jeg har tenkt over dette,' begynte han lavt, uten å se på henne. (GN1T)
- (b') [lit.] [...] began he low, without to look at her.

- (58) (a) 'I'm afraid there may be,' I began. (DF1)  
(b) 'Det kan nok dessverre gjøre det,' begynte jeg. (DF1T)  
(b') [*lit.*] [...] began I.

To sum up, there are similarities between English *begin* and Norwegian *begyn*\* as these are frequently used symmetrically (except when English *begin* uses the participle complementation which is blocked for Norwegian *begyn*\* (c.f. section 5.2)). Greater symmetry is found between this cognate pair than between *start/starte*. Furthermore, there do not seem to be many syntactic restriction differences between the cognates *begin/begyn*\* based on the corpus data. However, one such difference is made clear in the sentence *he began a book* versus *\*han begynte en bok*. For the latter case to become grammatically correct, the preposition *på* is needed.

The data gathered for this dissertation only give room for certain observations. It is not possible to make negative observations based on one sole study. Translations differences may be indicative of restrictions, however, and could at least tell us something about tendencies.

The next chapter analyses and discusses the presented data.



## Chapter 6

# Analysis and discussion

The analysis has three main parts, each devoted to analyzing and discussing the research questions presented in this thesis. The first part is an English monolingual comparison of *start* and *begin* discussing possible factors responsible for any non-interchangeability between this aspectual verb pair. The second part is devoted to analyzing and discussing the particular connotations only found in *start* as according to Freed (1979). This section includes sub-chapters discussing the extent to which concepts such as *onset*, *reversible onset situations*, *process*, *cause* and *complement constructions* apply, according to my data. The final part discusses to what degree the cognates *start/starte* are used symmetrically in English and Norwegian. The analysis is followed by a concluding chapter summing up the findings.

### 6.1 English monolingual comparison

In this section I discuss the claims that the verbs presented in this thesis are not fully synonymous, and that they cannot be used interchangeably in every context. Freed (1979)'s idea is that particular syntactic forms can be correlated with specific semantic features, and that although *start* and *begin* share syntactical traits, *start* has additional semantical meaning not found in *begin*.

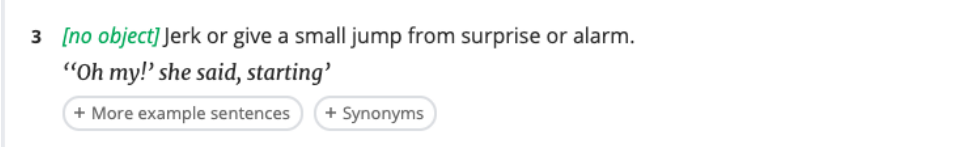
As seen in chapter 2, the verbs under discussion are oftentimes defined by each other in dictionaries. There are indeed contexts in which *start* and *begin* can be used interchangeably. One example is in the context "begin to happen / start happening" (MMD), hence the verbs' inchoative quality. Yet, there are cases showing that, at least in certain uses, these two inchoative verbs are not wholly synonymous and interchangeable: The incorrectness of clauses like *\*to begin the lawnmower* and *\*"Dad," I started* are examples of this. Therefore, what follows presents some ways in which these verbs are claimed to differ, according to some linguists (including Freed (1979) and Tobin (1993)).

Firstly, researchers seem to agree that *start* and *begin* in English are inchoative verbs, oftentimes functioning as catenative verbs, referring to the inception of, for example, an event or an activity. They carry aspectual

meaning, hence the label *aspectualizers* or *aspectual pair*.

Secondly, there are ways in which these verbs are claimed to differ from one another: While some (more or less credible) sources online claim that *begin* is more formal than *start* (one of the credible ones is the Cambridge Dictionary stating: “We can use the verbs *begin* and *start* to mean the same thing but *begin* is more formal than *start*”), Freed (1979) and Tobin (1993) disavow this notion of difference in register. The explanation is that *begin* is more restricted in its use compared to *start* and thus may seem more formal (c.f. (Freed 1979, p. 68)). Put differently, while both verbs are used syntactically as aspectualizers, *start* has additional semantical meanings and may thus be used in additional contexts. Some of these contexts will be discussed in depth in this chapter.

An interesting place to commence is where one particular meaning of *start* differs significantly from any meaning of *begin*. As shown in Figure 4 and Figure 5, *start* has the notable description of sudden movement as when surprised.



3 [no object] Jerk or give a small jump from surprise or alarm.  
“Oh my!” she said, starting’  
+ More example sentences + Synonyms

Figure 4: Definition of *start* in the sense of jerk/flinch [OED].

Historically, the words under discussion are quite unrelated. Their etymologies are in fact so unlike that it is remarkable how similar they are today. *Begin* is a compound of *be* ‘about’ and *\*ginnan*, an original Teutonic verb, meaning “to open; to open up” – as seen in modern day English in phrases like “to open a speech; [...] up negotiations” (Freed 1979, p. 68). *Start*, on the other hand, shows a more complicated semantic derivation from its earlier senses to its current aspectual meaning, Freed (1979, *ibid.*) explains. She bases her account on the OED’s suggestion that *start* comes from the Old English word *styrtan* which derives from the Old Teutonic *\*sturtjan* meaning “to overthrow, precipitate, overturn”. It was also used intransitively to mean “to rush, to fall headlong, to gush out”, Freed (1979, p. *ibid.*) explains. Moreover, “the occurrence of *sterte* in East Northern English [...] points to the existence of a form [of the word] corresponding to the Middle High German *sterzen* meaning “to set up or stand stiffly, to move briskly””. The latter meaning is represented in the modern day use we see in 4 and Figure 5. All these source forms of *start* suggest something about movement or motion, Freed states, an interpretation interestingly close to the notion captured by *onset* (defined in section 6.2.1) (Freed 1979, p. 69).

The descriptions of *start* as ‘jerking’ and ‘flinching’ arguably have an inchoative quality about them, as they accentuate the change from a relative stillness to a sudden movement. It is also possible to claim that they fit with Freed’s notion of onset and movement, as these characterizations

[1]

**to move your body suddenly because something has surprised or frightened you:**

- He started **at** the sound of the phone.

Figure 5: Definition of *start* in the sense of jerk/flinch [CD].

could be said to pose an element of sudden onset. We may therefore argue that these “new-found” notions of onset and movement actually stem from the original meaning of *start*. Although *start* and *begin* in modern English are used as close synonyms, there might be a deep-rooted underlying difference between them that is felt when certain cases make this distinction more clear.

Related to this topic, yet outside the scope of this thesis, are cases where *start* is used as part of a phrasal verb. To use Tobin’s example, *to start toward* something means to move in the direction of this something. He believes that this movement is similar to that of an onset, and moreover that it is what he calls ‘result-oriented’ – a notion he reserves for *start*, and excludes for *begin* (Tobin 1993, p. 162).

What is more, there seems to be a clearer element of initiation in the corpus data with *start*. Related to initiation, is the semantic role of an Agent. In other words, many of the events followed by *start* could be perceived as more ‘person-initiated’. On a side note, weather phenomena might be an exception because there is no Agent, however *start* is regularly used in these cases because weather usually has a cause (and *start* is mainly used about cause, as will be shown in section 6.2.1). As an illustration, consider example (59) below. In short, the claim is that *start* requires a cause which may be an Agent, and if there is an Agent it therefore tends to connote more purpose/intention than *begin* does.

- (59) (a) The storm started  
 (b) It started to rain  
 (c) It started raining

In the analysis of the data, a notable structure only occurring with English *begin* became evident. The construction stands out because it is not interchangeable with English *start* nor with Norwegian *starte*. This structure is *begin* used as a main verb in reported speech. The Norwegian translations use the cognate *begynne*, and thus it is fair to assume that the use of *begin/begynne* to report dialogue only applies to this cognate pair, and not to their aspectual counterparts.

- (60) (a) 'I been thinkin' on this here thing,' he began quietly, without looking around. (GN1)  
 (b) 'Jeg har tenkt over dette,' begynte han lavt, uten å se på henne. (GN1T)  
 (b') [*lit.*] [...] began he low, without to look at her.
- (61) (a) 'I'm afraid there may be,' I began. (DF1)  
 (b) 'Det kan nok dessverre gjøre det,' begynte jeg. (DF1T)  
 (b') [*lit.*] [...] began I.

Lastly, a theory of how the inchoatives might encode different perspectives on the event has emerged. One possible representation of the placement of *start* and *begin* in time is presented in my illustration in Figure 6. This suggestion is based on Freed (1979)'s theories, and visually presented by myself. At the bottom is an arrow representing time. Above the time line we find an event, and at the inception of that event are small arrows to present where the inchoative pair might be argued to differ. *Start* is placed just at the inception and on the outside of the event, illustrating the onset. *Begin* on the other hand, is placed at the very beginning, yet inside the event, indicating the first temporal period during which the event takes place.

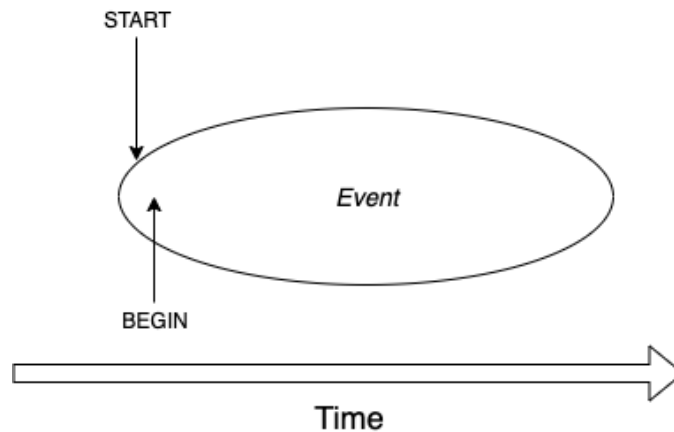


Figure 6: Holistic Perspective.

From this, we could argue that *start* indicates a more holistic perspective than *begin* – that is, with *start* the event is seen from outside, or as a whole. From this point, the Agent may still change his or her mind and not enter the event nucleus. Put differently, once the Agent has entered the event, he or she is in a process, and so we lose the holistic view.

To sum up, both *start* and *begin* are aspectual verbs referring to the inception of an event or activity, i.e. they are inchoative. *Start* is claimed to have an additional property of being causative, as well as indicating motion and onset (perhaps related to its distinct sense: sudden movement or ‘flinching’). Furthermore, *start* seems to have a clearer Agent, as well as being marked for Result. *Start* is also more holistic than *begin* because it refers to the onset of an event – a moment where e.g. the Agent still has a holistic perspective, before entering the process of the event itself. *Begin* on the other hand, is claimed to be unmarked, and may indicate both Process and Result. *Begin* refers to the initiation of a period of time during which some event or activity takes place. The key term here is process, as *begin* points to the first part of a process in action.

## 6.2 Can Freed’s theories be confirmed through translation?

This part of the analysis answers the questions of whether the theories presented in this thesis can be confirmed through translation – Can a contrastive corpus analysis support or disprove the theories presented about the inchoative verbs *start* and *begin* and their aspectual complementation? The idea is that translations are windows into meaning distinctions, as partitioned in the language of the translation. To answer this research question, I have divided the analysis into three parts which I will present one by one in the following sections. Concluding remarks will sum up the findings.

### 6.2.1 *Start* distinguished from *begin*

As mentioned in chapter 2, both *start* and *begin* are used syntactically as aspectualizers in English. Yet *start* has additional semantical meanings and may thus be used in additional contexts. One such context involves primitive nouns that contain some sort of motor or moving part. Freed (1979, p. 80) claims that only *start* may be used in these cases, which helps explain why *start* alone is grammatically correct in a sentence like *she started the car*. In her view, the notion of movement and/or motion found in *start* is similar to what she calls *onset* (Freed 1979, p. 69). She states that only *start* bears reference to an onset, thus distinguishing it from *begin*. To reiterate, Freed (1979, p. 31) states:

The onset of an event is a temporal segment which takes place prior to the initial temporal part of the nucleus of that event. It is a preparatory stage necessary before the nuclear activity of the event (or action) is actually initiated. It is not an optional segment of the event in that it cannot be passed over or skipped in the temporally ordered sequence of time intervals that make up an event. It is presupposed of any ongoing event in this class of events.

The aspectual verbs she investigates in her book constitute a time-index indicating the onset, beginning, continuation, duration, repetition, cessation, and completion of activities or events (Freed 1979, p. 19). Her claim is that “the semantic consistency of these verbs represents a second-order time reference not indicating precise points in time but rather periods of time relative to one another. In this way,” she continues, “the beginning or ‘first temporal period’ of an event is the beginning relative to the moment just before during which this event had not yet begun. It does not, however, suggest the first or original inception of this particular verbal action” (Freed 1979, p. 20-21).

Another context where the verbs under discussion are claimed to differ regards the notion of *cause* (first presented in chapter 3). While both *start* and *begin* are used syntactically as aspectualizers, only *start* has the additional semantic feature ‘cause’ (Tobin 1993, pp. 180-181; Freed 1979, p. 80). Freed distinguishes an onset from a cause, and maintains that there is a difference between a causative onset of an event (or an object) and the temporal onset of a period during which an event takes place (Freed 1979, p. 80). She exemplifies by stating that pressure applied to a sheet of glass may cause the glass to break, and that we in this case are dealing with separate events which take place before and lead to or cause subsequent events. “The onset of an event can never be considered the cause of that event”, she maintains (Freed 1979, p. 31). Regardless of this distinction, it is possible to argue that certain actions or events involving causality carries a particular connotation of initiation. Whereas English *start* in some cases implies that there is a ‘causer’ (e.g. an initiating Agent) or even requires one to be mentioned, English *begin* is claimed not to need a ‘causer’.

Furthermore, both Freed and Tobin seem to agree that *start* also suggests movement and motion, notions not found in *begin*. The OED defines “set something in motion” as “start moving or working; start or trigger a process or series of events” – again, here it is fair to make associations with cause (“cause something to move/happen”). As was presented in chapter 2, only *start* has the word ‘cause’ in its definition: “to cause someone to do something” (MMD) (e.g. *what she said started me thinking*); and “cause or enable to begin doing something” (OED) (e.g. *his father started him off in business*). *Begin* is not interchangeable with *start* in these examples, thus strengthening the claim that the notions of movement, motion and cause are reserved for *start*.

According to Tobin (1993, p. 180), the marked form *start* makes a specific claim for the feature Result – Result meaning that an inceptive action, state or event must be viewed from the point of view of a result, goal, consequence, conclusion, destination, telic endpoint, et cetera, which may be explicitly stated or implicitly implied. He states that the unmarked form *begin* makes no specific claim or is neutral for the semantic feature Result. In other words, an inceptive action, state or event may be viewed from the point of view of a Result and/or a Process which may be explicitly stated or implicitly implied. It seems that his claim is that *start* is more likely to be used when there is a clear Result, whereas *begin* is used whenever the

event may be interpreted as having a Result or be the inception of a Process.

The next section discusses two important concepts in the theories, namely process and onset.

### 6.2.2 Process versus onset

This section mainly discusses the notion of onset, and whether a contrastive corpus analysis can validate the claim that only *start* with infinitival complementation may refer to reversible onset situations. To reiterate, a claim presented in this dissertation is that *start* invites a more holistic view of an event than *begin* does. Also, when referring to the notion of onset, it is important to emphasize that an onset is reversible. It is for this reason that sentences that specifically refer to the onset of an event, as is the case with sentences using *start* with a complement in the infinitive, could entail a non-occurrence of the event named in the complement. Conversely, the inceptions of events expressed by the use of *-ing* participial complementation are not reversible because they are perceived as having entered the event, and are thus already in process.

The following set of cases from the ENPC are interesting. All of the English original sentences contain the structure *start to V*, yet all of the Norwegian translations differ in how they present this aspectual reading. Moreover, the cases displayed below all imply the onset of an event which is then reversed. In other words, these translations seem to support Freed's theory about *start* entailing reversible onset situations.

- (62) (a) He started to move forward... and then stopped. (SK1)  
(b) Han skulle til å styrte frem... men stanset. (SK1T)  
(b') [*lit.*] He should til to start forward... but stopped.
- (63) (a) He started to climb out of the front window, then came back for a moment. (ST1)  
(b) Han gikk for å klatre ut gjennom vinduet; så snudde han og kom tilbake. (ST1T)  
(b') [*lit.*] He went for to climb out through the window [...].
- (64) (a) She started to approach her and ask for directions to the bus station, but she changed her mind. (GN1)  
(b) Hun holdt på å gå bort til henne og spørre om veien til busstasjonen, men ombestemte seg. (GN1T)

(b') [lit.] She held on to go over to her [...].

(65) (a) Andrew started to laugh, then abruptly changed his mind.  
(AH1)

(b) Andrew åpnet munnen for å le hjertelig, men ombestemte seg plutselig. (AH1T)

(b') [lit.] Andrew opened the mouth for to laugh [...].

All of the four cases above suggest that the event named in the complement has an onset, but that the event nucleus does not take place. The sentences all indicate the intention of the Agent to execute the event, and we arguably also see the initiation of the event, yet the onset is reversed. The Norwegian translations in (64) and (65) explicitly state that the Subject is about to do something, but then changes his and her mind (“*men ombestemte seg*”). The remaining sentences also indicate that the action is intended, but does not take place. This is to say that the English original sentences as well as their Norwegian translations support Freed’s theory – She claims that when the inchoative verb *start* has the infinitive of a verb as its complement form, the action named in the event nucleus may be reversed; that is, the onset of the event may be intended and indeed initiated, but not executed. All of the English original cases presented above support this. Correspondingly, the Norwegian translations suggest the intention of the Agent to perform the event named in the complement, yet stopping or being stopped before performed. None of the translations contain a symmetric use of *start* with infinitival complement constructions found in the original text.

All translations use infinitival complements, however, which corresponds to the infinitive found in the original text, but the verb *start* is exchanged with phrases such as *skulle til å*, *gikk for å* and *holdt på å*. Arguably, these all contain a sense of intention to perform an action, or even including a preparatory phase of the action, yet with an explicit mention that the event does not take place. It is noteworthy that three of the four translations contain the contrastive Norwegian word *men* (but), emphasizing the non-occurrence of the event.

The next part of the analysis regards whether *begin* with infinitival complement constructions refers to reversible onset situations. Freed claims that it does not, and data from my contrastive corpus analysis support this.

First of all, none of the examples from the ENPC depicting *begin* with infinitival complement structures suggest that the onset of an event was reversed. The readings all imply that the event was put into process (c.f. example (21) repeated here as (66)). This is in line with Freed’s theory. The Norwegian translations also support this, as none of the events named in the complements are reversed. Rather, they mirror the original reading and



point to the first part of an action in process. Thus, I argue that both Tobin's and Freed's theories are supported by the translation data.

- (66) (a) Steam began to rise from his jersey and shorts. (MM1)  
(b) Det begynte å dampe av genseren og knebuksene. (MM1T)  
(b') [lit.] It began to steam of the jersey [...].

A total of 21.2% of the translations of *begin* with infinitival complementation differs from the rest. A common translation of *begin to V* is *ga seg til å* – an expression that – as was mentioned in section 5.1.2 – portend “begynne (med)” (NAOB). To what degree does this structure indicate process versus onset? As mentioned, it is often difficult to be precise about the aspectual meanings of language. Yet, based on the data gathered from the corpus, it seems that the English original cases with *begin to* to a larger degree suggest process rather than onset. The events are not seen as reversible, but instead suggest that the event has been initiated and is now ongoing. We lose the holistic perspective as the event nucleus has begun.

In some cases, the Norwegian translations are perhaps even more clear than the original texts in this regard. As seen in example (67) below, the Norwegian text has omitted the catenative verb and only retained the main verb *kjenne* (feel). This suggests that the process of feeling better has already begun. As mentioned in chapter 5, one possible interpretation of these translations is that they have atelic main verbs, suggesting that the event is still in process. It is also interesting that the co-text of the translations suggests the inception of the activity, without having a linguistic item which encodes this aspect.

- (67) (a) Little by little, he began to feel better. (SK1)  
(b) Litt etter litt kjente han seg bedre. (SK1T)  
(b') [lit.] [...] felt him himself better.

In sum, both *start* and *begin* direct readers' attention to the onset of an event, but as shown, *start* is and *begin* is not compatible with the process not being entered into. Personally, I find the Norwegian translations using different expressions than *begyn\* å* the most intriguing. Phrases such as *skulle til å* and *gikk for å* followed by the contrastive word *men* emphasize the notion of reversible onset situations. I find that these Norwegian phrases make Freed's point even more clear than the English data she discusses in her book (Freed 1979), as they imply intention to perform an action followed by then revoking it. Interestingly, the Norwegian translations are perhaps even more explicit on the non-occurrence of the event. Additionally fascinating is the Norwegian translation *sette i å*. This phrase accentuates the original sense of *start*, as the connotation of sudden onset is part of the meaning of this Norwegian expression.

To conclude this section on process versus onset, the denouement is that the theory is supported. The English *start to* constructions with ascribed Norwegian translations do in some cases indicate reversible onset situations, and attract attention to the onset of an event. Conversely, English *begin to* constructions with Norwegian translations do not have this meaning potential.

Next is a section discussing meaning distinctions based on complement constructions.

### 6.2.3 Meaning and complement construction

According to Freed, an inchoative aspectualizer with a participial complement construction is more likely to suggest process than one with an infinitival complement. I would argue that there is a semantic and/or pragmatic difference between the aspectualizers depending on their complement structure.

First of all, it should be noted that many of the English participial complement constructions are translated into infinitival complement constructions in Norwegian. The difference in meaning between these two constructions is not always clear as they are often interchangeable in a process reading (c.f. Huddleston and Pullum (2005, pp. 1241-2)) as seen in the following sentences:

- (68) (a) He began to eat  
(b) He began eating

Therefore, translations cannot give much insight into this difference either. Where translation data might prove more fruitful, however, is when different structures are used. Data from the ENPC reveal two structures of interest. The first set of Norwegian translations omit the catenative verb and retain the main verb from the original text, as was seen in (35) and (44) in chapter 5, repeated here as (69) and (70).

- (69) (a) The black man started nodding about halfway through, his knife blade still smoothing the surface of the soap. (SG1)  
(b) Halvveis i beskrivelsen nikket den svarte mannen. (SG1T)  
(b') [*lit.*] Halfway in the description nodded the black man.
- (70) (a) They were outside Mrs Fletcher's cottage when someone began shouting at them. (MM1)  
(b) De var kommet til Mrs. Fletcher sitt hus da noen ropte etter dem. (MM1T)  
(b') [*lit.*] [...] when someone shouted after them.

Omission of the catenative verb occurs in translations of both *start* and *begin* with participial complemental constructions. One possible interpretation of this phenomena is that the gerund in English implies an event in process, hence the Norwegian translations' use of the main verb – the event is happening. Notwithstanding, omission also happen with *begin* and infinitival complemental constructions, as was seen in example (27) in chapter 5, repeated below as (71).

- (71) (a) Little by little, he began to feel better. (SK1)  
 (b) Litt etter litt kjente han seg bedre. (SK1T)  
 (b') [*lit.*] [...] felt him himself better.

The next question, then, is whether omission also happens in translations of *start* with infinitival complemental constructions. It has been established that alternative constructions are oftentimes used in the translations, and that these maintain the inchoative reading and sense of onset from the original text, as seen in the examples below.

- (72) (a) I lifted my arms way up and started to move but it still rubbed my side. (RDO1)  
 (b) Jeg løftet armene så høyt jeg kunne og prøvde å flytte meg unna, men likevel streifet den meg i siden. (RDO1T)  
 (b') [*lit.*] [...] and tried to move myself away [...].
- (73) (a) "I started to, when he asked when I was going to get ready for church." (JSM1)  
 (b) "Jeg kom såvidt inn på det, men da spurte han om jeg ikke snart skulle gjøre meg klar til å gå i kirken." (JSM1T)  
 (b') [*lit.*] I came just in on it [...].

Only one instance is found in the ENPC where the Norwegian translation of *start* with an infinitival complement has omission of the catenative while retaining the main verb. Because the sole source is reported speech, it is questionable whether it is representative. In any case, it is possible to argue that this particular construction stands out based on the translation data.

- (74) (a) "Lord, he's starting to squall!" (GN1)  
 (b) "Herre Jesus, som han hyler!" (GN1T)  
 (b') [*lit.*] [...] as he shouts!

The second set of Norwegian translations use the phrase *gi seg til*, or similar ones, portending *begynne med*, as translations for both *start V-ing* and *begin V-ing*. This was seen in (40) and (25) in chapter 5, repeated here as (75) and (76).

- (75) (a) Then he started howling with more laughter. (JB1)  
 (b) Så ga han seg til å hyle enda verre enn før. (JB1T)  
 (b') [lit.] So gave him himself til to shout even worse than before.
- (76) (a) Taking paper and pencil, Philby began to rough out the first draft of his reply. (FF1)  
 (b) Philby tok papir og blyant og ga seg til å skrive ned hovedlinjene i første utkast til svaret. (FF1T)  
 (b') [lit.] [...] took paper and pencil and gave himself til to write down [...].

The translation data suggest that both English inchoative aspectualizers with participial complemental constructions portray similar readings. The Norwegian translations follow an analogous pattern (omission of the catenative or using the phrases *gi seg til* or *begyn\* å*) regardless of which inchoative verb is used in the original text, perhaps with the exception of translations of *start* with an infinitival complement. However, these findings are indicative and need to be further researched.

To conclude this section, the data support Tobin and Freed's theories: Regardless of which inchoative aspectualizer is used, a complement in the present participle form suggests the first part of an event in process.

### 6.3 The cognates *start/starte* compared

This part is related to the English monolingual comparison in that some of the differences in use in Norwegian are due to syntax, unlike the differences found in English.

The English aspectual verb *start* is generally translated into some form of the aspectual verb *begynne* in Norwegian. A mere four cases are found where English *start* as a verb is translated into Norwegian *starte*.

- (77) (a) That was how the riot started. (BO1)  
 (b) Det var slik opptøyene startet. (BO1T)  
 (b') [lit.] It was so the riots started.

- (78) (a) “Well, Miss Eva, I’d have to had started [*sic.*] twenty years ago to beat your record,” Mattie kidded. (GN1)
- (b) “Skulle jeg ha slått din rekord, måtte jeg ha startet for tjue år siden, Miss Eva,” ertet Mattie. (GN1T)
- (b') [*lit.*] [...] must I have started for twenty years ago [...].
- (79) (a) Francis must be seen against his background, and if we are not to start at the very beginning of all things, we must not neglect the Senator. (RDA1)
- (b) Francis må betraktes mot sin bakgrunn, og selv om vi ikke behøver å starte ved alle tings begynnelse, må vi ikke forsømme senatoren. (RDA1T)
- (b') [*lit.*] [...] and even if we not need to start by all things' beginning [...].
- (80) (a) We start from the Embankment. (PDJ3)
- (b) Vi starter på Embankment. (PDJ3T)
- (b') [*lit.*] We start on Embankment.

The cognate pair functions as intransitive main verbs in all cases. A central question is still left unanswered: Since English *start* in its catenative sense is never translated into *starte* in Norwegian, how is the Norwegian verb *starte* used in the ENPC? How do these cognates differ? What is more, the Norwegian verb *starte* is infrequent in the data. Why does it not occur when its cognate *start* is so frequent? One part of the answer of why these cognates diverge might be that *starte* does not function syntactically as a catenative in Norwegian as it does in English. *Starte* in Norwegian is mainly a transitive verb, as seen in the following examples.

- (81) (a) Det kan passe godt å starte beretninga idet Sandy Hook kom til Kvitøya, og så gå litt bakover i tida. (JM1)
- (b) I'll begin the story with the Sandy Hook's arrival at White Island, then go back a little in time. (JM1T)
- (a') [*lit.*] It can fit well to start the story when [...].
- (82) (a) Jeg startet en produksjon av engler, og hun kunne hjelpe meg. (CL1)

(b) I'd begun producing angels, and she'd be able to help me.  
(CL1T)

(a') [*lit.*] I started a production of angels [...].

This last example is curious in itself, as the source text and the translation seem to convey slightly different messages: In the Norwegian text, the inchoative verb *starte* takes a nominalized verb as its dO. The English translation, on the other hand, uses the inchoative verb *begin* with the gerund form of the verb *produce*. Arguably, these two structures are different holistically – The Norwegian clause suggests the inception of an event, the inception of a whole, so to say. The English counterpart suggests process, and that the event is already ongoing.

As is true for the English cognate *start*, Norwegian *starte* may also function as an intransitive verb, as seen in the examples below.

(83) (a) Carl Lange stod ved vinduet og så bilen starte og kjøre vekk.  
(KA1)

(b) Carl Lange stood by the window watching the car start and drive off. (KA1T)

(a') [*lit.*] [...] and saw the car start [...].

(84) (a) To fly starter mot nord. (KH1)

(b) Two planes started northwards. (KH1T)

(a') [*lit.*] Two planes start towards north.

*Starte* in Norwegian is an example of an ergative verb. An ergative verb can be transitive (i.e. used with an object) or intransitive (i.e. used without an object), with the object of the transitive verb used as the subject of the intransitive verb. *Starte* in Norwegian cannot be used as a catenative (e.g. \**starte å le* (start to laugh)). This distinguishes it significantly from its English cognate *start* which is a common catenative aspectualizer. Despite it being an ergative verb, *starte* in Norwegian is mainly used as a transitive verb, and takes a noun phrase object in the majority of the cases found in the ENPC. An interesting fact to point out is that when Norwegian *starte* is used as a transitive verb, the English translations use *begin* (c.f. example (81) and (82)). When Norwegian *starte* is used intransitively, however, the English translations also use *start*. Hence, there is a symmetry to be found in the intransitive use of Norwegian *starte* and English *start*.

Furthermore, English *start* occurs frequently with both infinitival and participial complement constructions, whereas Norwegian *starte* does not

appear with either. The data show that translators work around this issue in three main ways: The first is to translate English *start* into Norwegian *begyn\**, and as a result both the source text and translation are likely to get a process reading. The second way is to paraphrase English *start* by using phrases such as *sette i*; *ta til å* and *gi seg til å*. According to NAOB, these expressions all entail inception and thus convey inchoativity without using an inchoative verb. Particularly interesting is *sette i* which entails a forceful and sudden start, a connotation which is especially suited to cover the cases where *start* is used in this way. The third way translators work around the issue of non-parallelism between *start/starte* is to omit the catenative in the source text while retaining the main verb. In most of these cases it is possible to argue that the co-text conveys inception despite not having a lexical item encoding inchoativity.

In sum, the data suggest that the syntactic restrictions of the cognates are different. While English *start* occurs frequently as a catenative aspectualizer, Norwegian *starte* does not – the latter is mainly used as a transitive verb. Furthermore, English *start* is only translated into Norwegian *starte* in a handful of cases. The majority of these cases present the cognates *start/starte* as transitive verbs. Whenever English *start* is used as a catenative verb, the Norwegian translations use a different syntactic construction without the cognate *starte*.

Finally, the last chapter sums up the findings of this dissertation with a concluding remark.





## Chapter 7

# Conclusion

At the starting point of this investigation, there was evidence to suggest that the English aspectual inchoative verbs *start* and *begin* are synonyms without much indication to the contrary. Indeed, there are contexts in which these verbs can be used interchangeably without a significant alteration in meaning (e.g. *the lecture starts at noon/ the lecture begins at noon*). Most researchers seem to agree with the fundamental assumption that both *start* and *begin* share a common semantic domain which can roughly be stated as: the indication or performance of an inceptive action, state or event (Tobin 1993, p. 180). The verbs are semantically akin because of their function as inchoative aspectualizers. However in certain contexts, one verb or the other may be deemed ungrammatical (e.g. *\*what you said began me thinking* and *\*"Listen", he started*). Yet, theories on how and why these verbs differ seem few and far between. The work of Freed (1979) became of particular interest in this investigation, as her book *The Semantics of English Aspectual Complementation* presents hypotheses on how these verbs differ. I therefore wished to test some of these theories, and to deepen understanding of the use and meaning of *start* and *begin*.

The present thesis has attempted to investigate three main research questions: The first regards to what degree the English inchoative verbs *start* and *begin* overlap in meaning. The theories I reviewed together with data from the cross-linguistic corpus ENPC indicate that there is some degree of overlap as both verbs are aspectual, and both refer to the inception of an event or activity. When the verbs are complemented by a present participle construction, there seems to be little to no distinction in meaning, and thus I have shown that this part of Freed (1979)'s theory is supported by the translation data. Great similarity is found in the translations of both *start* and *begin* with participial complement structures: The most common Norwegian translation of both *start V-ing* and *begin V-ing* is *begyn\* å; gi seg til å;* or the sole use of the main verb from the source text, i.e. omission of the catenative verb found in the original. Both *begyn\* å* and *gi seg til å* have *begynne med* in their definitions from the Norwegian monolingual dictionary NAOB, which suggests a strong overlap in meaning of the English verbs from the source text.

However, there are connotations to be found in both English verbs that do not overlap. Only *start* has the connotation of causality in the sense “to cause someone to do something” as in *what you said started me thinking*; or to cause something to happen as in *the fire was started by arsonists*, and to the sudden movement of flinching as when surprised (e.g. *the noise made me start*). *Begin*, on the other hand, is the only one that can be used as a reporting verb with reported speech (e.g. “Dad?”, *I began*).

These observations lead to the next research question, which investigates Freed (1979)’s theories on the particular notions unique for *start* with infinitival complement constructions. These connotations are *onset* and *reversible onset situations*, *cause*, *sudden movement* and *initiation of machinery*. As shown, dictionaries, corpus data and linguists agree that *cause*, *sudden movement* (i.e. ‘flinching’) and *initiation of machinery* are reserved for *start*. Moreover, the corpus data seem to support Freed (1979) and Tobin (1993) in that the connotation of movement is only available for *start* (e.g. *the planes started northwards* and *I started home* – both of which can be argued to make a specific claim for Result). Additionally, two personal observations are made as regards particular connotations of *start*: there seems to be a clearer initiating Agent in these constructions, as well as the ability to view an event holistically. However, these hypotheses need further investigation to be of relevance.

In short, Freed (1979)’s theories are supported in this corpus-informed investigation. In particular, her theories about onset and reversible onset situations proved to be accurate when analyzing translation data – indeed, many Norwegian translations provide clearer evidence for these theories (e.g. the non-occurrence of the event in reversible onset situations). This observation inspired my personal theory of the holistic perspective, i.e. a theory of how *start* is placed outside the event, at a point where the Agent may still change his or her mind and not enter the event nucleus.

Finally, the last research question regards the degree of symmetry between the English/Norwegian cognate pair *start/starte*. While English *start* occurs frequently in the corpus data, Norwegian *starte* is rather infrequent. The analysis shows that this cognate pair is different syntactically: English *start* oftentimes functions as a catenative verb, while the Norwegian cognate mainly occurs as an ergative verb, as the catenative function is unavailable for this verb in Norwegian.

In conclusion, evidence from cross-linguistic translation data supports Freed (1979)’s theories regarding the contexts in which *start* has different meaning potentials as compared with *begin*. There do indeed seem to be connotations found in *start* with infinitival complement constructions that are not found in this aspectual pair’s counterpart, supporting the idea that these two verbs are not fully synonymous and interchangeable in every context. This study has also highlighted that there are syntactic differences between the cognate pair *start/starte*. Specifically, Norwegian *starte* does not take infinitival or participial complements, two common constructions occurring with English *start*. I have explored the strategies translators use to work around this issue. The two most common ways in cases where

translators do not use *begyn\**, are to paraphrase *starte* into e.g. *sette i; ta til á; gi seg til á;* or to not translate English *start* at all, i.e. omission of the catenative while retaining the main verb. Especially in the cases where paraphrasing is used, the translators have managed to encourage an inchoative reading without the use of an inchoative word, as the co-text of the clauses conveys inception.

## 7.1 Unresolved issues

Since the scope of this thesis is limited and there are many intriguing nuances and details to be explored in this topic, I had to make a strict selection of areas to focus on. There are still a number of unanswered questions and issues left unresolved. These would provide a good basis for further research.

Freed (1979) mentions other analyses that have arrived at similar conclusions based on formal syntactic or semantic categories or structures akin to her own. One of them is Newmeyer (1969, p. 71) who claims that *begin* and *start* can only occur with those objects which can be objects of a definable class of verb, namely ‘the continuing activity verbs’ – verbs he defines as “verbs which denote a non-instantaneous non-perceptual activity over which the subject has conscious control”. This class includes verbs such as *eat, cook, read, write, swim, dance, act, study, sing* and *play*, he writes. Tobin (1993) mentions this in his research as well, and questions whether these verbs are unmarked for Result, but does not elaborate any further.

Newmeyer (1969, p. 82) also claims that *start* shares certain ‘syntactic properties’ with another class of verbs – ‘verbs of motion’ – including *run, walk, spin, jump, canter, hop* and *dance* (*dance* is also included among the ‘continuing activity verbs’).

Freed (1979) states that Newmeyer’s distinction is consistent with her own claims about the feature of ‘motion’ [c.f. etymology] of *start*. It does not, however, help us explain the occurrence of *start* with *garden, apple* or *trouble* (e.g. example (85abc) below), all noun objects that cannot occur with *begin*, she points out.

- (85) (a) I [\*began /started] an apple but couldn’t finish it  
 (b) The separatists [\*began /started] trouble after the dictator’s death  
 (c) They like to [\*begin /start] the garden early in the spring

A speculative explanation for the possibility of *start* with the nouns mentioned above (*apple, trouble, garden*) is that there is an understood onset, perhaps in the form of planning such nouns. Yet, this would not explain the existence of a sentence like “She started the box of cookies last night [eating it, making it, designing it, planning it, etc.]”. This issue has been left unresolved so far, Freed (1979) and Tobin (1993) agree.

## 7.2 Further research

Even though many of Freed (1979)'s theories are supported in English-Norwegian translation data, further investigation with other cross-linguistic corpora could shed more light on the topic, and is thus encouraged. Furthermore, due to the limited scope of this dissertation, I have been forced to make tough decisions on which areas to focus on. It would be very interesting to, for instance, investigate *start* as part of phrasal verbs. Several examples with this structure are found in the ENPC, but are not included in the present thesis and thus provide new ground to cover. Additionally, a deeper cross-linguistic investigation into Norwegian sources of English *start* and *begin* is recommended. I did gather data on this, but am unable to include it due to limited time and scope.

At the very end of my writing process, I also found an interesting book which I unfortunately was unable to study in detail: "Ingressive and Egressive Verbs in English: A cognitive-pragmatic approach to meaning" by Franceschi (2015). She writes about both *start* and *begin*, and covers ground which potentially could add to the findings of this dissertation.

As for questions relating to any semantic difference between the infinitival and the participial complement constructions, a more thorough analysis of these structures is needed. Vandevorde (2020a) has written a book on semantic differences in translation, focusing on inchoativity and the verb *begin* in particular. She writes that the invariance of meaning has, partly due to practical constraints, rarely been challenged in Corpus-based Translation Studies. "In answer to this," she writes, "the aim of this book [*Semantic Differences in Translation*] is to question the invariance of meaning in translated texts: if translation scholars agree on the fact that translated language is different from non-translated language with respect to a number of grammatical and lexical aspects, would it be possible to identify differences between translated and non-translated language on the semantic level too?" (Vandevorde 2020b). This book seems like an interesting place to start further investigations.

I conclude the present thesis hoping it can function as a beginning for someone else.

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