ON THE ARTICULATION OF ASPECTUAL MEANING IN AFRICAN-AMERICAN ENGLISH

A Dissertation Presented

by

JULES MICHAEL EUGENE TERRY

Submitted to the Graduate School of the University of Massachusetts Amherst in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

May 2004

Department of Linguistics
ON THE ARTICULATION OF ASPECTUAL MEANING IN AFRICAN-AMERICAN ENGLISH

A Dissertation Presented

by

JULES MICHAEL EUGENE TERRY

Approved as to style and content by:

Barbara H. Partee, Chair

Angelica Kratzer, Member

Lisa I. Green, Member

Thomas Röper, Member

Gary M. Hardegree, Member

Harry N. Seymour, Member

Elisabeth Sellkirk, Department Head
Department of Linguistics
To my very first and very best teachers: my parents.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Like many graduate students, while working on this dissertation I consulted – at times possibly as a form of procrastination – a number of books on how to “successfully complete a dissertation”. Three such books (one I bought, two that were given to me) are set next to me as I write these very acknowledgements. They offer time-tested, practical advice that varies remarkably little from text to text. All, for instance, recommend keeping one’s committee as small as possible. The logic is clear: with fewer committee members to satisfy, the odds of a timely completion are much greater. It is my good fortune that I ignored that particular piece of advice. And if by ignoring it, my task in writing this dissertation has been made any more difficult, I am all the better for it. Indeed, I am grateful to all of the members of my committee for the attention they have given to my work and to me.

Barbara Partee has been a wonderful chair. Throughout the course of my studies she has given me guidance, support and encouragement the likes of which I could have never even hoped for. The breadth and depth of her knowledge of philosophy and linguistics continue to amaze me, as does her generosity; it is one thing to have such gifts, quite another to share them so freely.

Likewise, Angelika Kratzer has, from the very beginning, instructed and inspired me. My understanding and appreciation of the role of formalism in linguistic theory and analysis not only developed, but, in a very real sense, began in her office. Her influence on my development as a semanticist has been immense.
More than anyone, Lisa Green has encouraged me to face the hard questions about data: What should “count” as African-American English? What do differences in judgments mean? Her willingness to share her knowledge of both linguistic theory and African-American English has been invaluable.

The writing style I have adopted in this dissertation has been greatly influenced by the presence of Tom Roeper and Harry Seymour on my committee. While at the University, I was fortunate enough to work with them both on the development of the Diagnostic Evaluation of Language Variation (DELV), a screening tool for speech pathologists that differentiates normally developing speakers of African-American English from African-American English speakers with Specific Language Impairment (SLI) and normally developing Standard American English (SAE) speakers. In that context and as committee members, they have impressed upon me the importance of the linguistic study of African-American English to fields other than linguistics. Along with their other valuable suggestions, they have encouraged me to do my best to write in a style accessible to a variety of types of scholars.

The shape of this dissertation has also been influenced by Gary Hardegree, who, as a committee member, unselfishly shared both his time and expertise. Each of his questions and comments taught me something important.

In addition to the members of my committee, I am deeply indebted to my other professors at the University, especially Peggy Speas, with whom I took my first linguistics class, and Lyn Frazier and Roger Higgins, who both gave me valuable comments on my work. Also, my fellow classmates have offered me advice and
friendship that I could not have done without. I thank them all, especially Mako Hirotani, Min-Joo Kim, Anita Nowak-Panlilio, Ana Arregui, Paula Menéndez-Benito, Pius Tamanji, and Eva Juarros-Daussa. And as anyone who has ever passed through South College knows, Lynne Ballard and Kathy Adamczyk are remarkable women. I thank them for their indispensable help.

I am also grateful to my friends and family outside of the Linguistics community, especially LaTonya Raines, Adé and Valerie Williams, and my parents, Eugene and Esther Terry. And I would like to thank the community of Wise, North Carolina, whose members have shared their language with me. Finally, I apologize to all those who deserve my thanks but whose names are not mentioned here due to lack of space.
This dissertation investigates the articulation of aspect in African-American English (AAE). Its primary goal is the development of a formal semantics of AAE simple V-ed sentences that explains their compositional interpretation and relationship to done V-ed sentences. Building largely on the valuable works of Green (1993; 1998), Déchaine (1993), Dayton (1996), the work herein supports the conclusions that AAE simple V-ed sentences such as *The frog done jumped* are ambiguous, having both past perfective and present perfect readings, and that AAE done V-ed sentences such as *The frog done jumped* are unambiguously present perfect. Further, it identifies a distinction in meaning between AAE simple V-ed perfects and done V-ed perfects. This distinction makes untenable analyses of the simple V-ed ambiguity in which a silent done is responsible for
contributing perfect aspect to the present perfect versions of these sentences. Instead, this work traces the ambiguity to the presence of a covert present tense operator found in the present perfect (but not past perfective) versions of simple $V$-$ed$ sentences, and the interaction of this operator with the $-ed$ morpheme. In the proposed analysis, single AAE $-ed$ morpheme unambiguously denotes a temporal relation of precedence, contrasting with the two distinct Standard American English (SAE) morphemes often notated as $-ed$ and $-en$ and often argued to denote past and perfect respectively. When it interacts with a covert present tense operator, AAE $-ed$ contributes its precedence relation to the domain of aspect, resulting in the perfect aspect relation (situation time precedes topic time). When it is the highest tense/aspect marker in a sentence, it contributes its precedence relation to the domain of tense, resulting in the past tense relation (topic time precedes utterance time). On the proposed analysis, $-ed$ thus makes the same semantic contribution to simple $V$-$ed$ sentences and $done$ $V$-$ed$ sentences on all of their readings. One theoretically interesting result of this investigation is the finding that a semantically unambiguous operator may contribute sometimes to the interpretation of aspect and sometimes to the interpretation of tense.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ACKNOWLEDGMENTS</td>
<td>v</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ABSTRACT</td>
<td>viii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LIST OF TABLES</td>
<td>xiii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LIST OF FIGURES</td>
<td>xiv</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTERS</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. INTRODUCTION</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. CORE DATA AND BASIC QUESTIONS</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.1 Questions of Form</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.1.1 Past Participles and AAE</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.1.2 Preverbal <em>done</em> as a Single Morphological Word</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.2 Questions of Meaning</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.2.1 Characterizing Tense and Aspect</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.2.1.1 <em>done</em> V-ed Sentences as Present Perfects</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.2.1.2 The Ambiguity of Simple V-ed Sentences</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.3 Summary</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. DEVELOPING A FIRST FORMAL FRAGMENT</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.1 Distinguishing Tense and Aspect</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
3.1.1 Perfective Aspect ................................................................. 76
3.1.2 Perfect Aspect ................................................................. 78
3.2 Steps Toward Formalization .................................................. 79
  3.2.1 The Locus of Perfect and Perfective Aspect ...................... 80
3.3 A First Formal Fragment .................................................... 83
3.4 Adverbial Interaction within the Fragment ......................... 94
3.5 Summary ................................................................. 111

4. REVISING THE FIRST FORMAL FRAGMENT .................. 113
  4.1 Aspect and Aktionsart .................................................. 116
  4.2 Situation Time .......................................................... 126
  4.3 AAE Perfects and Perfectives Revisited ......................... 132
  4.4 Formalization .......................................................... 135
  4.5 Potential Problems .................................................... 140
    4.5.1 Sequence of Tense and –ed Morphology .................... 140
    4.5.2 The Similarity of V-ed Present Perfects and Past Perfectives .... 144
  4.6 Summary .......................................................... 145

5. THE PRESENT, BE AND DONE: THE FRAGMENT IN CONTEXT ...... 147
  5.1 Present Tense in AAE .................................................. 149
  5.2 Invariant be in AAE .................................................. 167
  5.3 Preverbal done in AAE .................................................. 183
  5.4 Summary .......................................................... 198

6. CONCLUDING REMARKS ................................................. 199
APPENDICES

A. DAHL’S PROTOTYPICAL OCCURENCES OF THE PERFECT AND POSSIBLE AAE RENDITIONS ........................................................... 202

B. DAHL’S PROTOTYPICAL OCCURENCES OF THE PERFECTIVE AND POSSIBLE AAE RENDITIONS ........................................................... 207

BIBLIOGRAPHY .......................................................................................................... 212
## LIST OF TABLES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Definite and Indefinite Adverbials</td>
<td>101</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Smith’s Situation Types</td>
<td>119</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>AAE and SAE 3rd Person Simple Tense Paradigms</td>
<td>151</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
# LIST OF FIGURES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Figure</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.</td>
<td>103</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.</td>
<td>104</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.</td>
<td>105</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.</td>
<td>106</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13.</td>
<td>137</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14.</td>
<td>139</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15.</td>
<td>170</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16.</td>
<td>192</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17.</td>
<td>193</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18.</td>
<td>195</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19.</td>
<td>196</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

Recent linguistic interest in African-American English has resulted in research that significantly advances what we know about the dialect’s verbal constructions. While most of this research has been sociolinguistic in nature, there has been a steadily increasing interest in the development of analyses of African-American English syntax and semantics that deploy and test theoretical concepts in frameworks that focus on the structure of language independently or nearly independently of its cultural aspects (Fasold 1972, Bailey and Schnebly 1988, Green 1993). In this dissertation, I build on and contribute to this newer line of research by developing a formal semantic analysis of African-American English (AAE) sentences such as those in (1).

(1) a. The frog jumped. (AAE)
    b. The frog done jumped. (AAE)

---

1 I refer to African-American English (AAE) here as a “dialect” of English though I might just as easily have referred to it as a “language” in its own right. As it states in the January 1997 Linguistics Society of America’s Resolution on the Oakland “Ebonics” Issue, “[t]he distinction between ‘languages’ and ‘dialects’ is usually made more on social and political grounds than on purely linguistic ones.” Few linguists are concerned with this distinction, and as there is no theoretical issue (syntax or semantic) at stake, I use the two terms almost interchangeably. The question of AAE’s status as a dialect or language should not, however, be confused with the ongoing debate over whether AAE has English or Creole origins (v. Poplack 2000, Poplack and Tagliamonte 2001, Rickford 1998). Though this debate is linguistically very interesting, I do not address it in this dissertation.
The analysis sheds light on the question of how the meanings of the various syntactic parts of such sentences contribute to their overall aspectual interpretation, and how aspect interacts with tense.

Though difficult to define, tense and aspect are two of natural language’s primary mechanisms for expressing temporal relations — i.e. notions such as past and present in the case of tense, and progressive and perfect in the case of aspect. In line with their centrality to natural language expression, tense and aspect are basic categories linguists use to describe and categorize natural language sentences. It is, for example, commonplace and fairly uncontroversial among linguists to say that the Standard American English sentence *The frog jumped* is past tensed. A still common, but more controversial claim is that the same sentence is, in terms of its aspect, perfective. Following the traditional grammarians, most linguists would agree that *The frog has jumped* is a present prefect sentence – present in terms of its tense and perfect in terms of its aspect. There is, however, much debate over issues such as how tense is introduced into the sentence and what constitutes a theoretically significant definition of “perfect”.

While there is a great deal of literature concerned with resolving such issues by studying the semantics of Standard American English, relatively little has been written about the semantics of tense and aspect in “dialects” such as African American English. By introducing new data to the field, developing a semantics based on African-American English (as opposed to Standard American English), with this dissertation, I hope to contribute to the developing cross-linguistic tense and aspect literature, and fulfill some of the promise of linguistic formalization.
Semanticists work with formal structures for two reasons. First, the core concern of the semanticist is compositionality; semanticists are interested in how the meanings of parts of words, words themselves, and phrases in natural language combine to produce the meanings of whole sentences. The translation of natural language expressions into a mathematically precise formal language – a symbolic logic – allows precise claims to be made about how this composition takes place. The second reason that semanticists formalize is that formal structures, perhaps better than any other device, are able to capture powerful truths about general relationships. Thus, their use allows the semanticist to say something general about meaning rather than just describe the meaning of a particular sentence or set of sentences. Through a detailed examination of sentences like those in (1), I aim to capture generalizations potentially important to the development of a general theory of aspectual composition.

The quintessential example of a formal language being used to make precise claims about the compositionality of natural language comes from the work of nineteenth century philosopher Gottlob Frege. Both formal semantics and symbolic logic are considered by many to have their roots in Frege’s work. He conjectures that the logical combination of language parts into wholes (e.g. words into phrases or phrases into sentences) is always a matter of a function’s taking an argument. Frege’s conjecture is precise because the mathematical notion of a function is precise, and it is this precision that allows it to constitute the basis of a program which linguists and philosophers such as David Lewis, Richard Montague, M.J. Cresswell, Barbara Partee, and Angelika Kratzer, to name only a few, have continued and extended. My own work is in this tradition. More specifically, it is a work of interval semantics, a sub-area of formal
semantics. In this dissertation, I use the interval semantics framework to both make claims about the nature of aspectual composition in African-American English and to support those claims by showing their utility in capturing generalizations about a range of aspectually relevant data. As an example of how formal structures capture generalizations, consider this familiar valid argument of syllogistic logic: *all men are mortal; Socrates is a man; therefore, Socrates is mortal.* Somewhat more formally, the structure of the argument is as in (2).

\[
(2) \quad \text{all } X \text{ are } Y; \\
\quad \text{Z is an } X; \\
\quad \therefore \text{, Z is } Y.
\]

The power of (2) is, of course, that it captures the famous argument’s *form.* Once we recognize that *all linguists are happy; Chomsky is a linguist; therefore, Chomsky is happy* has the same form, we can conclude that it too is a valid argument; if its premises are true, then its conclusion will likewise be true. The reward of formalization in natural language semantics is the ability to show that sometimes seemingly unrelated sentences (or parts of sentences) turn out to have the same formal structure, hence they are in an important sense, instances of the same structural features of language. An example from the aspect literature is the parallel Emmon Bach (1986) draws between count-mass distinction in nouns (e.g. *a beer vs. beer*) and the event-process or telic-atelic distinction in verbs (e.g. *walk to the park vs. walk in the park*). Building on Godehard Link’s (1983) work on plurals and mass nouns, Bach extends Link’s algebraic account to the domain of
eventualities (Bach’s cover term for both events and states). Subsequent work by Link (1987) further reveals the power of formal (more specifically algebraic) structures to unite these two domains. In a somewhat similar fashion, the formal syntax of Noam Chomsky and others has gone far in showing how the syntax of very different looking languages may be thought of as parameterizations of the same formal objects.

I intend my work to reveal formal structures of African-American English tense and aspect which provide new ways of thinking about tense and aspect in Standard American English as well. Many of the apparent differences between the two dialects can be explained as differences in the way that the same formal structures are combined; thus, something general about tense and aspect is revealed. More ambitiously, I seek to identify the sources of some of these differences. Many of the tense and aspect differences between Standard and African-American English may, I believe, be traced to small differences in their respective agreement systems. For example, a key claim of this dissertation is that unlike their Standard American English counterparts, African-American English sentences such as *The frog jumped* are ambiguous between past tense and present perfect. The fact that African-American English speakers may say “The frog jump” whereas Standard American English speakers must say “The frog jumps” may very well be the source of this difference in their “past” forms. In Chapter 5, I show how the unmarkedness of the present tense forms in African-American English may represent part of a structural and not merely phonological difference that goes across both present and past tense.

Despite the fundamental nature of temporal relations in natural language, tense and aspect remain among the least understood areas of linguistic theory; and many of the
fundamental issues involved in their study are still issues of great debate. Disagreement among researchers notwithstanding, great advances have been made in tense and aspect semantics. Many of these advances have come out of work that has been done in interval semantics. Interval semantics is perhaps best defined by its break with earlier tradition. Before interval semantics, earlier approaches to tense and aspect within formal semantics, including the work of Montague, were based on a tense logic in which the fundamental concept is the notion of the truth of a sentence (under a given interpretation) at a moment in time. In *The Proper Treatment of Quantification in Ordinary Language* (1973), Montague gives conditions paraphrasable as in (3), as those required for a native speaker of English to judge the sentence *John has walked* as true.

(3)  

*John has walked* is true at a moment in time, t, if and only if there exists another moment in time, t’, such that t’ comes before t and *John walks* is true at moment t’.

Interval semantics breaks with this earlier tense logic tradition in that it takes as its core idea the notion of the truth of a sentence (under a given interpretation) at an *interval* of time rather than a moment in time.

One of the earliest references for the idea of interval semantics in linguistic theory is Michael Bennett and Barbara Partee’s unpublished, but widely circulated paper *Toward the Logic of Tense and Aspect in English* (1972). In a 1978 postscript to a publicly accessible version of that paper, the authors explain their reasons for not publishing it:
This paper is still a draft in the sense that we have always considered it as incomplete and inadequate in several major respects ... [W]e have decided to disseminate it as is in unpublished form for two reasons: (i) the paper is cited as one of the primary sources of the idea of interval semantics in a number of recent works, and we wish to make it more generally accessible as part of the literature on interval semantics; and (ii) our ideas about many of the issues treated here have changed sufficiently that if we were to revise the paper for publication now, the result would probably not be in any sense the same paper.

They go on to say that “one prominent inadequacy of the paper” is that it fails to provide a compositional syntax and semantics of the constructions treated; while it provides meanings of whole sentences, it does not explain how the parts come together to make their wholes. As the authors point out, getting from truth conditions for whole sentences to a compositional syntax and semantics is by no means a mechanical task. A host of yet unresolved issues keep it from being so. Thus, this “prominent inadequacy” of the Bennett and Partee paper is an inadequacy of the field, one it has been grappling with at least since their 1972 paper. Developing a compositional semantics of the Standard American English (or any) tense and aspect system is an important though elusive goal of linguistic theory and analysis.

I hope to make a contribution to the achievement of this goal by bringing new data to bear on the problem. Much of the structure argued for in the Standard American English tense and aspect system is invisible; it is not phonologically expressed. In contrast to the standard dialect, African-American English has a rich, highly articulated, and phonologically explicit tense and aspect system. It admits such sentences as *She be done did it before he get the chance* and *She been done been doing it that way*, almost every word of which introduce something by way of tense, aspect, or some other temporal operator. It is the high degree of articulation of this system that increases the
likelihood of achieving compositionality in its analysis. Simply put, in African-American English, there are more visible pieces of the puzzle with which to work than in Standard American English. This dissertation focuses on putting these pieces together. It focuses on the interaction between tenses and aspects and among individual aspects themselves in African-American English sentences such as those in (1). Further, by examining African-American English against a backdrop of literature on primarily Standard American English, the work takes on a comparative nature that increases the chances of finding a correct compositional account even more. My views on this are in concert with those of Richard Kayne (1996), who argues in favor of studying the small syntactic differences between closely related languages and dialects. Kayne writes that

[c]omparative work on the syntax of a large number of closely related languages can be thought of as a new research tool, one that is capable of providing results of an unusually fine-grained and particularly solid character. If it were possible to experiment on languages, a syntactician would construct an experiment of the following type: take a language, alter a single one of its observable syntactic properties, examine the result to see what, if any, other property has changed as a consequence of the original manipulation. If one has, interpret that result as indicating that it and the original property that was altered are linked to one another by some abstract parameter.

(Kayne 199, p. xii)

Kayne continues this thought, saying that though experiments of this type cannot be performed, examining pairs and larger sets of more and more closely related languages/dialects comes perhaps as close as we can get to actually performing them. By looking comparatively at dialects such as Standard English and African-American English, we get a better sense of the syntax to which we are attaching meanings, and thus, a better sense of how those meanings compose.
Working against a backdrop of literature on both Standard English and African-American English, this dissertation asks questions about sentences that are a part of the variety of African-American English spoken in the small rural community of Wise, North Carolina. My data are sentences I have heard within that speech community, as well as my own sentences and sentences reported in the literature to the extent that members of that community have also judged them as acceptable. Though the boundaries between the types of empirical inquiry are often fuzzy, my work is analytic, as opposed to theoretical or metatheoretical, in that it is primarily concerned with investigating the domain in question (acceptable African-American English sentences) through the deployment and testing of the concepts of theoretical work. Theoretical work, in contrast, has as its primary concern the development of the primitives and architecture of theory, and metatheoretical work is primarily concerned with adequacy conditions, either for theories in general or a theory of a particular domain. As Robert Chametzky (1996) notes, linguists typically do not distinguish between metatheoretical, theoretical, and analytic work, but between “theoretical” and “descriptive” work, “where both of these are better understood as analytic work with, respectively, more or less explicit reliance on and reference to a specific framework and its concepts and architecture.” Despite his rejection of this terminology, Chametzky goes on to say that such “theoretical” work, as a typical linguist might use the term, will therefore be more likely than “descriptive” work to “impinge on purely theoretical issues”. My work is analytic work of Chametzky’s second variety; it relies heavily on the framework of interval semantics, and seeks to

---

2 Wise is a small town located in Warren County, North Carolina. Information regarding the sociolinguistic landscape of Warren County and many of the structural features of African-American English as it spoken there can be found in Hazen (2000).
“impinge on” such theoretical issues as the difference and relation between properties of times and properties of eventualities in an interval semantics, and whether or not tenses should be considered operators.

Most other researchers studying African-American English have chosen different frameworks. This is principally because they are asking different kinds of questions. With some notable exceptions (e.g. Green 1993), the vast majority of work done on African-American English has been either historical or socio-linguistic in nature. Among other things, it has sought to trace how the dialect as a whole has changed over time, to predict likely changes in the future, and to determine what role factors such as socioeconomic status play in a speaker’s choice of words. One hopes, however, that where different choices of framework are made based solely on the different kinds of questions being asked, the results of different analyses will, for the most part, be compatible. Language has formal properties, yes, but it is also subject to historical change and it is also used as a social tool. Choices of framework based on a particular framework’s inability to give satisfactory answers to the questions it is designed to answer are, on the other hand, another matter. Such cases are (most of the time) resolved once it is convincingly shown that one framework can account for a larger set of data than another. This is yet another reason why the inclusion of dialect data is important to the field of natural language semantics.

Regardless of framework, everyone studying African-American English is faced with the problem of systematizing the data, African-American English sentences and pieces of African-American English sentences. Likewise, everyone is faced with the need to idealize (to at least some degree) the data in order to focus on the particular questions
that he or she is asking. As with choice of framework, some choices in the way the data are systemized, though different, will be compatible; others will be the source of great debate and further study.

Among other challenges, researchers interested in African-American English verb forms are all faced with the placing of invariant *be*\(^3\), preverbal *done*\(^4\), stressed *been* (\*been\(^5\)), and their allowable combinations (*be done*, *been done*) within a larger system of verbs and verb endings. It is in large part the presence of these markers and the way in which they combine that makes looking for compositional meanings within African-American English so attractive. The meaning of *John been ate that cake* (roughly *John ate that cake a long time ago*) and the meaning of *John done ate that cake* (roughly *John has eaten that cake*) seem to predict the meaning of *John been done ate that cake* (roughly *John has eaten that cake and it was a long time ago*). I organize my data around verb paradigms in a search for core compositional meanings for elements like the verbal suffix *–ed*\(^6\), and *done*.

It is sometimes argued that core meanings of markers like *be*, *been* and *done* are a structuralist’s fool’s gold; that they do not exist. The common argument runs something like this: to have a core meaning of an element like *done* requires adherence to a one-

---

\(^3\) This *be* is often referred to as “*be\(_2*\)” as, for example, in the work of Dayton (1996). Green (1993, 1998) refers to this *be* as “aspectsual *be*” and “habitual *be*”.

\(^4\) Green (1993, 1998) refers to preverbal *done* as “*d\(_n*\)” to distinguish it from main verb *done* and to underscore the fact that in this position it is unstressed.

\(^5\) Various typological conventions have been used to distinguish between stressed *been* and unstressed *been*. For example, Rickford (1973) refers to stressed *been* as *BÍN*. Green (1993), Dayton (1996) and others refer to it as “*BIN*”. In this work, I represent stressed *been* as *been*.

\(^6\) I assume an abstract suffix *–ed* that is responsible for turning verbs such as *eat* into *ate* as well as turning verbs such as *work* into *worked*. 
form-one-meaning hypothesis. That is, we must believe that every time we see the marker *done*, for instance, it must either mean the same thing or, allowing for changes over time, mean something very closely related to it. If it does not, then there can be no core meaning, and we must admit a number of meanings with no central core. Such thought quite often leads to positing a large number of meanings for single words or pieces of words and non-compositional ways of putting them together – the meanings of the parts are not predicted from the meanings of the wholes. With respect to *done*, William Labov (1968, 1996), argues that its meaning is “inevitably disjunctive”, having both “perfective” and “intensive” meanings which can, but need not, coincide. Similarly, Elizabeth Dayton in her (1996) dissertation explicitly argues against the one-form-one-meaning hypothesis and for largely non-compositional analyses of the marker combinations (*be done*, and *been done*). I am quite sympathetic to this view. Syncretism – one form with several roles or meanings – is unquestionably a part of natural language. For example, most linguists and grammarians admit at least four roles for the Standard English suffix –*ed*. It has a role in the formation of the past tense, perfect participle, passive participle, and verbal adjective as the following examples taken from Steven Pinker and Allen Prince (1988) show:

(4) Past tense: It *opened*.
    Perfect Participle: It has *opened*.
    Passive Participle: It was being *opened*.
    Verbal adjective: a recently-*opened* box
It is also true that whenever we have a closed class of linguistic elements, it is likely that over time speakers of the language will call upon them to do varied things. This can and often does result in homophones elements as well as irregularity and idiomaticity in the combinations of elements. Still, with respect to the African-American English tense and aspect system, I believe that there is much that can be given a perfectly compositional analysis with a minimum of appeals to homophonous morphemes or idiomatic combinations. In this dissertation, I develop an analysis of done and its interaction with –ed that I believe shows something about the way in which aspectual meanings are composed and which I also believe advances the search for compositionality in the semantics of African-American English. My organization of the data will reflect this belief.

In organizing their data, researchers of African-American English must also determine what sentences and associated meanings will “count” as a part of the dialect, and different people are likely to disagree as to the acceptability of some sentence-meaning pairs. This is an unfortunate inevitability, one that highlights the fact that African-American English, like any language or dialect, is to some extent, a fiction. In the words of Chomsky, languages in this sense are “epiphenomenal”; they are secondary phenomena accompanying and caused by something more fundamental. What we really study when we study formal linguistics are grammars, the rule systems within individual speaker’s heads. We can, however, without contradiction or too much confusion talk about languages such as Italian, French, etc. In practice, most formal linguists query a

7 I am grateful to Barbara Partee (p.c.) for first bringing this to my attention.
number of people all of whom consider themselves to speak the same language, say Italian, and then develop their grammatical analyses based on the most stable of the judgments they collect. It is not uncommon for linguists proceeding in this fashion to say that they “work on Italian” or whatever language their informants consider themselves to speak. Working from judgments in this way means that the linguist is producing an analysis of the common features of a number of people’s grammars. The stability of judgments across speakers helps assure the linguist that any particular judgment is part of a grammar – it is an organizing principle – rather than an accident or whim. When a formal linguist says that he “works on Italian” he is using a kind of short hand notation for saying that he studies a composite grammar constructed from the common parts of the grammars of a group of people. My study of African-American English is no different. My aim is to formally represent a number of the common portions of the grammars of African-American English speakers in Wise, North Carolina that are critical to the understanding of how tense and aspect work in what can be thought of as African-American English as a whole.

As people living close to one another are more likely to have similar grammars than people living far apart, we expect that a large number of differences in linguistic judgments will break along regional lines. The African-American English spoken in Wise, North Carolina will not be exactly the same African-American English that Green (1993) has studied in Lake Arthur, Louisiana, and neither of these will be exactly the same African-American English that Dayton (1996) has studied in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Nonetheless, they share enough common features (e.g. their use of invariant be, been and done) to discuss them under the rubric of African-American
English. Their differences may be thought of as distinguishing different varieties of the language or dialect. Kayne (1996) sees such differences as further reason for studying ever more closely related languages. Seeing, as I do, no syntactically or semantically significant distinction between “language” and “dialect”, and no justification for neglecting the latter in linguistic study, Kayne argues that we must radically revise current estimates of the number of the world’s languages if by language we mean a distinct syntactic system. He argues that if we make the very reasonable assumption that no two speakers have exactly the same syntactic judgments one hundred percent of the time, then we must allow for at least five billion syntactically distinct (potential) human languages (an estimate of the number of people alive today). And adding past and future languages/dialects currently not spoken, he further reasons that the number is far greater. Kayne might well be criticized here for making the rather unrealistic simplifying assumption that each person only speaks a single dialect or idiolect. Linguistically speaking, what is in a person’s head may very often reflect exposure to multiple dialects, and this may be a source of some of the inconsistencies and uncertainties that appear in people’s language production and judgments. So, Kayne’s estimates of the number of “languages” we must account for may be high, but the point he wishes to make is still valid. Operating under the Chomskyan hypothesis that the language-learning child does not pick its syntax whole from a set of all possible syntactic systems, but instead sets individual syntactic parameters the end result of which is the syntactic component of the grammar, Kayne asks what his staggering numbers have to say about the language acquisition process. He calculates the number of independent binary-valued syntactic parameters needed to allow for 5 billion syntactically distinct grammars at 33 (2 raised to
the 33rd power is about 8.5 billion), and notes that if the number of parameters is increased to 100, then the corresponding number of grammars is over one million trillion trillion. As Kayne is quick to point out, in the face of such staggering numbers, linguist’s recent attempts to cover more ground by paying closer attention to the small-scale variation of “dialects” is modest. Still, he argues, and I agree (especially since his number may be in need of revision), that the enterprise is nonetheless a “powerful tool”, that “allows us to probe the questions concerning the most primitive units of syntactic variation.” I would add that as syntactic structures are the input to semantic interpretation and the search for a compositional semantics requires assigning meanings to pieces of a syntactic tree, studying “dialects” is a powerful tool for the semanticist as well as the syntactician.

Not all of the differences in judgments relevant to this dissertation will define different varieties of African-American English. Not all of these differences can or should be explained by regional or even individual differences among speakers. A key reason is that this dissertation is concerned with the semantics of tense and aspect in African-American English. While syntax is primarily concerned with configurational issues such as word order, semantics is concerned with meaning. In terms of its syntax, a string such as the boy ate the fish is judged as either acceptable or unacceptable. This particular string is an acceptable sentence of most varieties of English. It contrasts with the string boy fish ate the, which is not. Semantic judgments, on the other hand, are judgments about meanings. They do not take the form acceptable vs. unacceptable.

---

8 This is something of a simplification. Syntax, especially modern syntax, is concerned with more than word order, but I believe the point is valid.
Rather they most often take the form true vs. false or appropriate vs. inappropriate. In contrast to acceptability, truth and appropriateness must be judged with respect to a context or state of affairs. The sentence *The boy ate the fish* is true (and appropriate) given a state of affairs in which the boy in question swallowed the fish, but false (and inappropriate) in a situation in which the fish swallowed the boy\(^9\). Two speakers (or two researchers) may give different semantic judgments for the same sentence, but before the difference can be considered regional or even a difference at all, careful consideration must be given to the context in which the sentence is spoken and how that context affects the interpretation of the sentence from the choice of syntactic structure through the assignment of meanings to that structure. Differing judgments must be probed and their “meaning” for the overall enterprise interpreted. The following is an example of differing African-American English judgments from the literature. I briefly discuss how they might be approached, and show how they affect different researchers’ organization of similar sets of African-American English sentences.

Green (1993, 1998) reports that similar to the Standard American English *have* construction, the African-American English preverbal *done* construction is incompatible with past time indicating adverbs. Thus, according to Green, like the Standard American

---

\(^9\) This view of semantics, with its dependence on notions of truth and reference, treats meanings as entities that relate pure psychology (what is inside the head) to the world (what is outside of the head). Thus, the study of semantics must be conducted in embodied and social contexts. (v. Putnum 1988). While it may be possible to study syntax independent of culture, semantics can never attain, nor should it ever try to attain, complete independence of cultural considerations. Still, I count the present work as part of a growing body of work on African-American English whose focus is linguistic structure rather than the use of language as a social tool. Despite a sometimes-antagonistic relationship, the two kinds of study should ideally inform each other.
English sentence in (5a), the African-American English sentence in (5b) is ungrammatical.10

(5)  a. *John has gone to town yesterday  (SAE)
    b. *John done went to town yesterday.  (AAE)

Dayton (1996), however, reports that Philadelphia speakers of African-American English sometimes use sentences similar to (5b) – done constructions with past time indicating adverbs. She argues that this is evidence that done is changing from a perfect marker to a perfective marker. In contrast to Green, who organizes her verb paradigms around a single done with a consistent meaning, Dayton allows done to span these two categories. The verbal paradigms that she presents reflect this decision. The difference between Green and Dayton’s reports of speaker judgments and the subsequent differences in their verb paradigms may reflect the fact that the dialect is undergoing change. They might also reflect a regional difference. Green’s data represent her own judgments and those of other Louisiana speakers; Dayton’s data come from Philadelphia. Without a context, I have found it difficult to get consistent judgments regarding the acceptability of sentences such as (5b). Out of the blue, most speakers that I have asked find (5b) and similar sentences unacceptable although there is enough variation to raise questions regarding the judgment. Once the context is fixed, however, the data become clearer. While I agree with Green’s basic generalization that past time indicating adverbs are incompatible with

---

10 “Ungrammatical” here is meant in descriptive sense of the linguist rather than in the prescriptive sense of the schoolteacher. In a descriptive account of a language, a sentence is grammatical if and only if native speakers use it spontaneously or accept it as normal.
the *done* construction, like Dayton, I have found that there are some situations in which many African-American English speakers (myself being one) will accept such sentences. When treated as a part of the discourse in (6), for example, I have found near uniform acceptance of the sentence among the speakers I have interviewed.

(6) Why you want to offer June a ride now? She done went to town yesterday.  

(AAE)

‘Why do you want to offer June a ride now? She has (already) gone to town (; it was) yesterday.’  

(SAE)

In contrast, when it is made clear that (5b) is to be taken as a simple statement of fact, there nearly all of my informants agree that the sentence is unacceptable. Following Labov (1968, 1996), one might argue that (6) shows that the meaning of *done* is “inevitably disjunctive”. One might consider (6) an instance of Labov’s “intensive *done*.” Under Labov’s proposal, the *done* in (5b) and the *done* in (6) would be considered distinct lexical items. The *done* in (5b) would mark perfect aspect, while that in (6) would mark something like intensity or purposeful action. In Chapter 3, I will argue that at least for speakers in Wise, North Carolina, the contrast between (5b) and (6) is best understood by using a single-*done* analysis. Roughly, I will argue that in (6) *yesterday* modifies the situation, June’s going to town, but in (5b) it modifies a higher projection within the sentence. The two sentences have different syntactic configurations that lead to the different judgments. So like Dayton, I count the judgment that past time denoting adverbs are *sometimes* incompatible with *done* constructions and *sometimes* not as a part of the
variety of African-American English that I am studying, but like Green I argue for a single-done analysis and organize my data, in part, around this claim. This particular organization introduces a number of analytical puzzles that I discuss and build upon while developing my semantic analysis of the sentences in (1).

The remainder of the dissertation proceeds as follows. In Chapter 2, I discuss the core data and some of the puzzles that they present. In Chapter 3, I discuss some general issues concerning aspect, and develop a first analysis of the African-American English present perfect and past perfective sentences. In Chapter 4, I revise the Chapter 3 analysis in order to address a number of its weaknesses. In Chapter 5, I discuss my Chapter 4 analysis of African-American English perfect constructions in relation to the dialect’s greater tense/aspect system. Finally, in Chapter 6, I offer a few concluding remarks.
CHAPTER 2
CORE DATA AND BASIC QUESTIONS

As described in Chapter 1, the goal of this dissertation is to develop a formal semantic analysis of sentences such as those in (1a) and (1b), repeated here along with SAE translations as (7) and (8), respectively.

(7) The frog jumped. (AAE)
   a. ‘The frog jumped.’ (SAE)
   b. ‘The frog has jumped.’ (SAE)

(8) The frog done jumped. (AAE)
   ‘The frog has jumped.’ (SAE)

My interest lies not simply in sentences (7) and (8), but in the sentence types that these sentences represent and the wide range of issues that must be addressed in order to explain their compositional interpretation. To be judged successful, the semantics to be developed must be able to account not only for the interpretation of (7) and (8), but for the interpretation of (9) and (10) and a host of other similar sentences as well.

(9) I lost my job. (AAE)
   a. ‘I lost my job.’ (SAE)
   b. ‘I have my job.’ (SAE)
My interest, then, is in a more abstract pairing of the form of these sentences with the kinds of meanings they convey.

In this chapter, I begin my examination of the form and meanings of these and other core data while outlining some of the puzzles they present.

2.1 Questions of Form

With respect to their form, sentences (7) and (9) can be viewed schematically as in (11), while sentences (8) and (10) can be viewed as in (12).

(10) I done lost my job. (AAE)

‘I have lost my job.’ (SAE)

(11) Subject V-ed (Object)

(12) Subject done V-ed (Object)

In both of these schemas Subject is the sentence’s subject, Object is the sentence’s object (the parentheses indicating that an object is not always required) and V-ed is the sentence’s verb, V, marked with what I will call -ed, the inflectional morphology that, in the cases of (7) and (8) turns the verb jump into jumped and in the cases of (9) and (10) turns the verb lose into lost. While not meant as fully articulated syntactic representations, the schemas in (10) and (11) abstract away from the particulars of (7)
through (10) in favor of more syntactic representations. Subject-hood, for instance, is a syntactic notion. Whether or not a noun phrase such as *The frog* in (7) or *I* in (9) is a subject is determined by its position and role in the sentence. The schemas in (11) and (12) say nothing about whether the subject is *The frog* or *Mary* or *My aunt’s dog Pee Wee* for that matter. In similar fashion, *V* stands in place of any verb, be it *jump, faint* or *bark*. This leaves *done*, which I treat as a single morphological word, and *–ed*, which is an abstract morphological unit that is phonologically realized in a variety of ways. The *–ed* in (11) and (12) should, then, be understood in much the same way as the *–en* in Chomsky’s *Syntactic Structures* (1957); its name is meant only to be suggestive of a representative morphophonemic shape. Like SAE, AAE makes the Germanic distinction between “weak” and “strong” verb stems. Suffixed to a weak verb stem, *–ed* is realized as one of three morphophonemic shapes, /t/ as in *jumped* (/dʒʌmplt/ ), /d/ as in *scared* (/skerd/), and /ɔd/ as in *fainted* (/fɛintɔd/). On the other hand, combined with strong verb stems, *–ed* has a wider variety of morphophonemic realizations. The *–ed* form of the verb *take*, for instance, is *took*; the *–ed* form of the verb *sing* is *sang*, and the *–ed* form of the verb *lose* is *lost*.

In SAE, the weak/strong verb stem distinction highlights the need to distinguish between the often homophonous past tense, past participle, and passive participle forms of a verb. While SAE weak verbs uniformly have homophonous past tense and participles, strong verbs often (but not always) show an overt difference between their past tense and participle forms. For example, while the weak verb *want* has *wanted* as its past tense, past participle, and passive participle forms as shown in (13), the strong verb
take has took as its simple past form and taken as its past and passive participle forms as shown in (14)\(^{11}\).

(13) a. John wanted the apple. \hspace{1cm} \text{(SAE, past tense)}
    b. John had wanted the apple. \hspace{1cm} \text{(SAE, past participle)}
    c. The apple was wanted by John. \hspace{1cm} \text{(SAE, passive participle)}

(14) a. John took the apple. \hspace{1cm} \text{(SAE, past tense)}
    b. John had taken the apple. \hspace{1cm} \text{(SAE, past participle)}
    c. The apple was taken by John. \hspace{1cm} \text{(SAE, passive participle)}

The past tense took and the participle taken are clearly syntactically distinct elements as demonstrated by (15). The participle taken is disallowed in the construction in (15a), but allowed in the constructions in (15b) and (15c). The opposite is true of the past tense form took. It is allowed in (15a) but disallowed in (15b) and (15c).

(15) a. John took/*taken the apple. \hspace{1cm} \text{(SAE)}
    b. John had taken/*took the apple. \hspace{1cm} \text{(SAE)}
    c. The apple was taken/*took by John. \hspace{1cm} \text{(SAE)}

\(^{11}\) The examples in (13) through (15) are adapted from examples in Rodney Huddleston and Geoffrey K. Pullum’s The Cambridge Grammar Of The English Language.
Since at least the publication of Chomsky’s *Syntactic Structures* (1957), syntacticians in the generative tradition have generally accepted the distinction between at least two underlying syntactic representations for the verb endings in (13) and (14): one for the past tense and the other for the past and passive participles. In *Syntactic Structures*, Chomsky distinguishes between an abstract “PAST”, which turns *take* into the past tense *took* and *want* into the past tense *wanted*, and an abstract –*en*, which turns *take* into the participle *taken* and *want* into the participle *wanted* (which is homophonous with its past tense form). By extending the syntactic distinction between *took* and *taken* to the case of *wanted*, the rules of grammar can be stated very generally, and the data can be accounted for in a straightforward fashion. SAE syntax allows the first or only verb in a canonical clause such as (14a) to appear in its PAST but not its –*en* form; but the –*en* form of a verb must follow *had* in the past perfect construction in (14b) and *was* in the passive construction in (14c). Based on semantic function rather than syntactic restriction, Chomsky might have posited three underlying forms: one for past tense, one for past participle and still another for passive participle. Indeed, most traditional grammarians and some linguists do.

Since it is pieces of syntax, compositionally put together, that the semantics interprets, the number of underlying syntactic forms that are assumed has important consequences for the development of a compositional semantics. My schemas in (11) and (12) treat forms like *lost* in *I lost my job* and *lost* in *I done lost my job* as one and the same, the strong implication being that they share not only a common syntax, but a common semantics as well. In contrast, Elizabeth Dayton (1996) contends that the verbs that follow *done* in AAE constructions like (8) and (10) are, in fact, participles. In her
view, they are syntactically and semantically distinct from their homophonous past tense forms. Put in the terms of Chomsky’s *Syntactic Structures*, Dayton’s view is that we should rewrite the schema in (12) as (16), where the participle-forming morpheme, –en, contrasts with the past-tense-forming morpheme, –ed, in (11).

(16) Subject done V-en (Object)

Whether or not AAE actually makes this underlying distinction emerges as an important question in this dissertation. At first, the fact that AAE has some participial-looking forms in apparent contrast to past tense forms would seem to settle the matter in Dayton’s favor, showing that AAE does, in fact, have participles. Both *gone* and *went*, for example, surface as forms of the verb *go* in the AAE grammar. Leaving the issue of passive participles aside, the position I take, however, is that AAE has neither syntactically nor semantically distinct past tense and past participle forms. I contend that examples such as the *gone/went* contrast constitute only a few idiosyncratic cases that can safely be ignored due to their lack of systematic usage; and while this by itself may not be sufficient reason to rule out the presence of participles in AAE, it points the way to possibly more fundamental reasons (which I will explore later) as to why the schema in (12) is preferable to that in (16).

In what remains of this section, I will look more closely at some of the questions raised by the schemas in (11) and (12). In section 2.1.1, I will review Dayton’s arguments for a past tense/past participle distinction in AAE, and advance a first argument of my own against such a distinction and in favor of a single –ed analysis. In section 2.1.2, I
will discuss my treatment of preverbal done as a single morphological word in (12). I take up the issue of the meanings carried by the forms in (11) and (12) in section 2.2.

2.1.1 Past Participles and AAE

Dayton’s argument for participles in AAE is built largely on analogy to SAE. She reasons as follows: We know that SAE has distinct past participle forms (e.g. taken in (14b)). We also know that in SAE, the adverb now can occur as a part of present perfect sentences such as (17a), which contain participles, but not simple past constructions such as (17b), which do not.

(17)  a. John has eaten now  (SAE)
     b. * John ate now  (SAE)

Dayton argues that now can therefore be treated as diagnostic for the presence of a participle. Noting that five percent of the done tokens in her data occur with the adverb now, she concludes that the verb form that follows done in sentences such as that in (18) is a participle.

(18)  John done ate now.  (AAE)

It seems doubtful to me, however, that now is sensitive to the presence of a participle – at least not in such a way that would make it diagnostic. If eaten in the present perfect
(17a) is a participle, then it is reasonable to assume that eaten in the past perfect sentences in (19) is also a participle. I know of no syntactic theory that tries to distinguish between the two. Yet now is as ungrammatical in (19b) as it is in (17b)\(^{12}\).

\[(19)\]  
  a. John had eaten. (SAE)  
  b. *John had eaten now. (SAE)

The contrast between the grammatical (17a) and the ungrammatical (19b) suggests a sensitivity on the part of now to presentness rather than participle presence that undermines Dayton’s argument.

While Dayton argues that there is a systematic use of participles in AAE done constructions, following Labov et al (1968), she also argues that there is no systematic distinction in overt form between simple past and past participle in the dialect. To argue this, she examines the irregular verbs that occur with done in her data. Using the classification system in Quirk et al. (1972), she separates the verbs into seven classes. Based again on analogy to SAE, she argues that were there a systematic distinction between overt simple past and past participle forms, this distinction would manifest itself in her “class four verbs”. These are verbs such as eat, break, freeze and steal. Noting that

\(^{12}\) When taken literally, (17b) and (19b) are, as noted, ungrammatical. There are, however, more metaphorical uses of these sentences that are grammatical. These uses demand treating a past event or state as though it overlaps with the “present” moment. A series of past events may be recounted using present tense forms. For example, It happened this way: first John comes home, then he walks over to the door. In such an account we might reach a metaphorical “present moment” and use a sentence such as (17b) or (19b). It would appear, then, that now in the SAE sentences in (17b) and (19b) is licensed by the description of events that overlap a metaphorical present. The contrast between the literal readings of (17b) and (19b) also suggest a connection with presentness rather than participle presence.
in her data fourteen percent (18/133) of these verbs occur after *done* in their “perfect form” (*eaten, broken, frozen, stolen*), but eighty-six percent (115/113) occur in their “preterite form” (*ate, broke, froze, stole*), Dayton concludes that in general, perfect forms are not distinct from preterite forms or, as I have been calling them, simple past forms.

As I said before, it is a general lack of systematicity in the data that forms the basis of my principal argument against there being a past tense/past participle distinction in AAE (at least as it is spoken in Wise, North Carolina). But simply having a class of verbs, some of the members of which have overt participle-looking forms and others of which do not, does not suggest the absence of an underlying distinction. On the contrary, it opens the door to the kind of argument used to extend the SAE *took*/*taken* distinction in (15) to cases like *wanted* in (13). The lack of systematicity in the AAE data, however, is of a different quality. By way of example, all of the AAE speakers I have interviewed allow both (20a) and (20b) with, as far as I can tell, no difference in meaning.

(20)  

a. John done went to the store. \hspace{1cm} (AAE)  
b. John done gone to the store. \hspace{1cm} (AAE)

However, the status of *gone* in simple past environments is questionable at best, as is shown in (21a). Here there is a clear contrast with *went*. Compare (21a) to (21b).

13 Recall that the obvious syntactic distinction between pairs such as *took* and *taken* in SAE is extended to cases like *wanted* because doing so allows the grammar to be stated in more general terms than if separate syntactic rules were posited to account for the individual cases.
(21)  
   a. ??John gone to the store yesterday.  (AAE)  
   b. John went to the store yesterday.  (AAE)  

A very different pattern emerges if you ask these same speakers about the forms *saw* and *seen*. Here most speakers (particularly the younger of them) allow both the form *saw* and the form *seen* in both simple past and *done* constructions:

(22)  
   a. John seen her yesterday.  (AAE)  
   b. John saw her yesterday.  (AAE)  

(23)  
   a. John done seen her.  (AAE)  
   b. John done saw her.  (AAE)  

After examining the candidate past participle forms in AAE, the picture that emerges is one of a handful of irregular verbs that behave differently from one another. They are, so to speak, irregulars among irregulars. The strongest evidence that I have found for the presence of past participles in AAE comes from forms of the verb *be*. The sequence *done been* is acceptable, whereas the sequence *done was* is not, and the form *been* cannot be used as a simple past:
The data in (24) are reminiscent of those in (15), and one might make the standard argument for participles, extending the distinction from *was* and *been* to the rest of the grammar. But while it is possible that a child acquiring AAE might infer a regular past tense/past participle distinction from the *was/been* distinction in (24), it is, I believe, rather unlikely. *Be* is not only one of the most common verbs in the English language, it is also one of the most irregular. As the following examples from Steven Pinker’s *Words and Rules* (1999) show, *be* is the only verb in SAE that comes in eight overtly distinct forms, most of which I find have similar details in AAE.

The infinitive; subjunctive; imperative:

The Present tense, first-person singular:

14 The sentence *John been here* without *yesterday* is acceptable. This and other data suggests that *John been here* is a present perfect rather than a simple past.
The Present tense, second-person singular, all persons plural:

(27) You/we/they are family. (SAE, ?AAE)

The Present tense, third-person singular:

(28) He/she/it is the rock. (SAE, AAE)

The past tense, first- and third-person singular:

(29) I/he/she/it was born by the river. (SAE, AAE)

The Past tense, second person singular, all persons plural; subjunctive:

(30) a. The way we/you/they were … (SAE, ?AAE)

b. If I were a rich man … (SAE, ?AAE)

The Progressive and Present participle; gerund:

(31) a. You’re being silly. (SAE, AAE)

b. It’s not easy being green. (SAE, AAE)

c. Being and Nothingness. (SAE, AAE)
The Perfect Participle:

(32)  I’ve been a puppet, a pauper, a pirate, a poet, a pawn and a king.  (SAE, AAE)

Although the exact category labels may be disputed, AAE be has all of these overt forms except perhaps for are in (27) and were in (30). It regularizes these two forms to is and was respectively, preferring, for example, We is family to We are family, The way we was to The way we were, and If was a rich man to If I were a rich man. While these forms are regularized, AAE arguably adds another overtly distinct form of be: stressed been (or been). Because it is obligatorily stressed, this form of be, which, roughly speaking, marks the remote past, may be considered overtly distinct from unstressed been. Following Labov et al. (1968), I assume that the been in (33a) and the been in (33b) are lexically distinct; they are different words.

(33)  a. John been a fireman.    (AAE)

       ‘John has been a fireman for a long time.’    (SAE)

       b. John been a fireman.    (AAE)

       ‘John has been a fireman.’    (SAE)

Their co-occurrence in sentences like (34) underscores their separateness.

This is not to say that AAE speakers are not familiar the SAE forms. Indeed, some may even incorporate them into their particular idiolects. By and large, however, is and was are the preferred forms.
(34) John been done been putting out fires. \hspace{1cm} (AAE)

‘John has been putting out fires for a long time.’ \hspace{1cm} (SAE)

These, of course, are only the overtly distinct forms of *be*. It is not entirely clear, for instance, that the *be* in *Let it be* and the *be* in *Be prepared* are the same in their underlying form, and all of the forms in (25) through (30) may be thought of as having both “main verb” and auxiliary versions. Both instances of *be* in *To be or not to be*, for example, are main-verb infinitives whereas the *be* in *To be talking now is against the rules* is the infinitive of the auxiliary *be*. Finally, AAE, rather famously, allows an uninflected *be* to appear in constructions like those in (35), which have habitual readings. Labov et al (1963), Green (1993), and Dayton (1996) are among many who argue that in its underlying form this form of *be* is distinct from all others in the language\(^{16}\).

(35) a. John be running. \hspace{1cm} (AAE)

‘John always/often runs.’ \hspace{1cm} (SAE)

b. John be happy. \hspace{1cm} (AAE)

‘John is always/often happy.’ \hspace{1cm} (SAE)

In addition to the irregularities already pointed out, *be* and *go* are the only verbs in SAE or AAE that exhibit suppletion in their simple past forms. That is, their simple past forms

\text{------------------}

\(^{16}\) I am not taking a side here. This form of *be* may or may not be distinct in its underlying form. My point is simply that not all irregularities need be on the surface.
are words completely unrelated to their base forms: be/was, go/went. Suppletion, as Pinker points out, arises from linguistic merger. Be and was (like go and went) derive from what were originally different verbs. Because of all of the irregularities of be that must be learned apart from the regular paradigms, it seems unlikely that the child acquiring AAE would infer regular participle use from the been/was distinction alone. It seems more likely that there is no underlying past tense/past participle distinction in AAE, and that what look like participle forms in the dialect are in fact historical remnants that have for the time being, at least, escaped regularization.

2.1.2 Preverbal done as a Single Morphological Word

Turning now to done, the schemas in (12) and (16) both treat AAE preverbal done as a single morpheme rather than a complex morphological object. Following the majority of the literature on the subject (e.g. Dayton 1996, Green 1993, Déchaine 1993), I do not decompose preverbal done into a root plus a suffix. For example, I treat only the second occurrence of “done” in the sentence in (36a) as an –ed form of the verb do.

(36)  
a. She done done it again.  (AAE)  
‘She has done it again.’  (SAE)  

b. She done did it again.  (AAE)  
‘She has done it again.’  (SAE)
This *done* alternates with *did* as shown by (36b), and I take it to be an instance of the main verb *doneldid* shown in (37a)/(37b).

(37)  a. She did it yesterday. (AAE)
      ‘She did it yesterday.’ (SAE)

       b. She done it yesterday. (AAE)
       ‘She did it yesterday.’ (SAE)

In contrast, preverbal *done* does not alternate with *did*.

My chief reasons for treating preverbal *done* as a single unit stem from the problems that a morphologically complex preverbal *done* pose for AAE phrase structure. (Hereafter I will drop “preverbal” and simply use “done” except when needed to make clear that I am not referring to main verb *done*.) For me, the heart of the issue is the syntactic classification of *done*. Despite the obvious similarities in form, syntactically, preverbal *done* does not behave, at least not completely, like an inflected main verb, a traditional verbal participle, or a traditional auxiliary – the principal candidates for its category if preverbal *done* is to be analyzed as *do* plus some suffix.

It is the preverbal auxiliary-like position of *done* in (12) and (16) that makes it unlikely that it is either an inflected main verb or a traditional verbal participle. If it were, then the rules of AAE phrase structure would have to allow a member of one of these two categories to precede an –*ed* marked verb. Any rule that permitted such a structure, however, would not be very productive. In fact, it would admit far more exceptions than
there would be cases where it were actually upheld. With the exception of *had and *been, no other candidates for membership in either of these categories can precede an –ed marked verb like *ate in (38).

(38)  

a. John *done ate.  (AAE)  

‘John has eaten.’  (SAE)  

b. John *been ate.  (AAE)  

‘John ate a long time ago.’  (SAE)  

c. John *had ate.  (AAE)  

‘John had eaten.’  (SAE)  

d. *John gone/seen/wanted *ate (AAE, SAE)  

The fact that in terms of its position *done patterns with *been and *had makes it seem more plausible that it is a form of the auxiliary *do. As Green (1993) notes, however, *been and preverbal *done do not behave like traditional auxiliaries. Here they part company with *had. In contrast to *had, *been and *done do not have the so-called ‘NICE’ properties that largely define the class of auxiliary – NICE being an acronym for negation, inversion, contraction, ellipsis.

While *had can host negation as shown in (39a), *been and *done cannot, as shown in (39b) and (39c), respectively.
(39)  a. I hadn’t ate.  
     b. *I been’t ate.  
     c. *I don’t ate.  

Like other auxiliaries, *had can be inverted in question formation as in (40a). As (40b) and (40c) show, *been and *done cannot.

(40)  a. Had John ate?  
     b. *Been John ate?  
     c. *Done John ate?  

*Had can also be contracted, another property of auxiliaries:

(41)  I’d ate.  

Neither *been nor *done has a contracted form. And finally, like other auxiliaries, but unlike *been and *done, *had can support ellipsis as in (42a). That *been and *done cannot is shown in (42b) and (42c).

(42)  a. John had ate and Mary had too.  
     b. John *been ate and *Mary been too.  
     c. John done ate and *Mary done too.  
While not having the NICE properties makes it doubtful, to say the least, that preverbal *done* is a traditional auxiliary, the clearest indication that *done* is not an instance of the traditional auxiliary *do* is that the two can occur simultaneously in the same sentence as shown in (43).

(43) She do be done done it. (AAE)

‘She does often have it done.’ (SAE)

So, the most obvious candidates for the category of *done* should it be analyzed as a form of *do* plus some suffix can all be ruled out. It is not a main verb, a traditional verbal participle, or a traditional auxiliary.

Based in large part on their not having the NICE properties, yet still occurring in a preverbal auxiliary-like position, Green argues that *been* and *done* along with the uninflected *be* in (35), which also has none of these properties, are “non-finite auxiliaries”. As Green argues that *be*, *been* and *done* all contribute aspect to the sentences in which they are found\(^\text{17}\), she also refers to them “aspectual markers”. The term “aspectual marker” strongly suggests non-decomposition, and indeed Green treats each of these markers as a single morphological unit\(^\text{18}\). By doing so, she successfully avoids the

---

\(^{17}\) According to Green (1993, 1998), *be* contributes habitual aspect; *been* contributes remote past aspect, and *done* contributes completive aspect.

\(^{18}\) One might, however, focus on Green’s alternate terminology. While Green herself does not treat preverbal *done* as a form of *do* plus a suffix, it might make sense to do so given her classification of *done* as a non-finite auxiliary. Preverbal *done* and *been* might be looked at as participle forms of the auxiliaries *do* and *be*, as most people consider participles to be non-finite. Invariant *be* might then be viewed as the infinitive of the auxiliary *be* (another non-finite form). Though attractive in some ways, this interpretation/extension of Green (1993) is not without its problems. To name just one, there is no clear reason why the participle form of auxiliary *be* should be obligatorily stressed or carry remote past meaning.
phrase structure problems that arise when one asks what kind of do preverbal done is formed from. On this view of things, unless one is speaking historically, preverbal done is not formed from any form of do at all; it is a whole by itself.

Although treating be, been, and done as single morphological units avoids many of the kinds of problems that we encountered earlier, it still leaves other challenges to be faced in the development of a fully workable phrase structure. Such challenges include accounting for differences in the syntactic distributions of the individual elements, and the co-occurrence restrictions among them. For example, unlike done, both be and been, can precede an adjective like happy in (44), or the –ing form of a verb like running in (45).

(44)  a. He been happy. (AAE)

      ‘He has been happy for a long time.’ (SAE)

   b. He be happy. (AAE)

      ‘He is usually/always happy.’

   c. *He done happy. (AAE)
(45)  a. He been running.  

‘He has been running for a long time.’  

b. He be running.  

‘He is usually/always runs.’  

c. *He done running.  

Be and been also pattern together in that they both can precede done. Done, however cannot precede be or been:

(46)  a. John been done ate.  

‘John has eaten and it was a long time ago.’  

b. John be done ate.  

‘John usually/always has eaten.’  

c. *John done been ate.  

d. *John done be ate.  

With respect to co-occurrence restrictions, although done can appear in sentences with either be or been, be and been cannot themselves appear in the same sentence. The only
possible marker combinations, then, are those in (47a) and (47b). The combinations in (47c) through (47f) are ungrammatical.

(47)  
   a. been done  
   b. be done  
   c. *done been  
   d. *done be  
   e. *been be  
   f. *be been  

Green’s syntax accounts for these data in the following way: *be, been* and *done* are the heads of Aspectual Phrases (AspPs), and it is simply stipulated that at most two AspPs can be projected in one sentence, and that if two AspPs are projected, *done* must occupy the lower of the two as shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Green’s Double AspP configuration

---

19 The sequence *done been* where *been* is unstressed is permitted. It does not have a remote past meaning however.
As a result, *be* or *been* can precede *done*, but *be* and *done* cannot both appear in the same sentence because to do so they both would have to occupy the upper AspP position. According to Green (1993), if *be* and *been* do compete for the same upper AspP position, *been* invariably wins the competition and is, therefore, phonologically expressed. In such cases, *be* leaves its habitual features. Thus Green explains why *been* sentences such as (48) have both habitual and non-habitual readings.

(48)  

Marie *been* knitting.  

a. ‘Marie has been involved in a single knitting event for a long time.’  (SAE)  
b. ‘Marie has had the habit of knitting for a long time.’  (SAE)

This, too, is rather stipulative, and one might ask why *be* cannot win the competition for pronunciation, resulting in remote past habitual readings of *be* sentences. So, it is clear that not all of the questions regarding this part of AAE phrase structure have been answered. But rather than continue this line of inquiry, I will work without settling on a complete phrase structure. I will, as I have said, follow the bulk of the literature to date, and treat *done* as a single morphological unit. However, I leave open the possibility that a phrase structure exists that will allow for its decomposition.

2.2 Questions of Meaning

Thus far I have concentrated on the form of sentences such as (7) and (8) and said relatively little about their associated meanings. In the discussion of their form, the chief
problem that emerged was determining the number of underlying syntactic representations needed to account for the verb endings in these kinds of sentences. I tentatively concluded that despite some benign idiosyncratic differences in overt morphological shape (e.g. saw vs. seen) and the irregularities of be (e.g. was vs. been), the verbs that appear in sentences such as *The frog Jumped* and those that follow *done* in sentences such as *The frog done jumped* are marked with the same abstract –ed morphology.

The task of sorting out the number of underlying representations in these cases is difficult because while the overt morphology contains distinct forms such as saw and seen, there is also a great deal of overlap in the roles these forms play. In the case of saw and seen, the overlap is complete. A very similar problem arises when trying to distinguish the meanings of Simple *V-ed* sentences from *done V-ed* sentences. Similarities in meaning and overlapping uses of the constructions suggest a very close relationship, but these very same similarities and overlapping uses make teasing apart the meanings of the two constructions difficult. For example, consider again, the *done* sentence in (9), repeated here as (49). In (9), I translated this sentence into SAE as simply *I have lost my job*. In (49), however, I give three different SAE translations, each a present prefect *have -en* construction as in (9), but with the addition of an adverb to further bring out the different shades of meaning that the sentence can express.

20 I refer here only to the verbal forms. AAE has an adjective seen (but not saw) as well.
(49)  I done lost my job.  (AAE)

a. ‘I have just lost my job.’  (SAE)

b. ‘I have lost my job already.’  (SAE)

c. ‘I have lost my job before.’  (SAE)

The sentence in (49) might be spoken, quite naturally, in any of the following scenarios: A worker upon opening an envelope and discovering a pink slip informing him that he has been fired might exclaim “I done lost my job”. Here an appropriate SAE translation would be (49a), I have just lost my job, and done seems to add a sense of recent completion not necessarily found in the sentence I lost my job, but this sentence may also be used. That same worker, some hours (or days) later, discussing with a friend whether or not he should storm into the former boss’s office to tell her exactly what he thinks of her might say “I done lost my job. What more can she do to me now?” In this case, the meaning of I done lost my job is more like (49b), I have lost my job already. Again, although the sentence with done may be preferred in this situation, the sentence without done is also possible. Finally, several years in the future, having found another job, when asked by a friend “Have you ever lost your job?” the same worker might answer “Yes, I done lost my job. Who ain’t lost his at one time or another?” (An even better response might be “Yes, I done lost a job.”) In this circumstance the presence of done appears to make plain that the speaker is referring to a past experience without implying any more
specific a time for its occurrence than that it was in the past. Here, the translation *I have lost my job before* is the most appropriate, although, once again, the sentence without *done* is also a possible response.

These examples show strong similarities in the meanings of *done* and simple *V-ed* constructions. They fail, however, to do much to tease them apart. Except for slight preferences, there is a complete overlap in the use of *done V-ed* and simple *V-ed* constructions in these scenarios.

Fortunately, Green’s work gives us a more solid place from which to begin distinguishing the meanings of these constructions. As I noted in Chapter 1, she reports that similar to the SAE *have –en* construction, the AAE preverbal *done* construction is incompatible with past-time-indicating adverbs, and here there is a clear contrast with simple *V-ed* sentences. In that same chapter, I questioned whether this is true of the variety of AAE spoken in Wise, North Carolina. I concluded that while there are some contexts in which speakers in Wise will accept past-time-indicating adverbs in *done* sentences (which I will consider in Chapter 3), but apart from these special contexts, Green’s judgment holds. Thus, for the variety of AAE that I am describing, when spoken out of the blue, the AAE sentence in (50a), like the SAE sentence in (50b), is ungrammatical, but the AAE sentence in (51a) like the SAE sentence in (51b) is grammatical.  

---

21 In (50) though (52), the a and b sentences are translation equivalents or near equivalents.
(50)  a. *John done went to town yesterday/last week/a year ago.  (AAE)

       b. *John has gone to town yesterday/last week/a year ago.  (SAE)

(51)  a. John went to town yesterday/last week/a year ago.  (AAE)

       b. John went to town yesterday/last week/a year ago.  (SAE)

As the examples in (52) show, the incompatibility of the have –en and done constructions with past-time-indicating adverbs is indeed restricted to past-time-indicating adverbs as opposed to temporal adverbs in general. Adverbs such as today, this week, and this year pose no problem.

(52)  a. John went to town today/this week /this year.  (AAE)

       b. John went to town today/this week/this year.  (SAE)

This in turn shows that there is a real semantic effect; there is a strong meaning component to the incompatibility in (50).

The contrast between the incompatibility of past-time-indicating adverbs with done sentences and their compatibility with simple V-ed sentences points the way to classifying and clearly distinguishing the meanings of the two constructions. Here, AAE done constructions behave like SAE have –en constructions, which are present perfects,
and AAE simple V-ed sentences behave more like their SAE counterparts, which I take to be past perfectives. Ultimately, I wish to defend a version of Rose Marie Déchaine’s (1993) claim that unlike their SAE counterparts, AAE simple V-ed sentences are ambiguous, having both past perfective and present perfect readings, while AAE done V-ed sentences, like SAE have –en sentences, are unambiguously present perfect. Positing an ambiguity in the simple V-ed sentences explains the overlap of uses between sentences such as I lost my job and I done lost my job; positing that only simple V-ed sentences have past perfective readings helps to explain why they, unlike done sentences, permit modification by past-time-indicating adverbs as well as other differences between the two constructions about which I will have more to say.

As I see them, then, the key differences in meaning between done and simple V-ed sentences are differences in tense (past vs. present) and aspect (perfective vs. perfect). Before presenting more evidence for this classification of the AAE sentences in question, I will now briefly discuss the distinction between tense and aspect.

2.2.1 Characterizing Tense and Aspect

There are a number of points of view as to how tense and aspect should be characterized and where the line should be drawn between the two. My own view on these issues, inspired in large part by the work of Wolfgang Klein (1994), is developed in the chapters to come. In the meantime, Comrie (1985) gives useful first definitions of tense and aspect that are consistent with a large number of theories. Tense, according to Comrie, is “the grammaticalization of location in time.” The present progressive sentence in (53a), for
example, describes an eating event that is in progress at the time the sentence is spoken. The past progressive sentence in (53b), on the other hand, describes an eating event that was in progress at time before the sentence is spoken.

(53)  

a. John is eating.  

b. John was eating.  

Claiming that done sentences and simple V-ed sentences on some readings are present perfects is to say that in some sense they are present. They have something in common with the sentence in (53a), though depending on the formulation of tense, it need not be that an event is temporally located at time the sentence is spoken. Finding the proper formulation is the challenge.

As with tense, the precise definition of aspect is much debated. In fact, it is an even more contentious issue. Here too it is customary to introduce the topic by first introducing contrasts that nearly everyone agrees are “aspectual” rather than beginning with a detailed definition of the term. In his now classic 1976 book Aspect, Comrie first offers as a “general definition” of aspect the following: “aspects are different ways of viewing the internal temporal constituency of a situation.” He illustrates this general definition with the following translation equivalents (or near equivalents), each exemplifying the contrast between perfective and imperfective aspect.
In each of these sentences, there is an intuitive and clear contrast between the functions of the second and first verbs (the verb *entered* and the verbal compound *was reading* in the English example). In Comrie’s words, the second verb presents an event, the speaker’s entry, as a “single unanalysable” whole – “without reference to its internal temporal constituency”; the entirety of the event, with beginning, middle, and end is represented as a single unit. In contrast, the first verb presents an event, John’s reading, as “background” to the speaker’s entry, and the focus is placed on the middle portion (rather than the beginning or end) of that event. Despite the somewhat metaphorical description, the contrast is clear, and it is what Comrie and many others refer to as the distinction between perfective and imperfective aspect, the first exemplifying imperfective and the second verb exemplifying perfective.

With Slavic languages such as Russian providing the paradigm cases, the perfective/imperfective contrast is the archetypical aspectual contrast. In Russian, as in many other Slavic languages, verb meanings usually come in two forms, one perfective,
the other imperfective. Allowing for some exceptions, verbs come in aspectual pairs. In English, on the other hand, verbs do not come in aspectual pairs. Neither AAE nor SAE has, for example, two verbs each with the meaning *read*. Aspect is marked in other ways. Instead of having an imperfective verb *read*, AAE and SAE use a complex construction, the past progressive *John was reading* in (54), and Comrie treats it as having roughly the meaning of the Russian *čital*. The comparison is, however, rough; the contrast between the Russian *čital*, and *vošel* is not exactly the same as the contrast between *was reading* and *entered*, or, say, *was eating* and *ate*. Such differences in basic contrasts and in the way constructions are formed have led some to question whether aspect is a unified and universal category. One method linguists use to try to answer this question is to begin with contrasts such as those in (54) and an admittedly vague notion of aspect. From there (still informed by cross-linguistic observations), they attempt to describe language-specific systems of aspectual contrasts, sharpening the notions of aspect along the way. Aspectual systems can then be compared and notions of aspect further sharpened. With this work I hope to provide the beginnings of such an account of AAE.

Slavic languages such as Russian provide the paradigm cases for aspectual contrasts because the basic perfective/imperfective contrast in them is so clear. In Russian there two forms of almost every verb (with the caveats noted). In SAE (and AAE) it is not so clear what to take as the “basic contrast”. While the past progressive

---

22 This is something of a simplification. In general, Russian perfectives are formed from imperfective stems through prefixation as in the case of *čitat* “to read” (imperfective); *pročitat* (perfective). However, as Binnick (1993) notes, there exist a number of perfective stems from which imperfectives are derived, and though the perfective is usually formed through prefixation, a number of other devices (e.g. vowel change and stem change, or the use of another lexical item) are used. These other devices are, however, the exception rather than the rule, and it is often useful to think of Russian verbs as coming in two forms, perfective and imperfective.
was reading is contrasted with entered in (54) it might also have been contrasted with a present perfect complex such as has entered or a past perfect complex such as had entered. Here the field grapples with questions such whether or not there is an “aspect” involved in I entered and what distinctions in aspect should be made between entered and had entered. Similar questions arise in AAE. My focus in this dissertation is on AAE done and simple V-ed questions, and the past perfective/present perfect contrast as different ways of talking about “the past”. In sections 2.2.1.1 and 2.2.1.2 to follow, I provide some preliminary evidence for describing AAE done V-ed sentences a kind of present perfect, and AAE simple V-ed sentences as ambiguous between present perfect and past perfective. I will return to and expand on much of this preliminary evidence when developing my formal analysis.

2.2.1.1 done V-ed Sentences as Present Perfects

Initial support for the AAE done construction’s status as a present perfect comes from its similarities in meaning to the SAE have -en construction. The reasoning here is by analogy. The SAE have -en construction in examples such as John has eaten, and I have been here before is widely regarded as employing both present tense and prefect aspect. Showing similar patterns of usage between the two constructions is at least suggestive that done constructions too are present perfects. That both have –en and done V-ed sentences are resistant to modification by past-time-indicating adverbs is a first similarity. There are more.
Within standard varieties of English, Comrie (1976) distinguishes between four general uses of the present perfect *have -en* construction that he calls different “types of perfects”: *the perfect of persistent situation, the experiential perfect, the perfect of recent past, and the perfect of result*. The AAE *done* construction can express all of these kinds of perfects, except for the perfect of result. The key questions that I am temporarily putting off are how these readings of the perfect come about and what roles present tense and perfect aspect play in them. Generally speaking, it is possible that each of Comrie’s perfects represents a distinct underlying form. Each reading of the perfect may come about due to a silent marker that contributes that particular meaning. Another possibility is that in terms of their truth-conditional semantics, these perfects are all the same, and the different readings come about for more pragmatic reasons. And there are, of course, middle-ground possibilities as well. Any one of Comrie’s perfects might share an underlying form with some but not others of these categories. These are among the issues that I will discuss as I develop my formal analysis. For now I simply show where there is overlap in meaning between the SAE and AAE constructions.

The first of Comrie’s perfects is the perfect of persistent situation. This is the use of a perfect construction to describe a situation that started in the past but persists into the present. There is, for example, a reading of Comrie’s example in (55) in which, at the time the sentence is spoken, the subjects have completed their tenth year of living here and are still living here.

(55) We have lived here for ten years.          (SAE)  (Comrie 1976)
AAE, at least the variety of AAE that I am trying to describe, has similar reading of done sentences such as *We done lived here for ten years*. There is a contrast here with simple V-ed sentences. The AAE speakers that I have interviewed allow such readings of done V-ed sentences like (56a) but not of simple V-ed sentences like (56b).

(56)  
   a. Mary done lived in Oxford for three years.  
       (AAE)  
       ‘Mary has lived in Oxford for three years.’  
       (SAE)

   b. Mary lived in Oxford for three years.  
       (AAE)  
       ≠ ‘Mary has lived in Oxford for three years’  
       (SAE)

My conclusion that AAE done V-ed sentences have perfect of persistent situation readings is at odds with the conclusions of both Green (1993, 1998) and Dayton (1996), who each of whom, based on her own data, argues otherwise. There may be regional differences here, although I am not sure if this is in fact the case. Green contends that AAE done constructions (at least as they are used in Lake Arthur, Louisiana), do not have perfect of persistent situation readings, based in part on the contrast that she draws between the SAE sentence in (57) and the AAE sentence in (58).

(57)  
   His sister has been an invalid all her life.  
   (SAE) (Quirk et al. 1972)

(58)  
   *His sister done been an invalid all her life.  
   (AAE) (Green 1993, 1996)
Here there is a clear difference in judgment. Neither I nor any of my informants from Wise find (58) unacceptable. Although Green treats (58) as ungrammatical, and argues that done constructions do not have perfect of persistent situation readings, she does offer a context in which she says her informants permit a “stylistic” use of done. This context, given in (59), is very similar to the context in Chapter 1 that I suggested makes past-time-indicating adverbs permissible with the done construction. I will have more to say about this context in Chapter 3.

(59) Why you want to help her now? She done been an invalid all her life. (AAE)

‘Why do you want to help her now? She has been an invalid all her life’. (SAE)

(Green 1998)

Green’s stylistic use of done can be considered a perfect of persistent situation reading. Since it is not clear how Green incorporates this use of done into her account of AAE grammar, it is not clear how far apart our respective positions or the two varieties of AAE we are describing are.

Dayton (1996) also reports that done is disfavored by quantifying adverbs such as for three years, all her life, and always. She reports the judgment in (60) among others:

(60) /* He always done told you the truth. (AAE) (Dayton 1996)

Dayton uses this judgment (along with similar data) to argue that done constructions, which she also considers to be perfects, do not have perfect of persistent situation
readings, or as she terms them, continuative prefect readings. While the speakers I have interviewed find Dayton’s sentence in (60) odd, they judge (61), the same sentence with the adverb in a different location, perfectly acceptable.

(61)  He done always told you the truth.  (AAE)

‘He has always told you the truth.’  (SAE)

I contend that *done* constructions, at least as they are used in Wise, do have perfect of persistent situation readings.

In contrast to the perfect of persistent situation, the experiential perfect can carry a strong sense that an event is over. The experiential perfect indicates that some situation has held at least once in the past. The glosses *I have lost my job already* and *I have lost my job before* in (49) indicate that an experiential perfect reading of the *done* construction is also available.

Comrie’s third perfect, the perfect of recent past, is used to indicate that a past situation is very recent. The gloss *I have just lost my job* in (49) indicates a perfect of recent past interpretation of the *done* construction. In SAE at least, there is a clear contrast between the sense of recent completion that speakers infer from a present perfect sentence such as *I have lost my job* and a simple past sentence such as *I lost my job*. Whether or not this effect is primarily semantic or pragmatic, the contrast makes it reasonable to conclude that the effect may be associated with perfect constructions.

In Comrie’s fourth perfect, *the perfect of result*, some present state is referred to as being the result of a past situation or eventuality. He uses examples such as the
following to demonstrate the perfect of result. In answer to the question *is John here yet?*, *Yes he has arrived* is a perfectly acceptable response whereas *Yes, John arrived* is odd. Thus, according to Comrie, sentence (62a) has a resultative reading that (62b) does not.

(62)  

a. John has arrived.  

b. John arrived.  

(Comrie 1976)

Both of the AAE sentences in (63) are possible answers to the question *is John here yet?*

(63)  

a. John done arrived.  

b. John arrived.  

(AAE)

This does not, however, show that *done* sentences do not have a perfect of result reading. After all, I have said that simple *V-ed* sentences in AAE are ambiguous between present perfect and past perfective. We expect that on its present perfect reading (63b) should be an acceptable answer to the question. This is similar to the perfect of recent past. There is no clear contrast between *I done lost my job* and *I lost my job* with respect to sense of recent completion that they convey, but the use of the AAE *done* construction and the SAE *have*-participle construction still overlap at that point. There is, however, additional evidence that the AAE *done* construction does not have a perfect of result reading.

Suppose that Stacy and Robert are each assigned a chore. Stacy’s chore is to open the window in the morning and Robert’s chore is to close it again in the afternoon once the
weather has turned cool. Given this scenario, the sentence in (64) is a perfectly acceptable answer to the question Have Stacy and Robert finished their chores?

\[(64)\quad \text{Yes, Stacy done opened the window and Robert done closed it. (AAE)}\]

If saying that Stacy done opened the window committed the speaker to the claim that the window, at the time of speech, were still open, one should not be able to follow it with “and Robert done closed it” without the sentence being at best odd, and at worst self-contradictory.

Moving away from Comrie’s categories, additional evidence that preverbal done sentences are perfects comes from Östen Dahl’s (1985) survey of tense, mood and aspect systems. Considering over 60 languages from a variety of language families, Dahl provides lists of prototypical occurrences (verbs and contexts) for both perfect and perfective constructions. A done construction can be used in all of Dahl’s prototypical occurrences of the perfect, but in none of his prototypical occurrences of the perfective. For example, according to Dahl’s survey, a prototypical occurrence of the prefect construction would be as a substitute for BRUSH in (65).

\[(65)\quad \text{Child: Can I go now? Mother: You BRUSH your teeth?}\]

As with all of Dahl’s prototypical environments for the perfect, a done construction can quite naturally be used here, as shown in (66).
(66) Child: Can I go now? Mother: You done brushed your teeth? (AAE)

The discourse in (67) is one of Dahl’s prototypical environments for the perfective. In (67), a verb in its perfective form is meant to substitute for DIE.

(67) Do you know what happened to my brother yesterday? I saw it myself. We were walking in the forest. Suddenly he stepped on a snake. It bit him in the leg. He took a stone and threw it at the snake. It DIE.

As in all of Dahl’s perfective environments, an AAE simple V-ed sentence can be used, but not a done sentence. The AAE sentence in (68a) can substitute for It DIE in (67), but the sentence in (68b) cannot.

(68) a. It died. (AAE)
    b. It done died. (AAE)

Appendix A presents a full list of Dahl’s prototypical occurrences of the perfect with possible AAE renditions. Appendix B presents a similar list of Dahl’s prototypical occurrences of the perfective.

Still another kind of evidence that done sentences are indeed present tense sentences comes from tag questions. Tag questions such as didn’t he? and ain’t he? in (69) are at least in part reflexes of the tense of the sentences they are tags to.
(69)  a. You done heard Mary sing, ain’t you? (AAE)
    ‘You have heard Mary sing, haven’t you?’ (SAE)

    b. You done heard Mary sing, *didn’t you/ *don’t you? (AAE)

Preverbal done sentences such as that in (69a) take ain’t tags; they are ungrammatical when followed by didn’t or don’t 23 tags as is shown in (69b). The ain’t he? tag in (69a) is a reflex of present tense rather than perfect aspect. Sentences (70a) and (70b) show that ain’t he? is a possible tag for a progressive sentence, but only a present progressive. Similarly, (70c) and (70d) show that while ain’t he? is the tag for present tense done sentences, adn’t he? or hadn’t he? is the tag for past tense done sentences (past perfects).

(70)  a. John (is) eating, isn’t/ain’t he? (AAE)
    ‘John is eating isn’t he?’ (SAE)

    b. John was eating, wasn’t/won’t 24 / *ain’t he? (AAE)
    ‘John was eating, wasn’t he?/*isn’t he?’ (SAE)

    c. John done ate, ain’t he? (AAE)
    ‘John has eaten, hasn’t he? (SAE)

23 While don’t tags might also reflect present or a part of present tense, they are only compatible with generic and habitual active verbs, plus some lexical stative verbs.

24 Won’t here is a phonological variation of wasn’t prevalent in Warren County as a whole. See Hazen (2000) for more discussion of this form.
d. John’d done ate, hadn’t he/*ain’t he?\(^{25}\)  

‘John had eaten, hadn’t he/*isn’t he/*hasn’t he?’  

(AAE)

(SAE)

The data in (70) highlight yet another puzzle posed by the AAE tense and aspect system. In the tag position, ain’t appears to be diagnostic of present tense within the sentence it is tag to, while in sentence internal positions, it does not seem to have this diagnostic property. While the AAE sentence in (71a) appears in present perfect environments as they are identified by Comrie and Dahl, (71b) occurs in past perfective environments.

(71)  
a. John ain’t ate.  

‘John hasn’t eaten.’  

(AAE)

(SAE)

b. John ain’t eat.  

‘John didn’t eat.’  

(AAE)

(SAE)

This puzzle and other unresolved issues notwithstanding, the collective evidence, thus far, suggests that it is reasonable to characterize simple done constructions as present perfects.

\(^{25}\) It is not at all clear how ain’t should be translated into SAE. The ungrammaticality of the ain’t version of (70d) seems, however, to be on par with the ungrammaticality of the SAE sentence John had eaten, hasn’t he?
2.2.1.2 The Ambiguity of Simple V-ed Sentences

Having given some reasons why it makes sense to consider done V-ed sentences as present perfects, I now offer preliminary support for the idea that AAE simple V-ed sentences are ambiguous between present perfect and past perfective. Again, more precise definitions of present tense, perfect aspect, and perfective aspect will be developed along with my formal analysis in the chapters to come.

In contrast to done sentences, AAE simple V-ed sentences appear in the vast majority of both the past perfective and present perfect environments that can be extrapolated from the work of Comrie (1976) and Dahl (1985). AAE simple V-ed constructions can, in this regard, act as any of Comrie’s perfects except for the perfect of result and the perfect of persistent situation. The perfect of persistent situation, then, draws a dividing line between the meanings of done V-ed constructions and those of Simple V-ed constructions, suggesting that although both may be perfects further distinctions must be made. Turning to Dahl’s survey, AAE simple V-ed constructions can be used all of Dahl’s prototypical occurrences of the perfect and all of his prototypical occurrences of the perfective as well. A simple V-ed construction can, for instance, substitute for BRUSH in (65). A simple V-ed construction can also substitute for DIE in (67). Full listings of Dahl’s prototypical occurrences of the perfect and perfective along with possible AAE renditions are given in A and B, respectively.

With respect to adverbial modification, AAE simple V-ed sentences are compatible with past time denoting adverbs. This is expected if AAE simple V-ed sentences have both past perfective readings and present perfect readings. There is
nothing about past perfective readings that would be incompatible with past perfectives. AAE simple *V-ed* sentences can also occur with adverbials that in SAE require perfect aspect. For example, in SAE, (72a) and (72b) contrast in that only (72a) is grammatical under the reading in which *since he was a child* means *since the time he was a child*. In examples (72) and (73) *since* is to be uniformly read as *since the time when* not *because*. The *since*-adverbial (with this meaning) appears to require perfect morphology and meaning. It is not licensed by the SAE simple past constructions such as (72b).

(72)  
a. John has eaten steak since he was a child.  
     b. *John ate steak since he was a child.  

In the AAE Simple *V-ed* sentence in (73), on the other hand, the *since*-adverbial (with this meaning) is licensed.

(73)  
     John ate steak since he was a child.  

     ‘John has eaten steak since the time he was a child.’

The sentence in (73) should not be confused with perfect of persistent readings of the simple *V-ed* construction. In (73), what is extended into the present is a generality or a habit.

Finally, depending on how they are interpreted, AAE simple *V-ed* sentences take either *didn’t* or *ain’t* tags. Interpreted as present perfects, they take *ain’t* tags; interpreted as past perfectives, *didn’t* tags. For example, as a follow up question to the discourse in
(74), the question in (75a) asks whether the speaker in (74) heard Mary sing at the concert. It is interpreted as a past perfective. In contrast, the question in (75b) asks whether the speaker has ever heard Mary sing. It is interpreted as an experiential perfect.

(74) Do you know what happened to me yesterday? I was at Mary’s concert when I got sick and had to be rushed to the hospital.

(75) a. You heard Mary sing, didn’t you? (AAE)
    ‘You heard Mary sing, didn’t you?’ (SAE)

    b. You heard Mary sing, ain’t you? (AAE)
    ‘You have heard Mary sing, haven’t you?’ (SAE)

The data in (75) suggest a covert present tense in the present perfect versions of AAE simple V-ed sentences that is not present in past perfective versions. This suggests a true ambiguity and not simply a vagueness on the part of AAE simple V-ed sentences. In conjunction with the evidence from Comrie’s classification, Dahl’s survey, and the adverbial data, the data in (75) strongly suggest that AAE simple V-ed sentences are ambiguous between simple past and present perfect.
2.3 Summary

In this chapter, I introduced the core of the AAE data important to this dissertation. In section 2.1, I focused on the forms of simple *V-ed* sentences such as *The frog jumped*, and *done V-ed* sentences such as *The frog done jumped*. I argued against Dayton’s (1996) analysis in which the verbs in simple *V-ed* sentences are in their “preterite” form while the verbs that follow *done* in *done V-ed* constructions are participles. Based principally on issues of learnability, I argued that the verb forms in these two constructions are the same, and that a single abstract morpheme, *-ed*, is responsible, for example, for turning the verb *jump* into *jumped* in both *The frog jumped* and *The frog done jumped*. Additionally, I cited reasons for following the bulk of the literature in treating the preverbal *done* in sentences such as *The frog done jumped* as a single morphological word.

In section 2.2, I turned my attention to the meanings carried by the simple *V-ed* and *done V-ed* forms. Using evidence from cross-linguistic data, adverbial attachment, and tag questions, I supported Déchaine’s (1993) claim that simple *V-ed* sentences are ambiguous between past perfective and present perfect while *done V-ed* sentences are unambiguously present perfect. Further, I argued that we must make a distinction between the kinds of present perfect meanings the two constructions can express. Simple *V-ed* perfects can express Comrie’s (1985) experiential perfect, and perfect of recent past. *Done V-ed* perfects, on the other hand, can express both of these perfects and Comrie’s perfect of persistent situation as well.
Given these conclusions, we can fix the principal problems to be addressed by the semantics as first, the problem of explaining the present perfect/past perfective ambiguity of AAE simple V-ed sentences, and second, the problem of explaining the relationship between this ambiguity and the unambiguously present perfect readings of done V-ed sentences. A key consideration for this second problem is that although done and simple V-ed sentences can both be considered perfects, they have different ranges of meaning. Two major constraints on the solutions to the problems are that done should be treated as a single morphological word, and that the solutions should employ a single underlying –ed.
My investigation of the past perfective/present perfect ambiguity of AAE simple *V-ed* sentences and their relation to the present perfect *done V-ed* construction requires, to a certain degree, examining both tense and aspect in tandem, simultaneously sorting out what makes a sentence past or present (an issue of tense) and what makes a sentence perfect or perfective (an issue of aspect). While, for the most part this is the strategy I will adopt – a simultaneous examination of the two issues – I will focus on the issue of aspect as I take it to be the more difficult of the two problem areas. As Robert Binnick (1991) puts it, compared to aspect, “tense is perhaps equally confusing, but at least it is a well-known traditional area with concepts intuitively clear to speakers of the familiar Western European Languages.” As a result, it may be easier, at least in the short run, to develop a provisionally adequate account of the tenses involved in the sentence types in question than their aspects. A number of off-the-shelf theories may be applicable. But in the end, a fully satisfactory analysis of these sentences must take into account tense, aspect, and their interaction if it is to explain the full range of the sentences’ meanings. An initial focus on aspect helps not only to sort out the problems of aspect, but also to limit the number of plausible theories of tense.
3.1 Distinguishing Tense and Aspect

A starting point in this endeavor is the teasing apart of tense and aspect as linguistic categories. This itself is a complicated task, as exactly where the line between the two categories should be drawn is a matter of great debate. Comrie (1976) argues that tense and aspect can and should be distinguished on the basis of temporal deixis. According to Comrie, of the two, only tense is a deictic category; only tense makes reference to a time (a moment or interval) relative to the speech time or some other contextually established temporal reference point.

Recall example (54), repeated here as (76).

(76)

English:  John was reading when I entered.

Russian:  Ivan čital, kogda ja vošel.

French:   Jean lisait quand j’entrai.

Spanish:  Juan leía cuando entré.

Italian:  Gianni leggeva quando entre.  (Comrie 1976)

Comrie argues, and few, I think, would disagree, that despite their aspectual differences, both the first and second verb forms in each of the sentences in (76) are past tensed. Consistent with the view that tense is indeed a deictic category, they both locate an event or portion of an event relative to a reference point, in this case, the moment the sentence is uttered. In the English example, the verbal complex was reading indicates that a
portion of a reading event occurred before the sentence was spoken, and the verb *entered* indicates that the full entering event occurred before the sentence was spoken. On Comrie’s account, aspect, unlike tense, is not a deictic category; it does not relate eventualities to times or to other eventualities that serve as reference points. Instead, aspect is concerned only with the “internal temporal constituency” of single eventualities in a non-relational way. The presentation of John’s reading as an incomplete and in-progress event as opposed to the presentation of the speaker’s entering as a complete whole is a matter of aspect, and according to Comrie, this difference in presentation is independent of any talk of relations or reference points.

The absolute distinction between tense as a deictic category and aspect as a non-deictic category is, however, less clear and more difficult to maintain than the above discussion might suggest. Considering Comrie’s distinction between absolute and relative tense is useful in demonstrating at least part of the difficulty.

Comrie defines absolute tense as a relation between the time of an eventuality and the present moment. He contrasts this with relative tense, which he defines as a relation between the time of an eventuality and the time of some other eventuality or situation. In the previous example, *was reading* and *entered* make use of absolute tense; each locates an event or portions of an event before the speech time. In contrast, Comrie argues that non-finite participial constructions in English make use of relative tense. He notes that in the sentences in (77), the present participle *walking* is used to indicate an event that is “simultaneous” with the time of the main verb, irrespective of the main verb’s tense. In

---

26 Comrie actually uses the term *event*, but he does not seem to have in mind the state/event contrast that led Bach (1986) to coin the term *eventuality* as a more general cover term for states and events.
(77a), the walking event overlaps the time(s) of the present tense habitual *meet*, and in
(77b) it overlaps the time(s) of the past tensed *met*.

(77)

a. When walking down the road, I often meet Harry.

b. When walking down the road, I often met Harry.  (Comrie 1976)

The distinction between tense (in particular relative tense) as deictic and aspect as non-deictic loses a great deal of its clarity when one considers issues such as how the simultaneity between walking events and meeting events in the sentences in (77) should be distinguished from the incompleteness or imperfectivity of *walking* in the same sentences. In both (77a) and (77b), *when walking* focuses on the internal portion of a walking event rather than its endpoints. As a result, it does the same job of backgrounding that Comrie associates with imperfective aspect. In this, it is like *was reading* in (76). Simultaneity with a reference time or event and imperfectivity both appear to correlate with –*ing* morphology. The problem is not so much that simultaneity with a reference time or event occurs with imperfective readings, but that –*ing* morphology forces them to do so. The two seem inseparable.

The issue of common morphology not only highlights a potential difficulty with maintaining a clean three-way distinction between absolute tense, relative tense and aspect, but it also highlights a difference in the goals of Comrie’s book *Aspect* and my own work here. In *Aspect*, Comrie is almost exclusively concerned with the characterization of cross-linguistic aspectual categories rather than language-particular categories realized in the morphology of any one language. If a language has a verbal
form that carries the meaning of one of Comrie’s cross-linguistic categories, then he says of that language that it has that aspect. Returning to the issue of perfective aspect, of the five languages represented in (76), Comrie says all have perfective aspect in this sense except for English. He notes, however, that “provided we restrict ourselves to non-stative verbs and exclude habitual meaning”, the difference between the two English verb forms in (76), the progressive versus non-progressive, is one of imperfectivity versus perfectivity. As my ultimate goal is to explain how aspects such as the perfect and perfective are realized in the syntax (which for me includes derivational morphology) of AAE, such language-specific morphological differences are extremely important.

The three-way distinction between absolute tense, relative tense and aspect has also been challenged on a less language particular basis. Though they work in very different frameworks, following Marion Johnson’s (1977) analysis of tense and aspect in Kikuyu, both Carlota Smith (1992) and Wolfgang Klein (1994), to name two particularly influential researchers, advocate systems that can be viewed as rejecting (in part or in full) the distinction between relative tense and aspect in favor of an expanded view and more precise definition of the latter. In his critique of what he calls the “standard characterization of aspect”, Klein faults Comrie and others for failing to move beyond largely metaphorical language that describes aspects as the different ways of “viewing” a situation. Comrie (1976), for example, describes the difference between imperfective and perfective aspect as the difference between viewing a situation from “inside” (imperfective) or “outside” (perfective). Granting that such language is nonetheless suggestive of something important, Klein, like Smith and Johnson before her, attempts to make these notions more precise and less metaphorical by explaining overall aspectual
meaning as the result of interaction between a system of temporal relations and the inherent lexical properties of the verb phrase. In Smith’s words, this constitutes the development of a “two component theory” of aspect. She refers to the two components as viewpoint aspect and situation aspect, respectively. Klein reserves the use of the term aspect for what Smith calls viewpoint aspect and refers to her situation aspect either as Aktionsart or simply as the lexical content of the verb phrase (VP). While this particular difference between Klein and Smith can be viewed as a notational variation on the same fundamental idea, which itself can be traced at least as far back as Johnson’s dissertation, the treating of aspect (or a part of aspect) as relational constitutes a substantive change from Comrie’s position that aspect is distinct from relative tense. In Klein’s and Smith’s systems, the job of “viewing” an eventuality or “focusing” on a part of it, is done by relating its time span or a part of its time span to an independent time interval. Talk of the view or focus being “inside” (imperfective) or “outside” of the eventuality (perfective) is more precisely stated in terms of what portions of an eventuality’s time span fall within this interval. On both Klein’s and Smith’s proposals, this relationship between an independent interval and the time span of an eventuality is a compulsory part of all sentences; all sentences, as Smith might say, have an aspectual viewpoint. Comrie’s relative tense, on the other hand, is by no means compulsory; thus it cannot be considered as simply a notational variant of viewpoint aspect.

Like Johnson, both Klein and Smith treat viewpoint aspect, hereafter simply aspect, as part of a three-parameter system of times such as that formalized by Hans

27 As noted by Klein (1994) the term Aktionsart is used by numerous authors and goes back to Agrell (1908).
Reichenbach\textsuperscript{28}. In his seminal work on tense, Reichenbach (1947) argues that explaining what he calls “the perfect tenses” (past, present and future perfect) requires reference to three distinct times. To explain the sentence \textit{John had walked home} for instance, we need to refer not only to the time when John walked home, and the time when the sentence is spoken, but also a time that comes \textit{after} John’s walking home and \textit{before} the time the sentence is spoken. Instead of \textit{John had walked home}, we might have considered the sentence \textit{John had walked home when Mary called to offer him a ride}. In this case, the third time is more easily identified; it is the time at which Mary called to offer John a ride. Reichenbach calls this time the sentence’s \textit{reference time}. Klein (1992, 1994) argues that such reference times are present in all sentences. He takes them to be the times about which sentences make assertions, or the times they are “about”. They are, in this sense, \textit{topics}; and Klein therefore refers to them as \textit{topic times}. Building on the three-parameter theory, Klein argues that tense and aspect are relations between intervals of time. Tense is a relation between the topic time and the time the sentence is uttered or \textit{utterance time}. Aspect, on the other hand, is a relation between the interval at which an eventuality takes place or \textit{situation time}, and the topic time.

Though these definitions are intuitively clear, and certainly help to move us beyond the metaphor of aspects being different ways of viewing situations, Klein’s notion that sentences are “about” times is potentially problematic. Topic times may alternately be thought of as particularly salient or focused times, which as Klein points

\textsuperscript{28} As Enrich (1992), Klein (1994) and others have pointed out, though the three-parameter theory of tense is often credited to Reichenbach (1947), versions of it can be found in grammars of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and in many descriptive analyses of the nineteenth century.
out can be linguistically expressed as in *I didn’t turn off the stove this morning* where *this morning* fixes the topic time, or can be left implied.

Partee (1973, 1984) makes essentially this same point – that a salient time may be left implied – in her discussion of nominal and temporal anaphora. She notes the following parallel between the two sentences in (78).

\[(78)\]
\[
\begin{array}{l}
\text{a. I didn’t turn off the stove} \quad \text{(SAE)} \\
\text{b. She left me} \quad \text{(SAE) (Partee 1973)}
\end{array}
\]

Pronouns such as *she* in (78b) can be used without linguistic antecedents when their referent is understood to be salient to the hearer; and though there is no analog to a salient physical presence, a particular past time can be presently salient. The sentence in (78a) to use Partee’s example, when said traveling by car, halfway down the turnpike, clearly refers to a particular interval of time made clear by the context — the time just before leaving the house, not, say, at some time last week. A “topic time” may well be the most likely referent for a temporal anaphor such as the “past tense” in (78a).

Like Klein, Smith also builds on the three-parameter system though her interpretation of it differs from that of Klein in a number of ways. Most important to the discussion at hand, Smith does not associate aspect with Reichenbach’s reference time. For Smith, such reference times only appear in complex constructions like the past perfect (e.g. *John had walked home*); they do not appear in simple sentences (e.g. *John left*). Simple sentences, according to Smith, only make use of two times: the situation time and the utterance time. Smith’s interpretation of situation time, however, is critically
different from Klein’s. Klein uses the term situation time to refer to what I have been calling the time span of an eventuality. In contrast, Smith states that the situation time interval is “independent of the situation itself” – a provision that she credits to Hans Kamp and Christian Rohrer (1989). Kamp and Rohrer’s original terminology in which temporal location corresponds to situation time is, in this case, more transparent. It makes clear that what Smith calls the situation time is not the time span of an eventuality, but an interval that bears some relation to the time span of an eventuality. It is this interval that Smith says is the locus of viewpoint aspect. Taking the position that this interval is related to the time span of a situation, it is possible in the case of complex sentences to view Smith’s system as utilizing (at least) four important times. In the sentence John had walked home when Mary called to offer him a ride, for example, the time span of the main event (the time of John’s walking home) is included in some other time (Smith’s locus of viewpoint aspect); this time precedes the reference time (the time of Mary’s call), which in turn precedes the utterance time (the now). So while Smith’s and Klein’s positions on aspect are largely in accord, a key difference between them lies in their definitions of situation time.

The definition of situation time, particularly as the term relates to states, presents a complex and important issue, one I will return to later. Until then, putting its precise definition aside, the situation time of an event may be thought of as that event’s running time – the time the event lasts. Thought of this way, the situation time of a walking event, for instance, is the interval made up of moments all of which are moments during which the walking was taking place.
3.1.1 Perfective Aspect

Adopting the position that aspect is a deictic category that relates the situation time of an eventuality (ST) to a topic time interval (TT) provides an initial framework within which to examine the aspects of particular sentences and sentence types. Positing different relations between the two times can capture intuitions about individual aspects such as perfect and perfective. Following Kratzer (1998)\(^29\), I treat perfective aspect as the relation \(ST\) is properly contained within \(TT\). If as Comrie says, “we restrict ourselves to non-stative verbs and exclude habitual meaning”, then in addition to their perfect readings, like their SAE counterparts, AAE simple \(V\)-\(ed\) sentences exhibit prototypically perfective readings: the events their verbs describe are presented as completed, unanalyzable wholes, with equal focus given to their beginnings, middles and ends. The relation \(ST\) is properly contained within \(TT\) captures these intuitions.

Consider the sentences in (79) as answers to the question *What happened while Esther was entering the room?*

\(^{29}\) The idea of containment or inclusion within an interval figures prominently in both Smith’s (1992) and Klein’s (1994) analyses of the perfective. Klein, for example, defines perfective aspect as the relation ST includes TT. Unlike my formulation, Klein allows improper inclusion. Smith’s and Klein’s definitions of situation time are different from one another and from the definition that I am entertaining here.
(79)  a. Eugene dropped the cake.

b. Eugene started eating the cake.

c. Eugene finished eating the cake.

d. ? Eugene ate the cake.

e. ?? Eugene wrote his dissertation.

The question determines the topic time: the short period of time during which Esther was entering the room. Among the possible answers to this question are: *Eugene dropped the cake* (79a), *Eugene started eating the cake* (79b), and *Eugene finished eating the cake* (79c), all of which describe events that could reasonably occur during a very short period of time. In answer to the same question, (79d), *Eugene ate the cake*, is distinctly odd, forcing an interpretation under which Eugene ate an entire cake while Esther was opening the door and walking into the room — surely an exaggeration. This sentence, (79d), cannot mean that Eugene started eating, finished eating, or continued eating the cake. The entire cake-eating event must be contained within the topic time. More dramatically, (79e), *Eugene wrote his dissertation*, forces the pragmatically odd reading under which Eugene writes an entire dissertation during what any graduate student knows to be an unreasonably short period of time. The sentence cannot mean that Eugene was simply working on his dissertation, writing, for instance, the very first sentence.
3.1.2 Perfect Aspect

Focusing on the perfect of recent past and the experiential perfect, like Klein, I assume a minimal definition of perfect aspect: \( ST \) precedes \( (and \ does \ not \ overlap \ with) \ TT \). This definition, together with the current assumptions regarding situation times, captures the intuition that verbs marked for perfect aspect prototypically describe events that are “over” or “complete” before some topic time. If the running time of an event precedes and does not overlap a topic time interval, then it follows that the event must finish before the topic time begins; the situation time of the event is past relative to the topic time. The definition of perfect aspect as \( ST \) precedes \( TT \) is consistent with other attempts to give a unified treatment of perfect aspect as an indefinite past (e.g. Reichenbach 1947, Inoue 1979, Smith 1992, Klein 1992, Kratzer 1998). And despite differing terminology, it is also consistent with the descriptions researchers give of the aspects involved in AAE simple \( V-ed \) and \( done \ V-ed \) constructions (e.g. Baugh 1983, Labov 1998, Déchaine 1993, Green 1993).

It is the perfect of persistent situation that poses the most obvious challenge to indefinite past theories of perfect aspect. Most need to say something extra to account for the fact that SAE sentences such as \( Mary \ has \ lived \ in \ Wise \ for \ three \ years \) and AAE sentences such as \( Mary \ done \ lived \ in \ Wise \ for \ three \ years \) can be interpreted as placing only a part of Mary’s living in Wise before the utterance time – they are judged true even

\[ \text{30} \]

Klein (1992, 1994) expresses this as \( TT \) after \( TSit \), where \( TT \) and \( TSit \) are the topic time and situation time, respectively.
when Mary’s living in Wise continues into the present. An associated concern is that only perfect constructions whose main verbs are either lexically stative or interpreted as habituals (habituals very likely being kinds of statives) allow this kind of reading (v. Bauer 1970, McCoard 1978, Brinton 1988, Portner 2000). Thus, verb class, an issue of lexical aspect, must play an important role in any full accounting of the perfect. In this chapter, I will limit my discussion so as to exclude habits and states. I will return to the perfect of persistent situation in Chapter 5.

3.2 Steps Toward Formalization

My goals in this chapter are to demonstrate how a Reichenbachian framework can be used to capture the basic notions of perfective and perfect and to develop a more formal analysis of AAE done and simple V-ed sentences along these lines. This initial analysis will serve as a base model to quarrel with and to build on while confronting more of the challenges that these sentence-types pose. Developing such an analysis requires definitions of tense as well as aspect. I assume that both SAE and AAE have two tenses, past and present. Following Klein (1992, 1994), I treat past tense as the relation topic time (TT) precedes (and does not overlap with) utterance time (UT). Unlike Klein, who treats present tense as TT includes UT, I treat present tense as the relation TT is properly

---

31 As Portner (2000) points out, by treating the perfect as describing non-future events, Stump (1985) produces an indefinite past analysis that does not require anything extra to account for perfect of persistent situation readings. Portner, who himself advocates a quite different kind of theory of the perfect, argues against Stump’s analysis on different grounds.
included in TT\textsuperscript{32}. These relations are summarized in (80). The aspect relations are summarized in (81).

(80) Past and Present Tense

a. Past Tense: TT precedes (and does not overlap with) UT.

b. Present Tense: TT is properly included in UT.

(81) Perfective and Perfect Aspect

a. Perfect Aspect: ST precedes (and does not overlap with) TT.

b. Perfective Aspect: ST is properly included in TT.

(Note: Less important to this dissertation, imperfective aspect may be thought of as ST properly includes TT)

Having arrived at (at least) working definitions of the tenses and relevant aspects, I now turn to the question of how tense and aspect are introduced into AAE done and simple V-ed sentences. My initial focus is on the aspects.

3.2.1 The Locus of Perfect and Perfective Aspect

Déchaine (1993) argues that preverbal done carries the semantics of perfect aspect in AAE. On her account, it is the presence of done that makes AAE sentences such as I

\footnote{The reasons for this difference will become clear in Chapter 5.}
*done lost my job* perfect, and her analysis of the ambiguity of AAE simple *V-ed* sentences is based on a claim that there is a phonologically unpronounced *done* in the present perfect versions, but not the past perfective versions of these sentences. That is, everywhere that I have translated a simple *V-ed* sentence as an SAE present perfect construction, the sentence, in its underlying form, has a preverbal *done*. For example, *I lost my job*, when interpreted as *I have lost my job*, is, according to Déchaine’s analysis, underlyingly *I done lost my job*. The phonological features, but not the semantic features of *done* have simply been deleted. A major strength of this analysis is that it links the unambiguously present perfect readings of *done V-ed* sentences to the sometimes present perfect readings of simple *V-ed* sentences. The two are surely related, and Déchaine’s analysis suggests what their relationship might be. Unfortunately, the analysis is untenable. Despite their both being perfects, the two constructions have different ranges of meaning. As I argued in the previous chapter, in addition to having the full range of perfect meanings of simple *V-ed* sentences, *done V-ed* sentences also have perfect of persistent situation readings. Since they mean different things, AAE simple *V-ed* sentences (when interpreted as present perfects) cannot simply be *done* sentences with silent *dones*. It is, however, reasonable to look for something common in their semantic make-ups. I believe that a more plausible explanation for the source of perfect aspect in the two constructions is their common morphology, the –*ed* verb ending. Consider an analogy to SAE analyses: early approaches to SAE tense and aspect (e.g. Chomsky’s *Syntactic Structures*) treated *have + -en*, which is often spelled out as *have + ed*, as a unit. More recent analyses (starting at least as far back as Gazdar et. al 1985) have tended to base-generate participial forms, having *have* select for a perfect-participial verb phrase
instead of being generated along with the participle-forming morpheme. Once *have* and
-*en* are split into two standardly co-occurring yet separate morphemes, the issue arises as
to where to put the semantics of perfect aspect within the *have* + *-en* complex – whether
in *have* or in *-en*. Nearly the same problem arises with *done* and *-ed*. I argue that the
evidence suggests that it is *-ed* rather than *done* that is responsible for introducing the
principal ingredients of perfect aspect into the *done* + *V-ed* complex. That is, the core of
the relation *situation time precedes topic time* is carried by the *-ed* morpheme.

Attributing the meaning of perfect aspect to *-ed* explains why both *done V-ed* and
simple *V-ed* sentences have perfect readings, but it leaves open two very important
questions. First, there is the question of *done*’s role: what does *done* do? If, contrary to
Déchaine’s claims, *done* does not carry perfect aspect, then it must have some other
function, presumably one that allows for perfect of persistent situation readings. Second,
there is the ambiguity question: why are AAE simple *V-ed* sentences ambiguous? Simply
saying that *-ed* carries perfect aspect does not explain how this ambiguity arises. In the
remainder of this dissertation, I will explore a number of possible answers to both of
these questions.

One possible explanation for the ambiguity of AAE simple *V-ed* sentences is that,
contrary to my arguments in the previous chapter, AAE *-ed* has two underlying forms,
one perfect and the other perfective. Further, if preverbal *done* selects for perfect
morphology and meaning the way that SAE *have* selects a past participle, the
unambiguous nature of *done* sentences is also explained. Indeed, perfect aspect may be
what distinguishes homophonous “past” and “past participle” morphology. My
arguments against past participles in AAE notwithstanding, it is useful to see how such an analysis might work once spelled out more formally.

3.3 A First Formal Fragment

The first step in producing a formal fragment of the AAE tense and aspect system is formalizing the notions of time implicit in the previous discussion and common to our everyday metaphysical intuitions. To this end, I adopt Bennett and Partee’s (1972) formalization of the basic structure of time.

As we commonly think of time as being infinite in both directions, dense, and linearly ordered, following Bennett and Partee, let T be the real numbers, and regard T as the set of moments in time. A mathematical abstraction, real numbers are commonly used when modelling real-world phenomenon such as distance, temperature, and time. Roughly speaking, a real number is a point on a number line that stretches infinitely in both directions33. So, this part of the formalization gives us the familiar notion of a “time line”. To capture the notions of before and after on that line, let ≤ be the standard dense linear ordering of T. Now we are in a position to define the “interval” in “interval semantics”. I is an interval of T if and only if I ⊆ T and for any t₁, t₃ ∈ I such that t₁ ≤ t₃ if t₂ is such that t₁ ≤ t₂ ≤ t₃, then t₂ ∈ I. For I to be an interval of T, then, I must be included

33 Strictly, real numbers are the equivalence classes of the Cauchy sequences of rationals under the equivalence relation “~”, where a ~ b if and only if a-b is Cauchy with limit 0.
in \( T \) (it must lie somewhere on the time line), and given two moments in \( I \), if a third moment, falls between them, it too must be a part of \( I \).

Let \([T]\) be the set of all intervals of \( T \) except for the empty interval. Let \( I' \) be a member of \([T]\). \( I \) is a subinterval of \( I' \) if and only if \( I \in [T] \) and \( I \subseteq I' \). A subinterval of \( I' \), then, is any interval that is included in \( I' \). This includes the interval \( I' \) itself. \( I \) is a proper subinterval of \( I' \) if and only if \( I \in [T] \) and \( I \subseteq I' \) and not \( I = I' \). So, although an interval, \( I' \), is considered a subinterval of itself, it is not a proper subinterval of itself. \( I \) is an initial subinterval of \( I' \) if and only if \( I \) is a subinterval of \( I' \) and there do not exist \( t' \in I' - I \) and \( t \in I \) such that \( t' < t \). \( I \) is a final subinterval of \( I' \) if and only if \( I \) is a subinterval of \( I' \) and there do not exist \( t' \in I' - I \) and \( t \in I \) such that \( t < t' \). Therefore, the initial moment of any initial subinterval of \( I' \) is the first moment in \( I' \), and the final moment of any final subinterval of \( I' \) is the final moment in \( I' \).

\(<\) is a strict partial ordering of set \( T \) if and only if \(<\) is an asymmetric and transitive relation having \( T \) as its field. (\(<\) is asymmetric if and only if not \( y < x \) whenever \( x < y \).) \( \leq \) induces a strict partial ordering \([<]\) on \([T]\). Let \( I, I' \) be members of \([T]\). \( I \) \([<]\) \( I' \) if and only if for all \( t \) in \( I \) and \( t' \) in \( I' \), \( t < t' \). These definitions allow us to (partially) order intervals based on the order of the moments they contain.

Let \( t \) be a member of \( T \) and \( I \) be a member of \([T]\). \( t \) is an initial point for \( I \) if and only if \([t]\) is an initial subinterval of \( I \). \( t \) is a final point for \( I \) if and only if \([t]\) is a final subinterval of \( I \). \( t \) is an endpoint for \( I \) if and only if either \( t \) is an initial point for \( I \) or \( t \) is a final point for \( I \). Thus, \( t \) is an initial bound for \( I \) if and only if \( t \) is not in \( I \) and \( t \) is an initial point for \( I \cup \{t\} \). \( t \) is a bound for \( I \) if and only if either \( t \) is an initial bound for \( I \) or \( t \) is a final bound for \( I \). These definitions tell us that initial and final points of time intervals are
the first and last moments that they contain, and that an interval is bounded by moments
that are not a part of the interval itself.

Although I have added some explanatory comments, this formalization of the
basic structure of time is taken directly from Bennett and Partee’s paper, and it serves as
the basic temporal framework within which I will formalize and further develop the
notions of tense and aspect that are under discussion.

Building within this framework, I assume an interval semantics that divides the
universe into individuals, intervals of time, and truth values. I therefore assume the
following basic types for variables: \( e \) (individuals), \( i \) (intervals of time), and \( t \) (truth
values). So far, I am still only considering VPs that describe events as opposed to states.
I assume that uninflected VPs denote properties of (complete) running times of events.
The denotation of the VP *John walk*, for example, is represented in the semantics as the
function \( \lambda t[\text{walk}(j)(t)] \), where \( j \) is the type-\( e \) metalanguage translation of *John*, the
variable \( t \) ranges over intervals, and \( \text{walk}(j)(t) \) holds if and only if \( t \) is the time of a
maximal walking event. Having argued that *-ed* is the locus of perfect aspect in AAE
*done* and simple *V-ed* sentences, and entertaining the idea that AAE *-ed* is ambiguous
between perfect and perfective, I treat verbal affixes such as *-ing* and *-ed* as the heads of
aspectual phrases (AspPs) situated above VPs as shown in the partial structure in Figure
2.
Figure 2. The Position of the Aspectual Phrase

Denotations for the two underlying forms of –ed are given in (82)\(^{34}\).

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{(82) a. } & -\text{ed}_{\text{perfect}} : \quad \lambda P_{\text{sit}} \lambda t_{\text{Top}} \exists t_{\text{Sit}} [P(t_{\text{Sit}}) \& t_{\text{Sit}} < t_{\text{Top}}] \\
\text{b. } & -\text{ed}_{\text{perfective}} : \quad \lambda P_{\text{sit}} \lambda t_{\text{Top}} \exists t_{\text{Sit}} [P(t_{\text{Sit}}) \& t_{\text{Sit}} \subseteq t_{\text{Top}}]
\end{align*}
\]

The denotation in (82a) is based on the definition of perfect aspect in (81a). The denotation in (82b) is based on the definition of perfective aspect in (81b). In both definitions, the variable \(t_{\text{Sit}}\) represents the maximal time interval of the eventuality, and the variable \(t_{\text{Top}}\) represents the topic time interval. The relation \(t_{\text{Sit}} < t_{\text{Top}}\) is one of temporal precedence: all times within the interval \(t_{\text{Sit}}\) precede all times within the interval \(t_{\text{Top}}\). The relation \(t_{\text{Sit}} \subseteq t_{\text{Top}}\) is one of temporal inclusion: all times within the interval \(t_{\text{Sit}}\)

\[34\] The variable subscripts in the denotations in (82) and those that follow refer to variable types; the superscripts are parts of the variable names.
are within the interval $t^{Top}$. I formulate the past and present tenses as operator heads of a Tense Phrase (TP) which relate topic times to the utterance time. They are treated as zero morphemes or silent adverbials, though they can, in some cases, be overtly marked by auxiliaries. In *I am writing a letter*, for example, *am* (a version of the auxiliary *be*) overtly marks the present tense. The denotations of past and present tense are given in (83).

\begin{align*}
(83) \quad \text{a. PAST:} \quad & \lambda P \lambda t_{Top} [P(t_{Top}) \& t_{Top} < t^\rho] \\
\text{b. PRES:} \quad & \lambda P \lambda t_{Top} [P(t_{Top}) \& t_{Top} \subseteq t^\rho]
\end{align*}

In these formulae, $t^{Top}$ represents the topic time and $t^\rho$ represents the utterance time or immediate now. The denotations are based on the definitions in (80).

These pieces can now be put together in concrete examples. Figure 3 shows the computation for the past perfective reading of the sentence *John ate the steak*. In Figures 3 through 11, $j$ is the metalanguage translation of *John* and $s$ is the metalanguage translation of *the steak*. I have simplified the denotation of the definite description *the steak* to a proper name for expository purposes only.
The resulting formula in Figure 3, \( \lambda_{\text{Top}} [\exists_{\text{Sit}} \text{[eat}(j)(s)(t_{\text{Sit}}) \& t_{\text{Sit}} \subseteq t_{\text{Top}}] \& t_{\text{Top}} < t^0] \), says the maximal time interval of John’s steak eating is contained within a yet-to-be-supplied topic time; and that topic time precedes the now. The containment of the entire running time of the steak-eating event within the topic time captures the sentence’s perfective quality, and the placement of the topic time before the utterance time captures its pastness. While the situation time variable in this computation is existentially closed, the topic time variable is left bound by a lambda operator. This implies a missing syntactic operation in which either context or an adverb gives the variable its content. I do not
existentially close the topic time variable as on the standard reading of the existential operator, the operator prevents context from playing a role. A potential problem with the system of tenses and aspects that I have outlined here is that it does not capture the fact that the perfective \(-ed\) in sentences such as *John ate the steak* seems to require past (as opposed to present) tense. While AAE Simple *V-ed* sentences have present perfect readings, they are never interpreted as present perfectives. The system as it stands, however, allows structures such as that in Figure 4, which predicts that *John ate the steak* should receive just such an interpretation.

Alternate methods for introducing context dependency include making the topic time variable a free variable.

---

35 Alternate methods for introducing context dependency include making the topic time variable a free variable.
A possible defense of the system is that in sentences like *John ate the steak*, past tense is supplied as a default for pragmatic reasons. Present tense may be unavailable because of the relative shortness of the present. The present or now in SAE and AAE is short relative to the time intervals of events. Graham Katz (1995) makes this point for SAE with something akin to the following argument: It can be said of a still photo “In this picture John is eating the steak”, the progressive aspect marking the fact that the eating event spans a time period larger than the short period of time which is captured by the still photo. On the other hand, one cannot say of a similar photo “In this picture John eats the steak”. The entire steak-eating event is too lengthy to fit within the time captured by the snapshot. In contrast, if one is speaking of videotape, which can capture much longer periods of time, it is perfectly acceptable to say, “In this video John eats the steak.” Katz argues that it is for this very reason that speakers of SAE (and the argument could be extended to AAE speakers as well) must use the progressive to refer to ongoing events; one cannot see John eating and exclaim, “John eats the steak”. The shortness of the now may also restrict perfective aspect in SAE and AAE to past tensed sentences. Were it applied to sentences in the present tense, the maximal running time of eventualities would have to be contained within the now, and this would (in the case of most non-instantaneous eventive sentences at least \(^{36}\) ) be the temporal equivalent of putting a quart in a pint bottle. It is not at all clear, however, that this explanation will hold once we

---

\(^{36}\) This qualification is necessary because of the grammaticality of sentences such as *I win*. It is possible to view winning in this context as occurring in an instant that can fit within the now. More problematic sentences include *I see him*, and performatives such as *I sentence you to three years in jail*. They too might be analyzed as having an instantaneous nature, but it is not at all clear that they do.
consider stative verb phrases. I take up some of the complications of stative verb phrases in the next chapter.

In the system under consideration, perfect aspect is carried by the –ed morphology in (82a). The computation for the sentence *John ate the steak* on its present perfect reading is shown in Figure 5.

![Figure 5: AAE John ate the steak (present perfect)](image)

Here present tense poses no problem. The topic time included within the utterance time does not itself include the running time of the steak-eating event. Instead, it follows it. By locating the utterance time within the topic time, the computation focuses the present. While the event in question is in the past, the sentence makes an assertion about the present.

On this account of AAE aspect, the –ed in (82a) introduces perfect aspect into *done* sentences as well as simple *V-ed* sentences. Since *done* sentences are
unambiguously perfect, presumably part of done’s role is to select for perfect (as opposed to perfective) aspect marking. The basic syntactic structure for the sentence John done ate the steak is that shown in Figure 6.

![Figure 6: AAE John done ate the steak](image)

I have made the semantics of done in Figure 6 the identity function – thus making done’s contribution as minimal as possible. Since done seems to play an important semantic role in perfect of persistent situation readings, this is only a temporary measure. Assuming that the actual semantics of done does not interfere with the basic utterance time, topic time, and situation time relations, as with the simple V-ed sentence in Figure 5, present
tense causes no problem here. However, one is led to ask why there is no past perfect reading of *John done ate the steak* that corresponds to the structure in Figure 7.

Once again the system appears to over-generate and produce unacceptable sentences. One might argue that instead of selecting for perfect aspect, *done* actually selects for present tense, with present tense, in turn, forcing the perfect rather than the perfective reading of *-ed*. But such a hypothesis turns out to be untenable when one considers sentences such as (84).

(84)  John’d done baked a cake.  (AAE)

‘John had baked a cake’  (SAE)
Here, ‘d (which I take to be contracted had\textsuperscript{37}) marks the past tense in the done construction. The overt marking of past tense gives rise to a pluperfect or past perfect reading that shows that done is not incompatible with past tense. The structure in Figure 7 remains a problem: one that seems to stem from my denotation for \textit{–ed}, and perhaps the introduction of multiple \textit{–eds}. In Chapter 4, I will develop a single \textit{–ed} analysis of these data that avoids this problem.

3.4 Adverbial Interaction within the Fragment

Despite the problems I have noted and the rather limited rage of data this formal fragment is meant to cover, it gets enough right so as to serve as a starting point, something to build on in the development of a better, farther reaching model. Before struggling with its shortcomings, I use it now to investigate, and possibly explain, the interaction between past time indicating adverbials and perfect aspect in AAE.

In Chapter 1, I noted that the AAE speakers who I have interviewed typically give what at first appear to be inconsistent judgments regarding the acceptability of sentences such as John done ate a steak yesterday, present perfect done constructions that include purely past time indicating adverbials. Only a very few these speakers (7 out of 50 in an informal survey I conducted) treat these sentences as always ungrammatical. These speakers’ judgments mirror those of SAE speakers who, by and large, find the same adverbials (e.g. yesterday, last week, last year) incompatible with the SAE present perfect

\textsuperscript{37} Although had is possible here, it is awkward; and the contracted form ‘d is much preferred.
have –en construction. The vast majority of AAE speakers I have spoken to, however, treat past-time-indicating adverbials as sometimes incompatible with present perfect done constructions and sometimes not. For these speakers, context plays an important role in acceptability of the sentences. Spoken out of the blue, or treated as simple statements of fact they are judged unacceptable. When placed in carefully constructed contexts, they are considered perfectly grammatical. For example, in the survey that I mentioned, forty-four of fifty speakers judged the sentence John done ate a steak yesterday as unacceptable when presented without any contextual support. Forty-one of fifty speakers judged the same sentence acceptable when presented in the discourse in (85).

(85) A. John acts like he’s always so good about his diet. It’s easy for him to say he just wants a salad today.

B. Why is that?

A. Oh, because John done ate a steak yesterday.

Crucial to understanding why this might be is investigating the interaction between tense, aspect, and the syntactic position of the modifying adverbial.

Numerous authors have advanced proposals in which the ability of adverbials to adjoin at different syntactic positions is used to explain the range of meaning of adverbially modified sentences. Two very early proposals of this type are those of David Dowty (1979) and Liliane Haegeman (1984). More recent proposals in this vein can be
found in work by Janet Hitzeman (1997) and co-authored work by Alessandro Giorgi and Fabio Pianesi (1998). Dowty, for instance, argues for a syntactic ambiguity in the interpretation of SAE for-adverbials based on data such as those in (86).

(86) a. John has lived in Boston for four years. (SAE)
    b. For four years John has lived in Boston. (SAE)

As Dowty points out, (86a) has two readings. It has a perfect of persistent situation reading in which John’s four-year period of living in Boston extends up to and includes the moment the sentence is spoken. It also has a reading in which the entire four-year period took place before the moment of utterance. It could, for example, be used to introduce John as someone who though he no longer lives in Boston, knows a lot about the city because he has (at a previous time in his life) lived in Boston for four years. Unlike (86a), (86b) only has the perfect of persistent situation reading. It can only be used to mean that John has lived in Boston for four years and still does. That presposing the adverbial has an effect on interpretation is, as Dowty notes, strong evidence of a true syntactic ambiguity, one that exists in AAE as well. The AAE sentences in (87a) and (87b), for example, have the same ranges of meaning as the SAE sentences in (86a) and (86b), respectively.

---

38 For a dissenting view see Vickner (1999).
a. John done lived in Boston for four years.  

b. For four years John done lived in Boston.

Hitzeman (1997) interprets the ambiguity in (87) as is outlined in Figure 9. Preposed adverbials are unambiguously adjoined above the VP (unless they have been moved through a process of topicalization) whereas postposed adverbial may be adjoined at sentence-level or VP-level.

I adopt this basic idea, and use it in explaining differing judgments for sentences such as *John done ate a steak yesterday*. My position is that some, but not all, AAE speakers treat adverbs like *yesterday* as ambiguous in attachment positions much the way they do *for*-adverbials.

Though an adverbial may attach at the VP-level, sentence-level, or a number of places in between, most relevant here is the adverbial’s point of attachment with respect
to the AspP. In the tense and aspect system I have been considering, a VP-level adverbial is positioned below AspP, and thus must modify a situation time. The application of aspect makes modification of the situation impossible and thus adverbials attached above aspect modify topic times.

As I have suggested, judgments vary as to whether sentences such as *John done ate a steak yesterday* are completely unacceptable or not. Let us first consider the judgments of AAE speakers for whom such a sentence is always unacceptable. For such speakers, modification of present perfect *done* sentences by both preposed and postposed past-time-indicating adverbials such as *yesterday* invariably results in ungrammatical sentences:

(88)   a. *Yesterday/*Last week/ *Last year Jim done baked a cake. (AAE)

   b. Jim done baked a cake *yesterday/ *last week/ *last year. (AAE)

There are, however, arguably past-time-indicating adverbs that behave differently. These are indefinite adverbials such as *on a Friday*, and those like *on Friday*, when they are used indefinitely. For *on Friday* this would be when like *on a Friday* it is used to refer to a past event that took place on that particular day of the week, but not a particular day. These adverbials contrast with those like *yesterday* in terms of their acceptability in the *done* construction even for the strict speakers being considered now.
(89)  a. *On Friday John done ate a steak

          b. John done ate a steak on Friday

‘John has eaten a steak on a Friday before’

The sentences in (89) show that in the preposed position, where it modifies a topic time, modification by on Friday results in unacceptable sentences. In the postposed position, on the other hand, modification by on Friday is acceptable. Here it modifies a situation time. Sentence (89b) above is acceptable, but on Friday must be interpreted indefinitely. The sentence can only mean that John has eaten a steak on a Friday before. When on Friday is used this way, taking place on Friday must be a critical part of the event. The following scenario helps to clarify the issue. Imagine that John in (89b) is a practicing Catholic who normally does not eat meat on Fridays. The sentence John done ate a steak on Friday may be used to contradict the claim that John never eats meat on Fridays, or to answer the question Has John ever eaten meat on Friday? — a question which fixes the topic time as now, and makes clear that the kind of event in question is partly defined by its taking place on a Friday. John done ate a steak on Friday cannot, in contrast, be used to answer the question What did John do on Friday? — a question that fixes the topic time as Friday.

39 Until 1966, all Fridays were obligatory day of abstinence from meat for practicing Catholics. Since that time, however, only Fridays during Lent have required that particular form of penance. Though on non-Lenten Fridays Catholics may substitute some other form of penance, the ordinary penance is still abstention from meat.
The judgments of these strict speakers of AAE mirror perfectly SAE judgments for the present perfect *have* construction. Compare (88) to (90) and (89) to (91).

(90)  
   a. *Yesterday/*Last week/ *Last year Jim has baked a cake. (SAE)  

   b. Jim has baked a cake *yesterday/ *last week/ *last year. (SAE)  

(91)  
   a. *On Friday John has eaten a steak (SAE)  

   b. John has eaten a steak on Friday (SAE)  

   ‘John has eaten a steak on a Friday before’ (SAE)  

Based on similar SAE data, Girorgi and Pianesi (1998) and Klein (1992,1994) before them argue that the SAE present perfect’s resistance to past-time-indicating adverbs has little to with the fact that these adverbs indicate past times. Instead, they divide adverbs into two groups, those that are definite and those that allow indefinite uses. They argue that there is a constraint against modifying SAE present perfect constructions with a definite adverbial. Examples of the two types of adverbs are given in Table 1.
Table 1: Definite and Indefinite Adverbials

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Definite</th>
<th>(Possibly) Indefinite^{40}</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>yesterday</td>
<td>on a Friday</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>last week</td>
<td>on Friday</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>last year</td>
<td>on my birthday</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In Klein’s work, his P-Definiteness Constraint states that the situation time and the topic time in a sentence cannot both receive definite temporal specification. He reasons as follows: In his formulation of the present perfect, topic time is equated with the utterance time, thus giving it a definite specification. (Recall that for Klein Present = topic time includes utterance time). According to the P-Definiteness constraint, then, the situation time cannot also be given a definite description. Portner (2000) argues against this type of constraint by questioning the notion of definiteness on which it rests. He notes, for instance, that there is no obvious way in which just now, which is compatible with the SAE present perfect (and the AAE done construction as well), is any less definite than last week, which is not. That the adverbial just now is grammatical in both the preposed and postposed positions within SAE present perfects, and AAE done V-ed sentences is shown in (92) and (93).

^{40} Except for on a Friday, which must be used indefinitely, all of these adverbials have indefinite and contextually definite uses.
Such data seem to show that an appeal to definiteness alone cannot explain the judgments in question. I propose that the judgments of strict speakers of AAE be explained in the following way. The definite adverbials in Table 1, those like yesterday, but not like just now, are treated by strict speakers as referential; they behave like the names of particular days. Being referential, they are also definite. (Note that this reasoning does not work in reverse. Being definite does not imply being referential.) The denotation of referential yesterday is given in (94).

\[
[[\text{yesterday}]] = \text{yesterday}
\]

In contrast to unambiguously definite adverbials such as yesterday, adverbials such as on Friday, when used indefinitely, are, I believe, treated as denoting properties of times. The denotation of the non-referential and indefinite on Friday is given in (95).

\[
[[\text{on Friday}]] = \lambda P \lambda t \exists t' [P(t) \& t \subseteq t' \& \text{Friday}(t')]
\]
Consider what happens when a referential adverbial such as yesterday is attached at the VP-level in a done sentence as shown in the partial structure in Figure 9.

\[
\begin{align*}
&\text{AspP} \\
&\quad \text{VP} \\
&\quad \quad \text{AdvP} \\
&\quad \quad \text{VP}_1 \quad \text{VP}_2
\end{align*}
\]

In Figure 9, yesterday saturates the \(t^{Sit}\) variable in \(\lambda t^{Sit}[\text{eat}(s)(j)(t^{Sit})]\) resulting in \([\text{eat}(s)(j)(\text{yesterday})]\) which is of the wrong type to combine with the aspectual head above it. The referential adverbial yesterday is thus prevented from modifying the situation time of the sentence. If attached above AspP as in Figure 10, no type mismatch error ensues. However, the computation results in the formula \(\exists t^{Sit}[\text{eat}(j)(s)(t^{Sit}) \& t^{Sit} \prec \text{yesterday}] \& \text{yesterday} \subseteq t^0\), which makes the assertion that yesterday is included within the moment.
of utterance (the present moment). As this cannot be, the sentence is ungrammatical (or semantically anomalous).

Figure 10: TP-attached referential \textit{yesterday}
An indefinite, non-referential adverbial such as *on Friday* can, without type mismatch error, attach at the above or bellow AspP as shown in Figures 11 and 12, respectively. Attachment above AspP, however, results in a pragmatically odd sentence where as attachment below AspP results in a perfectly acceptable sentence.

![Diagram](image)

\[
\text{[[VP]]} = \{\text{[John eat the rutabagas]}\] = \lambda^{\text{top}} \{\text{eat(j)(s)(t^\text{top})}\} \\
\text{[[-ed]]} = \lambda^{\text{top}} \exists t^\text{top} \{P(t^\text{top}) \land t^\text{top} < t^\text{top}\} \\
\text{[[AspP]]} = \{\text{[on]}\}\{\text{[VP]}\] = \lambda^{\text{top}} \exists t^\text{top} \{\text{eat(j)(s)(t^\text{top})} \land t^\text{top} < t^\text{top}\} \\
\text{[[done]]} = \lambda^{\text{top}} \{P\} \\
\text{[[XP]]} = \{\text{[done]}\}\{\text{[AspP]}\] = \lambda^{\text{top}} t^\text{top} \{\text{eat(j)(s)(t^\text{top})} \land t^\text{top} < t^\text{top}\} \\
\text{[[PRES]]} = \lambda^{\text{top}} \exists t^\text{top} \{P(t^\text{top}) \land t^\text{top} \leq t^\text{top}\} \\
\text{[[TP]]} = \{\text{[PRES]}\}\{\text{[XP]}\] = \lambda^{\text{top}} t^\text{top} \exists t^\text{top} \{\text{eat(j)(s)(t^\text{top})} \land t^\text{top} < t^\text{top}\} \land t^\text{top} \leq t^\text{top} \\
\text{[[AdvP]]} = \{\text{[on Friday]}\] = \lambda^{\text{top}} \exists t^\text{top} \exists t^\text{top} \{P(t^\text{top}) \land t^\text{top} \leq t^\text{top} \land \text{Friday(t'}}\} \\
\text{[[TP2]]} = \{\text{[AdvP]}\}\{\text{[TP1]}\] = \lambda^{\text{top}} t^\text{top} \exists t^\text{top} \{\text{eat(j)(s)(t^\text{top})} \land t^\text{top} < t^\text{top}\} \land t^\text{top} \leq t^\text{top} \land t^\text{top} \leq t^\text{top} \land t^\text{top} \leq t^\text{top} \land t^\text{top} \leq t^\text{top} \\
\text{Figure 11: TP-attached Indefinite on Friday/anomalous}

---

41 The superscripts in \(t^{\text{top}}\) and \(t^{\text{top}}\) are simply parts of the variable names. They are mnemonic, meant to help keep straight what the variables represent. Since they have no semantic effect, I replace the t in (95) with \(t^{\text{top}}\) in Figure 11 and \(t^{\text{top}}\) in Figure 12.
The computation in Figure 11 yields the formula $\lambda t^{\text{Top}} \exists t^{\text{Sit}} [\exists t^{\text{Sit}} [\text{eat}(j)(s)(t^{\text{Sit}}) \& t^{\text{Sit}} < t^{\text{Top}}] \& t^{\text{Top}} \subseteq t^0] \& t^{\text{Top}} \subseteq t' \& \text{Friday}(t')]$, which asserts that the topic time is contained in the utterance time and is itself contained within Friday. When said on any day other than Friday, this is not true. When said on Friday, the sentence is pragmatically odd, and would rather be said as *Today John done ate a steak*. When the adverbial is VP-attached, as in Figure 12, no such assertion is made. The resulting formula is $\lambda t^{\text{Top}} [\exists t^{\text{Sit}} [\exists t^{\text{Sit}} [\text{eat}(j)(s)(t^{\text{Sit}}) \& t^{\text{Sit}} < t^{\text{Top}}] \& t^{\text{Top}} \subseteq t^0] \& t^{\text{Top}} \subseteq t' \& \text{Friday}(t')]$.
[eat(j)(s)(t_{Sit}) & t_{Sit} \subseteq t' & Friday(t')] & t_{Sit} \subset t^{Top}] & t^0 \subseteq t^{Top}], in which it is the situation time that is located within Friday.

So far I have accounted for the fact that adverbials such as yesterday cannot modify present perfect done constructions and that adverbials such as on Friday, when used indefinitely, can. I have not yet given a formula for adverbs like the contextually definite on Friday or explained why they cannot be used in present perfect done constructions. I propose that the denotation for contextually definite on Friday is that given in (96).

(96)  
\[ [[\text{on Friday}] = \lambda P \ [P(t) \ & \ Friday(t) \ & \ contextually\_definite(t)] \]

In (96), contextually\_definite(t) is a placeholder for a pragmatic condition (not formalized) to the effect that t, which is free in the formula, is fixed by the context: it should be a contextually definite Friday. Friday here can be either past or future, but never present; as I noted earlier, if it were present, it would be referred to as today. While this denotation uses a free variable, its effect on the semantic objects it combines with is very much like referential adverbs such as yesterday. It cannot modify a present perfect done construction for the very same reasons that yesterday cannot. In contrast, I propose that though definite, the denotation of just now is more like the denotation of the indefinite on Friday. Taking place just now is represented in the semantics as a property of times. The denotation for Just now is given in (97).

(97)  
\[ [[\text{just now}] = \lambda P \lambda t \ [P(t) \ & \ t \subseteq t' \ & \ just\_now(t')] \]
Though the two are similar, the denotation for *just now* in (97) and the denotation for the indefinite *on Friday* in (95) differ in important ways. In the denotation in (95), the t’ variable is bound by the existential operator (∃). In (97), t’ is left free so that context may play a role; *just now(t’)* is a placeholder for a pragmatic condition (not formalized) to the effect that t’ should be a contextually definite time that can be appropriately referred to as *just now*. Such time intervals can be conceptualized as very recent past or as present (or sometimes as immediate future) as shown by the occurrence of *just now* in past tense, present perfect and present sentences such as *Just now I ate a steak*, *Just now I have eaten a steak*, and *Just now I eat steak*. Like indefinite *on Friday*, the contextually definite *just now* can attach above or below AspP in a present perfect *done* construction. As there is no inconsistency with saying that a moment falls both within the speech time and the time we call *just now*, attaching *just now* above AspP causes no problems. Both *just now John done ate a steak* and *John done ate a steak just now* are grammatical.

The different denotations that I have given to indefinite *on Friday*, contextually definite *on Friday*, definite *just now*, *today* and *yesterday* are meant to capture a number of intuitions about their behavior. They are meant to capture the intuition that both definiteness and pastness seem to play a role in their relative acceptance in present perfect *done* constructions. They are also meant to capture the intuition that in that order, these adverbials behave increasingly like names. Additionally, they are meant to be useful in explaining why not all AAE speakers in all circumstances treat past-time-indicating adverbs like *yesterday* as incompatible with present perfect *done* sentences.
Let us now turn to the judgments of an AAE speaker for whom sentences such as *John done ate a steak yesterday* can be acceptable. For such speakers only the postposed versions of these sentences are acceptable and they are only acceptable given particular contextual constraints such as those in (98) through (100). What the contexts in these examples make clear is that the past denoting adverbial, be it *yesterday, last week* or *last year* is part of the situation being discussed itself. In (98), *yesterday* directly modifies Jim’s sleeping; it is a part of the situation time. The topic time in (98) is the now, and is introduced by reporting on Jim’s status (now) of being able to stay awake. In (99), *last week* is a part of a situation time modifying the baking of the cake, while the topic time is now as the sentence is concerned with the wasting of food that is going on now. In (100), *last year* modifies the situation time, while the topic time is now, the topic of the sentence being the current desire to help the woman in question.

(98) It’s easy for Jim to stay awake today. After all, he done slept all yesterday.

(AAE)

‘It is easy for Jim to stay away today. After all, he slept all yesterday.

(SAE)

(99) Stop wasting food and eat something; Jim done baked a cake last week and it’s still here.

(AAE)

‘Stop wasting food and eat something; Jim has baked a cake. It was last week when he did, and the cake is still here.’

(SAE)
(100) Why you want to help her now when she done wrote you off last year?

(AAE)

‘Why do you want to help her now when it is the case that she wrote you
off last year?

(SAE)

That many speakers accept such sentences (in such contexts) while others do not
can be explained by positing that speakers for whom (98) through (100) are acceptable
either do not treat adverbs like yesterday, last week, and last year as referential or that
they allow these adverbials to type-shift and be treated as properties of times. This
analysis is supported by the fact that many of these speakers use the adverbial on
yesterday in sentences such as John done ate on yesterday. While it contains yesterday, a
prototypical referential adverbial, on yesterday has the form of on Christmas, which can
be treated as a property of times. Another reason why this way of thinking about the AAE
judgments is attractive is that it places the observed variation in lexical items. Lexical
items must be learned, and thus, we expect their meanings to vary across speakers and
dialects. I give the denotation for yesterday as a property of times in (101a). I give the
denotation for today as a property of times in (101b) for the purpose of comparison.

(101)

a. \[yesterday] = \lambda P \lambda t [P(t) \& t \subseteq t' \& day(t') \& t' < t_0 \& \neg \exists t'' [day(t'') \& t < t'' < t_0]]

b. \[today] = \lambda P \lambda t [P(t) \& t \subseteq t' \& day(t') \& t_0 \subseteq t')]
In words, *yesterday* in (101a) (implicitly “on yesterday”) applies to the set of times that are within yesterday, where yesterday (a) is a day, (b) precedes the speech time, and (c) is the day immediately preceding the speech time: no other day follows yesterday and precedes the speech time.

### 3.5 Summary

I began this chapter by revisiting the issue of how tense and aspect should be characterized. Following Johnson (1977), I adopted the position that both tense and aspect are deictic categories that can be formalized within a Reichenbachian system. In Klein’s (1992; 1994) terminology, tense is the relation between a sentence’s utterance time and its topic time, and aspect is the relation between a situation time and a topic time, where topic time can be equated with Reichenbach’s reference time. Working within this basic framework, I argued for the following definitions of perfective and perfect aspect. Perfective aspect is the relation *situation time is properly contained within topic time*, and perfect aspect is the relation *situation time precedes (and does not overlap with) topic time*. Limiting my discussion to non-stative verbs and excluding habitual meaning, I argued that these relations are able to capture the prototypical notions of perfective and perfect necessary to account for the past perfective/present perfect ambiguity of AAE simple *V-ed* sentences, and the present perfect behavior of simple *done V-ed* sentences.

Turning to morphological concerns, I argued contra Déchaine (1993) that locus of perfect aspect in these sentence types is not *done*, and instead that it is the *–ed*
morphology common to both constructions. Thus, -ed must carry the core of the relation *situation time precedes (and does not overlap with) topic time*. This presented a problem.

If, as I argued in Chapter 2, AAE makes use of a single underlying –ed, and –ed carries perfect aspect, then it is not clear how the past perfective/present perfect ambiguity of simple *V-ed* sentences arises. Putting my arguments from Chapter 2 temporarily aside, I developed a formal semantics for simple *done* and simple *V-ed* sentences that makes use of two underlying –eds, one perfect and one perfective. I used this semantics to investigate differences in native speaker judgments with respect to adverbially modified *done* constructions such as *John done ate a steak yesterday*. I argued that the fact that some speakers of AAE treat such sentences as always ungrammatical and others allow them in certain contexts can explained by positing that the former treat adverbials like *yesterday* as referential while others can treat them as non-referential, denoting properties of times instead. This same intuition may be recast in an event semantics with the difference being one between adverbials that denote properties of events and adverbials that denote properties of times.

While successful in many respects, the semantics presented so far does not account for the unacceptability of certain readings of sentences such as a past perfect reading of *John done ate the steak*. Further, the semantics was designed to capture the prototypically perfect and perfective behavior of eventive *done* and simple *V-ed* sentences. It was not designed to account for the behavior of statives. I will address these issues in the next chapter.
CHAPTER 4

REVISING THE FIRST FORMAL FRAGMENT

In Chapter 3, I developed a formal analysis of the past perfective/present perfect ambiguity of AAE simple V-ed sentences. Further, I suggested how pieces of this analysis might be used to explain the unambiguously perfect nature of AAE preverbal done sentences. Rejecting Déchaine’s (1993) analysis in which the marker done carries perfect aspect, I argued that it is the –ed morphology common to both the done and simple V-ed constructions that, in fact, supplies sentences of these types with perfect aspect. Whereas Déchaine accounts for the ambiguity of simple V-ed sentences by positing a silent done that appears in the present perfect (but not the past perfective) versions of simple V-ed sentences, the analysis I presented in the previous chapter, uses ambiguous –ed morphology to accomplish the same job. Under that analysis, AAE simple V-ed sentences have both present perfect and past perfective readings because they sometimes make use of a perfect –ed and other times make use of a perfective -ed. In contrast, preverbal done sentences are unambiguously perfect because part of done’s role is to select for perfect (as opposed to perfective) –ed.

This explanation of the facts, however, contradicts my earlier conclusion that done and simple V-ed sentences make use of a single underlying representation for –ed morphology. Recall that in Chapter 2, I argued against there being two –eds in AAE based primarily on issues of learnability: the difficulty that an AAE acquiring child
would have in discovering the proper meanings and distributions of the two homophonous forms. There is a tension, then, between the demands of learnability (at least as I see them) on the one hand, and my method of explaining the present perfect/past perfective ambiguity on the other. Additionally, the positing of two underlyingly distinct –ed may well be the reason that the semantics developed in Chapter 3 tends to predict unavailable readings of some sentences. Having a formal analysis with two underlying –ed requires having sufficient mechanisms to constrain their distribution. This puts the linguist who is building a formal semantics in much the same situation as the would-be language-learning child: having too many homophonomous pieces of morphology greatly complicates the task.

In the present chapter, I revise the Chapter 3 analysis to address these problems and to extend the range of data to which it can be applied. Recall that the goal in developing the Chapter 3 analysis was simply to account for the prototypically perfect and perfective behavior of the AAE sentences in question. This prototypical behavior (at least as far as perfective –ed sentences are concerned) arises only when, as Comrie (1976) says of similar SAE sentences, we limit ourselves to non-stative, non-habitual interpretations of the verbs and verb phrases that the sentences include. Habitual and stative verb phrases behave differently. For example, on its most salient reading, entered in (102a) exhibits prototypically perfective behavior. My entering is presented as a completed, unanalyzable whole, with equal focus given to its beginning, middle and end. In this it contrasts with John’s drinking which is presented as an in-progress event, the focus falling on the middle portion of that event. Changing the eventive verb phrase entered to the lexically stative lived here, changes the aspectual character of the entire
sentence. To wit, the most salient reading of (102b) is one in which *was drinking* is interpreted habitually, and the behavior of *lived here* is far less prototypically perfective than that of *entered* in (102a).

\[(102)\quad \text{a. John was drinking when I entered.} \quad \text{(SAE), (AAE)}\]

\[\text{b. John was drinking when I lived here.} \quad \text{(SAE), (AAE)}\]

The most common reading of (102b) is that in it, *drinking* refers to John’s habit of drinking alcohol, a habit that he engaged in at a time when I lived here. And while when spoken out-of-the-blue, the sentence seems to imply that I no longer live here, this is not a semantic necessity. While an admittedly awkward use of it, (102b) might be used to refute the claim that I do not know what John is really like because although I live here now, I did not when John was drinking. This on-going, imperfective-like reading may be somewhat awkward in the case of *lived here* in (102b), but it is impossible in the case of *entered* in (102a). This is an important distinction. The sentences in (103a) and (103b) provide a more striking demonstration of the same difference.

\[(103)\quad \text{a. I entered the room a minute ago *and I still am entering it now.} \quad \text{(SAE), (AAE)}\]

\[\text{b. I lived here in the 1980s and I still live here now.} \quad \text{(SAE), (AAE)}\]
In (103a), *I entered the room a minute ago* cannot be followed by *and I am still entering it now*. The two parts of the sentence contradict one another. When I say that I entered the room, I assert that the action is over and complete. Following it with any suggestion that the action is still in progress is contradictory. In contrast, while by itself *I lived here in the 1980s* implies that I no longer live here, following it with *and I still live here now* as in (103b) does not produce a self-contradictory sentence. Instead, it simply produces a sentence that asserts that the state of my living here held at some time during the 1980’s and that the state still holds now. The aktionsart value (or lexical aspect class) of the verb has an important effect on the interpretation of viewpoint aspect. In order to extend the Chapter 3 analysis to wider variety of verb classes, one that includes states as well as events, more must be said about the interaction between these two components of theory.

The remainder of this chapter proceeds as follows. In section 4.1, I continue my discussion of aspect and aktionsart. In section 4.2, I redefine situation time as it is used in my aspectual relations. Situation time is redefined in such a way that it can be applied to both stative and eventive verb phrases. In sections 4.3 and 4.4, I use the results of section 4.2 to develop a single –ed analysis of the present perfect/past perfective ambiguity of AAE simple V-ed sentences. This analysis has a number of advantages over the Chapter 3 analysis which I discuss. In section 4.5, I discuss some potential problems with the newer banalysis before summarizing in section 4.6.

### 4.1 Aspect and Aktionsart

The examples in (102) and (103) show that there is an important connection between a
verb phrase’s aspectual interpretation and its aktionsart value. Many other authors have
made this point. Referring to what I have been calling simply aspect as viewpoint aspect,
and what I have called aktionsart as lexical aspect, Smith (1992) is particularly vocal in
her contention that these two components of linguistic theory must be thought of in
conjunction with one another. As I have noted, she refers to her own theory as a “two
component” theory of general aspect, and her work is an important part of a body of work
that makes clear that aspect and aktionsart, although distinct, are two importantly related
categories.

In Chapter 3, I defined (viewpoint) aspect, but said relatively little about
aktionsart. Without aiming for a strict definition, let us say that aktionsart has to do with
contrasts in the meanings of verb phrases (though this might reduce to contrasts in the
properties of eventualities). Aktionsart, then, tells us something about the contrast
between entered and lived here highlighted in (102) and (103) as well as contrasts in verb
phrases such as walk, walk in the park, and walk to school. Aktionsart deals with issues
such as dynamism and telicity – properties that are often described in terms of opposing
features that can be used to divide verb phrases like the ones mentioned into classes. The
most fundamental of these class splits puts verb phrases like enter, and walk, which
describe dynamic eventualities, in one category – the category of events, and verb
phrases like live here and know, which describe static eventualities in the category of
states. Eventive verbs, though not stative verbs, can be further subdivided. For instance, a
major line of division is often drawn between telic and atelic verb phrases. Based in part
on work by Garey (1957), Smith (1992) characterizes the telic/atelic contrast in this way:
Telic verb phrases describe events that have an “outcome” or “goal”. When the goal is
achieved, the event is completed. Atelic verb phrases, on the other hand, do not have goals. The verb phrase *walk to school* is telic; its goal is the arrival at school. In contrast, the atelic verb phrase *walk in the park* has no such goal.

All of the verb phrases considered in Chapter 3 were eventive (as opposed to stative), and most were telic (as opposed to atelic). These properties play an important role in the Chapter 3 analysis’ ability to capture the prototypically perfective behavior of simple *V-ed* sentences formed with these verb phrases. In Chapter 3, I defined perfective aspect as the relation *situation time is properly contained within topic time*, and treated the situation time of eventive verb phrases as the running times of the events they describe. The running time of a telic event includes its goal or termination point, thus, if an interval that properly includes this time falls before the utterance time, the event must have terminated; its beginning, middle, and end all come before the utterance time, and it is treated as a whole.

Dynamism and telicity though extremely important here, are not the only features that linguists use to distinguish between eventuality types. Smith, for example, adds duration (whether the event a verb phrase describes is idealized as instantaneous or not) to the list. She uses these three features to divide eventualities or situations into the five basic types in Table 2.
Table 2: Smith’s Situation Types

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Situation Type</th>
<th>Static</th>
<th>Durative</th>
<th>Telic</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>State</td>
<td>[+</td>
<td>[+</td>
<td>[-]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Activity</td>
<td>[-]</td>
<td>[+</td>
<td>[-]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accomplishment</td>
<td>[-]</td>
<td>[+</td>
<td>[+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Semelfactive</td>
<td>[-]</td>
<td>[-]</td>
<td>[-]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Achievement</td>
<td>[-]</td>
<td>[-]</td>
<td>[+</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

I have already given several examples of stative verb phrases *live here* and *know* among them, and we can add *own a car*, *be a fireman* and *want ice cream* to the list. What the eventualities that these verb phrases describe have in common, what makes them states, is that their existence measures out a single undifferentiated interval of time. As a result, we speak of states as “holding” or “obtaining” rather than “occurring” in time as events do (v. Taylor 1977, Parsons 1990). In the domain of events, telicity distinguishes activities from accomplishments. Accomplishments are telic; they have natural endpoints or goals. *Walk to school*, *eat a plate of rutabagas*, and *write a dissertation* all describe accomplishments. Their respective goals are the arriving at school, the finishing of the dissertation, and the finishing of the plate of rutabagas. Activities, on the other hand, are atelic. They do not goals. Some examples of activity verb phrases are *walk in the park*, *eat rutabagas*, and *write*. Smith’s classification system treats both activities and accomplishments as durative, and here they contrast with semelfactives and achievements, which are instantaneous. To say that a semelfactive such as *knock at the door* or *hiccup*, or an achievement such as *reach the top* or *arrive* is instantaneous as
opposed to durative is not to say that these events literally take no time. Rather, as Smith notes, they are only idealized in this way. While both eventive and instantaneous, semelfactives and achievements differ in that the former are atelic while the latter are telic. Achievement verb phrases such as *arrive, reach the top,* and *break the vase* all have natural end points. Semelfactive verb phrases such as *knock at the door,* *cough,* and *scratch* do not.

Smith’s classification is not unique. There are many similar classification systems all of which most likely have their roots in Aristotle’s discussion of actions that do and do not take time to be completed found in his *Metaphysics.* In more recent times, other influential systems of this type have been devised by authors such as Ryle (1949), Vendler (1957), and Verkuyl (1972). Following Dowty (1979), Krifka (1989, 1992) is critical of feature-based systems that stop at placing verb types into classes. While recognizing their descriptive power, he forcefully argues that such systems are incapable of explaining the distinctions they describe. Aware of this, Smith treats the feature system outlined in Table 2 as shorthand for distinctions that she sees as being rooted human beings’ perceptions of eventualities and the naïve physics that these perceptions inspire. For instance, according to Smith, states are perceived as continuing unless something happens to change them. Events, on the other hand, are perceived as occurring in successive stages and as requiring energy to do so. It follows, then, that states and events differ in terms of energeia or dynamism. Further, Smith derives the bounded nature of events from this dynamism. Energy is assumed to have a source and is perceived as having a beginning and an end. Thus, events, too, are perceived (and talked about) as having beginning and ending points. In contrast to Smith’s work, Krifka’s work is
mereological; it focuses on explaining aspectual composition and the effects of aktionsart value through the part/whole relations of eventualities. In particular, Krifka is largely concerned with formally accounting for the parallels between the count-mass distinction in nouns (e.g. *a beer* vs. *beer*) and the telic-atelic distinction in verbs (e.g. *walk to the park* vs. *walk in the park*). He proposes that countable, quantized events and things have similar internal structures. In algebraic terms, he proposes that both countable, quantized events and countable, quantized things have a path that traverses the entire internal structure, and that cumulative events and things have no such internal structure and no such path. Thus, Krifka’s work offers an explicit and explanatory account of the count-mass/telic-atelic analogy. Further, his account is able to explain how nominals contribute to the aspectual character of the entire verb constellation. It can explain, for instance, why *eat apples* is an atelic verb phrase, but *eat an apple* is a telic verb phrase. While I will not follow Krifka in detail, I will seek a merelogical grounding for the distinctions most important to the discussion at hand.

One of the earliest formal mereological analyses of aspectual composition is that of Bennett and Partee (1972). In *Toward the logic of tense and aspect in English*, they propose the “sub-interval property” (among others) as a means of distinguishing telic and atelic eventualities: the predicate of an atelic eventuality (a state or a process) is true at a time interval *t* if and only if it also true for every part *t’* of *t*. If, for example, the stative predicate *want a car* is true at some time interval *t*, it must also be true of all the intervals that are a part of *t*. Similarly, according to Bennett and Partee, atelic event

---

42 *Processes* here refers to both activities and semelfactives in Smith’s classification system.
predicates such as *run* also have the sub-interval property: if *run* is true at time $t$, then *run* is true at every sub-interval (including every moment) of $t$.

Bach (1981) argues that taken literally, the subinterval property applies only to stative predicates like *want a car* and the progressive *be running*; it does not apply to non-stative predicates like *run*. If we consider an instant included in some interval of running, then the plain predicate *run* will not necessarily hold at that interval. Instead of the sub-interval property (a property of times), Bach (1981) proposes anti-subdivisibility (a property of events) as a means for distinguishing (telic) events from processes. Anti-subdivisibility, the property that an event has when it cannot be sub-divided into events of the same type, applies to some atelic events or processes, but to all telic events. Because anti-subdivisibility applies to all telic events, Bach sees it as a property useful in the grounding of the telic-atelic distinction in the mereology of eventualities. Thus, he sees it as important in explaining aspectual composition.

The principal concern of this dissertation is the syntactic realization of aspect. As the work of Smith, Klein and many others has shown, in order to understand how aspect (view point aspect) is syntactically realized in sentences, we must consider the interaction between aspect and aktionsart (lexical aspect). And inasmuch as the mereological structure of eventualities is important to moving beyond the descriptions of feature based systems of aktionsart contrasts, properties such as Bennett and Partee’s sub-interval property and Bach’s anti-subdivisibility are at the very least potentially important to the subject at hand.

Of course, I am assuming here that Smith’s classification system in Table 2, or something very close to it, is descriptively adequate and that it can and should be given
explanatory power through grounding in mereological concepts. Klein (1994) argues against such classification systems, not because they lack explanatory power, but because he sees notions such as duration and boundedness as purely metaphorical in this context. Klein argues that whenever verb phrases are used in concrete utterances, they are “selective descriptions of a situation”, and thus are always subject to (temporal) boundaries and delimited duration. He invites us to consider the sentences in (104).

(104) a. Nani slept in the guest bed. (SAE), (Klein 1994)
    b. Nani closed the window. (SAE), (Klein 1994)

We do not know from the sentences in (104a) and (104b) alone how long Nani slept in the guest-bed or how long it took her to close the window. Klein’s point, however, is that both Nani’s sleeping and her closing of the window lasted some length of time; both have (temporal) endpoints; both have a limited duration. He says:

... what does it mean to say that a lexical item has a temporal feature like ‘having duration’ or ‘having a right boundary’, if it does not mean that the situation typically referred to by these words does have a duration or a right boundary? Any instance of sleeping has some time, hence may be long or short; but the lexical content of to sleep has no time, there is no watch to measure its duration, and if we imply that it has duration, then only by virtue of the fact that the situation it refers to – the acts of sleeping – can be measured by a watch. There is no time at which the lexical content can ever be over, because it has no time at all. What can be over at some point in time are the situations to which we may refer by means of these words. In other words: duration or boundedness are characteristics of real situations, because these occur in time, can be measured, and are over at a certain time. If we say that a certain lexical item involves such a feature, the it is only by virtue of the fact that this lexical item can be applied to situation which indeed have a duration, or an end. Hence, it seems mysterious that a set of situations should have duration, or an end in reality, but the corresponding
lexical contents do not contain such a temporal feature. But if this is true, the distinction between ‘event VPs’ and ‘state VPs’ without boundaries, or between punctual and non-punctual verbs (or VPs) collapses, because in reality there are no situations without duration. This, however, means that virtually all known systems of verb classification are on shaky ground – not for practical but for principled reasons.

While it is true that there are no actual situations without duration and that actual states can and do end, the situation is not as dire Klein’s language suggests. The grounds on which Smith’s and so many verb classification systems stand may not be so shaky after all. As Smith (1992) notes, they are, in fact, grounded in two different sources. First they are grounded in the mereological properties they lie at the heart of the analyses of Bennett and Partee (1978), Bach (1981), Krifka (1989, 1992), and others. Second, they are grounded in the naïve physics inspired by speakers’ perceptions.

Klein’s own solution to the aktionsart problem is to build information about changes of state into the lexical content of verbs and verb phrases, and to relate these state changes to topic times. By doing this, he is able to explain many of the differences between different kinds of event predicates and state predicates. Take for example Vendler’s for x time test. Vendler (1957) separates achievements and accomplishments from states and activities by testing whether the verb phrase denoting the eventuality in question tolerates adverbials such as for five hours, for ten minutes, etc. States and activities do: Nani slept in the guest-bed for three hours. Achievements and accomplishments do not: *Nani closed the window for five minutes (when said to mean it took five minutes for Nani to close the window). Klein explains this contrast by saying that the lexical content of open a window (unlike that of sleep in the guest-bed)
includes two qualitatively distinct states (window not open — window open), and a
durational adverbial such as for five minutes cannot modify both states at the same time.

In effect, Klein is taking one type of eventuality, states, and deriving from them another,
events. In this way his technique is similar to Von Wright’s (1963) logic of change. I turn
to Bach (1981) on this matter:

Von Wright is himself quite careful not to claim that all events and process
can be analyzed in this way. Davidson (1967) gave good reasons for
doubting that this would work for all events: for many events the only state
that comes about as a result of the event is the trivial one of the event’s
having taken place: walking around the block, playing a game of chess.
There is apparently a strong tendency to think that states are somehow basic,
a sort of filmstrip view of reality which I do not share. If anything, quite the
opposite seems to be true. It took about two millennia to come up with a
satisfactory way of coping with Zeno’s questions about what it could
possibly mean to be in a state of motion at an instant or how you possibly
add together dimensionless instants to get changes (you can’t).

So, while Klein’s point that actual eventualities, be they states or events, always take
place in time is well taken, I reject his assertion that this leads to abandoning verb
classification systems based on features such as dynamism, duration and telicity, and
treating events as being derived from states.

To recapture: in Chapter 3, I defined aspect as the relation between a topic time
and a situation time. Using Smith (1992) and Klein (1994) as examples, I noted that
different authors take different positions on how situation time should be defined within a
Reichenbachian framework. For the purposes of the rather limited model in Chapter 3, I
took the situation time of an event to the events running time, the time that the event
lasts. This, however, ignored basic aktionsart differences, perhaps most importantly, the
differences between states and events. In order to take such differences into account, we
must revisit the definition of situation time and ask what role properties such as anti-
subdivisibility and the sub-interval property play in it.

4.2 Situation Time

My aim at present is to redefine situation time so as to take into account aktionsart
differences such as those outlined in Table 2. Put another way, my goal is to redefine
situation time so that it is sensitive to the fact that verb phrases describe different kinds of
situations or eventualities. The definition of situation time, then, is intimately linked to
the way that verbs and verb phrases are represented in the semantics. It lies at the border
between aspect (viewpoint aspect) and aktionsart (lexical aspect), the two components of
Smith’s two-component theory of aspect. And in the end, it must rely on tools common to
both.

Smith’s call for a two component theory of aspect can be read as a call to bring
closer together logical semantics, with its focus on the truth-conditional compositionality
of sentences, and lexical semantics, with its focus on the structure of word meanings. As
Carol Tenny and James Pustejovsky (2000) point out, although lexical semantics and
logical semantics have traditionally used different tools to address distinct aspects of
semantic composition, interest in the events as grammatical objects has done a great deal
to bring the two together. They write “lexical semanticists must look outward from the
verb to the sentence in order to characterize the effects of a verb’s event structure; and
logical semanticists must look inward from the sentence to the verb to represent the
semantic facts that depend on event-related properties of particular verbs.” The idea that
events (and states) are grammatical objects, explicitly represented in the semantics will play an important role in my definition of situation time and revising of the formal fragment of Chapter 3.

In his famous article *On the logical form of action sentences*, the philosopher Donald Davidson (1967) argued that the logical form of simple eventive sentences should be analyzed as introducing a variable that stands in place of the event the sentence describes. Davidson treated that variable as an argument of the verb, one that can be modified by adverbs. His principal reason for introducing this “event argument” was that explicitly representing events in the logical forms of eventive sentences helps explain why certain inference patterns can be drawn regarding the meaning contribution of adverbial modifiers to sentences. For example, following Davidson (1967), the sentence in (105a) might be given the logical form in (105b).

(105)  a. Marie quickly closed the door for Diana. (SAE), (AAE)

    b. $\exists e \ [\text{close} (e, \text{Marie, the-door}) \ & \text{for} (e, \text{Diana}) \ & \text{quick}(e)]$

The formula in (105b) says that there is an event $e$; $e$ is the closing of the door by Marie; $e$ is for Diana, and $e$ is quick. From it, it follows by rules of predicate logic alone that Marie closed the door, Marie closed the door quickly, and Marie closed the door for Diana.

Linguists such as Bach (1981, 1986) and Krifka (1989, 1992), Hinrichs (1985), and Kamp and Reyle (1993) among numerous others, have adopted Davidson’s proposal and used it in their explanations of aktionsart class distinctions. In their work, the
aktionsart distinctions outlined in the feature systems like those of Vendler (1957), Verkyul (1972) and Smith (1992) reduce to properties of eventualities and correspond to constraints on the predication of the event (or eventuality) argument. While controversial, many of these linguists have extended Davidson’s original proposal that only eventive sentences have a “Davidsonian” argument, proposing instead that stative sentences also make use of such an argument. Terence Parsons (1985, 1990, 2000) has been at the forefront of elaborating and defending this “neo-Davidsonian” position that all verbs have an underlying eventuality argument. The formula in (106b) is a Parsons-style representation for the stative sentence *Richard loves Mary*.

(106) a. Richard loves Mary

b. $\exists s \ [\text{loving (s)} \& \text{Subj. (s, John)} \& \text{Object(s, Mary)} \& \text{Hold(s, now)}]$

The formula in (106b) says that there exists a state $s$; the state is a state of loving; John is the subject of the state; Mary is the object; and the state holds now. The sentence’s temporal information is contained within the predicate *Hold* and its arguments, the state itself and the time at which the predicate *Hold* is true. The predicate *Hold* contrasts with Parsons’ predicate *Cul* (short for culminate) which only applies to events. I will follow Parsons in assuming that the logical forms of stative sentences contain state variables. I will differ with him, however, in how temporal information is represented. Major differences will stem from my inclusion of both events and times as arguments of verbs.

\[\text{For arguments against underlying state variables see Katz (2000).}\]
Kratzer (1998) is among the first to seriously consider the division of labor between events and times in the interpretation of tense and aspect. She treats eventive verb phrases as denoting properties of events, and treats the aspect phrases with which they combine as denoting operators that map properties of events into properties of times. While verb phrases in her system denote properties of events, aspectual operators locate events in time. I give a Kratzer-style denotation for the verb phrase *John eat the rutabagas* in (107). The subscripts \( l \) and \( s \) refer to the types for events and worlds, respectively. I retain the types \( i \) (time intervals) and \( e \) (individuals) from the Chapter 3 analysis. The variables \( j \) and \( r \) stand for *John* and *the rutabagas*, respectively.

(107) \[
[[\text{John eat the rutabagas}]] = \lambda e_l \lambda w_s [\exists e [\text{eat}(j)(r)(e)(w)]
\]

The denotation in (107) can be thought of as the characteristic function of the set of all eating events \( e \) in which John eats the rutabagas in world \( w \).

Based on Klein (1994), Kratzer (1998) introduces the aspectual operators in (108) to work in conjunction with her verb phrases.

(108) a. Imperfective: \[
\lambda P_{<l,<s,t>} \lambda t_i \lambda w_s [\exists e [\text{time}(e) \subseteq t \& P(e)(w) = 1]]
\]

b. Perfective: \[
\lambda P_{<l,<s,t>} \lambda t_i \lambda w_s [\exists e [\text{time}(e) \subseteq t \& P(e)(w) = 1]]
\]

c. Perfect: \[
\lambda P_{<l,<s,t>} \lambda t_i \lambda w_s [\exists e [\text{time}(e) \prec t \& P(e)(w) = 1]]
\]
In (108a) through (108c), the function $\text{time}$ calculates the running time of an event, and the interval $t$ represents the sentence’s topic time. Thus, (108a) formalizes Klein’s definition of imperfective; it properly includes a sentence’s situation time (calculated as the running time of its event argument) within its topic time. Similarly, (108b) and (108c) formalize Klein’s definitions of perfective and perfect aspects. The formula in (108b) states that the situation time of a sentence is included within its topic time, and the formula in (108c) states that a sentence’s topic time comes after its situation time. Kratzer’s semantics combines Klein’s Reichenbachian approach to tense and aspect with the benefits that come from working within an event semantics. She does not, however, say how states should be incorporated into her system. She does not say how the situation times of states should be calculated. In what follows, I build on Kratzer’s proposal in order to develop suitable way of representing the situation times of both events and states.

Like Kratzer, I assume that verbs have both an event argument and a world argument. I go further, however, by including a time argument as well. By including a time argument in the verb phrase, I am not only incorporating insights from Kratzer’s work, but also to a degree, following Partee (1973), who, based primarily on analogies between tenses and pronouns, suggested a number of reasons for treating times as argument of verbs rather than as operators. I take verb phrases to denote relations between eventualities, times which include those eventualities, and worlds which include those times. I assume, for example, that the verb phrase *John eat the rutabagas* has the denotation given in (109).
I interpret $t$ in (109), and in all similar verb phrase denotations, as the smallest interval during which the eventuality described by the verb phrase can be said to have taken place. The verb phrase *eat a plate of rutabagas* is telic; the event that it describes has a natural final endpoint, the point at which all the rutabagas on the plate have been eaten. In addition, no part of a plate-of-rutabaga-eating event is itself a plate-of-rutabaga-eating event; eating a plate of rutabagas is anti-subdivisible. As a result, $t$ in (109) spans the entire event. It is the event’s running time. Compare the denotation for the eventive verb phrase *John eat the rutabagas* in (109) to the denotation for the stative verb phrase *John live in Amherst* in (110).

Every part of a living-in-Amherst state is a state of living in Amherst; therefore, $t$ in (110) reduces to a moment when the state holds. This account of the semantic structure of the verb phrase uses the mereological structure of eventualities and the relationship between a verb’s eventuality argument and its time interval to capture the fact that events culminate, but states hold. This is done without introducing predicates such as *Cul* and *Hold* as in Parsons’ analysis. With regard to the definition, I propose that, in most sentences, the time variable $t$ in verb phrases such as those in (109) and (110) is treated as the situation time in aspectual relations. That is, in most cases, it is directly related to the sentence’s topic time. At other times, it is treated as the topic time itself. I will have more
to say about these cases after considering more of the specifics of AAE tense and aspect morphology. In general, when $t$ is interpreted as the situation time of any eventive verb phrase, it will be the running time of some event. This is true even in the case of an atelic verb phrase such as *John eat rutabagas*. Unlike *John eat a plate of rutabagas*, *John eat rutabagas* does not describe an event with a natural endpoint. Further, the event that it does describe can, in principle, be subdivided into events of the same kind. There are parts of rutabaga-eating events that are themselves rutabaga-eating events. The situation time $t$ of the verb phrase *John eat rutabagas* needs only to span as much of John’s rutabaga eating as is necessary to count as rutabaga eating. Although this interval may not cover all of John’s rutabaga eating, $t$ is still the running time of a rutabaga-eating event. That event may just happen to be part of a larger event of the same kind. At issue here is the granularity of events. The situation time of a rutabaga-eating event (or any event for that matter) will, however, never reduce to a moment the way the situation time of a state will.

### 4.3 AAE Perfects and Perfectives Revisited

With my revised denotation of the verb phrase and definition of situation time in place, I return now to morphological considerations specific to AAE perfect and perfective constructions. In Chapter 3, I argued that perfect aspect in preverbal *done* sentences is introduced by the –ed morphology affixed to the sentence’s main verb. That is, the core of the relation *situation time precedes topic time* is carried by –ed morphology. It is clear, however, that the character of the situation time in perfect constructions, as in all
other constructions, is fixed by the verb itself along with its arguments and not by its tense or aspectual morphology. We know for instance that the situation time in the sentence *John done worked* is a time during which John worked because of the verb phrase *John work*. The verb ending alone could not give us this information. The –*ed* morphology we find affixed to the verb must relate an arbitrary time (fixed descriptively by the verb) to a topic time. Likewise, the topic time itself is fixed by either the context or by adverbial modifiers, both of which are distinct from the verb ending. Thus, -*ed* morphology in AAE perfect constructions, and perhaps SAE perfect constructions as well, relates two arbitrary times via the precedence operator. It tells us that one arbitrary time precedes another.

Adopting this view sheds some light on the ambiguity of AAE simple V-*ed* sentences, and points the way to a single –*ed* analysis of AAE *done* and simple V-*ed* sentences. I have already noted a number of problems with positing an ambiguous –*ed* morphology in order to explain the present perfect/past perfective ambiguity of AAE simple V-*ed* sentences. A problem that I have not yet mentioned is that while positing an ambiguous –*ed* in AAE explains how these sentences come to be, it does not explain why. Presumably, there is a principled explanation for why AAE simple V-*ed* sentences are ambiguous between simple past and present perfect, and not, say, present perfect and present progressive or some other two sentence types. The view that AAE makes use of a single –*ed* that acts as the precedence operator on times helps provide such an explanation. The notion of precedence is important to both past tense and perfect aspect. Past tense tells us that a topic time precedes the utterance time, and perfect aspect tells us that the situation time precedes the topic time. If the –*ed* morphology we find common to
both simple past and present perfect constructions simply introduces the notion of precedence, then the appearance of \(-ed\) in both constructions and the ambiguity can be explained. In the section to follow, I show how \(-ed\), when positioned under a null present tense operator, relates a situation time to a topic time, and thus is interpreted as aspect, and how when \(-ed\) is the highest tense/aspect marker in a sentence's syntax, it introduces a topic time, relates it to the utterance time, and thus, it is interpreted as tense. This view of AAE morphology is an improvement over the ambiguous \(-ed\) approach not only because it explains why we see the ambiguity that we see, but also because it avoids the learnability and over-generation problems that I discussed in Chapter 3.

For such a system to work, we must, syntactically speaking, separate the utterance time from tense morphology. To this end, I posit an operator (distinct from any tense morphology) that is responsible for introducing the utterance time into the semantic computation. The idea is this: whenever a simple declarative sentence (be it past or present tense) is spoken, a topic time is somehow related to the utterance time. In the case of a past tense sentence, the topic time precedes the utterance time; in the case of a present tense sentence, the topic time is included in the utterance time. Tense morphology may interact with the utterance time, but it need not carry it as part of its meaning. Instead I allow a sentence-level assertion operator to both introduce the utterance time and assert the existence of the eventuality introduced by the verb. In addition to separating the utterance time from tense/aspect morphology, the system that I am developing should explain how perfective aspect, *situation time included in topic time*, is introduced into past perfective constructions. Here the time argument in verb phrase will play an important role.
4.4 Formalization

Based on the discussion in the previous section, I assume that the role of \textit{–ed} is to introduce the precedence relation into the semantic computation; it is therefore neither past tense nor perfect aspect, but an important ingredient of both. My proposed denotation for \textit{–ed} is given in (111).

\[
([-ed]) = \lambda Q_{e<\text{ut} \land \text{t}'} \lambda e \lambda t_i' \lambda w \left[ Q(e)(t')(w) \land t' < t'' \right]
\]

In past perfectives, \textit{–ed} contributes the precedence relation to past tense (\textit{topic time precedes utterance time}) and the topic time is an argument of the verb phrase. In present perfect constructions, \textit{–ed} interacts with a null present tense morpheme, the denotation of which is given in (112).

\[
[[\text{PRES}]] = \lambda Q_{e<\text{ut} \land \text{t}''} \lambda e \lambda t_i'' \lambda w \left[ Q(e)(t'')(w) \land t'' \subseteq t'''' \right]
\]

Under present tense \textit{–ed} contributes the precedence relation to perfect aspect (\textit{situation time precedes topic time}), which is arrived at through the following means: a time which includes the situation time precedes the topic time; thus, the situation time precedes the topic time.

In this case, it is the \textit{–ed} morphology rather than the bare verb phrase that introduces the topic time. In the previous chapter I used the variable name \textit{t}^\text{top} as a mnemonic device to highlight which interval was taken as the topic time. This was
possible because the topic time was always introduced by a verb ending. In the present system, different sentences treat different intervals as the topic time: past perfectives treat the time argument of the verb as the topic time whereas present perfects treat the interval introduced by the verb ending \(-ed\) as the topic time. The generalization, as I have already said, is this: the highest reference time in the syntactic tree is taken to be the sentences’ topic time. This is an odd generalization. While configurational, it is not like most syntactic generalizations in that it makes no reference to any category label. And while it has a direct effect on interpretation, it is not like most semantic generalizations in that the differences that it describes do not seem to be a matter of denotation. It seems likely that the generalization is more psycholinguistic in nature, having to do with issues of processing. While I will not pursue it here, it seems to me that an explanation for this generalization might come from the order in which listeners build a sentences’ phrase structure from an auditory string, and general strategies for determining which of the time intervals in a sentence is focused based on that order.

Figures 13 and 14 provide sample computations for the system I just described. They make use of the following types, variables and constants. Types: \(i = \text{time intervals}, t = \text{truth values}, e = \text{eventualities}, w = \text{worlds}\); variables: \(t = \text{times (} t^0 \text{: utterance time)}, w = \text{worlds (} w^0 \text{: actual world)}\); constants: \(j = \text{John}, r = \text{rutabagas}\). In both figures, I simplify the denotation of the definite description \textit{the rutabagas} to a proper name for expository purposes only.

The computation for \textit{John ate the rutabagas} on its present perfect reading is given in Figure 13. Once the actual world, \(w_0\), is contextually supplied, the resulting formula, \(\exists e [\text{eat}(j)(r)(e)(t’) & t’ < t’’ & t’’ \subseteq t^0]\) says that there is a contextually supplied time
which includes an event of John’s rutabaga eating; this time precedes the topic time (also contextually supplied); and the topic time is included within the utterance time.

Figure 13: AAE John ate the rutabagas (present perfect)

Beyond making possible a single –ed analysis of AAE present perfect and past perfective constructions, there is an added benefit to this indirect method of relating eventualities to topic times within perfect constructions. Adopting it helps explain why perfect constructions can be used to refer to specific intervals of time in the past. Dorit Abush and Mats Rooth (1990) use the discourse in (113) to show that the SAE present perfect have –en construction can indeed refer to a particular time.
(113) Mary: Is Sue here?

    Bill: I’ve seen her, but I don’t know where she is right now.

    (Abush and Rooth 1990)

In the spirit of Partee’s famous *I didn’t turn off the stove* example, they argue that in (113), Bill is saying more than simply that he saw Sue at some arbitrary time before his speaking the sentence. He is not simply saying that has seen Sue *before*. Rather, there is some contextually salient time (probably on the same day of his utterance) that Bill is referring to. The same case can be made for AAE perfects such as *I seen her* and *I done seen her*.

Abush and Rooth use (113) to argue for an extended now analysis of the present perfect. Following McCoard (1978) and others, they conclude that the present perfect introduces a time interval that stretches backward from the utterance time to include the eventuality described by the verb phrase. It is this extended now interval (which they treat as a pragmatically reconstructed variable) that Abush and Rooth say Bill is referring to in (113). Bill might have been more specific, however. Assuming that Mary asked her question at 5:00pm, he might have answered as in (114).

(114) Bill: I’ve seen her. It was between 3:00pm and 4:00pm today. I have now idea where she is now though.

Bills answer in (114) makes clear that in his initial statement, he is not referring to a time that extends up to the present. Again, the same argument can me make for AAE perfects.
The indirect method of relating eventualities to topic times that I have proposed for AAE perfect constructions allows them to refer to a contextually supplied interval that includes the eventuality introduced by the verb phrase, but need not extend forward to include the utterance time.

The computation for *John ate the rutabagas* on its past perfective reading is given in Figure 14. Once the actual world, \( w_0 \), is contextually supplied, the resulting formula, \( \exists e[\text{eat}(j)(r)(e)(t')(w^0) \& t' < t^0] \), says that there is a contextually supplied time which includes an event of John’s rutabaga eating and that this time precedes the utterance time. In this formula, the time about which the sentence makes an assertion (the topic time) is set up directly as an argument of the verb phrase, without the mediation of an additional aspectual operator.

![Figure 14: AAE John ate the rutabagas (past perfective)](image-url)
4.5 Potential Problems

In this section, I address some potential problems for my revised analysis.

4.5.1 Sequence of Tense and –ed Morphology

In separating the utterance time from tense/aspect morphology, my proposal is in the spirit of Zagona (1990) and Stowell (1996), both of whom advocate the separation of the referential and relational parts of tense operators. In fact, my proposal that AAE –ed morphology carries precedence, the relational part of past tense, is very similar to an analysis of SAE –ed rejected by Stowell in favor of a more abstract view of the role of SAE tense morphology. In this section, I address Stowell’s principal argument against such an analysis and sketch a possible solution to the problem he presents. In what follows I apply Stowell’s argument to AAE sentences, as there is no relevant distinction between the AAE sentences I present and their SAE equivalents.

In his argument against a precedence-denoting –ed, Stowell reasons that if –ed denotes precedence, it should do so in main and complement clauses alike. The role of –ed in Mary ate the rutabagas should, then, be the same in (115) as it is in (116); it should place the time of Mary’s eating the rutabagas before some other reference time.

(115) Mary ate the rutabagas. (AAE)

‘Mary ate the rutabagas.’ (SAE)
As Stowell notes, eventive verbs such as *eat* in (115) and (116) pose no real problem for the *–ed* as precedence approach. In (115) the reference time supplied to *–ed* is, as has been discussed, the utterance time, and a plausible case can be made that in sentences like (116), the reference time of the subordinate clause is the situation time of the main clause. In (116), this would mean that *–ed* places the time of Mary’s eating before the time of John’s saying. Given such an analysis, (116) could be paraphrased as follows: 'at some time before now, there was a saying event the agent of which was John, and that saying event reported that at some time before the saying event itself, there was a rutabaga eating event the agent of which was Mary.' That is, (116) says that John said something to the effect of “Mary ate the rutabagas”.

The problem Stowell points out arises when we consider stative verbs like *want* in the subordinate clauses of sentences such as (117). Here we encounter the well-known phenomenon of sequence of tense, where a “past tense” in indirect discourse may correspond to a present tense in direct quotation.

(117) John said that Mary wanted the rutabagas. (AAE)

‘John said that Mary wanted the rutabagas.’ (SAE)

Like its SAE counterpart, the AAE sentence in (117) has two readings. In the first, the situation time of the subordinate clause (the time of Mary’s wanting a plate of rutabagas)
is taken to be a time prior to the time of John’s saying time. That is, (117) can be used as a report of John’s having said, “Mary wanted the rutabagas”. In the second reading (the sequence of tense reading) the time of Mary’s wanting a plate of rutabagas is interpreted as being simultaneous with the situation time of the main clause. In this case, (117) can be used to report John’s having said, “Mary wants the rutabagas.”

Based on the belief that a precedence denoting –ed cannot account for the sequence of tense readings of sentences such as (117), Stowell rejects the –ed as precedence hypothesis. In his system, -ed is a temporal polarity item and precedence is carried by a syntactically distinct and phonologically null phrase. While I agree with Stowell’s assessment that positing a homophonous –ed that only attaches to stative verbs, and that has present tense meaning is an ad hoc move that does not really solve the sequence of tense problem, I think his rejection of the –ed as precedence hypothesis is premature. The temporal framework introduced and formalized in this chapter provides a way for a single precedence denoting –ed to play a role in both readings of (116)\(^{44}\).

Until now, I have, following Stowell, assumed that the reference time of –ed in the subordinate clause of a sentence such as (116) or (117) is always fixed as the situation time of the main clause. But what happens if the subordinate clause is allowed to project its own assertion operator and the utterance time acts as –ed’s reference time in both main and subordinate clauses? For sentence (116), this results in a sentence whose meaning can be paraphrased as ‘at some time before now, there was a saying event the

\(^{44}\)What I present here is only a sketch of an analysis. While I address Stowell’s problem, I leave many aspects of the sequence of tense phenomenon unaccounted for. A full analysis would among other things have to address the intensionality of the verb say in John said that Mary ate the rutabagas.
agent of which was John, that saying event reported that at some time before now, there
was a rutabaga eating event the agent of which was Mary.'

At first this paraphrase seems to underdetermine what John could have said, as
Mary’s eating time is not directly ordered with respect to John’s saying time. If,
however, we pragmatically constrain interpretations of what John said to a set of more or
less reasonable options, a different picture emerges. If John said “Mary will eat the
rutabagas”, he would have been making a statement about a possible event; to report that
John said an actual event occurred would be false. If John said “Mary is eating the
rutabagas”, he would have been making a statement about an in progress event, and to
report that John said a completed event occurred would be false. Reasonably speaking,
for (116) to be true John must have reported that at some time prior to his saying event
there was a rutabaga-eating event the agent of which was Mary. John could have only
said something to the effect of “Mary ate the rutabagas”. Of course, John might have
made a statement such as “In the future there is a actual completed event rutabaga eating
event of which Mary was the agent” but it is not clear to me how to judge (116) in this
situation as the statement is not only pragmatically odd, it may even be self-
contradictory.

Because it contains a stative verb in its subordinate clause, sentence (117) yields a
wider range of possible interpretations than (116). Recall that in the system I am
proposing, the situation time of a state reduces to a moment at which the state holds.
When the reference time of the –ed on want is fixed as the utterance time, the meaning of
(117) can be paraphrased as at some time before now, there was a saying event the agent
of which was John, that saying event reported that at some moment before now, Mary
was in a state of wanting the rutabagas. Sentence (117) cannot be used to report John’s having said “Mary will want the rutabagas.” It cannot be used to report John’s statements about times in his future for the same reason sentence (116) could not. And like (116) there is no problem with (117) reporting John’s statement about times in his past. It can be used to report John’s having said “Mary ate the rutabagas.” Sentence (117) differs from (116), however, in that it allows the sequence of tense reading. It can be used to report a statement by John about his present; John could have said “Mary wants the rutabagas”. Had he done so, he would have been making a statement about a moment, his moment of utterance. As (117) says that John said something about a moment that temporally precedes the now, there is nothing that prevents this interpretation of the sentence.

The account of the sequence of tense phenomenon outlined in the section provides a way to maintain a single precedence denoting –ed.

4.5.2 The Similarity of V-ed Present Perfects and Past Perfectives

A possible criticism of my approach to AAE simple V-ed perfects and perfectives is that the denotation of the two forms are too similar. The denotations for the past perfective and present perfect versions of John ate the rutabagas in Figures 13 and 14, for example, are truth conditionally equivalent. They are distinguished entirely by the choice of topic time. That is, they are distinguished by which time in the sentence is focused. I do not, however, see this as a weakness as the readings the two sentences allow are so similar and as they may quite reasonably be explained by differences in focus. Of Comrie’s four
perfection, simple V-ed sentences clearly allow the perfect of recent past and the experiential perfect. The question is how differences in focus (choice of topic time) can give rise to these readings. By choosing to focus a moment included within the utterance time rather than an interval that includes the situation time of an eventuality, the speaker of a present perfect sentence invites his or her listener to infer why that choice was made. One way that a past eventuality can be presently relevant is to be temporally very close to it. This is the condition under which the perfect of recent past is used. In the case of the experiential perfect, the crucial point is not so much that the present is focused, as it is that the interval that includes the situation time of the verb is not. The experiential perfect simply says that an event occurred or a state held at some arbitrary time in the past. There is a conflict between focusing an interval that includes a situation time and keeping it contextually so not descript as to be arbitrary. Differences in choice of topic time and the pragmatics that follow from them may very well be all that is needed to explain the differences between AAE simple V-ed present perfects and past perfectives.

4.6 Summary

In this chapter, I developed an alternative to my Chapter 3 analysis of the past perfective/present perfect ambiguity of AAE simple V-ed sentences. I began by revisiting the definition of situation time within a Reichenbachian framework. I modified my definition of situation time so that it could be applied to stative and eventive verb phrases in such a way that states “hold” and “do not hold” while events “occur” and “culminate”. This was done without the use of separate predicates such as Parson’s Hold and Cul. I
used this definition of situation time in the development of a single –ed analysis of the ambiguity of AAE simple V-ed sentences. This analysis has a number of advantages over the previous chapter’s analysis. The Chapter 3 analysis used two underlying representations for –ed, one perfect and one perfective. It was unable to rule out unattested tense aspect combinations involving these two operators. Because the revised analysis uses only one underlying representation of –ed it does not face this problem. Nor does it pose the learnability problems that a multiple –ed analysis does. In the revised analysis –ed is treated as the precedence operator on times. When it interacts with a covert present tense operator, -ed is interpreted as perfect aspect becoming a part of the relation situation time precedes topic time, but when it is the highest tense/aspect marker in the sentence, it is interpreted as past tense; it becomes a part of the relation topic time precedes utterance time. In the following chapter, I discuss how this analysis might fit into the larger system of AAE tenses and aspects.
In Chapter 1, I made a case for the importance of AAE data to the study of tense and aspect in general, and to the study of tense and aspect in English (or perhaps better said, “the Englishes”) in particular. I noted that in comparison to the standard dialect, AAE has a rich, highly articulated, and phonologically explicit tense and aspect system, one that admits such temporally complex sentences as “She be done did it before he get the chance” and “She been done been doing it that way” – sentences whose almost every word seems to contribute something in terms of either tense or aspect. I argued that the high degree of articulation and morphological transparency that the AAE system displays increases the likelihood of eventually arriving at a correct compositional analysis of its semantics by, in effect, allowing AAE to provide more visible pieces of the semantic puzzle than its more standard variety counterparts. None but the simplest of puzzles can be put together all at once however, and so in this dissertation, I have chosen to work with a relatively small number of pieces that I hope are suggestive of the general shape of the greater system as a whole.

In the previous chapters, I fixed as my chief problem the formal characterization of the present perfect/past perfective ambiguity of AAE simple V-ed sentences such as (118). By comparing them to done V-ed sentences such as (119), I was able to constrain the analysis. I rejected all analyses that derive the present perfect readings of simple V-ed sentences through an optional “deletion” of the done in corresponding done V-ed sentences. This followed from my contention that simple V-ed sentences (on their present
perfect readings) and *done V-ed* sentences are not perfectly synonymous despite the fact that the present perfect *have –en* construction is the closest SAE translation for each.

(118) The frog jumped. (AAE)
   a. ‘The frog jumped.’ (SAE)
   b. ‘The frog has jumped.’ (SAE)

(119) The frog done jumped. (AAE)
   ‘The frog has jumped.’ (SAE)

In Chapter 2, I teased apart some of the differences between the meanings of the two AAE constructions, and in chapters 3 and 4, I developed two solutions to the ambiguity problem, the second supplanting the first.

In this chapter, I take a step back from the Chapter 4 analysis to view it in a somewhat broader context. Here my interest lies in how that analysis’ various pieces might fit into a larger picture of the AAE tense and aspect system. Adopting this perspective, however, entails taking something of a rhetorical risk. In contrast to the previous chapters in which a steadily building argument led to a final analysis, this chapter, by necessity, contains more stops and starts; it is more speculative, and in some places it may even cast some doubt on the correctness of parts of the analysis it builds on. In short, in attempting to place the analysis in context, it is quite possible to appear as the proverbial cow that gives a good bucket of milk only to step in it and knock it over. The risk, however, is well worth the taking. In fact, it is necessary if one is to truly exploit the
visibly high level of articulation that is characteristic of the AAE system as a whole. It is that articulation, after all, that makes a compositional analysis of the AAE system so attractive in the first place. This chapter, then, focuses on what the Chapter 4 analysis might say about the role of present tense, forms of \textit{be} and preverbal \textit{done} in AAE.

\section*{5.1 Present Tense in AAE}

My explanation for the ambiguity of AAE simple \textit{V-ed} sentences such as (118), detailed in Chapter 4, involves positing a phonologically unexpressed inclusion operator in the present perfect, but not the past perfective, versions of these sentences. This inclusion operator combines with the utterance time (supplied by assertion) to form a present tense (Recall, from Chapter 3: present = topic time included in utterance time). Thus, on its present perfect reading, the AAE simple \textit{V-ed} construction can be thought of as a “present over precedence” construction, with precedence being supplied by the \textit{–ed} morpheme. In contrast, when a sentence like (118) is interpreted as a simple past, no inclusion operator intervenes between the precedence operator and the utterance time. Thus, they form a past tense (Recall, from Chapter 3: past = topic time precedes utterance time). This second case is presumably what happens in SAE, as this is an interpretation of simple \textit{V-ed} sentences that AAE and SAE share.

From the point of view of the system, an obvious question emerges: given that the two dialects are so similar, why is it that only AAE treats simple \textit{V-ed} sentences as ambiguous? Put in terms of the mechanics that I have argued for, why is it that only
AAE allows the (null) present over precedence construction? A possible answer comes from morphological differences between the two dialects.

Across geographic regions, one of the most stable characteristics of AAE is that unlike SAE, it does not require a third person singular s in simple present constructions. That is, by and large, AAE prefers sentences like *Constance cook* and, *Marie like her cooking* to sentences like *Constance cooks* and *Marie likes her cooking*. If in addition to agreement information, SAE’s third-person singular s carries tense information – either present tense or a part of present tense, say, inclusion – then the fact that AAE does not require it may be the reason that AAE allows the present over precedence construction, with the consequence that simple V-ed sentences are ambiguous. Conversely, the fact that SAE does require third person singular s, may be the reason that it does not allow the present over precedence construction, so that its simple V-ed sentences have only a past perfective interpretation. I reason as follows: assume that SAE third person singular s carries inclusion as well as agreement. Given this assumption, the present tense paradigm in Table 3 provides the SAE language-learning child with overt morphological evidence that present tense is a suffix – a verb ending that needs a verb to host it. Confronted with a third person singular s in cases such as *Marie likes Constance’s cooking*, the child presumably posits a null version of the same verb ending in sentences such as *I like Constance’s cooking*, *You like Constance’s cooking*, *We like Constance’s cooking* and *They like Constance’s cooking*.

---

45 I am grateful to William Labov (p.c.) for first bringing to my attention the relative stability of this characteristic of AAE.
In contrast to the SAE case, the morphological evidence that the AAE language-learning child receives is quite different. As Table 3 shows, without a third person singular \( s \), the AAE paradigm provides no evidence whatsoever that present tense or any part of present tense is a verb ending. So while in what follows I will assume that both SAE and AAE make use of a null present in sentences such as *I/You/We/They like Constance’s cooking*\(^{46}\), there is good reason for SAE null present and AAE null present to behave differently. Since SAE null present is a verb ending, it cannot modify verbs that have already taken a suffix. SAE null present cannot, for instance, modify the –*ed*-marked *jump* in *The frog jumped* any more than third person singular *s* can. AAE null present, on the other hand, is not a verb ending. Because it is not, there is no reason why it cannot modify an –*ed*-marked verb. This account gives us a principled reason why AAE allows

\(^{46}\) Sentences of this type appear in both dialects with the same meanings.
a present over precedence version of the simple V-ed construction and SAE does not. For SAE to place present tense above a precedence operator it must project a new verb for the inclusion portion of present tense to attach to. This very well may be the reason that SAE must project the auxiliary have in present perfects constructions such as The frog has jumped and We have jumped.

If the AAE null inclusion operator is not treated as a verbal suffix, and as a result is “freer” in its distribution than the SAE version, we might expect to find it playing a role in the formation of present progressive constructions (constructions whose main verb is marked with –ing) as well as in present perfect constructions (constructions whose main verb is marked with –ed). Indeed, AAE does allow “zero auxiliary” present progressive sentences such as those in (120).

(120)  a. John running. (AAE)

‘John is running.’ (SAE)

b. Mary working. (AAE)

‘Mary is working.’ (SAE)

As the SAE glosses suggest, these sentences have only present tense (present progressive) interpretations. Sentence (120a) cannot, for example, mean John was running, nor can (120b) mean Mary was working. It is possible that these sentences make use of present tense, but do not have auxiliary verbs, not even in their underlying forms; it is possible that such sentences arise because AAE null present does not need to attach
to a verb. Similarly, AAE’s null present may account for the presence of “zero copula” sentences such as those in (121). Again, only present tense readings are possible.

(121)  a. Mary nice. (AAE)
       ‘Mary is nice.’ (SAE)

       b. Mary happy. (AAE)
       ‘Mary is happy.’ (SAE)

Of course, this story or beginnings of a story is dependent on the SAE and AAE “present tense paradigms” in Table 3 actually making use of present tense. Whether they do or do not is a matter of considerable debate. For example, in contrast to my own view, Mürvet Enç (1991) explicitly argues against the presence of present tense in English. “Tense” here is used in a strict syntactic sense. In Enç’s words, it refers to “morphemes that occur as part of the verbal inflection in English”, and “contribute purely to the temporal interpretation of the sentence.” This definition is meant to exclude modals (e.g. deontics which shift possible eventualities into the future) and temporal adverbs. One might quibble over whether or not strictly speaking it also excludes the “null presents” that I propose for SAE and AAE. The question here is whether either of them should be considered “verbal inflection.” In the case of SAE, only the relational part of present tense is a suffix, and in the case of AAE neither the referential nor the relational parts of present tense is treated as a suffix. This issue and the possibility that Enç’s argument
might not directly apply to my proposal notwithstanding, a brief review of it is instructive.

In developing her argument, Enç introduces the informal tense rules in (122), both of which are compatible with the assumptions on which my Chapter 4 analysis rests.

(122)  a. If a sentence has past tense, the situation it describes holds at an interval that precedes the time of evaluation.

       b. If a sentence has present tense, the situation it describes holds at the time of evaluation.

Enç assumes that for matrix sentences, the evaluation time is the utterance time, the time when the sentence is spoken. She assumes a referential rather than relational theory of tense. So despite the phrasing of (122a), on her account, a past tense sentence is not past because its semantics includes a precedence relation, but because it includes an operator that replaces the default (present) evaluation time with a past time. Given these assumptions, Enç argues that the rule in (122b) treats the present as “semantically vacuous”. This is because “the original evaluation time in a [present tense] sentence is not changed.” Thus, in her analysis, the present tense of a sentence such as Mary be in her office behaves as if there is no tense at all. (Note that Mary be in her office here is the sentence Mary is in her office before any tense, aspect, or agreement marking, not the AAE habitual sentence Mary be in her office.)
Much of this part of Enç’s reasoning is compatible with the framework in which I have developed my Chapter 4 analysis of AAE simple V-ed sentences. As I have already said, her tense rules mirror my own assumptions although we differ greatly in our approaches to their implementation. Further, her assumption that the utterance time serves as a default evaluation time in matrix sentences is somewhat similar to my claim that the utterance time in matrix sentences is introduced through an assertion operator rather than any tense/aspect morpheme. But there are important differences. I am working in a relational rather than referential theory of tense. In the system I advocate, present tense has two parts, and only its referential part (the utterance time) is a part of assertion. If third person singular $s$ carries inclusion (the relational part of present tense), then its role is not semantically vacuous. However, Enç is quick to point out that the semantic vacuity she claims does not in and of itself show that English does not syntactically represent present tense. She argues that what it does show is that independent arguments for not syntactically representing present tense would not necessarily face interpretation problems. Despite our different assumptions about the workings of tense, her main arguments are very relevant to my current proposal.

Enç begins her chief arguments against present tense in English by looking at how the tense rule in (122b) applies to stative and non-stative predicates. She notes that stative verbs can occur with both past and present tenses and have their behavior captured by the rules in (122). Some of her examples include those in (123).
In (123a), for instance, the state of Sally’s knowing the answer holds at the time the sentence is spoken. The interaction between present tense and eventive verbs is not as easily captured by (122). In particular, rule (122b) fails us. Sentence (124a), for instance, does not mean that Sally is singing at the utterance time; instead it has only a generic reading. It means something similar to *Sally usually sings* or perhaps *Sally can sing*.

(Enç 1991)

Enç asks two questions: *why is the expected event reading not there?* and *why do we get generic readings?* She rejects analyses along the lines of Taylor (1977) and Bennett and Partee (1978). This style of analysis derives the event/state tense difference from differences between events and states themselves: states can be true at moments; events can only be true at intervals bigger than moments. If the utterance time is a moment, then only states can hold at the utterance time. Bennett and Partee (1978) formalize this using their sub-interval property, which I used in Chapter 4 to explain a number of aktionsart...
differences and suggest an analysis of the sequence of tense phenomenon. They build on a suggestion by Greg Carlson (1977) that generics might be state readings of event predicates, and that the generic reading of sentences such as (124a) might arise from the conversion of event sentences into states for the purpose of fitting them into either utterance times or some other relatively short present time.

Enç’s prime reason rejecting this type of analysis comes from her sentences in (125) – (127).

(125) If John comes home early, we may go to the movies (SAE)
(126) Sally rarely walks to school. (SAE)
(127) When she shows up, we will all yell “Surprise!” (SAE)

(Enç 1991)

She notes that the candidate present tense forms in (125) – (127) (comes, walks, shows up) do not have stative readings. Further she argues that if a state reading were forced by present tense, then one would expect state readings of (125) – (127). Enç makes the very reasonable assumption that the generic readings of sentences such as (124a) come about due to the presence of a phonologically null generic operator, GEN. Since the sentences in (125) – (127) do not necessarily receive generic readings, she argues that if we do maintain that these sentences make use of present tense, we are left with the generalization in (128).
An event verb can occur with present tense if and only if it is in the scope of some operator.

For example, we have the generic operator in sentence (124a), the modal *may* in (125), the adverb of quantification *rarely* in (126) and the modal *will* in (127). The difficulty lies, as Enç points out, in explaining this generalization and reconciling it with the ability of an event verb to occur with past tense without a similar restriction. She rejects the idea that English has a present tense based on a seeming inability to do so.

Before finally giving up on present tense, Enç tries to explain (128) within the context of her (1985) proposal that event verbs have time arguments that must be bound, either by tenses, which denote intervals, or variable binding operators such as the generic operator. As before, past tense sentences pose no problem. Within Enç’s framework, we can explain the pastness of (124b), *Sally sang* simply by saying that a past tense binds the time argument of the verb. Problems only arise when we consider present tense sentences such as (124a), *Sally sings*. If present tense denotes an interval, either the utterance time or a time that includes the utterance time, then as Enç points out, we expect it to be able to bind the temporal argument of the verb. While the binding of the verb’s time argument by the generic operator explains the generic reading of (124a), it does not explain why this is the only reading of (124a). There is no apparent reason why (124a) does not have a non-generic present tense reading. Faced with this dilemma, Enç supposes that there is no present tense in English. Without present tense, Enç explains GEN’s presence in sentences like (124a) by saying that in tenseless sentences in which there is no overt operator such as a modal or adverb of quantification, the null GEN is the
only possible binder for the time argument of the verb. She gives the sentences in (129) as examples of “tenseless sentences” with overt operators binding their verbs’ time argument.

(129)  
   a. Timmy must eat his okra.   (SAE)  
   b. They will follow us.   (SAE)  
   c. You may speak up.   (SAE)  
   d. Sally rarely sings.   (SAE)  
   e. Texans always sing.   (SAE)  

(Enç 1991)

It is worth noting that these sentences do not behave uniformly with respect to third person singular’s. The generalization that emerges is that sentences with modals do not allow third person singular’s marking, which is otherwise required. This can be seen by comparing the grammatical sentences in (129) to the ungrammatical sentences in (130).

(130)  
   a. *Timmy must eats his okra.   (SAE)  
   b. *John will follows us.   (SAE)  
   c. *John may speaks up.   (SAE)  
   d. *Sally rarely sing.   (SAE)  
   e. *John always sing.   (SAE)  

(Enç 1991)
Enç goes on to build a fuller account of English without present tense. I will not review that account here. Rather, I will make a few more comments about her argument against present tense and its relation to my account of AAE tense and aspect.

At this point, it is useful to recall some of Enç’s assumptions and how they differ from my own. First, Enç assumes that that tense is referential; present tense is simply a present time interval. Second, she assumes that if there is present tense in English, that it is carried, at least in SAE, by third person singular \( s \). In contrast, I am assuming a relational theory of tense, and entertaining the possibility that third person singular \( s \) carries the inclusion relation, a part of present tense. Assuming that third person singular \( s \) has the temporal function of introducing the inclusion relation may turn out be useful in explaining its unacceptability in modal sentences. Further, it might provide a way around Enç’s principal argument against present tense. Assuming that third person singular \( s \) carries inclusion rather than the whole of present tense, we can rewrite Enç’s generalization in (128) as (131).

(131) An event verb can occur with inclusion if and only if it is in the scope of some operator.

If an operator such as any of those in (125) – (127) can override or take the place of the utterance time that I have been assuming to be a part of assertion, then that operator might still make use of the inclusion operator. This would preserve Bennett and Partee’s (1978) explanation for the generic readings of simple presents, and we would not need to abandon the idea that English has a present tense.
Another issue relevant to present tense and its role in the AAE tense/aspect system is the formation of tag questions. In Chapter 2, I argued that in the tag position, *ain’t* is a reflex of present tense in a matrix clause. I noted that *ain’t* tags are possible for all of the present tense sentences, but none of the past tense sentences in (70), repeated here as (132). And while it is not clear how *ain’t* should be translated into SAE, its ungrammaticality in AAE past tense sentences appears to be on par with that of an SAE past tense sentence followed by a present tense tag.

(132)  

a. John (is) eating, isn’t/ain’t he?  (AAE)  

   ‘John is eating isn’t he?’  (SAE)  

b. John was eating, wasn’t/won’t/*ain’t he?  (AAE)  

   ‘John was eating, wasn’t he?/*isn’t he?’  (SAE)  

c. John done ate, ain’t he?/*didn’t he?  (AAE)  

   ‘John has eaten, hasn’t he?/*didn’t he?’  (SAE)  

d. John’d done ate, hadn’t he/*ain’t he?  (AAE)  

   ‘John had eaten, hadn’t he/*isn’t he/*hasn’t he?’  (SAE)  

As I noted before, *won’t* here is a phonological variation of *wasn’t* prevalent in the AAE spoken in Warren County, NC. Hazen (2000) has a more detailed discussion of this form.
I argued for a present perfect/past perfective ambiguity rather than vagueness in AAE simple V-ed sentences based in part on the fact that on their present perfect readings, simple V-ed sentences take ain’t tags, and on their past perfective readings they take didn’t tags. This is shown in (133).

(133) a. John ate ice-cream, ain’t he?  (AAE)
   ‘John has eaten ice-cream (before), hasn’t he?’  (SAE)

   b. John ate ice-cream, didn’t he?  (AAE)
   ‘John ate ice-cream didn’t he?’  (SAE)

I also noted that while ain’t in the tag position appears to be diagnostic of a present tense within the sentence it is tag to, ain’t in sentence internal position does not seem to have this diagnostic property. While the AAE sentence in (134a) appears in present perfect environments, (134b) occurs in past perfective environments.

(134) a. John ain’t ate.  (AAE)
   ‘John hasn’t eaten.’  (SAE)

   b. John ain’t eat.  (AAE)
   ‘John didn’t eat.’  (SAE)
We can now add to the puzzle the fact that AAE “simple presents” like *Constance cook* and *Marie like her cooking* take *do* tags rather than *ain’t* tags:

(135)  
   a. Constance cook, don’t she?  
       ‘Constance cooks, doesn’t she?’
       
   b. Marie like her cooking, don’t she?  
       ‘Marie likes her cooking, doesn’t she?’

In this they pattern with invariant *be* sentences, which receive habitual or in some cases perhaps generic interpretations.

(136)  
   a. Sally be happy, don’t she?  
       ‘Sally is usually/always happy?’
       
   b. Sally be shopping at the corner store, don’t she?  
       ‘Sally usually/always shops at the corner store, doesn’t she?’
       
   c. Sally be done finished by then, don’t she?  
       ‘Sally usually/always has finished by then, hasn’t she?’
It is tempting to conclude that since AAE simple presents do not take *ain’t* tags, they do not employ present tense – either this, or that *ain’t* tags are not really diagnostic of present tense in the matrix sentences that they are tags to. This is the view that one might take if, for instance, one assumed that tag questions are formed through a syntactic process of copying the tense of the matrix sentence and repeating it as the tag. Under this type of analysis, *ain’t*’s being diagnostic of present tense might be thought of as saying *ain’t* carries present tense. This, however, is not what I assume, and it is very possible that *ain’t* tags are sufficient but not necessary for diagnosing present tense in the sentences they are tags to. An alternative way of thinking about tag questions is to treat the auxiliaries that form them as being semi-independent of the auxiliaries in their matrix sentences. The auxiliary in any particular tag question may be thought of as the auxiliary needed to form a sentence that negates the matrix sentence; the auxiliary is retained, and the rest of the sentence is elided. The sentences in (137) provide examples. The material that would make the tag a full grammatical sentence in its own right is given in brackets.

(137) a. Mary eating, aint she [eating]?  
     ‘Mary is eating, isn’t she [eating]?’
     (AAE)

     (SAE)

b. Mary ate, ain’t she [ate]?  
     ‘Mary has eaten, hasn’t she [eaten]?’
     (AAE)

     (SAE)
c. Mary ate, didn’t she [eat]? (AAE)
   ‘Mary ate, didn’t she [eat]?’ (SAE)

d. Mary done ate, aint’ she [done ate]? (AAE)
   ‘Mary has eaten, hasn’t she [eaten]?’ (SAE)

e. Mary be happy, don’t she [be happy]? (AAE)
   ‘Mary is usually happy, isn’t she [usually happy]?’ (SAE)

f. Mary be eating, don’t she [be eating]? (AAE)
   ‘Mary usually eats, doesn’t she [usually eat]?’ (SAE)

g. Mary be done ate, don’t she [be done ate]? (AAE)
   ‘Mary usually has eaten, hasn’t she [usually eaten]?’ (SAE)

We can now make the following generalization: do tags surface when the full sentence version of the tag question includes a bare (uninflected) version of the matrix verb. When the full sentence version of the tag is both present tensed and includes an inflected verb, the ain’t tag is used. This seems related to the data in (134) and the fact that when ain’t precedes an –ed marked verb, the sentence formed receives a present perfect interpretation; but when it precedes an uninflected verb, the sentence receives a past perfective interpretation. It is quite possible that the function of ain’t is to introduce a time interval and state that there are no time intervals of that sort. If ain’t performs this
function with the help of its own inclusion operator, then there is a reason why before an
–ed marked verb it would result in the negation of a present perfect sentence, and before
an uninflected verb it would result in the negation of a present perfective sentence. It
would act just like a negated, vocalized version of the null correlate to third person
singular s, vocalized, presumably so that it can carry negation. A key question that this
account leaves unanswered is why tag questions with ain’t tags cannot be given past
perfect readings. That is, why is (138) impossible?

(138) * Mary ate, ain’t she [eat]? (AAE)

The answer to this question may eventually come out of a fuller account of tag question
formation.

Thus, while I have not answered all of the questions raised by my proposal for an
AAE null present, I have tried to show it to be an idea that is useful beyond simply its
role in accounting for simple V-ed perfects. In addition to being critical to the
interpretation of these sentences, it may very well play a part in the interpretation of so-
called zero auxiliary and zero copula constructions. These are exactly the places where
one would expect to find AAE null present given that I argue that unlike present tense in
SAE, it is not treated as a verbal suffix. I traced this difference between the two dialects
to morphological differences in their agreement systems, specifically, the fact that SAE
requires third person singular s in its simple present paradigm.
5.2 Invariant *be* in AAE

In the previous section, I focused on my proposal for a null present tense in AAE. I began my investigation into the utility of this idea by asking the question why is it that AAE allows a present over precedence construction and SAE does not. The answer came from probing differences between AAE and SAE present tense sentences. SAE simple present sentences such as *Sally sings* obligatorily make use of third person singular *s*; AAE simple presents do not. In this section, I concentrate on AAE invariant *be* sentences such as *Sally be singing* and *Sally be happy*. Although this is my focus, I will begin by again comparing AAE and SAE present tense constructions, tracing the consequences of their morphological differences. There is a certain irony here. I have argued that the morphological transparency of AAE is a key reason for developing a formal semantics of its tense and aspect system, yet so far in this chapter I have focused on a phonologically unexpressed element. There is a reason for this: No dialect can be expected to wear all of its structure on its sleeve. Indeed, this is why cross-dialectal comparative work is so important. While AAE has an abundance of visible tense and aspect markers, it lacks the third person singular *s* found in SAE. Comparison of the two dialects, each revealing something different, has led to a better understanding of my proposed null present. With this understanding, the more visible AAE tense/aspect markers such as *be*, *been* and *done* can provide invaluable help in properly locating this null element within the rest of the system. I continue with this cross-dialectal approach, letting AAE null present lead the way to invariant *be.*
Consider the two SAE perception reports in (139a) and (139b). They differ from one another in a number of ways, the most obvious being morphological. In sentence (139a), the verb *work* is marked with third person singular *s*. In sentence (139b) it is not.

(139)  

a. Mary saw John works  

b. Mary saw John work

As one might expect, there are a number of meaning differences that accompany, and most likely follow from, this difference in morphology. Sentence (139a) reports in an epistemically non-neutral way, Mary’s seeing that John works. This is the case whether or not she has witnessed an actual event of John’s working. For example, Mary might have seen John’s paycheck and concluded that he has a job. Unless she has forgotten it, we can conclude, then, that Mary knows that John works. On the other hand, sentence (139b) reports in an epistemically neutral way Mary’s seeing an event of John’s working, whether or not she recognizes it as such. For instance, Mary might have seen John working at his computer and mistakenly thought that he was playing a video game. Mary need not know that John was working when she saw him or even that John works.

That sentences such as (139a) can support the overt complementizer *that*, but sentences such as (139b) cannot, leaves us with a correlation between complementation, third person singular *s*, epistemically non-neutral readings of the embedding verb, and generic readings of the embedded verb phrase in SAE perception reports.

---

48 While such sentences may sound somewhat unnatural out of context, they are predicted on virtually all accounts and are attested.
(140) a. Mary saw that John works.  (SAE)
    b. * Mary saw that John work.  (SAE)

In the spirit of the previous section, we might assume that third person singular *s carries inclusion, and that the possibility of complementation signals that the embedded sentence is a full sentence: one that includes an assertion phrase which supplies the sentence with the utterance time. Together, the inclusion operator and the utterance time form a present tense, which in this case, is applied to the eventive verb *work*. This gives us all of the elements necessary for explaining the generic reading of the embedded verb phrase with Bennett and Partee’s (1978) approach. The eventive verb phase, *work*, is converted into a generic state for the purposes of fitting it into the utterance time. Following Enç (1991), we might further assume that the generic operator, GEN, does this conversion. In short, we might assume that the embedded portion of (139a) has a syntax something like that in Figure 15, where CP stands for Complementizer Phrase, AssertP stands for Assertion Phrase, GenP stands for Generic Prase, T/A P stands for Tense/Aspect marker phrase, and VP stands for Verb phrase.
The embedded verb phrase in (139b) is presumably just that, an embedded bare verb phrase without all of the structure in Figure 15. The AAE sentence in (141) can be translated into SAE as either (141a) or (141b). With overt complementation as in (142), however, only the (141a) reading is available.

(141) Mary saw John work. (AAE)
    a. ‘Mary saw (that) John works.’ (SAE)
    b. ‘Mary saw John work.’ (SAE)

(142) Mary saw that John work. (AAE)
     ‘Mary saw that John works.’ (SAE)
Thus, the same correlation that exits in SAE also exists in AAE except third person singular \( s \) plays no role in it. Again in the spirit of the previous section, it seems reasonable to assume that AAE has a phonologically null version of third person singular \( s \), and apart from this, the AAE perceptual reports have the same structure as those in SAE.

Like (141), sentence (143) contains (what on the surface at least) looks like a bare verb phrase. Also like (141), (143) has two readings: one is an epistemically non-neutral report of Mary’s seeing \textit{that} John has the habit of being happy or perhaps is a happy person, the other an epistemically neutral report of Mary’s seeing John \textit{act} happy. And as with (141), only the former reading is available when the sentence has an overt complementizer as in (144).

(143) Mary saw John be happy. \hspace{1cm} (AAE)

a. ‘Mary saw (that) John is usually happy/ is a happy person.’ \hspace{1cm} (SAE)

b. ‘Mary saw John act happy.’ \hspace{1cm} (SAE)

(144) Mary saw that John be happy. \hspace{1cm} (AAE)

‘Mary saw that John is usually happy/ is a happy person.’ \hspace{1cm} (SAE)

I should add, however, that although the (b) reading of (143) is possible, sentence (143) is not the most natural way of expressing that idea; it is somewhat awkward. This awkwardness notwithstanding, there are two parallels I mean to point out and make use of here. First, there is the parallel between the behavior of the SAE perception reports in
(139a) and (139b) and the (a) and (b) readings of the AAE perception report (141). This parallel seems at least consistent with the idea that AAE has a null correlate to third person singular \( s \). Second, there is the parallel between the AAE sentences in (141) and (142) and those in (143) and (144). This second parallel seems to suggest that the AAE null correlate to third person singular \( s \) can be applied to the verb \( \text{be} \). Thus, understanding how AAE invariant \( \text{be} \) sentences such as (145) and (146) work will be important in understanding how the null operator works, and understanding the workings of the null operator will help us to better understand invariant \( \text{be} \) sentences.

\[
\begin{align*}
(145) & \quad \text{John be happy.} & (\text{AAE}) \\
& \quad \text{‘John is usually happy/ is a happy person.’} & (\text{SAE})
\end{align*}
\]

\[
\begin{align*}
(146) & \quad \text{John be running.} & (\text{AAE}) \\
& \quad \text{‘John is usually running.’} & (\text{SAE})
\end{align*}
\]

Another word of caution: because \( \text{work} \) in the previous examples is an eventive verb phrase, following Bennett and Partee’s (1978) analysis, it makes sense that under present tense it should receive a generic interpretation. An entire working event cannot fit within the utterance time, thus, GEN converts the event predicate into a state-like habit that can. If, however, we assume \( \text{be happy} \) in sentences like (143) on the (143a) reading and (144) is a stative predicate to begin with, then it is not clear why GEN would be required under present tense. So while the data I have introduced are suggestive of the parallels I want to draw, it is not entirely clear that these parallels will hold up to greater scrutiny. And if
they do not, then my approach of trying to draw very close connections between the behavior of the AAE null correlate to third person singular s and invariant be sentences may need reexamination.

Green (2000) offers what is to date the most successful formal account of invariant be sentences. She argues that AAE distinguishes between two types of genericity, the kind which she argues is found in invariant be sentences such as (145) and (146), and the kind that is found in simple present sentences such as (147).

(147) John work. (AAE)

‘John works.’ (SAE)

If sentences such as (145) display a type of genericity different from those like (147), then it might call into question the parallel between their “generic” readings when they are used as complements to perceptual verbs. I want now to briefly review Green’s analysis, argue against her claim of two distinct forms of genericity in AAE, and sketch the broad outlines of alternative account that while still consistent with much of Green’s analysis preserves the parallel between sentences like (145) and (146).

Although Green is concerned with both be + adjective sentences such as (145) and be + V-ing sentences such as (146), her analysis develops from an initial focus on the latter forms. Through an investigation of be + V-ing sentences, she develops a notion of habituality that she then extends to the be + adjective cases. Green makes two major

49 As I noted in Chapter 2, Green gives these sentences two names. She calls them “habitual be” and “aspectual be” sentences.
claims that I wish to question. First, she argues that both $be + V-ing$ sentences and $be + adjective$ sentences are “habitual”, where habituality is considered distinct form of genericity. According to Green, these sentences do not make use of the generic operator. Second, she argues that despite their morphology, $be + V-ing$ sentences are not progressives; the -$ing$ morphology that they make use of acts as an agreement morpheme that “matches the iteritivity of $be$.” I believe that both of these claims may be wrong. It is quite possible that $be + V-ing$ and $be + adjective$ sentences may be “generics” in the theoretically important sense that they both may make use of the same generic operator, GEN. It is also quite possible that the $be + V-ing$ structure is a kind of progressive, and that the distinct form of habituality that Green identifies is a result of an interaction between the GEN and progressive -$ing$. As such, it only characterizes the $be + ing$ structure, and Green’s extension to the $be + adjective$ structures is unwarranted. My aim is to show the plausibility of this view.

As I said, Green’s analysis is built largely on her characterization of the $be + V-ing$ construction. She uses examples similar to the following to show that unlike the generically interpreted simple presents, $be + V-ing$ sentences do not have capacity readings. Imagine I have just bought a brand new printer with which to print a future copy of this dissertation. Imagine further that the printer is designed to print one hundred pages per minute. By design it has that capacity. Upon taking the printer out of its box, I can felicitously say in SAE “This printer prints a hundred pages per minute”. Similarly, in AAE, I can use the sentence in (148a), “This printer print a hundred pages per minute”.

174
Both the SAE and AAE sentences are perfectly acceptable and judged true in this situation even though the printer has never actually printed anything. The fact that it has the ability to print one hundred pages per minute licenses a generic statement of the kind Green associates exclusively with simple tense generics. In contrast, given the same situation, I cannot felicitously use the sentence in (148b). I cannot say “This printer be printing a hundred pages per minute.” This sentence is judged true only if the printer has demonstrated its ability to print one hundred pages per minute at least once.

Green also shows that be + V-ing sentences do not behave, at least not completely, like present progressives. She notes that although some stative verbs such as know and own are disallowed in present progressive constructions, they are allowed in be + V-ing constructions:
(149)  a. Mary be knowing the answer.                  (AAE)

        ‘Mary always/habitually knows the answer.’            (SAE)

    b.*Mary (is) knowing the answer.                      (AAE)

She also notes that *when* clauses behave differently in the two constructions. In (150),
the eventuality described in *be + V-ing* sentences can be interpreted as already being in
progress before the time indicated by a *when*-clause. It can also be interpreted as starting
after the time indicated by the *when*-adverbial. The present progressive construction
allows only this second interpretation of *when*-adverbials. She demonstrates this with the
example in (151).

(150)  Bruce be crying when the teacher call his momma.   (AAE)

        a. ‘It is usually the case that Bruce is already crying when the teacher
calls his mother.’                        (SAE)

        b. ‘It is usually the case that Bruce starts to cry when the teacher calls
his mother.’                           (SAE)

        (Green 2000)
While it is certainly important, I will have little to say about this difference between the present progressive and *be* + *V-ing* constructions, except that it is a difference between the two different constructions, and that the source of the difference within the constructions is not entirely clear. It may very well be that these constructions are both progressives of different sorts. Later I will give reasons why I think this is so, and why I believe that GEN combines with progressive aspect in *be* + *V-ing* sentences giving rise to Green’s habitual readings.

Green rejects the idea that GEN supplies genericity to *be* + *V-ing* and *be* + *adjective* sentences. She does so because she accepts Claudia Gerstner-Link and Manfred Krifka’s (1993) analysis of GEN and adopts it for use in AAE simple presents. Gerstner-Link and Krifka show how a single generic operator, GEN, can be used to capture both universal and existential generic readings as they are defined in Lawler (1973). Crucially, universal genericity allows capacity and dispositional readings, whereas existential genericity does not. Take the sentence *John drinks beer*, for example. This sentence can be said to mean that John does not object to drinking beer (universal genericity) or that John actually has the habit of drinking beer (existential genericity).

---

50 Although Green’s point is well taken, it should be noted that out of the blue, this sentence has a rather odd flavor.
Gerstner-Link and Krifka give the semantic representations in (152a) and (152b) for these two readings, respectively.

(152) \begin{align*}
\text{John drinks beer.} \\
\text{a. GEN (x = John & beer(y) & in (x,s); drink(x,y,s))} \\
\text{b. GEN (x = John & in (x,s); y(beer(y) & drink(x,y,s))}
\end{align*}

(Gerstner-Link & Krifka 1993)

The representation in (152a) is generated when \textit{drinks} is under focus and receives phonological stress. It says that if \( s \) is a situation in which beer is available, then John drinks it. The representation in (152b) is generated when \textit{beer} is stressed. It says that when John is in a situation \( s \), he typically drinks beer. Because Gerstner-Link and Krifka treat GEN as a non-monotonic inference rule, both cases allow for exceptions. The sentence is true, even if on a particular occasion John refuses beer. As AAE sentences such as \textit{John drink beer} behave like their SAE counterparts, Green suggests extending this analysis to AAE, but argues that GEN should not play a part in \textit{be + Ving} sentences (or \textit{be + adjective} sentences).

Green’s formal analysis of these sentences is based on Kratzer’s (1995) analysis of the stage-level/individual-level contrast. In rough terms, stage-level predicates are predicates like \textit{be dancing}, \textit{be tired}, or \textit{be afraid}, which can be thought of as saying something about a spatio-temporal slice of an individual rather than the individual itself. In contrast, individual-level predicates, such as \textit{be a dancer}, \textit{know French}, or \textit{be a woman}, say something about an individual rather than a spatio-temporal slice of an individual.
The distinction between the two plays a role in a wide variety of grammatical constructions. For example, stage-level, but not individual-level predicates can be modified by locatives such as *on the lawn* or temporal adverbs, such as *this morning*. In Krazer’s analysis, stage-level predicates have an event argument associated with them, but individual level predicates do not (cf. Davidson 1967). Kratzer uses this to explain a number of differences between the two predicate types, including those just mentioned. In her examples in (153), *is dancing* introduces an event argument, *e*, that can be modified by *on-the-lawn*, and *this-morning*. In contrast, *dancer* does not introduce such an argument, and as a result, (153c) cannot easily be modified by *on the lawn* or *this morning*.

(153)  

a. Manon is dancing on the lawn

   [dancing(Manon, e) & on-the-lawn(e)]

b. Manon is dancing this morning

   [dancing(Manon, e) & this-morning(e)]

c. Manon is a dancer

   [dancer(Manon)]

(Kratzer 1995)

However, Kratzer does argue that individual-level predicates can be coerced into becoming stage-level predicates. Green makes use of these aspects of Kratzer’s account.
She argues that the *be* in AAE invariant *be* sentences is distinct from other forms of *be* in the dialect, and that it introduces an eventuality argument that is bound by a habitual operator, HAB. Thus, predicates in these sentences always receive a stage-level interpretation due to *be*.

Until now, I have said relatively little about Green’s characterization of *be* + *adjective* sentences such as *John be happy*. For her, these sentences like *be* + *V-ing* sentences are habitual. In her view, *John be happy* means something close to *John is happy whenever I see him* or *John is happy on most of the occasions when I see him*. In Green (1993), she makes this point with the example in (154).

(154) Sput shoes be blue.

‘Sput shoes are usually/always blue.’

(Green 1993)

Sput shoes are a fictional kind of shoe whose trademark, we are told, is their royal blue color. If you and I disagree about whether or not a pair of shoes was made by Sput, I might argue that they probably aren’t Sputs because they are yellow and “Sput shoes be blue”. In this type of situation, Green says that the sentence means that “Sput shoes are always blue.” That is, “on occasions when an observer see or refers to these shoes, they are always blue”.

There are two problems with this example. First, *Sput shoes* is a kind-denoting noun phrase (NP), which might introduce genericity on its own and confuse the issue (v. Carlson 1977). Second, it is extremely difficult to tease apart what, semantically speaking, sentences like *Sput shoes be blue* and *John be happy* say, and what evidence
justifies our saying them. I may know, for instance, that John is a happy person. I know this because usually when I see him, he is happy. Knowing this, I say he is, in a generic (not habitual) sense, happy. The semantic content of my statement may say nothing about habituality in Green’s sense of the term, but a habitual occurrence is required before I have enough evidence to make it. Green’s printing example is much clearer because the evidentiary issues are taken care of. We know that the printer prints (has the ability to print) one hundred pages per minute because it is designed that way. I propose that the same kind of example be used to test whether \textit{be + adjective} sentences such as \textit{John be happy} are really habitual. Imagine two brand new robots, neither of which has ever been used before. The first is designed to work. It washes dishes. The second is designed for company. It is programmed with emotions, and is designed to be happy. Given this situation, I can point to the first robot and say, as in (155a), “This robot wash dishes”. I cannot say “This robot be washing dishes”. In contrast, I can say, as in (155c), “This robot be happy”, though I cannot say “This robot be being happy”, (155d).

\begin{enumerate}
\item \textit{This robot wash dishes.}
\item \textit{This robot be washing dishes.}
\item \textit{This robot be happy.}
\item \textit{This robot be being happy.}
\end{enumerate}

The sentences in (155b) and (155d) become grammatical, however, when said of old robots that have had experience washing dishes and being happy, respectively. The data in (155) lead me to reject Green’s assertion that the –ing in \textit{be + V-ing} sentences such
(155b) and (155d), is simply an agreement marker which “matches the iterativity of be”. The suffix -ing appears to be performing a more contentful role by excluding capacity readings, and thus producing Green’s habitual (as opposed to generic) readings. That this should happen makes a certain kind of sense from the point of view of aspectual composition. As Carlson (1977) notes, “… among other things, the progressive seems to have the function of predicating a verb of a stage, but not of an individual.” Krifka et al. (1995) make the same point when in The Generic Book, they say “progressive and perfect sentences show at least a strong tendency toward a particular, non-characterizing interpretation.” Non-characterizing here can be read as non-generic. It may be that the be in be + V-ing sentences licenses the same generic operator that is in simple present and be + adjective sentences, only positioned above a progressive verb form, it turns a stage-level predicate into an individual-level predicate of a stage-level property. In a sentence such as This printer be printing a hundred pages per minute, the progressive verb form printing forces the realization of a stage of printing at a rate of one hundred pages per minute. For the individual-level predicate be printing a hundred pages per minute to be true, then, the printer must have (at least once) printed at a rate of one hundred pages per minute.

Green’s take is just the opposite. On her account –ing is semantically empty and be coerces individual-level predicates into becoming stage-level by introducing an eventuality argument that is bound by a habitual operator. In what she calls bicycle sentences, be sentences that like (155) and (156) have bare plural subjects and predicates that indicate permanently stable properties, the habitual operator quantifies over events of encountering entities.
Green calls these sentences bicycle sentences due to example (156), which she takes from Fasold (1972). She argues that in this example, the habitual operator quantifies over events of encountering bicycles. While I have not produced a full formal account, I would argue that a promising line of analysis would be to treat these sentences as containing individual-level predicates, the generic operator, and present tense.

5.3 Preverbal done in AAE

Recalling that the chief problem addressed in this dissertation has been explaining the present prefect/past perfective ambiguity of AAE simple V-ed sentences, with a main goal of building a formal analysis of that ambiguity that also explains its relationship to the unambiguously present perfect done V-ed construction, let us now turn to the meaning of done. In my argument, present perfect simple V-ed sentences are present perfect because in them –ed sits under a phonologically unexpressed present tense, and is therefore interpreted as perfect aspect. Present perfect done V-ed sentences make use of the same –ed (again under present tense), and thus, are likewise present perfect. This is the relationship between the two constructions. Both are present perfects because both make use of the same machinery. This analysis, however, begs the question what does done do? In Chapter 3, I used perfect of persistent situation readings to draw the line
between simple \textit{V-ed} and \textit{done V-ed} perfects. Like SAE \textit{have –en} constructions, \textit{done V-ed} constructions allow perfect of persistent situation readings, whereas simple \textit{V-ed} constructions do not. For this very reason, I rejected analyses in which the two constructions are identical and a silent \textit{done} supplies perfect aspect to simple \textit{V-ed} sentences. Since the two constructions have different ranges of meanings, they must have some different parts to explain them. Whatever the function of \textit{done}, then, presumably, its presence allows for perfect of persistent situation readings.

Along with allowing for perfect of persistent situation readings, AAE \textit{done V-ed} sentences and SAE \textit{have –en} sentences share another property: In sentences such as (157a) and (157b), they seem to carry a sense of personal responsibility above and beyond that found in the simple \textit{V-ed} sentences of either dialect.

(157) a. He has obstructed the administration of justice, by refusing this assent to law for establishing judiciary powers. \hspace{1cm} (SAE)

b. He \textit{done} obstructed the administration of justice, by refusing this assent to law for establishing judiciary powers. \hspace{1cm} (AAE)

The SAE sentence (157a) is taken from that part of the United States Declaration of Independence that lists the offences of the king – those things he is being held responsible for. This section of that document reads as a virtual catalog of present perfect constructions, listing one after another. Though a striking example, it is not unique in its use of the present perfect, as it is common for both \textit{have –en} and \textit{done V-ed} present perfects to be used in such “blaming contexts”. They are preferred here to past
perfectives and even simple V-ed perfects in the case of AAE\textsuperscript{51}. The AAE sentence *You done messed up now*, to add another example, carries a greater sense of personal responsibility than *You messed up now*. This preference for present perfect constructions is not limited to blaming or negative contexts, however. In general, any context that highlights personal responsibility, blame or accomplishment tends to favor the *have/done* kind of perfect. For example, in comparison to *Marie did it*, the sentence *Marie done did it* seems to highlight personal responsibility for what Marie did whether what she did was good or bad. This makes the *done* sentence seem more emphatic than its simple V-ed counterpart. Indeed, these contexts overlap with those in which one finds Labov’s (1996) “intensive done”. In Chapter 1, I briefly discussed Labov’s argument that *done* is “inevitably disjunctive” and that intensive *done* is distinct from what he sees as other forms of preverbal *done* in AAE. Still maintaining the view that AAE makes do with a single preverbal *done*, I believe a full story of its contribution to the AAE grammar should explain both its role in adding a greater sense of personal responsibility to perfect constructions and its role in perfect of persistent situation readings. If both things can be accounted for by a single property, all the better.

In Chapter 4, I noted that Parsons (1985, 1990, 2000) has been at the forefront of elaborating and defending the neo-Davidsonian position that all verbs, be they eventive or stative, have an underlying eventuality argument. States, then, are explicitly represented in Parsons’ semantics. For example, the formula in (106b), repeated here as (158b), is a Parsons-style representation of the stative sentence *Richard loves Mary*.

\textsuperscript{51} I am grateful to Angelika Kratzer (p.c.) for bringing this fact to my attention and suggesting the US Declaration of Independence as a source of examples.
(158) a. Richard loves Mary. (SAE)

   b. ∃s [loving (s) & Subj. (s, John) & Object(s, Mary) & Hold(s, now)]

The formula says that there exists a state, s; s is a state of loving; Richard is its subject; Mary is its object; and the state holds now. Parsons argues that present perfect sentences formed with event predicates also explicitly represent states. According to Parsons, these sentences introduce “resultant states”. A resultant state is the state of having done something. A Parsons-style representation of the SAE present perfect sentence *The Police have taken the victim* is given in (159b).

(159) a. The police have taken the victim (SAE)

   b. ∃e [Taking(e) & Agent(e, the police) & Theme(e, the victim) &

      Hold(e’s R-state, Now)]

The formalization in (159) says that there is some taking event, e, of which the police are the agent, the victim is the theme, and e’s resultant state (the state of e’s having taken place) holds now. If SAE present perfects do make use of a resultant state, and if resultant states do not simply hold, but hold of the subject of the sentence, this might help explain the sense of personal responsibility associated with SAE perfect constructions. Rather than simply asserting that the subject was a participant in an event that occurred in the past, SAE present perfect sentences would, in addition to this, assert that the subject is therefore in a state of having participated in that event. It is understandable, then, why speakers would make the pragmatic choice of using SAE present perfect constructions.
instead of past perfective constructions in cases where personal responsibility is to be highlighted. A similar analysis could be given of the AAE done construction. That is, if done introduces a resultant state, a similar story can be told.

The idea that done constructions are stative is neither novel nor particularly controversial. Though Déchaine (1993) calls done a perfect head, she says that in sentences such as He be done went to the store it is selected for by invariant be based on its stativity. And Green adopts Parson’s (1990) representation of the SAE perfect for her representation of preverbal done sentences. She gives the example in (160).

(160) a. The police done took the victim

b. $\exists e [\text{Taking}(e) \& \text{Agent}(e, \text{the police}) \& \text{Theme}(e, \text{the victim}) \&$

Hold(e’s \text{ R-state, Now})

(Green 1993)

Like the formalization in (159), (160) says that there is some taking event, $e$, of which the police are the agent, the victim is the theme, and $e$’s resultant state (the state of $e$’s having taken place) holds now. Both Déchaine and Green argue that stativity is an essential component of the done construction, but neither decouples it from perfect aspect. My own view is that these two things should be separated, and that it is possible that the –ed in the done V-ed structure introduces perfect aspect (a temporal relation) while the done introduces stativity. Preverbal done may very well do the job of converting the topic time intervals in perfect sentences into states. These intervals are strong candidates for becoming states because like states they are uniform; they have Bennett and Partee’s sub-
interval property. The topic time of a present perfect sentence is a time interval that
comes after the completion of some event (or the start of some state). Every sub-interval
of such an interval – including every moment – will also come after the completion of the
same event (or start of the same state). On the other hand, the topic times of past
perfective sentences do not, in general, have the sub-interval property. Take, for example,
the past perfective sentence *John ate the rutabagas*. The topic time in this sentence is an
interval that includes John’s entire rutabaga-eating event. That topic time may, however,
include moments when John is not eating the rutabagas as well as moments when he is.
Not being uniform, it is not a good candidate for becoming a state. I continue with the
assumption that the *have* in the SAE *have –en* construction and the *done* in the AAE *done*
V-ed construction perform the same function: they both introduce resultant states into the
sentences in which they are found.

As I noted in Chapter 3, only perfect constructions whose main verbs are either
lexically stative or interpreted as habituals (habituals very likely being kinds of statives)
allow perfect of persistent situation readings. So, stativity also plays a role in the perfect
of persistent situation. The extent of this role, however, is not so clear. Consider the *have*
–en sentence in (161) and the *done V-ed* sentence in (162). Each of these sentences has
two readings, one in which Mary lived in Amherst for some three-year period in the past,
and the perfect of persistent situation reading in which Mary’s living in Amherst
immediately precedes and extends into the utterance time of the sentence.

(161) Mary has lived in Amherst for three years. 
(SAE)
In both readings the *for*-adverbial seems to measure the length of a state. But as Kamp & Reyle (1993) note, in the case of the perfect of persistent situation reading, it is difficult to determine which state the *for*-adverbial measures, the state introduced by the verb or the resultant state introduced by *have* or *done*. This difficulty arises because although the resultant state of an event starts at the moment that the event culminates, the resultant state of a state (the state of having been in that state) starts at the moment the state starts. Ultimately Kamp & Reyle conclude that when SAE sentences such as (161) are given perfect of persistent situation readings, their *for*-adverbials do, in fact, measure out the state introduced by the verb. They reach this conclusion based on the fact that *for*-adverbials never seem to measure the lengths of the resultant states of eventive predicates. There is, for instance, no reading of *Mary has eaten beans for half an hour* in which Mary has been in a state of having eaten beans for a half hour. That is, *Mary has eaten beans for half an hour* does not mean *Mary ate beans a half an hour ago*. This fact leads Kamp & Reyle to locate the source of the ambiguity in sentences like (161) in the perfect construction itself. They simply stipulate two kinds of perfects: one in which the state denoted by a verb phrase extends into the utterance time, and one in which it does not.

Kamp & Reyle might also have argued against the ability of a *for*-adverbial to modify a resultant state based on the fact that resultant states last forever. Once Mary has lived in Amherst she is always in a state of having lived in Amherst, even after she has moved somewhere else, say, Durham. Mary’s state of living in Amherst can end, but its
resultant state goes on forever\textsuperscript{52}. Imagine that Mary lived in Amherst for two years and then moved to Durham where she has been living for one year. Mary’s state of living in Amherst lasted only two years and ended a year ago. Mary’s state of having lived in Amherst has lasted for three years and will go on forever. Interpreted with respect to this scenario, (161) and (162), even on their perfect of persistent situation readings, are false. If the \textit{for}-adverbial in either sentence were able to measure the length of a resultant state, then that sentence should be judged true.

Still, there is something very attractive about the idea that the \textit{for}-adverbial in perfect of persistent situation readings measures the length of the resultant state that I assume is introduced by \textit{have} in the case of SAE and \textit{done} in the case of AAE. Were this the case, it would explain why, in contrast to the ambiguity of the sentences in (161) and (162), the sentences in (163) and (164) only have perfect of persistent situation readings.

(163) For three years Mary has lived in Amherst. \hspace{1cm} (SAE)

(164) For three years Mary done lived in Amherst. \hspace{1cm} (AAE)

The explanation would go as follows: The markers \textit{have} and \textit{done} both introduce resultant states. In the postposed position as in (161) and (162), the \textit{for}-adverbial can attach either high (where it modifies the resultant state) or low (where it modifies the state introduced by the verb phrase). In the preposed position as in (163) and (164), it can

\textsuperscript{52} Strictly speaking, this might not be true. It may be that all of Mary's states end at her death, but this is debatable.
only attach high, and thus, must modify the resultant state that must hold at the utterance time. The situation is similar to the presposing and postposing of temporal adverbs such as *yesterday* that I discussed in Chapter 3.

Now I want to consider how much of this story we might be able to save while still maintaining that *for* -adverbials do not measure the lengths of resultant states. First, there is the issue of how resultant states should be represented within the framework that I introduced in Chapter 4. I propose the formula in (165) as a first approximation of the denotation of preverbal *done*, which I assume introduces resultant states into AAE *done V-*ed perfects. As in Chapter 4, the variable subscripts refer to semantic types. Again as in Chapter 4, I assume the following types, variables and constants here and in subsequent computations. Types: \(i = \text{time intervals}, t = \text{truth values}, e = \text{eventualities}, w = \text{worlds};\) variables: \(t = \text{times} (t^0: \text{utterance time}), w = \text{worlds} (w^0: \text{actual world});\) constants: \(j = \text{John}, r = \text{rutabagas}.\)

\[
(165) \quad \text{[[done]]} = \lambda Q_{<e<i<wt>>} \lambda s \lambda t_i' \lambda w_w \forall w_w' \forall t_i' \exists e_e [\ [Q(e)(t')(w') \leftrightarrow hold(s)(t')(w')] \ \& \ hold(s)(t'')(w)]
\]

The meat of (165) is the bi-conditional relationship \([Q(e)(t')(w') \leftrightarrow hold(s)(t')(w')]\). The *done* function takes as its argument an *-ed* marked predicate, \(Q\), whose denotation appears as the left hand side of the bi-conditional. When the predicate’s verb is eventive, \(Q(e)(t')(w')\) says that an event took place before time \(t'\) in world \(w'\). According to the bi-conditional, this implies that a state \(s\) holds at \(t'\) in \(w'\), and that the state \(s\) holds at \(t'\) in \(w'\) implies that the event took place. Because \(t'\) and \(w'\) are each bound by a universal
quantifier, this relationship is necessary. That is, the state $s$ is the state that comes into being once the event has culminated in all possible worlds. The state $s$ is a corresponding stative property of the predicate $Q$. Conjoining $[Q(e)(t')(w') \leftrightarrow \text{hold}(s)(t')(w')]$ with $[\text{hold}(s)(t'')(w)]$ and leaving $t''$ and $w$ outside of the scope of universal quantification makes it possible for $done$ to combine with present tense and for $done$ sentences to assert that an event’s resultant state holds at the utterance time. Figure 16 shows $done$ at work in the full computation for the sentence $John done ate the rutabagas$.

Figure 16: John done ate the rutabagas ($done$ as stativizer)
Figure 17 shows a similar computation for the lexically stative sentence *Mary done lived in Amherst*.

Consider done’s role in Figure 17. More to the point, consider what it might mean to be the resultant state of a state, and how whatever it might mean is captured in Figure 17. The concept is not so clear. Once Mary’s state of living in Amherst ends, once she moves to Durham, say, she is in a state of having lived in Amherst – a resultant state. This state, as Kamp & Reyle point out, reaches back to the moment that Mary started living in Amherst. But do in-progress states have resultant states? At any moment during Mary’s state of living in Amherst, she is in a state of having lived in Amherst. The “resultant state” of an in-progress state, if there is such a thing, can be identified as the state itself.
The two are in fact one. This is, in part, what allows Kamp & Reyle to say that the resultant state of a state begins the moment the state does. While Mary’s state of living in Amherst is still in progress, ∀w′∀t′∃s [([live(m)(a)(s)(t)(w′) & t < t′] ↔ hold(s')(t')(w′)] is trivially true. Once Mary’s state of living in Amherst ends, however, we have two distinct states: the state that ended, and the state of having been in that state, which goes on forever.

Returning now to the question of *for*-adverbials, I assume that *for*-adverbials cannot modify what I will call “pure resultant states”. These are the states that cannot end. Consequently, a *for*-adverbial can never modify a state introduced by *done* when *done* precedes an eventive verb phrase predicate. A *for*-adverbial can only modify the state introduced by *done* in lexically stative sentences, when the state described by the verb is assumed to be in progress.

I assume that *for three years* has the denotation in (166), and use it in the computations for *Mary done lived in Amherst for three years* in Figures 18 and 19.

(166)  [[for three years]] λQ<e<i<wt>>λsλtλw.(Q(s)(t)(w)& for_3_years(s)]
Mary done lived in Amherst for three years

\[ \exists t \Delta \text{TP} \]

PRES \hspace{1cm} XP

\hspace{1cm} done

AspP

\hspace{1cm} -ed

\hspace{1cm} (\circ)

\hspace{1cm} VP

\hspace{1cm} AdvP

Mary live in Amherst for 3 years

\[ [[\text{VP}]] = [[\text{Mary live in Amherst}]] \]

\[ = \lambda s.\lambda s'.\lambda w. \varphi \cdot [\text{live}(m)(s)(t)(w') \land \text{for}_3\text{years}(s)] \]

\[ [[\text{AdvP}]] = \lambda s.\lambda s'.\lambda w. \varphi \cdot [Q(s)(t)(w) \land \text{for}_3\text{years}(s)] \]

\[ [[\text{VP}]] = [[\text{AdvP}]][[\text{VP}]] \]

\[ = \lambda s.\lambda s'.\lambda w. \varphi \cdot [\text{live}(m)(a)(s)(t)(w) \land \text{for}_3\text{years}(s)] \]

\[ [[-\text{ed}]] = \lambda s.\lambda s'.\lambda w. \varphi \cdot [Q(s)(t)(w) \land t < t'] \]

\[ [[\text{AspP}]] = [[-\text{ed}]][[\text{VP}]] \]

\[ = \lambda s.\lambda s'.\lambda w. \varphi \cdot [\text{live}(m)(a)(s)(t)(w) \land \text{for}_3\text{years}(s)] \land t < t' \]

\[ [[\text{done}]] = \lambda s.\lambda s'.\lambda w. \varphi \cdot \exists w'\exists w'' \exists t'' \exists s'' \cdot \left[ Q(s')(t')(w') \leftrightarrow \text{hold}(s'')(t''(w'') \land \text{hold}(s')(t')(w') \land \text{hold}(s'')(t''(w'')) \right] \]

\[ [[\text{StatP}]] = [[\text{done}]][[\text{AspP}]] \]

\[ = \lambda s.\lambda s'.\lambda w. \varphi \cdot \exists w'' \exists t'' \exists s'' \cdot \left[ \text{hold}(s'')(t''(w'')) \land \text{hold}(s')(t')(w') \land \text{hold}(s'')(t''(w'')) \land \text{hold}(s')(t')(w') \land \text{for}_3\text{years}(s) \land t < t' \right] \]

\[ [[\text{FRES}]] = \lambda s.\lambda s'.\lambda w. \varphi \cdot \exists w' \exists t \exists s \cdot \left[ \text{hold}(s)(t'(w')) \land \text{hold}(s)(t'(w')) \land \text{for}_3\text{years}(s) \land t < t' \right] \]

Figure 18: Mary done lived in Amherst for three years (low attachment)
Figure 19: Mary done lived in Amherst for three years (high attachment)
The computation in Figure 18 results in the formula $\exists s \forall w' \forall t' \exists e \left[ \left[ \text{live}(m)(a)(s)(t)(w') \& \text{for}_3\text{\_years}(s) \right] \& t < t' \right] \leftrightarrow \text{hold}(s)(t')(w') \& \text{hold}(s')(t'')(w^0) \& t'' \subseteq t^0$ which asserts that the resultant state of Mary’s state of living in Amherst for three years holds now. The state introduced by *done* is not modified by the *for*-adverbial. The computation in Figure 19 results in the formula $\exists s' \forall w' \forall t' \exists s \left[ \left[ \text{live}(m)(a)(s)(t)(w') \& t < t' \right] \leftrightarrow \text{hold}(s)(t')(w') \& \text{hold}(s')(t'')(w^0) \& t'' \subseteq t^0 \& \text{for}_3\text{\_years}(s) \right]$. Here the *for*-adverbial does modify the state that *done* introduces. Thus, for the sentence to be grammatical, the state cannot be a pure resultant state; it must be identified with the state introduced by the verb phrase. This formula differs from the previous one, however, in that it requires that Mary’s state of living in Amherst hold at the utterance time. So, the perfect of persistent situation readings of *done* sentences can be explained in terms of the stativity of the construction.  

I said before that AAE has two types of perfects: simple *Ved* perfects and *done V-ed* perfects. As both the added sense of personal responsibility that *done* adds to perfects and its licensing of perfect of persistent situation readings can be explained in terms of its stativity, we can restate this fact as follows: AAE has two types of perfects, one stative (the *done V-ed* construction), the other non-stative (the simple *V-ed* construction on its present perfect reading). Kratzer (2000) makes this same point about adjectival passives in German. They, too, come in stative and non-stative versions.

---

53 A number of explanations have been advanced for the perfect of persistent situation in SAE. See, for example, Hitzeman (1997).
5.4 Summary

In this Chapter, I have tried to place my Chapter 4 analysis of the ambiguity of AAE simple *V-ed* sentences in context. I examined how its various pieces, especially null present tense, might fit into a broader picture of the AAE tense and aspect system. I sketched three possible analyses. The first was an analysis of the relationship between AAE present prefects and SAE present perfects. I asked why AAE simple *V-ed* sentences are ambiguous and SAE simple *V-ed* sentences not. I proposed that while both AAE and SAE make use of a null present in some instances, that unlike the AAE null present, the SAE version is treated as verbal morphology. This followed from the fact that unlike AAE, SAE requires third person singular *s* in simple present sentences. Because AAE null present is not treated as verbal morphology, it can appear above -*ed* marked verbs. The second sketch I gave was an account of invariant *be* sentences. It, too, made critical use of my proposed null present. In this account, invariant *be* sentences make use of null present and the generic operator, GEN. Finally, I looked at what role preverbal *done* plays in the AAE tense and aspect system. I concluded that *done* is a stativizer; it makes non-stative prefect sentences stative. The stativity of *done* can account for *done*’s role in making perfect of persistent situation readings possible, and perhaps with the help of further pragmatic principles concerning the generation of the implicatures, for the added sense of personal responsibility that *done* perfects have compared to simple *V-ed* perfects.
CHAPTER 6

CONCLUDING REMARKS

This dissertation has been a case study of the compositionality of aspect and its interaction with tense in natural language. In it, I have focused on African-American English simple V-ed sentences such as \textit{The frog jumped}, and done V-ed sentences such as \textit{The frog done jumped}. It is my contention that by revealing common semantic parts and general mechanisms important to the interpretation of a wide variety of African-American English sentences, the study of this small set of sentences can shed significant light on the African-American English tense and aspect system as a whole.

African-American English simple V-ed sentences are ambiguous; they have both present perfect and past perfective readings. Done V-ed constructions, on the other hand, are unambiguously present perfect. Although present perfect and past perfective constructions are both ways of talking about “the past”, they are distinct in terms of their tense and aspect makeup. Further, careful examination of African-American English simple V-ed and done V-ed perfects reveals a stative/non-stative distinction within the category of present perfect that is not found in Standard American English. While \textit{The frog has jumped} is the closest Standard American English translation for each, the African-American English sentences \textit{The frog jumped}, on its present perfect reading, and \textit{The frog done jumped} are not perfectly synonymous. Developing a compositional semantics in which the various pieces of these constructions are put together opens a window to large portions of the African-American English grammar.
Throughout this dissertation I have used the tools of interval semantics theory not only to account for the African-American English data, but also to test, and indeed prove, the richness of the theory itself – a richness that is demonstrated by its ability to capture a wide range of facts about the language. The facts that I have sought to explain have been principally semantic, but my focus on compositionality has led me to make commitments to, and claims about, issues that are syntactic, morphological, pragmatic, and even metaphysical in nature.

Following Zagona (1990) and Stowell (1996), I have argued for the syntactic separation of the referential and relational parts of tense and aspect. My arguments for this separation were motivated by both interpretive and morphological concerns. With respect to morphology, I have suggested that tense/aspect markers such as -ed and -ing carry only the relational parts of these categories. For example, in my analysis, -ed is treated as the precedence operator on times. When it interacts with a covert present tense operator, -ed is interpreted as perfect aspect, becoming a part of the relation situation time precedes topic time, but when it is the highest tense/aspect marker in the sentence, it is interpreted as past tense; it becomes a part of the relation topic time precedes utterance time. Thus, this semantically unambiguous operator contributes sometimes to the interpretation of aspect and sometimes to the interpretation of tense.

Pragmatics has played a key role in this dissertation as I have tried to separate the meanings of the sentences under study from their use. For instance, while Labov (1968, 1996), argues that the meaning of done is “inevitably disjunctive”, having both “perfective” and “intensive” meanings, I have argued for a single denotation of done and
suggested that its semantics lends itself to pragmatic interpretations of *done V-ed* constructions that might very well be called “intensive”.

In his 1981 essay *On Time, Tense, and Aspect: An Essay in English Metaphysics*, Bach engages in what he calls “ethnometaphysics” – an attempt to “dig out the hidden assumptions made by speakers of English about the way the world is.” Just as has been the case with my work here, his particular focus is time. Of his method, he says:

> The tack that I will take is this: We attempt to find out about the hidden structures of meanings in a language and culture by constructing formal theories about the syntax, semantics, and pragmatics of the language. We seek indirect evidence for our hypotheses by trying to give the most accurate and general explanations for various facets of linguistic knowledge. In carrying out this task we find that we can account for a number of seemingly disparate facts – intuitions about sentences, their well-formedness, interrelations, truth conditions – by separating out certain assumptions that seem to be metaphysical in character, rather than semantic or syntactic. Thus, the validity of our conclusions rests ultimately on the coherence and explanatory value of our entire picture.

All of the aforementioned issues – syntactic, morphological, and pragmatic – as well as my more semantic concerns, rest on metaphysical notions of what, as Bach might say, African-American English speakers speak of as if there is. Along with Bach’s work, Kratzer’s (1998) distinction between properties of times and properties of eventualities, Parsons’ (1990, 2000) arguments in favor of explicitly representing states within natural language semantics, and Bennett and Partee’s (1978) notions about the differences between states and events rest at the foundation of my attempts to figure out what these things are. Ultimately, I would like this work to be judged, as Bach suggests, based on its overall coherence and explanatory value, even as it is but a small contribution to the developing study of African-American English and cross-dialectal semantics.
APPENDIX A

DAHL’S PROTOTYPICAL OCCURRENCES OF THE PERFECT AND POSSIBLE AAE RENDITIONS

In the examples that follow, a perfect construction is prototypically used in place of the verb in all capital letters.

Prototypical Occurrence of Perfect:

(A: I want to give your brother a book to read, but I don’t know which. Is there any of these books that he READ already?)
B: (Yes,) he READ this book.

Possible AAE renditions:

(A: I want to give your brother a book to read, but I don’t know which. Is there any of these books that he done read already?)
B: (Yes,) he done read this book.

(A: I want to give your brother a book to read, but I don’t know which. Is there any of these books that he read already?)
B: (Yes,) he read this book.
Prototypical Occurrence of Perfect:

A: It seems that your brother never finishes books.
(That is not quite true.) He READ this book (=all of it)

Possible AAE renditions:

A: It seems that your brother never finishes books.
(That is not quite true). He done read this book (=all of it).

A: It seems that your brother never finishes books.
(That is not quite true). He read this book (=all of it).

Prototypical Occurrence of Perfect:

Q: Is the king still alive? A: (No,) he DIE

Possible AAE renditions:

Q: Is the king still alive? A: (No,) he done died.

Q: Is the king still alive? A. (No,) he died.
Prototypical Occurrence of the Perfect:

Q: You MEET my brother (at any time in you life until now)?

Possible AAE renditions:

Q: You done met my brother?

Q: You met my brother?

Prototypical Occurrence of the Perfect:

Child: Can I go now? Mother: You BRUSH your teeth?

Possible AAE renditions:

Child: Can I go now? Mother: You done brushed your teeth?

Child: Can I go now? Mother: you brushed your teeth?
Prototypical Occurrence of the Perfect:

Q: What did you find out when you came to town yesterday
A: the king DIE.

Possible AAE renditions:

Q: What did you find out when you came to town yesterday
A: The king done died.

Q: What did you find out when you came to town yesterday
A: The king died.

Prototypical Occurrence of the Perfect:

A person who has heard but not seen the event says: The king ARRIVE

Possible AAE renditions:

A person who has heard but not seen the event says: The king done arrived.

A person who has heard but not seen the event says: The king arrived.
Prototypical Occurrence of the Perfect:

When I COME home (yesterday), he WRITE two letters (- that is what he accomplished during my absence)

Possible AAE renditions:

When I came home yesterday, he had done wrote two letters.

When I came home yesterday, he had wrote two letters.

Note: My analysis predicts that without overt tense marking AAE perfect constructions are present tense, and thus the overt *had* is needed above for pluperfect readings
APPENDIX B

DAHL’S PROTOTYPICAL OCCURRENCES OF THE PERFECTIVE AND POSSIBLE AAE RENDITIONS

In the examples which follow, a perfective construction is prototypically used in place of the verb in all capital letters.

Prototypical Occurrence of Perfective:

Do you know what happened to my brother yesterday? I saw it myself. We were walking in the forest. Suddenly he stepped on a snake. It bit him in the leg. He took a stone and threw it at the snake. It DIE

Possible AAE renditions:

It died.

Note: “It done died” is not acceptable.
Prototypical Occurrence of Perfective:

Do you know what happened to me yesterday? I was walking in the forest. Suddenly I stepped on a snake. It bit me in the leg. I took a stone and threw it at the snake. It DIE.

Possible AAE renditions:

It died.

Note: “It done died” is not acceptable.

Prototypical Occurrence of Perfective

Q: What your brother’s reaction BE to the medicine (yesterday)?
A: He COUGH

Possible AAE renditions:

Q: What was your brother’s reaction to the medicine (yesterday)?

Note: “done was” and “done been” are not acceptable.
A: He coughed

Note: “done coughed” is not acceptable.

Prototypical Occurrence of the Perfective:

Q: How long did it take for your brother to finish the letter
A: He WRITE the letter in an hour

Possible AAE renditions:

Q: How long did it take for your brother to finish the letter
A: He wrote the letter in an hour.

Note: “done wrote” here is awkward if acceptable at all.

Prototypical Occurrence of the Perfective:

Last year, the boy’s father sent him a sum of money. When the boy GET the money, he BUY a present for the girl
Possible AAE Renditions:

When the boy got the money, he bought a present for the girl.

Note: “done got” and “done bought” are not acceptable here.

Prototypical Occurrence of Perfective:

Q: What your brother’s reaction BE to the medicine (yesterday)?
A: He COUGH twice.

Possible AAE renditions:

Q: What was your brother’s reaction to the medicine (yesterday)?
A: He coughed twice.

Note: done constructions are not acceptable here.

Prototypical Occurrence of Perfective:

The boys father sent him a sum of money some days ago and it arrived yesterday.

When the boy GET the money, he BUY a present for the girl
Possible AAE Renditions:

When the boy got the money, he bought a present for the girl

Note: “done got” and “done bought” are not acceptable here.


_______ 1983, Black Street Speech, Austin: University of Texas Press.


Bennett, Michael and Barbara Partee: 1972, ‘Toward the Logic of Tense and Aspect in English,’ Indiana University Linguistics Club, Indiana.


Carlson, Gregory N: 1978, Reference to Kinds in English, Ph.D. dissertation, University of Massachusetts, Amherst.


Poplack, Shana and Sali Tagliamonte: 1989, ‘There’s no tense like the present: verbal –s inflection in early black English,’ *Language Variation and Change* 1, 47-84.


