



POSUDEK VEDOUCÍHO BAKALÁŘSKÉ PRÁCE

Studijní obor: **Anglický jazyk a literatura (dvouoborové studium)**

Název práce: **The evolution of progressive verb forms within the language system from late Middle English to Early Modern English**

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Short characteristics of the thesis

The title of the thesis only partly covers its subject matter. In fact, the study surveys the occurrence and developments in the usage of all -ing forms as a background for the evolution of progressive verb forms in English from the late Middle English period through early Modern English. The analysis works with a sample of texts which were chosen as representative of a register closest to actual spoken language between the close of the 14th century and the early 18th century: autobiographical writings and letters by women. As women had little access to formal education, their writings, especially of (semi-)private nature, are less likely to be influenced by either literary conventions or usage informed by more formal study of language – a factor especially important towards the close of the selected period. The actual analysis is introduced by a brief outline of language typology, a survey of the stages in the development of the English language (with an emphasis on its historical and social background), and a chapter describing the verbal system in Middle and Present Day English. The analysis itself lists all the -ing forms in the selected texts and compares the balance of respective nominal (verbal noun, gerund, participle) and verb forms (the progressive), documenting the gradual establishment of the progressive as part of the English verbal system. The texts are presented in the Appendix, tagged for -ing forms. The findings are summarised in the Conclusion.

Overall assessment

The development of progressive verb forms and its establishment as part of the English verbal system has been the subject of a number of recent studies. While Elsness 1994 works with the entire corpus of Middle and early Modern English writings, Fitzmaurice 2004 investigates a much narrower segment of texts by literary writers of the 18th century. In this respect, the present thesis is an ambitious and valuable attempt to complement these two approaches by a) covering the entire period which, as scholars agree, is decisive for the development of the progressive, and b) working with texts which can be supposed to reflect closely the spoken usage of the period, eliminating such factors as literary conventions or developments prompted by the efforts to systematize English grammar and usage.

It follows from the character of the topic that the author had to work with a very difficult material. She had to deal with texts in the original Middle and Early Modern English, in unfamiliar, often non-standardized spelling. This part of her work and the effort invested in it is clearly demonstrated in the Appendix, with its meticulous tagging and classification of all occurrences of -ing forms. At the same time it is clear – and regrettable – that the time expended on this stage of the analysis was lacking in the



final presentation. The discussion of the results is incomplete: it focuses on the gradual rise in the frequency of progressive verb forms, but it leaves unaddressed the problem of its stabilization, e.g. its mandatory use to express durativity or the combination with specific semantic verb types (stative verbs). Even the simple issue of rising frequency would be presented with greater clarity and force if the absolute numbers shown in survey tables were also given as percentages relative to the length of the respective text. It has to be admitted, however, that the interpretation of the findings in the conclusion reaches a higher standard than the discussion which precedes it.

The time pressure is also apparent in the language of the thesis, where the differences in register (e.g. chapter 3 and 4 in comparison with the introduction to chapter 6) seem to indicate the uneven amount of time available for the writing of the respective sections. Quite apart from stylistic imbalance, the thesis unfortunately displays a number of language errors, such as the absence of concord in number (e.g. "the occurrence [...] are comparable", 35), mistaken use of articles, prepositions and conjunctions (e.g. "while" for "as", 33; "as well" for "either", 35) and, somewhat paradoxically, a rather non-standard use of the progressive ("the text is mapping the development", 29).

The chapter which surveys the four stages in the development of English as well as the description of the evolution of the morphology of the English verb shows another problematic aspect of the thesis. Both chapters work extensively with a single source which they seem to reproduce. Especially in the latter chapter (4) this results in a situation where the matter appears insufficiently digested and made conformable to the objectives of the thesis. It is too diffuse in its focus, so that the reader completely loses sight of the central theme, the progressive verb forms. Moreover, the structuring of the survey makes it difficult to follow.

The thesis also misses a brief survey of the state of research in the field and its basic problems – a subject-matter which could conveniently fill the space devoted to the survey of the entire morphology of the English verb (rather than its relevant aspects).

In conclusion, the thesis is apparently the result of much hard work and it is the more regrettable that in its final form it fails to present its results in a convincing manner. The study has the potential to provide new insight into a much-discussed issue, but to achieve this aim it would need substantial revision as regards content (expanding the discussion in chapter 6), structuring (chapter 4 especially, but the whole introductory part could benefit from a closer focusing towards the central topic in its various aspects) and language.

Despite these considerable reservations, I recommend the thesis for defence. The issues which the defendant should definitely address are as follows:

1. Which parts of chapter 4 are directly relevant to the topic of the thesis? How would she restructure this chapter to make it conformable to the themes which she pursues in the analysis and the Conclusion? Would she add anything?
2. Does her material provide any evidence for the **functional** stabilization of the progressive along the PDE lines?

Práci **doporučuji** k obhajobě.

Navrhovaná klasifikace:

dobře

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Datum

Podpis