

SYNTACTIC CHANGE AND THE CARTOGRAPHY OF SYNTACTIC STRUCTURES

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1. INTRODUCTION

THREE SURFACE CHANGES in English circa the late 18th century:

• Decline of the passival:

- (1) *Whereas a Brass Foundery is now building at Woolwich...*
 (London Gazette, 10 July 1716, quoted in OED s.v. brass)

• Acceptance of the progressive passive (replacing the passival):

- (2) *...like a fellow whose uttermost upper grinder is being torn out...*
 (R. Southey, letter of 9 Oct. 1795, quoted in OED s.v. be)

• Final decline of the *be*-perfect (replaced by the *have*-perfect):

- (3) *...he informs me his son is set out...*
 (O. Goldsmith, *She stoops to conquer* I.i, 1773, quoted in OED s.v. be)

ONE STRUCTURAL CHANGE:

Voice and aspect, previously bundled on a single head, split into separate projections.

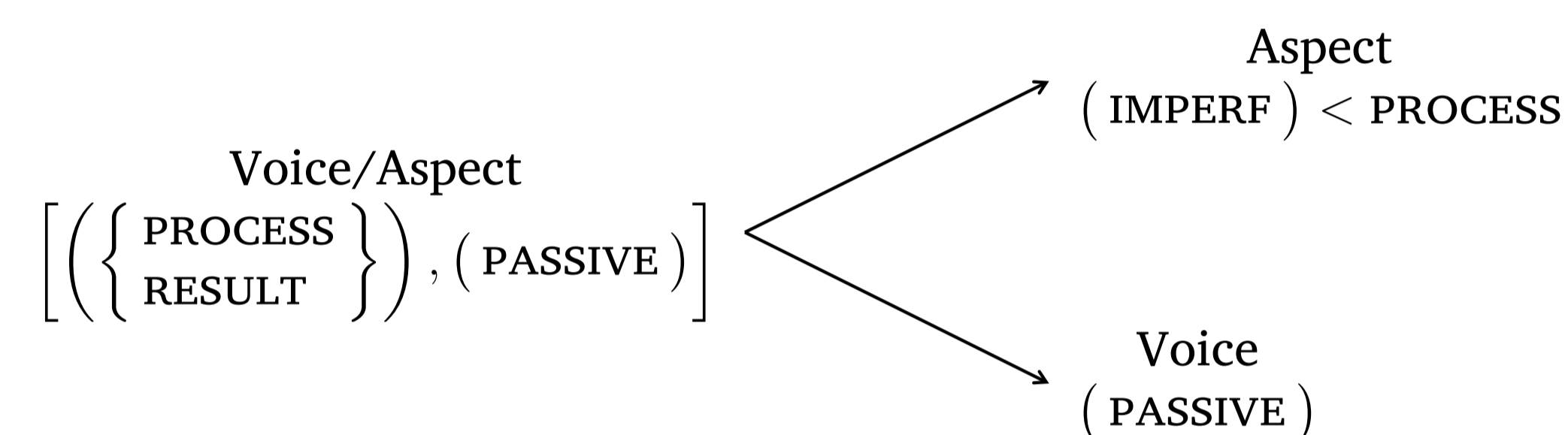


FIGURE 1: The separation of Voice and Aspect

2. BEFORE THE CHANGE

VOICE AND ASPECT were on a single head (VAsp), with six featural possibilities:

• [RESULT] – resultative *be*-perfect Spellout: *be* + *-en*

- (4) *I am come as ye bade me.*
 'I have come as you asked me.'
 (J. Mirk, *Festial*, a. 1415, quoted in McFadden & Alexiadou 2010)

McFadden & Alexiadou (2006, 2010) argue that the *be*-perfect was really a resultative. By the late 18th century, the true (temporal) perfect with *have* occurred with the full range of verbs, and the resultative *be*-perfect only with unaccusatives. The distinctness of the *be*- and *have*-perfects can be seen in the fact that they could be combined:

- (5) *He has been come over about ten days.*
 (J. Swift, *Journal to Stella*, 1710–13, quoted in Rissanen 1999)

• [PROCESS] – active progressive Spellout: *be* + *-ing*

- (6) *As you are fishing, chaw a little white or brown bread...*
 (I. Walton, *The Compleat Angler*, 1653–76, quoted in Rissanen 1999)

• [RESULT PASSIVE] – resultative passive Spellout: *be* + *-en*

- (7) *On[e] paine is lefnd by an others anguifh...*
 (W. Shakespeare, *Romeo and Juliet*, I.ii.45, ca. 1591–95)

• [PROCESS PASSIVE] – passival Spellout: *be* + *-ing*

- (8) *Our Garden is putting in order, by a Man who bears a remarkably good Character...*
 (J. Austen, letter of 8 Feb. 1807, quoted in Denison 1998)

• [PASSIVE] – 'intransitive for passive' Spellout: simple tense

- (9) *One desperate greefe cures with an others languifh.*
 (W. Shakespeare, *Romeo and Juliet*, I.ii.47, quoted in Rissanen 1999)

The so-called intransitive-for-passive construction is simply an aspectually unmarked counterpart to the passival.

• [] – plain active Spellout: simple tense

- (10) *I saw the man today.*
 (W. Shakespeare, *All's Well that Ends Well* V.iii.234, quoted in Rissanen 1999)

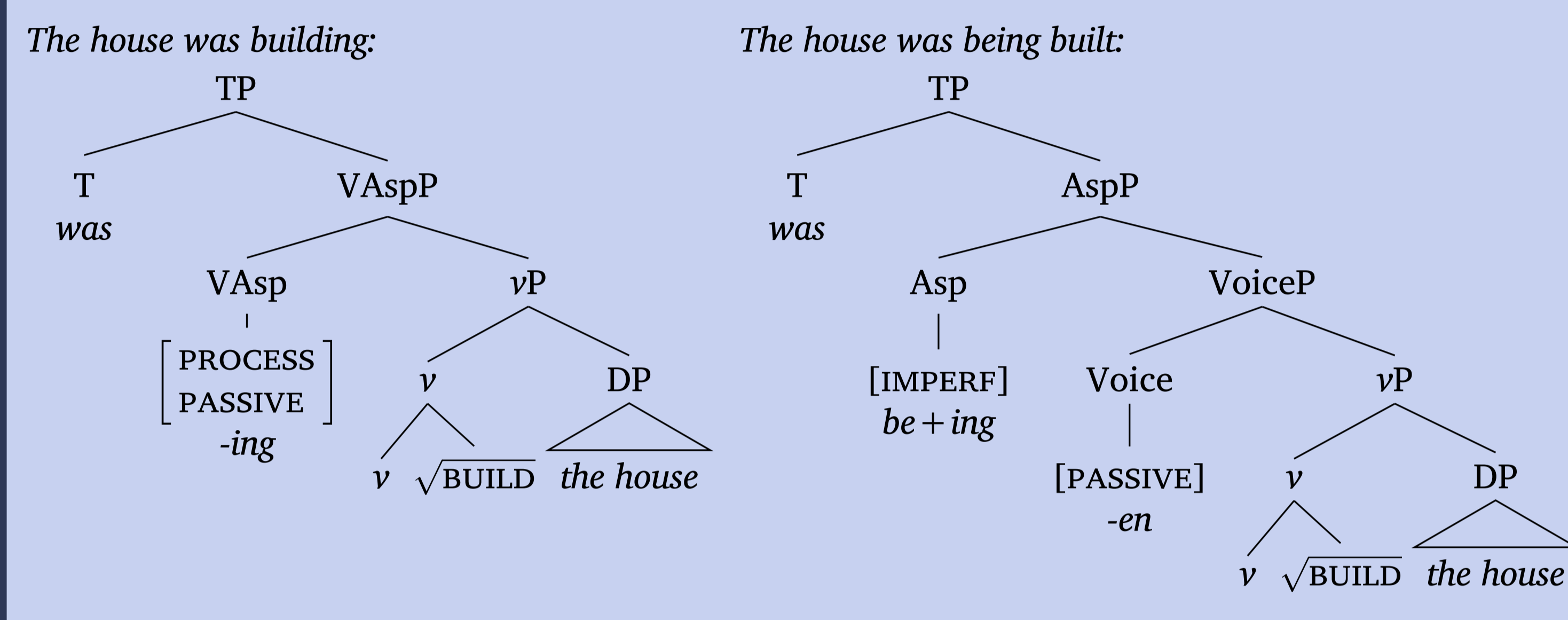
3. AFTER THE CHANGE

ASPECT AND VOICE are on separate heads.

• Aspect is now above Voice, has scope over the external argument, and is thus 'outer' (viewpoint) aspect (in the sense of Smith 1991). The feature that was [PROCESS], and which is still spelled out with *-ing*, now encodes imperfective viewpoint aspect rather than processual 'inner' aspect.

• Voice is syntactically independent of Aspect, and the marked voice feature, [PASSIVE], is spelled out with the *-en* that formerly realized [RESULT].

THE PASSIVAL AND THE PROGRESSIVE PASSIVE



- ▶ THE PASSIVAL IS GONE because [PASSIVE] has its own morphological exponent, *-en*.
- ▶ THE INTRANSITIVE FOR PASSIVE IS GONE, for precisely the same reason.
- ▶ THE PROGRESSIVE PASSIVE IS POSSIBLE, because Aspect and Voice project separately. Each can thus have its own morphological spellout.
- ▶ THE BE-PERFECT IS GONE because there is no longer a resultative inner aspect head.
- ▶ ENGLISH NOW HAS A VIEWPOINT ASPECT CONTRAST.

Before the change, the simple present tense was unmarked as to perfectivity:

- (11) a. *What do you read, my Lord?*
 (W. Shakespeare, *Hamlet* II.ii.190, ca. 1604, quoted in Visser 1973)
 b. *Eubulus seems to intimate that Things go well.*
 (R. Steele, *Spectator* I, no. 49, 1711, quoted in Visser 1973)
 c. *What do you laugh for, Mrs. Jervis?*
 (S. Richardson, *Pamela* I, p. 66, 1741, quoted in Visser 1973)

In Present-Day English, progressive *-ing* is obligatory as a marker of imperfective viewpoint aspect; an eventive simple present is interpreted as perfective, and receives a habitual, scheduled, or reportive reading.

4. THEORETICAL IMPLICATIONS

THE ANALYSIS outlined above depends on the assumption that different languages, or different stages of the same language, may differ in how they group features into heads.

THE PARAMETRIC VIEW:

- Each language selects a subset [F] of the universal set of features, making a one-time assembly of the elements of [F] into a lexicon (Chomsky 2000: 100).
- A feature may project independently, or it may be bundled with other features.
- Intrinsic semantic entailments between features restrict both their combination into lexical items and the selectional requirements of those lexical items (Cowper 2005).
- Some typological evidence for the parametric view: Bobaljik & Thráinsson (1998) on the INFL system in Germanic.

The parametric approach allows for a simple and unified account of the changes described above in terms of the diachronic unbundling of Aspect and Voice.

The parametric view contrasts with...

THE STRONG CARTOGRAPHIC VIEW:

- "While it is logically possible that the absence of an overt functional element in language A corresponding to a functional element visible in language B could indicate that language A entirely lacks that functional element, there is a substantial tradition that has profitably taken the opposite position—namely that if language B visibly has some functional element, then all languages must have it, even if in some or many it fails to be pronounced at all" (Kayne 2005: 16).
- "If some language provides evidence for the existence of a particular functional head (and projection), then that head (and projection) must be present in every other language, whether the language offers overt evidence for it or not" (Cinque & Rizzi 2008: 45).
- "ONE PROPERTY—ONE FEATURE—ONE HEAD": Featurally complex heads can arise only through movement (Cinque & Rizzi 2008: 50).

WHAT could the strong cartographic approach say about these changes in English?

- Outer aspect, voice, and inner aspect would have to be three separate heads both before and after the change.
- What changed, then, would not be the heads themselves, but (a) whether they are semantically active and (b) how they are spelled out.

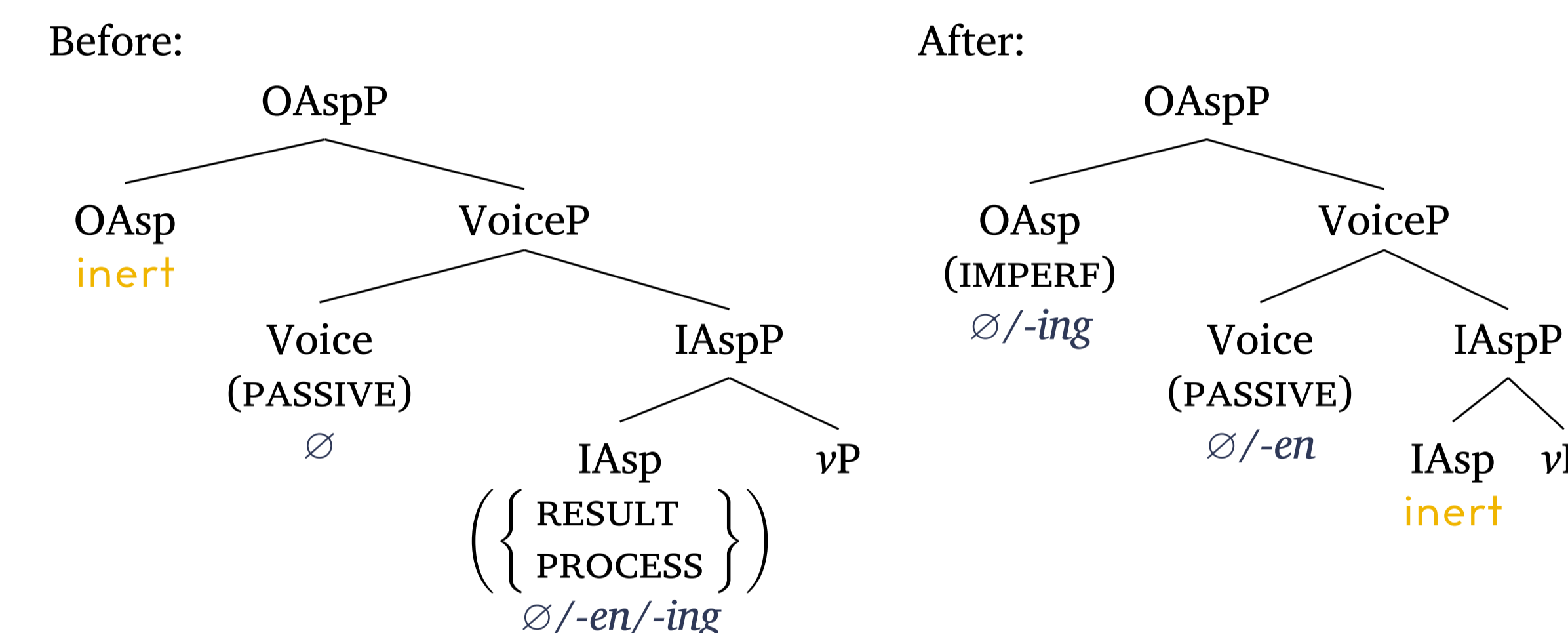


FIGURE 2: A cartographic approach to the change

This involves several changes with no obvious connection:

- IAsp becomes semantically and morphologically inert.
- The suffix *-ing* spells out a newly active [IMPERF] feature of OAsp.
- The feature [PASSIVE], which had been morphologically null, is now realized by *-en*.

BUT: What if "one feature— one head" is an acquisition bias that influences diachronic change, rather than an absolute principle of syntactic structure? Here's how the acquisition of functional projections might work:

- ▶ Learners like simple one-to-one correspondences between features and heads...
- ▶ ...but they require positive evidence to set up separate projections.

THE NEXT QUESTION:

- ▶ What evidence in the late 18th-century English primary linguistic data led learners to posit separate Aspect and Voice projections?

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