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CORPUS-CONTEXTUAL ANALYSIS OF THE LEXICAL ASPECT: SEMELFACTIVES VS ACHIEVEMENTS

The article is devoted to the analysis of the aspectual classification of predicates in modern English. In particular, the classifications of M. Moens, C. Smith, D. Dowty, J. Dölling, Z. Vendler are analyzed. Verbs of the class of semelfactives and achievements are also considered. Lexical and grammatical types of the aspectuality of the predicate are examined. Particular attention is paid to the dynamism, duration and telicity as the main criteria for determining the category of class at the verb level.

The main **aim** of the work is to analyze the verbs of the categories of semelfactives and achievements, their comparison, as well as to identify common and distinctive features. Semelfactive verbs are the aspectual class of verbs that denote instantaneous actions that occur over a very short period of time. They are able to express the value of multiplicity regardless of the form in which they occur. They are characterized by signs of dynamism, telicity and lack of duration; they describe events that do not involve a change of state. Achievements are defined as durative, telic (without a complex internal structure) predicates. The basis of the telicity of achievement is the ability to indicate a change of the state.

The **novelty** of the work lies under specific examples which show the properties of semelfactives and achievements, their characteristics and interpretation of their use in sentences. Moreover, the criteria of division of verbs of semelfactives and achievements into separate aspectual classes are examined and reasoned.

During the research work, several **methods** of analysis were used, namely corpus-contextual, descriptive and comparative.

In the **conclusion**, the main results of research are generalized, which, in their turn, will determine the relevance of further study of aspectual and structural features of verbs of the class of semelfactives and achievements. The observations and conclusions made in the course of the survey are illustrated by the examples from the British National Corpus.

Key words: aspectuality, telicity, semelfactive, achievements, predicate.

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КОРПУСНО-КОНТЕКСТУАЛЬНИЙ АНАЛІЗ ЛЕКСИЧНОГО АСПЕКТУ: СЕМЕЛЬФАКТИВИ ТА ДОСЯГНЕННЯ

Стаття присвячена дослідженню аспектуальної класифікації предикатів у сучасній англійській мові. Зокрема проаналізовано класифікації М. Моенса, К. Сміт, Д. Дауті, Дж. Дьолінг, З. Вендлера. Розглянуто дієслова класу семельфактивів та досягнень. Також звернено увагу на лексичний та граматичний типи аспектуальності предиката. Особливу увагу приділено динамічності, тривалості та граничності, як основним критеріям визначення категорії виду на рівні дієслова.

Основною **метою** роботи є аналіз дієслів категорій семельфактивів та досягнень, їхньому порівнянню, а також визначенню спільних та відмінних ознак. Семельфактивні дієслова – це аспектуальний клас дієслів, що позначають миттєві дії, які відбуваються протягом дуже короткого проміжку часу. Вони здатні виражати

значення кратності незалежно від форми, у якій вони зустрічаються. Для них характерні ознаки динамічності, граничності та відсутність тривалості; вони описують події, що не передбачають зміни стану. Досягнення визначено як граничні, миттєві (без складної внутрішньої структури) предикати. Основою граничності досягнень є здатність позначати зміну стану.

Новизною роботи є те, що на конкретних прикладах показано властивості семельфактивів та досягнень, їхні характерні ознаки та надана інтерпретація їхнього вживання у реченнях. А також досліджено та обгрунтовано критерії розподілу дієслів семельфактивів та досягнень на окремі аспектуальні класи.

Під час роботи над статтею використано декілька **методів** аналізу, а саме корпусно-контекстуальний, описовий та порівняльний.

У **висновку** узагальнено основні результати досліджень, які, своєю чергою, зумовлюють актуальність подальшого вивчення аспектуальних та структурних особливостей дієслів класу семельфактивів та досягнень. Спостереження і висновки, зроблені в ході дослідження, обгрунтовані прикладами з Британського Національного Корпусу.

Ключові слова: аспектуальність, граничність, семельфактив, досягнення, предикат.

Formulation of the scientific problem. The term «aspect» has a very wide range of application. It refers either to aspectual classes of verbs and the combination of the verb with its arguments and adverbial phrases or to morphological aspectual markers, such as inflectional or derivational morphemes marked on the verb. Linguistic theories of tense and aspect recognize two kinds of aspect: lexical aspect and grammatical aspect.

Grammatical aspect refers to the grammaticalized linguistic devices, often in the form of inflections and/or auxiliaries (e. g., English -ed and be I V-ing), that allow the speaker to impose a bounded or unbounded perspective on a situation or event (hence, the term viewpoint aspect as well). Such bounded versus unbounded distinction is typically discussed in terms of perfective versus imperfective grammatical aspect. In simple terms, perfective aspect denotes completed events, whereas imperfective aspect denotes ongoing situations. As defined in B. Comrie (1976), perfective aspect allows us to view an event as a completed whole (bounded or external perspective), whereas imperfective aspect constrains us to focus on the internal stages of an ongoing situation (unbounded or internal perspective). For example, in English, the progressive form (be I V-ing) marks imperfective aspect, whereas the simple past form (V-ed, as well as other irregular past forms) marks perfective aspect.

Lexical aspect refers to the inherent temporal meanings of a verb, whereas grammatical aspect refers to a particular viewpoint toward the described situation. For example, whether the verb characterizes a situation as having a temporal boundary or an end result is a matter of lexical aspect, whereas whether the sentence presents a situation as ongoing (progressive/imperfective) or completed (perfective) is a matter

of grammatical aspect. In English as well as in many other languages, lexical aspect is typically encoded by verb semantics, whereas grammatical aspect is encoded by morphological markers (e. g., English suffixes -ing and -ed).

Analysis of the latest investigations of the question. As summarized by M. Olsen (1997), aspect refers to two related phenomena: the ability of verbs and other lexical items to describe how a situation develops or holds in time – Lexical Aspect (LA) and the view some verbal auxiliaries and affixes present of the development or result of a situation at a given time – Grammatical aspect (GA).

The survey of the aspectual classifications of predicates has started from Z. Vendler's classification of verbs into activities, accomplishments, achievements, and states. This classification became the basis of the investigations in the field of aspectual features of such linguists as D. Dowty (1979), C. Smith (1997, 1999), A. Murlato (1978), M. Moens (1988), S. Rothstein (2004, 2008), J. Dölling (2003, 2013), H. Verkuyl (1972), A. Mitvoch (2010) and others.

Semelfactives, as the fifth aspectual class, are discussed in details by C. Smith.

The **aim** of the article is to give a precise description of the achievement verbs. It also consists in the complex analysis and comparison of the semelfactives vs achievements and as separate classes of predicates.

Presentation of the basic material and interpretation of the results of the investigation. Lexical aspect refers to situation types denoted in the verb (phrase) that are distinguished on the basis of temporal properties, such as dynamism, durativity, and telicity. Dynamism contrasts with stativity and is defined in terms of whether or not energy is needed to

maintain a given situation. Durativity contrasts with instantaneity and is defined in terms of how long or how briefly a situation persists. Telicity is defined in terms of whether an event involves a natural endpoint. If a verb is not telic, it is atelic.

Z. Vendler's classification divides verbs into four main classes, depending on the semantic meaning associated with them when used in sentences that represent different situations in the world: (1) activity verbs like *walk* and *run* encode situations as consisting of successive phases over time with no inherent endpoint; (2) accomplishment verbs like *build a house* also characterize situations as having successive phases, but differ from activities in that they encode an inherent endpoint (e. g., housebuilding has a terminal point and a result); (3) achievement verbs encode situations as punctual and instantaneous, e. g., *recognize a friend* and *cross the border*, and (4) state verbs encode situations as involving homogeneous states with no inherent endpoint, e. g., *know*, *want*, and *possess*.

However, there are a few remaining verbs that do not fit into these four aspectual verb classes. The verbal means of expressing the category of frequency are represented by means of the predicative group in English, which, according to the C. Smith's classification, belong to the **semelfactive** class. The linguists denominate these predicates in different ways, e. g. *dotted*, *momentary*, *punctate* etc. There are no definitive criteria of distinction these concepts that often result either into total identification or into the layer of each other. Let us see some more examples of a typical point-like semelfactive event.

(1) *John winked at Mary only once* [BNC AN7 3345].

(2) *John skipped down the stairs so suddenly that his mother almost choked on her coffee* [BNC K95 3466].

(3) *He was just lowering his glasses when the bell rang twice again* [BNC CKC 142].

(4) *He crossed to the guard and tapped him on the arm* [BNC ECK 1462].

(5) *The little vole scratched his ear three times very quickly* [BNC CFJ 85].

The sentences contain semelfactive events of the subclasses mentioned above. It can be observed that in some cases the occurrence of a semelfactive event can be identified by adverbials like *once*, *twice*, *suddenly*, and not

infrequently the usage of the semelfactive verbs becomes apparent from the context. The sentences denote single (countable) punctual events.

Semelfactive Verbs vs Achievement Verbs. Semelfactive verbs differ from achievements.

Semelfactives are punctual events which have no result state:

(6) *As the lights **blinked** in the overhead monitors we could see more and more buses were sold out* [BNC G2W 595].

(7) *He went up to the two detectives and **coughed** delicately* [BNC GUD 2389].

(8) *Henry leaned across and **tapped** her on the chest* [BNC ASS 2171].

(9) *He dropped it and I **kicked** it down the alley* [BNC ALH 1368].

(10) *Carrington raised the bottle, swallowed, and **sneezed** hard as the fumes went up his nose* [BNC HWA 3075].

It is important to note that these particular verbs are argued to be achievements by those scientists who do not think a fifth class is necessary (including D. Dowty, V. Zender and others). Both semelfactives and achievements describe an instantaneous event with no endpoint, but it seems that they differ in that semelfactives can sometimes have an agent. The following three examples shown below check to see if the verb in question has an agent:

(11) *Jim persuaded Kate **to break** the promise* [BNC J19 268].

(12) *Sam forced Janny **to knock** on the door* [BNC A0F 1274].

(13) ? *Marry persuaded the window to shatter* [BNC CEN 3009].

The question mark in (13) signifies that the sentence is unacceptable on a semantic basis. In other words, there is nothing wrong with the structure/syntax of the sentence, the individual meanings of the words put together don't make sense. These first three examples show us that while semelfactives do not always have an agent, they differ from achievements that they can, depending on the sentence. For example, (13) would be acceptable if changed to «*Marry persuaded Bill to shatter the window*», just as «*Jim persuaded the promise to break*» no longer remains acceptable.

(14) ***Knock** on the door!* [BNC CRC 1216].

(15) ? *Notice Sally!* [BNC KBL 4298].

(16) ? *Explode the house!* [BNC K5M 4122].

(17) ***Tap** on the window!* [BNC HNJ 2985].

Putting the verb into an imperative construction is another way to test if there is an agent. Again, we can see that, depending on the sentence and the situation, semelfactives can sometimes have an agent. If we changed (15) to «*Notice how beautiful Amily looks today*», it turns into an acceptable sentence.

(18) *Ted carefully **broke** the candy bar* [BNC HH0 632].

(19) *Andrew deliberately **shattered** the glass statue* [BNC KC8 1006].

(20) ? *Sam deliberately noticed the painting* [BNC HA7 820].

(21) ? *Jack deliberately fell asleep* [BNC H9C 3849].

The last examples (adding the word *carefully/deliberately*) show that the undisputed achievement verbs *notice* and *fall asleep* can still be proven to be just those – achievements, while verbs like *break*, *shatter*, *tap*, *knock*, etc. are shown to have agents in these sentences. Since it does not make semantic sense to be able to say someone *deliberately* noticed something, we can see that there is no hint of sentience (which would otherwise provide for proof of an agent) in the verb.

Adverbials that imply duration such as *quickly*, *rapidly* and *slowly* can occur with events involving temporal duration, regardless of whether they involve dynamic action. But with achievements, these adverbs indicate a relatively slow process:

(22) *That feeling lasted a while but after we'd had the children something changed and I **slowly realized** that I didn't love her anymore* [BNC ECT 3447].

(23) *Already in the fields the snow **is melting slowly** and the swollen rivers herald Spring* [BNC AEW 642].

whereas these adverbials are only marginally possible with Semelfactives and can only yield ingressive reading,

(24) *I **coughed slowly** and said, 'Good evening, I – 'My voice sounded hoarse* [BNC BMS 405].

may mean that I was slow to cough (although the sentence may have a multiple-event reading in which the coughs followed each other at a slow rate).

Moreover, adding «*once*» to the sentence with a semelfactive verb and any of the adverbials above would render the sentence unacceptable:

(25) *Meryl **coughed once** briefly to advertise her presence, and Gladys swung round* [BNC C8D 421].

But semelfactives need a delimiting mechanism and they can be intensified by some modifiers, such as suddenly, instantly, once, on one occasion, only:

(26) ***Instantly** the girl **leaped** from the cart and ran away* [BNC CH0 534].

(27) *The figure **suddenly jumped** into the water* [BNC HA0 3225].

(28) *To be certain, he **kicked** Trent **twice** on the sole of his right boot* [BNC AMU 279].

And very often it is the context that helps to identify the semelfactive verb:

(29) *I felt like my throat was going to rip apart when I **sneezed*** [BNC CG2 676].

(30) *As I slid to the floor I **was kicked** hard in the face with a slippered foot* [BNC CCP 955].

(31) *He **blinked** and the relief in his eyes was evident* [BNC CR6 2036].

C. Smith (1991), who is probably most responsible for the consensus that semelfactives constitute a real class of verbs, argues that they are really atelic achievements. She phrases this by saying that semelfactives are dynamic, atelic, and instantaneous, while achievements are dynamic, telic, and instantaneous. Her intuition is that semelfactives are, like achievements, single stage events, which, though they take time/have duration, are conceptualised as instantaneous. They differ from achievements which are also single stage events, since achievements are events of change, while semelfactives do not bring about a change. While it seems clear that C. Smith is right that achievements and semelfactives differ in that the former is a predicate of change and the latter not, there are two problems with her account.

- The first is that it does not explain why semelfactives occur with in α time (and other telic modifiers).

- The second is that while achievements really are non-extended, consisting of two temporally adjacent instants, semelfactives really take time and are temporally extended (Smith, 1997).

An event in the denotation of *arrive* has no internal structure; it consists of the last instant at which x is not at location l and the first instant at which x is at location l , and there is no gap between these instants. But, semelfactives do have internal structure. *Jump*, *flap a wing*, *kick* and *wink* all have trajectories, in the sense that for an event of knocking to occur, several things have to happen at different non-adjacent instants: an object has to be brought sharply through space to come in

contact with a hard surface. For an event of winking to occur, an eye has to close and then open again, and so on. If semelfactive events are defined via trajectories, then they cannot be instantaneous (Smith, 1997).

Conclusion. Perspectives for further investigations. The analysis has shown that semelfactives, like activities and accomplishments, hold at minimal intervals and not at instants. Like accomplishments they are quantized, they induce

the imperfective paradox and they occur with in α time, but unlike accomplishments, they do not denote events of change. The semelfactive verbs are argued to be achievements by those who do not think a fifth class is necessary. Both semelfactives and achievements describe an instantaneous event with no endpoint, but it seems that they differ in that semelfactives can sometimes have an agent. So it seems appropriate to explore the relation between semelfactives and achievements further.

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