

## Aspect and aspectuality

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### 1) Situation aspect = lexical aspect = Aktionsart

= The classification of eventualities/ situations (states in terms of their temporal properties and classification of the types of expression referring to them in particular languages)

Types of eventualities:

- States: denoted by stative expressions, e.g. to exist
- Events: denoted by eventive expressions, e.g. arrive
- Process/ activity: denoted by processual expressions, e.g. run
- Series: denoted by a serial expression, e.g. *whimper in the puppy whimpered all night.*
- Episode: the occurrence of a process/ state over a bounded period of time, e.g. *I was extremely ill only once, but it lasted for weeks.*

Vendler's (1957) distinction between:

- expressions denoting momentary events (achievements, e.g. win a race)
- expressions for events extending over time (accomplishments, e.g. draw a picture)

The classificatory scheme categorizes verbs and phrases, but especially the level of clause or proposition is relevant for linguistics, because aspectual classification could be affected by other various expressions, e.g.:

- (1) One of the applicants swam across the pool.
- (2) All of the applicants swam across the pool.

In both sentences swam is eventive, but (1) refers to an event, and (2) refers to a series.

### 2) Temporal properties of eventualities

The classes of eventualities differ in temporal properties (stativity, telicity and durativity), cumulativity and partitivity.

Stative states: Uniform, lack internal structure and development, tend to endure, have subinterval property

Processes may be durative (*climbing a mountain, ageing*) or non-durative (achievements, e.g. *spotting a coin on the pavement*). Series are always durative.

Telic events: Change from an initial state to a result/consequent state, containing an end-point. States, processes and series are atelic.

Incomplete events: No end-point or final bound, e.g. *John was reading Hamlet when Susan came in*.

Non-events: Assigned a final bound, e.g. *the puppy was lonely until his owners returned*; cumulative and partitive

Eventualities consist of sequences of parts or phases.

The Model of Moens & Steedman (1987, 1988): states and processes consist of unitary phases.

Achievements: Consist of a point of transition (culmination of an implicit process, e.g. arrive, transition into a state/ progress, e.g. appear/ break into song)

Accomplishments: Consist of a preparatory phase, a durative process, and an achievement.

- The consequent state is included in the event nucleus.
- Any of the phases may itself be complex.
- The preparatory phase may be designated by the progressive aspect, e.g. *Mr. Blandings was building his dream house*.
- Progressive aspect can also be used with achievements (lack of preparatory phase, but an analogous preliminary phase = initial state preceding an event), e.g. *the train was arriving at the station*.)
- Stages are also called phases and their marking phasic aspect.

### **3) Viewpoint Aspect = verbal aspect = grammatical aspect**

= A grammatical category, but not found in all languages; marking of different ways of viewing the internal temporal constituency of situations (aspectual markers/tense markers don't indicate objective differences = the same can be represented in different ways: *Susan built kayaks* or *Susan was building kayaks*)

Comrie's (1979) distinction between:

- perfective aspect (provides an external view of the eventuality as a single, complete whole)
- imperfective aspect (gives a partial, internal view, recognizes two varieties: habitual aspect ® represents the eventuality as a series; continuous aspect ® eventuality in its course, incomplete)

Theorists differ on whether the simple tenses mark aspect (aspectual marker is absent):

- eventive expressions: represented as complete eventuality (*Mr. Blandings built his dream house*)
- atelic expressions (state/ progress): representing an incomplete eventuality (*The children played.*)

Tenses could therefore be aspectually indifferent, in phasic theories of aspect as optional, in boundness theories as obligatory.

Simple tenses mark neutral aspect, including initial bound and a portion of eventuality (Smith 1991).

Habitual aspect: marked by *used to/modals (will/would)*, e.g. *John used to swim every day, and he still does.*

If expressions have a habitual interpretation, they may have a generic interpretation, too, e.g. *the cat catches mice* (characterizing a period of time without referring to specific occurrences).

Continuous aspect: represents the eventuality as in its course, incomplete; marked by progressive forms (*be + progressive participle*, e.g. *Susan was sleeping*).

Prospective aspect: represent posterior eventuality, marked by *be to/be going to/future*.

Progressive aspect: variety of continuous aspect, eventuality is dynamic, e.g. *Mr. Blandings was building his dream house*. Temporal properties: durativity, unboundness, dynamicity

Perfect aspect: represents anterior eventuality, marked by the perfect form (*have + perfect participle*, e.g. *John has swum across the pool.*)

- resultative: state of affairs resulting from a prior event, e.g. *Mother has just gone to the store.*
- experiential: previous occurrence of eventuality on at least one occasion, e.g. *Mother has been to a World's Fair twice.*
- continuative: eventuality, which continues at the reference time, e.g. *The children have been outside all morning.*

- perfect of recent past: reports events that happened recently, e.g. *The council has jus voted to raise taxes.*

Four types of theories of the perfect (McCoard 1978):

- (1) Current relevance theory: the perfect presupposes current relevance.
- (2) Indefinite past theory: the perfect represents an anterior event occurring at a nonspecific time.
- (3) Extended now theory: the perfect is used for events occurring in an interval of time.
- (4) Embedded past theory: the perfect is embedded within the scope of another tense.

But none of these theories are accepted by a majority of scholars.

Situation aspect:

- interacts with viewpoint aspect
- Present tense sentences refer to eventualities with stative expressions, including progressive and perfect, e.g. *John was tall.*
- Progressive normally can't be used with stative expressions

#### 4) Phasic Aspect

- Concerns reference to one or more stages of eventuality, e.g. *John began to run; John stopped to run.*
- Marked by an aspectualizer (= verbs like *begin/start, continue/keep, stop/cease*)
- Eventualities are divided into: initial, medial, final phase.

#### 5) Theories of aspect

- Boundedness theories of aspect: either don't recognize perfect and prospective aspects at all, or define them in a very different way.
- Relational aspect theories: aspect is defined as a temporal relationship between reference time R and time E of eventuality.
- Phasic aspect theories: situation and viewpoint aspect are not treated as distinct; viewpoint aspects transforms aspectual classes of an expression.

The present tense is a state selector (Michaelis 2006): it occurs only with stative sentences, e.g. *Susan is tall.* The tense selects the periods of stasis in habitual or generic interpretations.

**6) Aspect in Discourse**

- Textual function: create and maintain the coherence of the discourse at global/ local levels of structure
- Narrative genres (fiction) contrast with discourse genres/commentary (conversation, reportage) in tense and aspect
- Narrative has a main narrative line, a foreground of eventive sentences in simple past tense: *I came, I saw, I conquered.*
- The background consists of non-eventive sentences in non-perfective aspect: *Tom looked for a restaurant. He was hungry. He hadn` t eaten for hours.*

Aspect serves to maintain coherence on three levels:

- Linguistic level: temporal relationships are important, e.g. *For the next few days the temperature was pleasant.* (*for the next few days* = time adverbial)
- Intentional level: coherence is a matter of logic of the discourse
- Attentional level: coherence is a matter of topical relevance

Temporal relations depend on rhetorical relations (coherence), discourse or topical relations. They hold between segments of discourse.

Coordinating rhetorical relations are typically marked by perfective aspects, including narration and listing.

- (1) Bill sang a song. Jane thanked him on behalf of the audience.
- (2) Bill sang a song. Jane played the piano.

Subordinating rhetorical relations include explanation, elaboration, consequence, e.g. *The waste bin burst into flame. Someone grabbed the fire extinguisher.*

Subordination is often associated with focalization = a change in perspective/ view-point.

Important is to maintain the coherence of the discourse!