INTERSECTION OF ENGLISH ASPECT AND TENSE

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Acest articol are drept scop evidenţierea relaţiei dintre categoriile gramaticale de timp şi aspectele verbului în limba engleză. Pe de o parte, categoria de timp se referă la momentul desfăşurării unei acţiuni, iar aspectul denotă structura temporală internă a situaţiei. Cercetările recente cu contribuţia lingviştilor Comrie, Holt, Bennet, Partee, C.Smith au demonstrat că există o relaţie strânsă între cele două categorii verbale, dar totuşi ele nu trebuie concepute ca un tot întreg, ci analizate separat. Categoria de timp a fost identificată drept o categorie *deictică*, stabilind legătură între diferite tipuri de situaţii şi momentul vorbirii şi structurându-le prin relaţii de simultaneitate şi consecutivitate, iar aspectul ca o categorie *nondeictică*. Unii lingvişti specifică diferenţa dintre aspect şi timp ca o diferenţă între timpul intern al unei situaţii, redată de *aspect*, şi timpul extern al unei situaţii, redată de *timp*. O dificultate aparte prezintă în limba engleză formele de *perfect,* care conform unor opinii lingvistice nu trebuie calificat nici ca timp, nici ca aspect, ci o categorie gramaticală separată ce redă anterioritatea. Articolul include clasificarea verbelor de către Vendler şi trihotomia lui Mourelatos cu privire la clasele aspectuale ale verbelor complexe.

According to grammatical tradition, Aristotle is said to have been the first to recognize the category of *tense*, observed in the systematic variations in the forms of the Greek verbs. These variations could be correlated with time notions such as *past* and *present*. Though English has many fewer such verb forms than the Classical Greek, there are still systematic correlations. Aristotle is also generally credited to be the first who noticed that verbs in natural languages may designate either a kind of activity or the end/result of that activity. He mentions in his work Metaphysics that "since no action which has a limit is an end , but only a means to the end, as e.g. the process of thinning, this process is not an action, or at least not a complete one, since it is not an end; it is the process, which includes the end, that is an action.

In the early 20th century scholars allowed a relatively loose conception of aspect, one in which aspect was understood to cover a variety of oppositions in so far as they are grammaticalized in the structure of particular languages: these oppositions are based on the notions of duration, instantaneity, frequency, initiation, completion.

"Every language has its peculiar problems of meaning", writes Geoffrey Leech, referring to areas of difficulty for language learners. He identifies verb tense and aspect as two of the most troublesome areas of English. A serious problem in dealing with the English tense system is the tendency to treat the verb forms as directly corresponding to the semantic properties of time reference. Form and meaning should be treated as distinct dimensions, since in no language tenses and time references match up on a one-to-one basis.

Tense and aspect have to do with *form*. Tense is the grammatical marking on verbs that usually indicates time reference relative to either the time of speaking or the time at which some other situation was in force. Dealing with tense is actually dealing with language *forms* used to represent time reference notions. English has adverbs like *yesterday, later, meanwhile*, and phrases like *the following day, last Monday*. None of these fall under the category of tense. Aspect is the grammatical marking on verbs of the internal time structure of a situation.

Time reference, unlike tense and aspect, has to do with *meaning* rather than *form*. Events and situations are located in time, perhaps *prior* to the moment of speaking about them (e.g. John *sang.* John *was singing.)*, perhaps *while* speaking about them (e.g. John *is singing.*), perhaps at some *later* time (e.g. John *will sing.* John *will be singing.*). Moreover, we may need to locate situations and events relative not just to the time of speaking but also to some other reference point. The tenses referred to have all related the time of the situation described to the present moment. Such tenses are referred to as absolute tenses. Another possible form of time reference is relative time reference where, instead of the time of a situation being located relative to the present moment, it is related to the time of some other situation. Nonfinite participial constructions involve relative rather than absolute tense. In the sentences (a) *When walking down the road, I often meet Harry* and (b) *When walking down the road, I often met Harry,* the present participle *walking* in both cases indicates a situation located simultaneous with the time of the main verb. In the (a) sentence, the situation

described by *walking* holds at the present, given the present tense *meet,* while in the (b) sentence it held in the past, given the past tense *met.* The relevant factor in the choice of the present participle is thus relative time reference, not absolute time reference. Similarly, the perfect participle in such nonfinite participial constructions indicates relative past time reference: e.g. *Having met Harry earlier, I don't need to see him again* and *Having met Harry earlier, I didn't need to see him again.* Evidently, in English finite verb forms have absolute tense, and nonfinite verb forms have relative tense.

Aspect is quite different from this. The difference between *He was reading* and *He read* is not one of tense, since both sentences have absolute past tense. In this sense aspect is different from tense. The linguist Holt gives a general definition of aspect: "aspects are different ways of viewing the internal temporal constituency of a situation". To illustrate this here is an example: *John was reading when I entered.* The first verb presents the background to some event, while that event itself is introduced by the second verb. The second verb presents the totality of the situation referred to (my entry) without reference to its internal temporal constituency: the whole of the situation is presented as a single whole, with beginning, middle and end rolled into one; no attempt to divide this situation up into the various individual phases that make up the action of entry. Verbal forms with this meaning have perfective meaning and thus it has perfective aspect. In this example reference is made to an internal portion of John's reading, while there is no explicit reference to the beginning or to the end of his reading. This is why the sentence is interpreted as meaning that my entry is an event that occurred during the period that John was reading, i.e. John's reading both preceded and followed my entry. It is relevant to point out that the difference between perfective and imperfective meaning is to say that the perfective looks at the situation from outside, without necessarily distinguishing any of the internal structure of the situation, whereas the imperfective looks at the situation from inside, and consequently is much concerned with the internal structure of the situation. It can both look backwards to the start of the situation, and look forward to the end of the situation.

It is evident that both aspect and tense are connected with time, but they are concerned with time in different ways. Tense appears to be a deictic category: it relates different kinds of events to the speech time and structures them by the relations of simultaneity and sequency. Aspect is not concerned with relating the time of the situation to any time-point, but rather with the internal temporal constituency of the situation. Comrie specifies the difference between aspect and tense as one between situation-internal time (aspect) and situation-external time (tense). He suggests considering the example with a sequence of events indicated by a sequence of forms with perfective meaning: *The wind tore off the roof, snapped the clothes-line, and brought down the apple-tree.* Each of the three situations is presented without regard to its internal constituency, but naturally they are events that occurred in succession, each one complete in itself. They will normally be taken to have occurred in the order in which they are presented in the text. However, it is quite possible for all three events to have been simultaneous, and this possibility can be made explicit by adding an appropriate adverbial to the sentence e.g. *the wind simultaneously…* Another possibility is that the speaker is not interested in the relative order of the three events, but is simply registering his observation of the overall result of the wind's damage. He may not even know the actual order of events.

The two aspects of English, perfect and progressive, can occur together, making possible combinations of tense, aspect, voice and mood: e.g. *I have been reading the boo; I have read the book, I would have read the boo; I am reading the book, I will be reading the book.* There are a number of other aspectual distinctions in English of more limited distribution, including the *'habitual'*,occurring only with the past tense*: I used to read,* and the '*mutative*' , which is restricted to the passive: *I got killed.*

There are some verbs in English which do not normally occur with progressive aspect, even in those contexts in which the majority of verbs necessarily take the progressive form. Zeno Vendler was the first to systematically distinguish among four different aspectual classes of verbs: *states, activities, accomplishments* and *achievements.* Vendler takes TIME as the basic concept in constructing the four types of situations. Classification of situations into sates, activities, accomplishments and achievements is grounded on time schemata presupposed by various verb phrases. Here are Vendler's time schemata used to delineate his verb classes:

States: *A loved somebody from t1 to t2* means that at *any* instant between t1 and t2 A loved that person.

Activities: *A was running at time t* means that time instant t is an *a* time stretch throughout which A was running.

Accomplishments: *A was drawing a circle at t* means that t is on the time stretch in which A drew that circle.

Achievements: *A won the race between t1 and t2* means that *the* time instant at which A won the race is between t1 and t2.

Here are examples of verbs from Vendler's categories to illustrate the four classes of verbs:

States: *know, believe, have, desire, lose*

Activities: *run, walk, swim, drive a car, push a cart*

Accomplishments: *make a chair, paint a picture, deliver a sermon, recover from illness*

Accomplishments: *recognize, spot, find, reach, die*

Vendler was also concernedwith how to group together the four categories or classes. He considered *states* and *achievements* to form one 'genus' and *activities* and *accomplishments* to form another one as the members of the former genus share the property of lacking progressive forms (i.e. verb phrases do not have internal temporal constituency and cannot be analysed in phases: *He is being tall, He is finding a penny in the steet*); the members of the latter genus allow the progressive form(i.e. verb phrases can be analysed in subsequent phrases: *He is running, He is building a house*). On the other hand, he noticed that *achievements* and *accomplishments* take adverbials with in , e.g. *in an hour: He noticed the painting in an hour, He ran the mile in a few minutes,* while *activities* and *states* occur with *for* adverbials, e.g. *for an hour: He walked for an hour, He slept for an hour.*

Many scolars added further criteria and parameters to Vendlerian classification of verbs in order to sort out the exact class to which verb expressions belong and to more accurately characterize each verb class. Mourelatos proposed a trichotomy for the aspectual classes of verb phrases. His investigation is based on the existence of common theoretical basis in the investigation of nouns and verbs. The theory assumes as basic the process of individuation i.e. the identification of an individual (object or situation in the case of nouns and verb phrases respectively) out of several individuals (objects or situations). The relation between a whole and its parts is defined by two properties: subdivisibility and homogeneity. Mourelatos draws a parallel between event predications and countable nouns on the one hand, and process predications and states and mass nouns, on the other hand. He sets up a verb phrase classification that does not rest upon the notion of *agent* and control by an agent, as Vendler's classification does, thus managing to include in his classification all those verb phrases that take inanimate subjects.

His trichotomy is based on the notion of *situation*. Situations are of the following kinds: *states, processes and events.* Here is the scheme of this trichotomy:
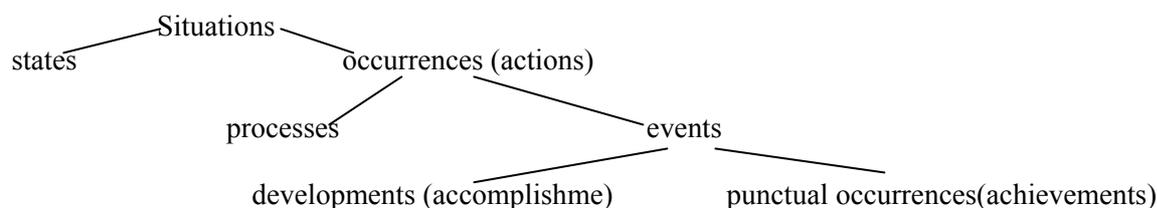
Mourelatos' trichotomy of situations has become standard in contemporary studies on aspect.

A more complete characterization of verb meanings is connected with the basic fact that the main property of situations is that they have a particular temporal structure. The description of the temporal structure of aspectual situations is grounded on a fundamental idea of modern temporal logic: the idea that propositions should be evaluated with respect to *time intervals,* not moments of time, as Bennet and Hall Partee suggest.

Another problem in the tense-aspect relationship is the treatment of perfect. Some linguists argue that the perfect qualifies neither as an aspect, (because it does not present a situation as incomplete nor as complete at a given point or period of time), nor as a tense , but represents a category of its own: "the recognition that the perfect is a verbal category separate from tense and aspect seems to be an important one and deserves emphasis". According to C.Smith the defining characteristic of the perfect is that of locating a situation prior to the reference point of that situation. Its primary value is that of anteriority of a certain situation relative to some reference time, e.g. *Now, John has arrived; last Saturday, John had already arrived; Next Saturday, John will have already arrived.*

Some linguists have conceived of both the simple and progressive forms and the perfect/non-perfect as demonstrating two separate aspect systems, each involving a binary contrast: e.g. *He sees/he is seeing; he saw/he was seeing; he has seen/he has been seeing; he had seen/ he had been seeing.*

Prospective forms, as Comrie defines them, denote a state related to some subsequent situaton, for instance when someone is in a state of being about to do something. English expressions such as: *to be going to, to be about to, to be on the point of* are often referred to as instances of *prospective aspect*: e.g. The ship is about to sail/ The ship is on the point of sailing. However, it has been argued that prospection is only a relatonship of posteriority in which the predicated event is linked to a reference point anywhere in present, past, or, less commonly, future time.

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