

## LINGUISTIC MEANS OF EXPRESSING THE FUNCTIONAL-SEMANTIC CATEGORY OF ASPECTUALITY

*Silviana CUPCIC*

*Catedra Filologie Engleză*

Articolul este axat pe abordarea noțiunilor de aspectualitate și de aspect în limba engleză. În el se face o descriere a mijloacelor lingvistice de redare a categoriei funcțional-semantice a aspectualității: morfologice, sintactice, lexicale, lexico-gramaticale și contextuale. Categoria aspectului este tratată ca parte principală a categoriei funcțional-semantice a aspectualității.

Aspectology as a branch of science appeared in the 1930s. It studies the verbal aspect and various phenomena related to it in different languages [1, p.4].

From the functional point of view, language is considered an instrument for social interactions, which is structured by rules: a system of semantic, syntactic, morphological and phonological rules governs the constitution of linguistic expressions while communicative rules or principles account for the patterns of verbal interaction, in which the linguistic expressions are used. The aim of Functional Grammar is to describe the rule systems of languages, from the starting point of communicative intentions or functions and semantics [2, p.16-17].

The category of **aspect** is one of the universal categories called by O.Jespersen as conceptual categories. A systematic analysis of linguistic conceptual categories shows that they are mainly grammatically expressed in various languages [3, p.206]. B.Comrie generalized the definition given by Holt and defines aspect as “different ways of viewing the internal temporal constituency of a situation” [4, p.3]. J.Lyons asserts that aspect has to do with “temporal distribution or contour of an action, event or state of affairs” [5, p.315]. O.Akhmanova and V.Belenkaya define aspect as primarily the way of viewing an action, much depending on prosody: e.g (a) *I looked out of the window. A man **stood** at the door.* (b) *I looked out of the window. A man **was standing** at the door* [6, p.85-86]. One and the same action is thus described differently depending on how the speaker views it. Both aspect and tense are concerned with time, but in different ways. Tense is a deictic category, i.e. locates the situations in time, usually with reference to the present moment, though also to other situations. Aspect is a semantic category. The difference between aspect and tense can be stated as the one between situation-internal time (aspect) and situation-external time (tense) [4, p.4-5]. Prof. Blokh M. considers that the aspective meaning of the verb, as different from its temporal meaning, reflects the inherent mode of the realization of the process irrespective of its timing [7, p.155].

Sentences may pertain to states or processes or events. They may express duration, frequency, habituality and many other forms of temporality. How do they do this? It is the aspectual properties of sentences in natural languages which allow the user to express a temporal structure. Henk Verkuyl explains aspectuality in terms of the opposition between terminative aspect and durative aspect, and describes the way in which terminative aspect is compositionally formed on the basis of semantic information expressed by different syntactic elements, in particular the verb and its arguments.

The most important features of the action denoted by the verb are the temporal, aspectual, modal and voice peculiarities. The linguistic means, whose meanings refer to duration and development of the action throughout time, make up the functional-semantic category of aspectuality. This category is expressed in English by several means: **morphological, syntactical, lexical, lexico-grammatical, contextual**. The category of aspect is the main part of the functional-semantic category of aspectuality.

Aspectuality is more abstract than the grammatical or lexical aspect, because the grammatical categories are based on the categorial forms of the words and the relations between them in the sentence. The lexical categories are based on the concrete meaning of the words. The means of the functional-semantic category of aspectuality have a common peculiarity, they indicate the development of the action throughout a period of time and each of these means has its specific characteristics.

The **morphological means** have a strict paradigm – they express categorial meanings with the help of morphological forms. The aspectual forms are closely related to the temporal forms, as the action is developing in the course of time and the category of time correlation. These three categories make up the aspectual-temporal system of the English language. A.I.Smirnitsky expressed the relationship between these three

categories as three intersecting lines, but they never form one line. This fact makes it difficult to analyze just one of these categories, thus the aspectual forms should be opposed to the other two categories. The categorial meaning of the forms of the continuous aspect refers to two main semes: 1) duration of the action; 2) concreteness of the action (the action is viewed as developing during a limited period of time). The forms of the common aspect do not ascribe to the action the aspectual feature mentioned above. Its categorial meaning is determined negatively – as indicating absence of the meaning rendered by the form of the continuous aspect. The linguist F.R.Palmer states that “the progressive indicates activity continuing through a period of time – activity with duration. The non-progressive merely reports activity, without indicating that it has duration” [8, p.35].

Thus the oppositions of the categorial forms of the continuous/common aspect in English basically indicate the mode of the development of the action through a period of time. The opposition is made up of one marked form, characterized by the presence of a definite semantic feature, denoting a concrete duration of the action, and another unmarked form, characterized by the absence of such a feature, lacking a concrete duration. Every form of the continuous aspect is a seme in itself, having the meaning of a concrete duration.

The **syntactical means** refer to the verb combinations and special aspectual constructions. These verb combinations express aspectual meaning and include a verb, denoting the phase of the action: the beginning, continuation or cessation, followed by an infinitive or gerund: e.g. *begin to sing, continue to read, finish writing*. The first component denotes the aspectual meaning of the phase of the action, which is expressed by the second component. The second component is the lexical nucleus of the aspectual construction, but its lexical meaning is denoted by the whole combination. The form of an infinitive or a gerund as the second component of the combination is determined by two factors: 1) the semantics of the infinitive or gerund forms – the infinitive shows the action or state as a fact, the gerund shows it as a developing process; 2) the semantics of the phase verb in the given combination, e.g. the verb *stop* can not be used with an infinitive to show the final phase of the action, as its meaning denotes a sudden interruption of the process – *stop talking*. The lexical meaning refers to the meaning of duration and development of the action throughout a period of time on the level of semantics of the verb, verb combination, aspectual construction.

Aspectual constructions may render such aspectual meanings like the beginning of the action or state (*come to believe*), its continuation (*keep smiling*), past habitual action (*used to sleep*), and the cessation of the action (*finish reading*). Any verb may form analytical structures if its lexical meaning does not contradict the lexical meaning of phase, thus resultative verbs (*find, drop*), relational verbs (*consist, belong*), stative verbs (*know, hear*) do not make combinations with phase verbs because of these reasons. The analytical means give the action a monosemantic aspectual feature without any additional contextual means. I would refer to the syntactical means some cases described by F.R.Palmer, in which the progressive is used with such adverbials and adjectivals as *more and more, faster and faster*: e.g. *It's getting bigger and bigger. More and more people are buying television sets. He's working less and less*. These phrases indicate an increase or decrease in the activity or some aspect of the activity, and therefore imply duration.

The **lexical means** do not express their aspectual meanings through a certain paradigm of grammatical forms, they appear on the semantic level. The verbs which have a different denotational meaning become part of the lexical means if they express aspectual meaning: duration and development of the action throughout a period of time. The classification of verbs according to their lexical meaning was the concern of many linguists- Vendler Z, Comrie, Palmer F.R., Lyons J., Preisler B. etc. Vendler Z. introduced a four-way distinction between verbs based on their aspectual features, a distinction which has had a major influence on theories of lexical aspect or aktionsart. Under Vendler's model, events may be classified into one of four aspectual classes: **states**, which are static and do not have an endpoint ("know," "love"); **activities**, which are dynamic and do not have an endpoint ("run," "drive"); **accomplishments**, which have an endpoint and are incremental or gradual ("paint a picture," "build a house"); and **achievements**, which have an endpoint and occur instantaneously ("recognize," "notice") [9, p.10-11]. Vendler Z. also popularized the use of the progressive aspect as a diagnostic for distinguishing between these lexical classes; for example, activities and accomplishments are able to appear in the progressive: e.g. *He is running, He is painting a picture*, whereas states and achievements are not *\*He is knowing French, \*He is recognizing his friend*.

Preisler B. suggests a semantic categorization of main verbs into **dynamic** (verbs which can take the progressive: *play, stay, die, knock*) and **stative** (verbs which do not normally take the progressive: *belong, resemble, know, see*). The distinction between them is mainly a semantic one. Stative verbs fall into two groups: **relational** verbs and **private** verbs. Relational verbs indicate a relation between things and/or persons, e.g. *belong, contain, concern, cost, differ, equal, fit, include, lack, measure, own, resemble, weigh*.

Private verbs include verbs whose meaning can be known only to the experiencer, e.g. *believe, doubt, forgive, imagine, know, like, notice, recognize, regard as, remember, think, understand*, as well as the verbs of sense perception, *feel, hear, smell, taste*. Dynamic verbs can be divided into **activity** verbs, **transitional** verbs and **momentary** verbs. Activity verbs denote actions like *ask, drink, eat, help, listen to, look at, read*, etc. Transitional verbs mark the transition from one state of affairs to another; the transition may happen at a point in time, e.g. *arrive, break, die, land, leave, open*, or it may happen more or less gradually, e.g. *change, melt, widen*. Momentary verbs refer to events of very short duration, e.g. *hit, jump, kick, knock, nod, tap* [10, p.93-94]. Comrie notes that state verbs involve no change, whereas dynamic ones involve necessarily change [4, p.49]. Stepkina T. [11, p.16-17] grouped dynamic and stative verbs into verbs of continuous action/state, and another group is called verbs of non-continuous action/state, which fall into single momentary verbs, like *nod, knock, kick*, and resultative verbs which she relates to different phases of the action – *begin, start, finish, cease, break, fall, find, open, choose*. It is important to mention that the classification of verbs is not absolute because one and the same verb may belong to different groups owing to the fact that the semantic structure of the verb may include different lexical meanings of the action/state: e.g. in the sentence *I smell perfume* the verb *smell* is stative, but in *I am smelling the perfume* the verb *smell* is dynamic.

The **lexico-grammatical means** include lexical groups of verbs that may be divided into perfective and imperfective verbs, expressing the meaning of the Continuous/Common aspect. These verbs show the presence or absence of the internal limit of the action in the lexical meaning of the verb. This limit is a time-point after which a new action or state begins. Perfective or imperfective verbs form oppositions: e.g. *come/go, bring/carry, find/look for, get/have, seize/hold, stop/stay*, etc.

The **aspectual context** includes the non-verb elements of the text which influence the information about aspectual features of the action: adverbial modifiers, conjunctions and syntactical structures of the parts of the sentence. The structures of the aspectual context include:

1) single momentary actions, expressed by the verb and the direct object in the singular, in which the name of one subject indicates that the action related to it has one act: e.g. *She touched a chair and moved it a little*. The direct object *chair, it* concretize the aspectual meaning of the verbs *touch* and *move*, thus giving them a shade of perfectivity.

2) successive actions, due to which the verbs can fully change their aspectual meaning in speech: e.g. *She got up from the chair, tip-toed to the door and opened it*. The imperfective verb *tip-toe* in this example acquires the meaning of perfectivity under the influence of the preceding perfective verb *get up* and the verb following it *open*.

3) simultaneous actions: e.g. *As we continued to laugh, his surprise gave way to an air of annoyance and indignation*. In this example the perfectivity of the verb *give way* is neutralized due to the parallel usage of the combination *continue to laugh*, expressing a progressive action [11, p.13].

The means of the aspectual context are tightly correlated with the other means of aspectuality and especially the morphological category of aspect. The role of the context in the aspectual feature of the action denoted by the verb depends on the degree of information of the aspectual form of the verb. When an English verb is used in the progressive form with a clearly expressed aspectual meaning, the above-mentioned contextual means, as a rule, specify this meaning. When the verb is used in the non-progressive form, the aspectual context comes out as the main indicator of aspectual features of the action denoted by the verb.

#### References:

1. Маслов Ю.С. Вопросы сопоставительной аспектологии. - Ленинград, 1978.
2. Boland A. Aspect, tense and modality: Theory, typology, acquisition. - Utrecht, Netherlands, 2006.
3. Melenciuc D., Matei T. Conceptual categories //Analele Științifice ale USM. - Chisinau, 2003.
4. Comrie B. Aspect. - Cambridge, 1976.
5. Lyons J. Introduction into theoretical linguistics. - Cambridge, 1968.
6. Akhmanova O., Belenkaya V. The morphology of the English verb. Tense, aspect and taxis. - Moscow, MGU, 1975.
7. Blokh M. Theoretical grammar of the English language. - Moscow, 1983.
8. Palmer F.R. The English verb. - Longman, 1976.
9. Crainiceanu I. The category of aspect in English and Romanian with special reference to the progressive aspect. - Craiova, 1997.
10. Preisler B. A handbook of English grammar on functional principles. - Aarhus, 1992.
11. Степкина Т.Н. Аспектуальные средства английского языка. - Воронеж, 1980.

Prezentat la 01.07.2011