

An approach to lexical-semantic classifications of predicates by Maslov and Vendler

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Abstract. This article discusses various lexical-semantic classification of verbs. Meticulous attention is paid to the lexical-semantic classification of verbs suggested by Z. Vendler for the English language and lexical-semantic classification of verbs suggested by Yu. S. Maslov for the Russian languages. Right after the work of Ye. V. Paducheva “Leksicheseskaja aspektual'nost' i klassifikacija predikatov po Maslovu-Vendleru” [“Lexical aspectuality and classification of predicates by Maslov-Vendler”] this article continues the investigation of these classifications and puts forward own suggestion for unification of Z. Vendler’s and Yu. S. Maslov’s classification. Unified classification will provide basis for typological analysis, as in the zone of lexical aspectuality aspectual universals are revealed.

[Dyussekeneva I.M. **An approach to lexical-semantic classifications of predicates by Maslov and Vendler.** *Life Sci J* 2014;11(8s):254-256] (ISSN:1097-8135). <http://www.lifesciencesite.com>. 55

Keywords: predicates, imperfective aspect, perfective aspect, states, activities, accomplishments, achievements

Introduction

Constructing the typology of predicates is an up-to-date task of the modern linguistics. Much literature is devoted to the solution of this problem. On the basis of various languages as well as in universal-typological plane semantics and function of different words, their forms and combinations are being studied. There exist various approaches as for the classification of the types of predicates, which are mostly based on aspectual and valency characteristics.

In many works there are distinguished two main types of verb predicates, which are named by the terms “action” and “state” [1: 123]; [2: 92-93] or “process” and “state” [3: 37-38]; [4: 138] that are contrasted by such characteristic feature as dynamism/ statics of the reflected situation or by activity/non-activity of the subject or by both. [5: 74-78]

Three main types of verb predicates are suggested in the Jespersen’s classification [6: 95], which relates them with notions of action /*eat, breath, kill*/, process /*grow, lose, die*/ and state /*sleep, wait, live*/. As examples show these notions differentiate in two ways: actions and processes in contrast to states suppose dynamism, change; actions in contrast to processes suppose manifestation of the subject’s will.

S. Dick [7], R. Van Valin, W. Folley [8] differentiate four main types of predicates which reflect two main situation parameters. The authors consider these parameters as dynamism / non-dynamism and controllability / noncontrollability.

Modern linguists suggest their classifications. For example, Mustajoki speaks of three types of predicates drawing out another basis of classification, namely temporality. “On the basis of

how P during time of event (t_E) refers to P during the time t_{E-1} there distinguished three main types of aspectuality. If at P no change has taken place, this is state..., if a gradual change has taken place, this is process, and if substantial change has taken place at P or during t_{E-1} there was no P, this is a turning-point” [9: 317]. H. Włodarczyk and A. Włodarczyk [10] propose to describe semantic feature structures of aspect category as a pair of feature bundles: analysis of a situation (viewed as a whole or as one of its moments or stages) and control of the situation (viewed as a set of operations such as iteration, flow and intensity modifications, composition).

Two classical lexical-semantic classifications of verbs

In the focus of this article are two classifications suggested by Zeno Vendler for the English language and Yuriy S. Maslov for the Russian language.

Zeno Vendler’s four-fold distinction of verb-types, which appeared nearly fifty years ago, is widespread and relevant nowadays. Z. Vendler singled out several criteria of classification. First, predicates that have and do not have inner boundaries in their development (activities/accomplishments), for example, run/run a mile. Second, predicates differentiate in the way they occupy a stretch or a point on the time axis. On this basis the predicates of the achievement class are opposed to all other groups. To this group belong, for example, verbs like *see, reach*. Third, there given purely formal distinction between predicates of the first two groups: the first group has Continuous form, the second does not. Fourthly, the predicates of the fourth group are the state predicates, to which Z. Vendler refer except verbs of *love, hate, know* types verbs such as *rule,*

run (in general) [11]. Essential feature of activities is their homogeneity. Achievements capture either the inception or the climax of an act. Accomplishments have duration intrinsically. States may endure or persist over stretches of time and they “cannot be qualified as actions at all” [11: 106]. This classification was later elaborated in the works of such linguists as D. Dowty [12] and B. Comrie [13].

As E. V. Paducheva points out, that “in Russian aspectology there have been no attempts to compare two “great” lexical-semantic verb classifications: Z. Vendler’s classification and Yu. S. Maslov’s classification [14: 3]. The linguist imposes Maslov’s classification, that is intended for the Russian language and being aspectually oriented, on the Vendler’s classification, which were developed beyond direct link with aspectual problems of the Slavic languages. This allows, as E.V. Paducheva states, raising the importance of each of them.

Table 1. Ye. V. Paducheva’s classification of verbs

Z. Vendler’s classes	Division of Z. Vendler’s classes according to agentive characteristic.	
1. states	1. stative, including: – properties and correlations; – steady states; – temporal states.	Non-agentive
2. activities	2.1. activities, i.e. atelic actions, including: – generic states	Agentive
	2.2. non-agentive atelic processes	Non-agentive
3. accomplishments	3.1. actions (i.e. telic actions, including: – with accumulation of effect; – conatives	Agentive
	3.2. non-agentive telic processes, including: – effect.	Non-agentive
4. achievements	4.1. instantaneous actions (focusing on the result)	Agentive
	4.2. accidents (non-agentive instantaneous changes of state)	Non-agentive

Yu. S. Maslov reveals inner links between grammatical semantics of the Russian aspect with lexical semantics of the verb [15]. Verbs were divided into three types according to formal characteristics: unpaired verbs of imperfective aspect, unpaired verbs of perfective aspect, verbs that constitute aspectual pairs. Yu. S. Maslov showed that a verb refers to one of these types by its lexical semantics. Unpaired verbs of imperfective aspect has in its semantics impossibility of momentalisation and inner unboundedness [16: 56]. Semantics of unpaired verbs of perfective aspect on the contrary supposes impossibility of processualisation. [16: 58]. Yu. S. Maslov divides verbs that constitute aspectual pairs into three groups. The first group of verbs has the opposition “attempt” – “success” or “tendency” – “realization” in its semantics. In the third group verbs of imperfective aspect show “impossibility of concrete processual usage”. The second group doesn’t possess such features, thus forming a separate group.

Ye.V. Paducheva unites Yu. S. Maslov’s classification and Z. Vendler’s classification adding agentive characteristic. [14: 6]

A new approach to the unification of the Z. Vendler’s classification and Yu. S. Maslov’s classification

In this article I try to bring into correlation Z. Vendler’s classes of verbs with Yu. S. Maslov’s classes of verbs. The classification presents more precise correlation of verb classes suggested by aforementioned linguists. On the basis of this classification I hold the investigation into types of verbs according to their aspectual characteristics in the Russian and English languages.

With Z. Vendler’s class of states correlate in the Yu. S. Maslov’s group of unpaired verbs of imperfective aspect such subgroups as:

a) “verbs that denote the fact of existence and the most common properties and quality of a subject, its quantitative and qualitative definitions in relation with other subjects: to be, to exist and other” [16: 54];

b) “verbs denoting feelings and emotional states, which cannot be thought as short-termed: love, hate and other” [16: 55].

Analyzed material allows claiming that these verbs express unchangeability of the situation, are not thought as instantaneous, do not lead to a new state.

With Z. Vendler’s class of activities correlate such unpaired verbs of imperfective aspect as:

a) verbs denoting membership of a person to a definite social group, his occupation, his position and other” [16: 55];

b) “verbs denoting a state even temporal one, but that doesn’t presume even in distant perspective any qualitative changes or inevitable given by nature of this process subsequent transition to a new state [16: 55];

c) verbs denoting occupation with activity without pointing out even in perspective the moment of finishing this action as its aim [16: 55];

d) verbs of “indefinite motion” [16: 55];

e) verbs of “definite motion” [16: 55];

f) “verbs of unsuccessful attempt or unsuccessful striving” [16: 56].

According to analyzed material, to this group refers unpaired verbs of perfective aspect that have the meaning of duration coverage.

To the activity class also refer pairs of correlated verbs of perfective and imperfective aspect of the second group: “verbs of “immediate, continuous effect”, verbs of emotional experience and mental states, which may be thought as long or

short-termed” [16: 62]. These verbs denote long-termed actions not connected with definite temporal stretch.

With Z. Vendler’s class of accomplishments collate pairs of correlative pairs of perfective and imperfective aspects of Yu. S. Maslov’s first group (meaning “attempt – success”). These verbs denote actions that take definite time period.

With achievement class correlate:

a) unpaired verbs of perfective aspect namely:

- “verbs of instantaneous, unpredictable actions, often unexpected for the speaker or for group of people who are spoken about (many of these verbs have emotional and stylistic tinge)” [16: 54];

- “finitive verbs and also verbs denoting different shades of fullness, exhaustion of an action (main point is idea of exhaustion, working off, not the process)” [16: 57];

- many inchoative verbs [16: 58];

b) pairs of correlative verbs of perfective and imperfective aspects (verb of perfective aspect denotes the fact of spasmodic, “punctual” transition to a new quality, and indication on “crucial point” in fact exhausts the semantics of correlative form) [16: 63].

Conclusion

Performed analysis allows affirming, that in spite of different morphology of the Russian and English languages, difference in approaches to the verbs classification by aspectual features, ways of expression of verb subgroups are identical. Presented classification provides the basis for typological investigation for in the sphere of lexical aspectuality one may find universals and on this basis make a comparative study of different languages.

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5/20/2014