

The Noun and Its Categories

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The Verb and Its Categories

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- The Verb
- A large class of words which indicate events and states of affairs. Verbs are divided into two main classes: the class of main verbs, which has a very large membership (for example, appear, drop, end, understand) and the class of auxiliary verbs, which has a small membership of important verbs (be, have, do, will, can, may, shall, would, could, might, should and must). Of the auxiliary verbs, *be*, *have* and *do* are known as primary verbs – they can also act as main verbs. The remaining auxiliary verbs are known as *modal (auxiliaries)*.

- Most verbs are *regular verbs* and have four forms, for example help, helps, helped, helping. *Irregular verbs* (of which there are over 200) include many common verbs and all auxiliary verbs.

The Verb

Semantic Features of the Verb

- The verb is a part of speech that denotes a process in the wide meaning of the word. The processual meaning is embedded in all the verbs.

We can distinguish the following types of process:

- 1) processes of doing, or material processes, e.g. Mary is writing a letter;
- 2) processes of happening, e.g. The sun is rising;
- 3) verbal, e.g. She told me the truth;
- 4) mental, e.g. The student did not know the answer; The woman did not see the lorry driving at full speed; She did not feel the pain;

- 5) relational, e.g. John is clever; Mary is at home; John has a new car;
- 6) existential, e.g. There is a dog under the table.

Semantically, the said process-types are expressed by two types of verb:

1) bounded and 2) unbounded.

Unbounded verbs are verbs that have no endpoint built in. Such verbs denote processes that go on without reaching a limit, i.e., there is nothing in them that can stop them; they can only be stopped from the outside:

- The earth turns round the sun.

The verb *turns*, however, can be used as bounded. Consider:

- The wheel is turning. It will finish turning in half an hour.

As can be seen, *turning* in this sentence have an end-point programmed.

- When processes function as bounded, they can be paraphrased using the verb finish: John lived to be old, i.e. John finished living when he reached an advanced age, i.e. when his 'programmed' life span exhausted itself.

When processes are unbounded, they can be paraphrased using the verb stop:

- John loves Mary. vs. John stopped loving Mary.

Unbounded processes can only be interrupted, but not finished.

The word *finish* implies a programmed end-point and, consequently, cannot be used with an unbounded process.

However, theoretically and practically traditional unbounded verbs can all be used as bounded: the actual meaning of such verbs is determined by the co-text. Consider:

- A. Is the baby still sleeping? (i.e. Hasn't the baby had enough sleep?)
- B. Yes. She generally sleeps (for) two hours during the day.

- The verb “to boil”, for instance, is bounded irrespective of the co-text in which it may occur. Verbs like boil can be called bounded verbs proper. Unlike unbounded verbs, bounded verbs proper do not have to be ‘programmed’ with respect to an end-point; an end-point is inherent in their semantics.

- Unbounded verbs can be of two types: stative and dynamic.
- Stative unbounded verbs express a static situation, i.e. a situation in which the entity is at rest while dynamic verbs express a situation in which the entity is engaged in some or other activity.

To stative verbs belong:

- 1) cognitive verbs (e.g. know, think, i.e. be of an opinion; understand, believe, remember);
 - 2) perceptive verbs (e.g. smell, taste, feel);
 - 3) affective verbs (e.g. like, love, hate);
 - 4) relational verbs (e.g. be, have, lack).
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- **Semantically**, they generally present the result of a bounded process.

Consider:

- John has learned the rule. John knows the rule.
- Mary has grasped the meaning of the word. Mary understands the word.
- The dog has perceived the smell of a cat. The dog smells a cat.

Dynamic unbounded verbs express a dynamic situation, i.e. a situation in which the entity is engaged in some activity. To dynamic unbounded verbs belong: run, walk, swim, skate, play, sleep, stand (i.e. to keep an upright position), live, stay, etc.

Consider:

- Peter is running.
- The girl is walking.
- The children are swimming in the river.

As already mentioned, unbounded processes have no end-point built in: they either denote the end of a bounded process (statives) or the activity itself (dynamic verbs).

Bounded verbs constitute a much larger class. We can distinguish two subclasses of the verbs:

- 1) punctual (e.g. shoot, promise, propose, fire, name);
- 2) non-punctual (e.g. boil, read, write, paint, peel, slice, kill).

Punctual - denoting or relating to an action that takes place at a particular point in time.

Punctual verbs have very short duration: the time occupied to express the process is longer than the time occupied to perform it. Such processes are indivisible, i.e. we cannot say

- *The soldier started shooting an arrow.
- *The soldier is shooting an arrow.
- *The soldier finished shooting an arrow.

Only non-punctuals can be thus divided:

- He started writing; he is writing; he finished writing.

However, not all such verbs have all the phases realized. Take, for instance, the verb *arrive* which denotes only the final phase while the inceptive and the middle phases are realized through the verb *go*: he started going; he is going; he is arriving. The end-point of the process of going is the time of arriving. Verbs that denote only the inceptive or the final phase are called achievements; and verbs that have all the three phases are called accomplishments (e.g. write, read, do, etc.)

- inceptive expressing the beginning of an action.

- The question arises: how important are the said semantic features of the verb to the user of the language?

The feature $[\pm \text{Boundness}]$ is directly related to aspect.

One can find a great divergence of opinions on the problem of the English aspect.

OXFORD DICTIONARY

Aspect

A category or form which expresses the way in which time is denoted by a verb.

There are three aspects in English, the progressive or continuous aspect (expressing duration, typically using the auxiliary verb be with a form in -ing, as in I was reading a book), the perfect or perfective (expressing completed action, typically using the auxiliary verb have with a past participle, as in I have read the book), and unmarked aspect (as in he reads books).

CAMBRIDGE DICTIONARY

Aspect

- The form of a verb that shows how the meaning of that verb is considered in relation to time, typically expressing if an action is complete, repeated, or continuous

Longman Grammar of Spoken and Written English.

- Structurally two aspects in English are distinguished as follows: perfect aspect and progressive aspect

- Aspect (G. LEECH)
- A grammatical category of the verb, indicating the temporal point of view from which an event, or state of affairs, is perceived as taking place. In English, two contrasts of aspect are usually recognized. (a) The progressive aspect, for example is working, indicates that the event/state is in progress – that is, is seen from a continuing, ongoing point of view. (b) The perfect (sometimes called perfective) aspect, for example has worked, indicates that the event/state is seen from a completed, retrospective point of view. Both aspect constructions may be combined, as in has been working (called perfect progressive). There are therefore these four aspectual possibilities in English:

- non-progressive progressive
- non-perfect works is working
- perfect has worked has been working
- The perfect construction is sometimes regarded not as an aspect, but as a tense form.

The feature [\pm Boundness] is directly related to aspect.

Consider:

- John wrote/ will write two letters.
- The boy broke/will break the window.

The verb *write* is bounded. Its peculiarity is that the past and future forms of it can be perfective and imperfective in meaning

When used as an imperfective verb, *write* denotes the middle, or the developmental, phase:

- e.g. John wrote letters yesterday;

when used as a perfective verb, it denotes the final phase (e.g. John wrote two letters).

- However, not all bounded verbs can be used so,
- e.g. The boy broke/will break the window,

where *broke*, *will break* are perfective only.

- The verbs of the first type are dual aspect verbs and verbs of the second type are single aspect verbs.
- To dual aspect verbs belong: write, read, paint, ring, lead, climb, build, teach, show, spend, etc.;
- To single aspect verbs belong: break, put, leave, die, take, make, produce, sell, bend, etc.

Unbounded verbs are imperfective in meaning,

- e.g. The baby slept well (badly) or We lived very simply.

However, in an appropriate environment, unbounded verbs can turn into bounded: The girl slept through everything or He lived out the remaining years of his life in London.

- Unbounded verbs are generally perfectivized by using an adverbial particle: up, down, off, through, out, over, across, away, etc. These elements can also be used with bounded verbs of dual aspect, e.g. eat, write.
- Consider: She ate up the cream in silence or I wrote down what the boy said.

An understanding of the aspective features of the verb helps both the speaker and the translator. The speaker, using unbounded verbs, has to differentiate between statives and non-statives: statives are not generally used in the progressive aspect, while non-statives are. Cf.

- *Max is knowing the answer. vs. Max is running in the yard.

Unbounded verbs as well as dual aspect bounded verbs may be used in both progressive and non-progressive perfect forms without a marked difference in meaning:

- John has been living in London for ten years.
vs. John has lived in London for ten years.
- Peter has been smoking for ten years.
- Peter has smoked for ten years.

However, if a dual aspect verb finds itself in a different co-text, its progressive perfect form will have a non-perfective meaning while its non-progressive form will have a perfective meaning:

- John has been painting the garage door. vs. John has painted the garage door.

If the bounded verb is perfective only (i.e. if it is a single-aspect verb), the non-progressive form is invariably perfective in meaning and the progressive is imperfective:

- Max broke the door.
- Max was breaking the door when I came home.

If the bounded verb is punctual, the meaning is perfective,

- e.g. He shot an arrow.

If the verb is used in the progressive, the form denotes a repetition of such acts,

- e.g. He was shooting arrows.