Verb classes in english and romanian

Clasele de verbe în limba engleză şi în limba română

Mihaela LAZOVIĆ
Doctoral student at the Faculty of Philosophy
University of Novi Sad, Serbia
laz_13@yahoo.com

Abstract

Verbs can be classified according to different criteria. This paper aims to distinguish and define verb classes in English and Romanian. The analysis starts with one of the most influential semantic classifications of verbs into four types: activities, states, accomplishments and achievements. This classification is based on English verbs, but it can also represent a framework for distinguishing different verb classes in other languages, including Romanian. This paper also discusses the general semantic features according to which verbs can be classified into classes. One of the aims of this scientific research is to verify whether the mentioned verb classes can be identified in Romanian language as well.

Rezumat

Verbele pot fi clasificate în funcţie de criterii diverse. Această lucrare vizează diferenţierea şi definirea claselor de verbe din limbile engleză şi română. Analiza începe cu una din cele mai influente clasificări semantice ale verbelor în patru tipuri: activităţi, stări, realizări şi îndepliniri. Această clasificare se bazează pe verbele engleze, dar poate reprezenta şi un cadru pentru diferenţierea claselor de verbe în alte limbi, inclusiv româna. Acest articol discută, de asemenea, trăsăturile semantice generale în funcţie de care verbele pot fi clasificate. Unul din scopurile acestei cercetări ştiinţifice este a verifica dacă clasele de verbe menţionate pot fi identificate şi în limba română.

Key words: *activities, states, accomplishments, achievements*
Cuvinte cheie: *activităţi, stări, împliniri, înfăptuiri*

Introduction

Verbs can be classified according to different criteria, both syntactic and semantic. One of the most influential semantic classifications is Z. Vendler's [1] classification of verbs into four types: activities, states, accomplishments and achievements. This classification is based on English verbs, but it can also represent a framework for the division of verbs in other languages, including Romanian. It is based on several general semantic features and syntactic behaviour of verbs. This paper discusses the main semantic features according to which verbs can be classified into verb classes. The aim of this research is to verify whether the mentioned verb classes can be identified in Romanian language, as well as whether Romanian verbs have the general semantic features mentioned in relevant literature.

Therefore, one of the aims of this analysis is to redefine and analyze verb classes in English and Romanian by discussing specific features in the semantic structure of verbs illustrating them with relevant examples.

The Classification of Verbs

One of the most prominent semantic classifications of verbs in the relevant linguistic literature is proposed by Z. Vendler. He classifies verbs into activities, states, achievements and

accomplishments. This classification is based on the meaning of verbs and their syntactic characteristics. Vendler uses linguistic tests to determine whether the verb situation denotes a process or development or not, as well as whether the situation consists of segments which are of equal quality or perhaps there is a segment which denotes an endpoint or completion, i.e. a goal to be reached.

Furthermore, this paper argues that Vendler's verb types can be defined according to distinctive features which are incorporated in the meanings of verbs. Those features are: (+/- stativity), (+/- duration), (+/- goal), i.e. (+/- telicity).

The distinctive feature (+ stativity) denotes a situation with no process or development, thus a situation which has certain duration. However, if a situation consists of segments and has development it will have the feature (- stativity). Thus, only states have the feature (+ stativity), while, activities, achievements and accomplishments have the feature (- stativity). A dynamic situation implies a process, a conscious agent and a constant input of energy. Stative situations, on the other hand, do not imply development and input of energy, but denote a quality lasting in time [2].

Contrary to English grammars, in Romanian grammars there is no stative/dynamic distinction of verbs. What is more, only the Grammar of Romanian Language published by the Romanian Academy of Science [3] mentions states, but not stativity as a distinctive verbal feature of Romanian verbs. Romanian stative verbs do not imply any change and conscious agent.

The distinctive feature (+ duration) denotes a situation which lasts in time, like activities, states and accomplishments. Punctual or momentary situations have the feature (- duration), such situations are called achievements. However, the duration of the situation can be relative, because there are activities and states which last a very short period of time.

Romanian contemporary grammars [4] also mention duration and state that it is the most important aspectual feature which differentiates between momentary (*verbe momentane*) and durative verbs (*vrebe durative*).

The distinctive feature (+ goal) or (+ telicity) denotes a situation which has a goal or a natural end point after which the situation cannot continue (it can only be repeated). Such situations are called telic. On the other hand, situations which do not tend towards a goal and do not have an end point are called atelic and they have the feature (- goal). However, there are situations which are directed towards a goal, but they do not reach it. One of the major problems in contemporary linguistic is how to define them. Namely, some linguists argue that modification of the distinctive feature (+ goal) into (- goal) took place consequently altering the type of verb situation from accomplishment to activity. Others argue against the modification of distinctive feature stating the goal is simply not reached.

Traditional Romanian linguistic literature does not mention telicity as a verbal characteristic. Contemporary Romanian grammars [5] analyze the telicity in relation to verbs of movement. Furthermore, the telic/atelic distinction is mentioned, but not thoroughly defined in the Encyclopedia of Romanian language [6]. Here, telicity is concerned with the way the action is realized, that is with Aktionsart.

Rothstein [7] also writes about verb classes and distinctive features of verbs arguing that there are only two distinctive features according to which verbs can be divided into the four verb classes proposed by Vendler. Those distinctive features are (+/- stages) and (+/- telicity). The two properties determine whether a situation has a natural stopping point (whether it is telic) and whether it can be analyzed as progressing or developing (whether it is dynamic, or has stages). The telic point is also called the culmination or terminal point.

The distinctive feature (+/- stages) determines whether the situation can be divided into smaller segments which create the whole situation or not. States and achievements cannot be divided into segments, while activities and accomplishments can. Namely, achievements are too short and do not extend over time. They are instantaneous situations, therefore stages cannot be distinguished. States, on the other hand, are long, but their non-dynamic nature proves that every

part of a state is exactly the same as every other part and therefore no stages can be differentiated [8].

Romanian grammars also mention this distinctive feature. The semantic feature (+/- stages) distinguishes inchoative, continuative and terminative situations (*incoativ / continuativ/ terminativ*) depending on whether the situation can be divided into stages or not. In Romanian linguistic literature, stages are understood as the initial, middle or final part of a situation. Consequently, inchoative verbs represent the beginning of the situation, continuative deal with the duration of the situation, while terminative depict the final stage of a situation. Such verbs are: *începe (start)*, *continuă (continue), termină (finish)*.

According to the mentioned general semantic characteristics both English and Romanian verbs can be classified into four classes: activities, states, accomplishments and achievements.

	Stativity (stativitate)	Duration (durată)	Telicity (scop)	Stages (faze)
Activities (Activităţi)	-	+	-	+
States (Stări)	+	+	-	-
Achievements (Împliniri)	-	-	+	-
Accomplishments (Înfăptuiri)	-	+	+	+

Activities (Activităţi)

Activities imply process and development, therefore can last in time. They have homogenous segments which mean that any part of the process is of the same nature as the whole, in the sense that there is no terminal point or goal to be reached. Their distinctive features are: (- stativity, + duration, - goal, + stages). However, activities may consist of different stages which create the whole situation denoted by the activity verb. For example, the activity of *walking* (*a se plimba*) consists of different stages when the agent lifts one foot, makes a step, lowers it down and does the same with the other foot, then the agent repeats the mentioned stages in order to create the situation of walking.

Activities are verbs such as: *run* (*a alerga*), *swim* (*a înota*), *walk* (*a se plimba*)...

For example:

(1) a.   He ran for 5 minutes.
  b. A alergat 5 minute.

Vendler's tests which are used for activities are valid in both English and Romanian:

(2) a.   How long / how long did one V?
  b.   Cât timp cineva a V?

(3) a.   How long did he run?
  b. Cât timp a alergat?

This test can be applied to activities because it indicates duration without reaching a goal.

(4) a.   For X time.
  b. X timp.

(5) a.   He walked for 15 minutes.
  b. Sa plimbat 15 minute.

The following test indicates that the situation lasts in time without reaching a goal:

(6) a.   If one stops Ving, one did V.
  b. Dacă cineva încetează să V, el a V.

(7) a.   If he stops running, he did run.

b. Dacă încetează să alerge, el a alergat.

On the other hand, activity verbs are not grammatical with the following test since it requires a terminal point:

(8) a.   How long did it take to V?
b.   Cât timp a trebuit să V?
*(9) a.   *How long did it take to run?*
*b. *Cât timp a trebuit să alerge?*

The last test proves that all segments of the activity are of equal quality, thus the activity can be interrupted at any point without changing the nature of that situation.

Romanian linguistic literature [9] also mentions activity verbs (*verbe de acţiune*). For example: *a alerga* (*run*)*, a înota* (*swim*)*, a învăţa* (*study*)*, a mânca* (*eat*), *a reapara* (*fix*)*, strânge* (*collect*), *a tirmite* (*send*) etc. Thus Romanian activities require a conscious agent and can imply a change which must not necessarily be a change of state. Romanian activity verbs are in fact Vendler's activities, achievements and accomplishments.

States (**Stări**)

States last in time, they cannot be divided into segments, they do not denote a process and development, and therefore do not have a goal. States simply indicate that a characteristic or a situation exists. They are stative and homogeneous, which means that all parts of a state are of equal quality. Their distinctive features are: (+ stativity, + duration, - goal, - stages).

States are verbs such as: *know* (*a şti*), *believe* (*a crede*), *love* (*a iubi*)...

For example:

(10) a. She loves him.
b. Ea îl iubeşte.

Syntactic tests for states are as follows:

(11) a. How long did one V?
b. Cât timp cineva a V?
(12) a. How long did she love him?
b. Cât timp la iubit?

This test indicates duration.

(13) a. For X time.
b.   X timp.
(14) a. She loved him for 3 years.
b. La iubit 3 ani.

The next test can be applied to states because they do no have segments, thus the situation can be interrupted at any time and any segment before the interruption can indicate the quality of the whole situation.

(15) a. If one stops Ving, one did V.
b.   Dacă cineva încetează să V, el a V.
(16) a. If she stops loving him, she did love him.
b. Dacă încetează să-l iubaescă, ea la iubit.

States have only one stage, since they do not imply any change. The beginning and the end of a stage are dynamic and are not part of the state itself. States are stative in the sense that there is no requirement of energy input. In other words, unless something happens to change that state, then the state will continue: *knowing* (*a şti*). With a dynamic situation, i.e. activity, on the other hand, the situation will only continue if it is continually subject to a new input of energy: *running* (*a alerga*). Namely, if John stops putting effort into running, he will come to a stop. To remain in a state requires no effort, whereas to remain in a dynamic situation requires effort [10]. However, states such as *be sad* (*a fi trist*) require effort or input of energy to last [11]. That is, the state of being sad requires the reason for being sad to continue and still exist.

States (*verbe de stare*) are also mentioned in Romanian relevant literature: *a iubi* (*love*)*, a se mira* (*to be amazed*)*, a durea* (*ache*)*,* etc. Romanian verbs of state do not imply a change or a conscious agent [12].

Achievements (Împliniri)

Achievements are punctual, which means that the whole situation happens in one moment. Their distinctive features are: (- stativity, - duration, + goal, - stages).

Achievements are verbs and phrases such as: *find* (*a afla*), *lose* (*a pierde*), *reach the summit* (*a se urca pe vârful muntelui*), *win a race* (*a învinge în cursă / alergare*)...

Achievements do not have an internal structure since they represent momentary changes of state which can be preceded by a preparatory activity which is not a part of the meaning of the achievement. For example:

(17) a. He reached the summit.
    b. Sa urcat pe vârful muntelui.

Achievement implies the moment of reaching the summit, while the preparatory activity entails John's climbing towards the summit.

The distinctive feature (- stages) indicates that achievements rarely occur in the progressive since it is contradictory to talk about momentary situations which last in time. However, there are examples which prove otherwise:

(18) a. The plane is landing.
     b. Fred and Susan are finally leaving.

Tests which are used to indicate achievements are:

(19) a. How long did it take to V?
    b. Cât timp a trebuit să V?
(20) a. How long did it take to reach the summit?
    b. Cât timp a trebuit să se urce pe vârful muntelui?
(21) a. In X time.
    b. În X timp.
(22) a. He reached the top in 2 hours.
    b. Sa urcat pe vârful muntelui în 2 ore.

Both syntactic tests indicate the time before reaching the summit since the subject obviously reached the summit in one moment.

Other syntactic tests used for achievements are:

(23) a. As soon as one Vs, one has Ved.
    b. În momentul când cineva a V, el a realizat V.
(24) a. As soon as he reached the summit, he has reached it.
    b. În momentul când sa urcat pe vârful muntelui , el sa urcat.
(25) a. At what time did one V?
    b. La ce oră a V?
(26) a. At what time did he reach the summit?
    b. La ce oră sa urcat pe vârful muntelui?
(27) a. He reached the summit at 2 o'clock.
    b. Sa urcat pe vârful muntelui la 2 ciasuri.

Accomplishments (Înfăptuiri)

Accomplishments are telic durative situations. They are not homogenous in nature, because they involve a terminal point after which the situation naturally ends and cannot continue. Their distinctive features are: (- stativity, + duration, + goal, + segments).

Accomplishments are verbs and phrases such as: *paint a picture* (*a picta o pictură*), *run a mile* (*a fugi o milă*), *draw a circle* (*a desena un cerc*)...

Some linguists consider accomplishments to be activities heading towards a goal. For example:

(28) a. Mary built a house.
    b. Mary a clădit o casă.

The accomplishment in (28) consists of an activity event of *building the house* and of the reached goal *the built house*. Accomplishments must have a terminal point in order to indicate the quality of the whole situation.

Tests for accomplishments are:

(29) a. How long did it take to V?
    b. Cât timp a trebuit să V?

(30) a. How long did it take to make a chair?
    b. Cât timp a trebuit să construiască un sacaun?

(31) a. In X time.
    b. În X timp.

(32) a. He made a chair in ten hours.
    b. A construit un scaun în zece ore.

(33) a. If one stops Ving, one did not V.
    b. Dacă cineva încetează să V, el nu a V.

(34) a. If he stops making a chair, he did not make it.
    b. Dacă încetează să construiască un scaun, ea nu la construit.

Tests in (29 and 30) indicate duration of the situation expressed by the accomplishment verb, whereas the tests in (31 and 32) indicate the attainment of a goal. Tests in (33 and 34) prove that accomplishments consist of different segments or stages, which means that they must include a final segment which makes the situation denoted by an accomplishment verb qualitatively different from the other segments.

Apart form activities and states, contemporary Romanian grammar [13] mentions events (*verbe de eveniment*). For example: *a se usca* (*dry*), *a creşte* (*grow*), *a îmbătrâni* (*grow old*), etc. Events do not require a conscious agent, but imply a change of state:

(35) a. Râul a secat.
    b. The river dried.

Romanian events are similar to English achievements and accomplishments with the exception that English achievements and accomplishments can imply a conscious agent.

Romanian linguists [14] also mention events such as *a cădea* (*fall*) which are atelic and do not imply a conscious agent. Such events denote a change of position. Some English linguists [15] consider such verbs to be momentary activities, while others [16] define them as achievements.

Conclusion

This paper offers a more general semantic classification of English and Romanian verbs. It aims to analyze and associate the theoretical assumptions presented in the relevant linguistic literature in a new and different way.

Verb classes are analyzed with respect to Vendler's semantic classification of verbs and verb phrases into activities, states, achievements and accomplishments. The classification is based on three general semantic features: stativity, duration, telicity, as well as internal temporal structure of a situation which indicates the possibility of segmentation of the situation into smaller elements or stages. This research has shown that the four mentioned verb classes can be identified in Romanian language as well and that Romanian verbs can be analyzed with respect to the general semantic features mentioned in the relevant linguistic literature.

This study of English and Romanian verb classes gives a better insight into the nature of the types of verb situation in both languages as well as an opportunity to establish parametric and

systematic similarities and differences, giving a specific contribution to aspectology and verbal semantics in general.

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