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**«The System of English Verbs»**

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**1. Theoretical background**

In contemporary semantics a broad distinction is drawn between *denotation (referential) approach* and *language-intrinsic* (or *language-immanent*) *approach*. This distinction follows from the opposition of two aspects of meaning: *denotation* and *sense.* As a rule the analysis of denotation results in the description of specific properties of extralinguistic objects denoted by a word (e.g. B. Pottier’s analysis of the field *siege (chaise, fauteuil, tabouret, canape, pouf – chair, armchair, stool, sofa, pouf)* is known to result in the distinction of such concrete and unique denotational components as *S1 – with back, S2 – with legs, S3 – for a single person, S4 – for sitting, S5 – with arms, S6 – made from hard material*).

The procedure proposed in the study is based on the principles of *language-immanent approach* in semantics (cf. E.N. Bendix, E. Coseriu, H. Geckeler, J. Lyons, J. Apresjan, A. Ufimtseva). It is assumed that it is definition of *sense* in terms of a limited number of semes that can provide the description of the semantic system of language.

*Sense* (being opposed to *denotation*) is considered as *linguistic (language-immanent)* *meaning* expressing the most essential features of an object denoted by a word.

Sense components, or *SEMES* (*semantic markers* in Katzian semantics; *classemes* in B. Pottier’s and A. Greimas’s approach) – such as abstract – concrete, definite – indefinite, etc. – reveal structural relations within semantic system. They are few in number and recur throughout the entire vocabulary. Semes are represented as binary / tertiary oppositions. For example, the seme definite – indefinite has binary structure: definite is the positive value (variant) of the seme; indefinite is the negative value (variant).

At present there is no elaborate integral method of the analysis of sense structure of lexemes, and traditionally semantic analysis is carried out only on the paradigmatic level of the lexicon. In this study an attempt was made to propose the technique of the analysis of sense structure which involves the description of both syntagmatic relations (in particular, interrelations of semes and semantic concord of lexemes in the text) and paradigmatic relations in the lexicon (the structure of semantic fields).

Though the technique proposed in this study cannot claim to provide an integrated description of the semantic structure of natural language, it proved to be effective in the analysis of the semantic fields of different language systems. The results of the research can be relevant to structural semantics (description of semantic relations, elaboration of formal representations (frames, thesauri)), they may be applied in lexicography, computational linguistics and language teaching.

**The problem of the theme** is that the system of the English verb is rightly considered to be the most complex grammatical structure of the language. The most troublesome problems are, indeed, concentrated in the area of the finite verb, and include, in particular, questions tense, aspect and modal auxiliary usage. This seems to be **an aim of our work** which has always gained the greatest interest in language learning. We can say with little fear of exaggeration that learning a language is to a very large degree learning how to operate the verbal forms of that language.

In Modern English, as well as in many other languages, verbal forms imply not only subtle shades of time distinction but serve for other purposes, too; they are also often marked for person and number, for mood, voice and aspect.

The general categorial meaning of the verb is process presented dynamically, i.e. developing in time. This general processual meaning is embedded in the semantics of all the verbs, including those that denote states, forms of existence, types of attitude, evaluations, etc., rather than actions. Edgar's room led out of the wall without a door. She had herself a liking for richness and excess. It was all over the morning papers. That's what I'm afraid of. I do love you, really I do. And this holds true not only about the finite verb, but also about the non-finite verb. The processual semantic character of the verbal lexeme even in the non-finite form is proved by the fact that in all its forms it is modified by the adverb and, with the transitive verb, it takes a direct object. Mr. Brown received the visitor instantly, which was unusual. – Mr. Brown's receiving the visitor instantly was unusual. – It was unusual for Mr. Brown to receive the visitor instantly. But: An instant reception of the visitor was unusual for Mr. Brown[[1]](#footnote-1).

The processual categorial meaning of the notional verb determines its characteristic combination with a noun expressing both the doer of the action (its subject) and, in cases of the objective verb, the recipient of the action (its object); it also determines its combination with an adverb as the modifier of the action.

From the point of view of their outward structure, verbs are characterised by specific forms of word-building, as well as by the formal features expressing the corresponding grammatical categories.

The verb stems may be simple, sound-replacive, stress-replacive, expanded, composite, and phrasal.

The original simple verb stems are not numerous, such verbs as go, take, read, etc. But conversion (zero-suffixation) as means of derivation, especially conversion of the «noun – verb» type, greatly enlarges the simple stem set of verbs, since it is one of the most productive ways of forming verb lexemes in modern English, a cloud – to cloud, a house – to house; a man – to man; a park – to park, etc.

# 2. The main part

# 2.1 Categories of verb morphology

What properties of the events described in the following sentences do the morphemes in bold tell us about?

Jimmy will graduate in June.

Jimmy would graduate if he studied.

Jimmy is sleeping.

In the last section we saw how grammatical morphology can specify one or another abstract category for the things that nouns refer to. In this section, we'll look at how grammatical morphology can do the same for verbs, focusing on one particular kind of verb morphology, morphemes that indicate general properties of the participants in the event or state that the verb designates.

Just as things divide naturally into a small number of categories on the basis of dimensions such as number, countability, and shape, events and states also divide naturally into a small number of categories on the basis of several basic dimensions.

# 2.1.1 Time

The Grammies realized early on that when an event occurred or a state was true often mattered. An utterance like Clark eat berries wasn't much use if the hearer didn't know whether Clark had already eaten the berries, was eating them at that moment, or was going to eat them at some later time. The Grammies developed two kinds of expressions to help them talk about the time of an event or state, absolute and relative expressions. This is a distinction we've seen before, in the context of adjective meaning.

Absolute time expressions label specific points in time, such as January 20, 1203, or points within a repeating unit of time, such as 3:00 pm (which labels a time within the day) and Tuesday (which labels a day within the week). The second type of expression may be used for repeating events or states (I get up at 7:00) or for a single event or state, in which case the Hearer has to be able to figure out which unit of time the Speaker has in mind. That is, I got up at 7:00 is only meaningful if we know which day the Speaker is talking about.

Expressions like yesterday and ago express times relative to the utterance time.

Relative time expressions label points in time relative some other reference point. The most obvious reference point is the utterance time, which is one of the roles in the utterance context and is directly accessible to the Hearer. Thus referring to time in this way is an example of a deictic use of language. For an event or state that is going on at the time of speaking, we have a word like now. For a past or future event or state, we can mention the length of time that has elapsed or will elapse between the time it occurred or will occur and the utterance time (an hour ago, in an hour), or we can simply say that it happened before the utterance time or will happen after the utterance time (already, in the future). There are other possible reference points for relative time reference. We can say things like before that time and after the wedding.

Just as number ended up grammatical in languages such as English, we might expect reference to the time of events and states to end up grammatical too. In fact, many, if not most, modern languages have a system for this, called tense, built into their grammar. For example, we distinguish Clark fell asleep, Clark is falling asleep, and Clark is going to fall asleep. Tense morphology divides events and states into the general grammatical categories past, present, and future; or a smaller set such as past and non-past; or a larger set, depending on the language.

As with other grammatical morphology, tense marking is normally obligatory in languages that have it, even when it is redundant. Both of the following English sentences have the past morpheme, even though that morpheme is redundant in the second example because the phrase last night makes it clear that the event happened before the utterance time.

I slept ten hours.

I slept ten hours last night.

Duration, repetition, completion

Events may be viewed «from inside», as they are going on, or «from outside», before they begin or after they finish.

There are other ways of looking at the temporal properties of an event or state than when it occurred or was true. It could be viewed as ongoing or completed, for example. Consider the difference between these two English sentences.

Clark was falling asleep.

Clark had fallen asleep.

Both have an unspecified time in the past as a point of reference. In sentence 3 the event is seen as ongoing at that time, and in sentence 4 the event is seen as completed at that time.

The Speaker may also point out the repeated nature of an event or state. Consider the difference between these English sentences.

Clark runs in the marathon.

Clark is running in the marathon.

For both of these sentences, the point of reference is the utterance time ('now'). In sentence 5, the running is viewed as repeated around this reference time; in sentence 6 it is ongoing at the reference time.

The grammatical representation of duration, completion, and repetition of events and states is known as aspect. As with other grammatical morphology, aspect morphology is often obligatory. In English, for example, speakers have to commit themselves to the choice between ongoing, repeated, or completed for an event with present reference time. That is, it is impossible in English to talk about Clark running the marathon, as in sentences 5 and 6, without making such a commitment.

# 2.1.2 Possibility, hypothesis, desirability

Another set of properties that distinguishes some events and states from others is related to their truth: whether they are true or likely to be true, whether we are treating them as true just for the sake of argument, whether we would like them to be true. The grammatical represention of meanings like these is called modality. Here are two English examples where the verb morphology reflects these dimensions.

If Jimmy spoke Spanish, he'd have a better chance with Lupe.

Perry suggested that Clark spend less time on computer games.

In sentence 7, the Speaker knows that Jimmy doesn't speak Spanish; if he did or there were at least a possibility that he does, the verb would be speaks rather than spoke. And in the same sentence, would ('d) indicates the conditional nature of the state of «having a better chance»; it would be true if Jimmy spoke Spanish, but he doesn't, so it isn't. In sentence 8, spend is used rather than spends, indicating the tenative nature of the «spending less time»; this is only a suggestion, not yet reality.[[2]](#footnote-2)

# 2.1.3 Participants

Events and states are defined in part by their participants. The choice of a particular verb commits the Speaker not only to a category of state or event but to a set of semantic roles. But these semantic roles may often be filled by a variety of things. We can group events and states into a small set of abstract categories on the basis of some general properties of these participants. The next subsection focuses on verb morphology with this function.

# 2.1.4 Verb agreement

What makes the following sentences ungrammatical? What kind of rule can you specify for the verb morpheme – s?

Clark always arrive late.

Clark's colleagues likes him a lot.

In many languages verbs take inflectional morphemes that convey some information about one or more participants in the event or state that the sentence is about. One way to think about this is in terms of the agreement between the verb and those participants on a small number of abstract properties. On the one extreme are languages like Mandarin Chinese and Japanese, which have no morphology of this type (though sometimes the choice of a verb in Japanese is governed by some properties of the participants). In what follows, I'll briefly discuss verb agreement in four languages that have some form of it. Notice that since agreement morphology conveys abstract properties of participants, that is, things, this topic overlaps with the topic of the last section.

English is a language with limited verb agreement morphology, the vestiges of what was a full-blown agreement system in Old English. Consider these sentences.

Clark plays golf.

Lois and Clark play tennis.

I play croquet.

Clark played 18 holes yesterday.

Clark likes team sports.

In English – s is plural when it appears on nouns but singular when it appears on verbs.

Notice that the form of the verb play differs in sentence 9 and 10. In sentence 9 the subject of the sentence, Clark, is 3rd person (that is, including neither the Speaker nor the Hearer) and singular, and the verb takes the suffix – s to indicate this. When the same verb is used with a subject that has any other combination of person and number, as in sentences 10 and 11, the verb takes no suffix. Notice also that an agreement suffix is only added to verbs in the simple present tense, that is, the tense category used in sentences 9, 10, and 11. Sentence 12 is in the simple past tense, and no distinction is made on the basis of person and number. Finally, notice that it is the participant in the syntactic role of subject, rather than any particular semantic role, that the verb agrees with. So in sentence 13, the verb again takes the – s even though the subject in this case refers to an experience rather than an agent, as in sentence 9.[[3]](#footnote-3)

With the verb be, there are three forms rather than two in the simple present, and rather than suffixes, completely unrelated forms are used: am (1st person singular), is (3rd person singular), and are (other person-number combinations). The verb be also has two forms in the simple past tense, was and were.

Thus English subject-verb agreement is limited both in terms of the number of different forms and the situations in which it must apply. However, it behaves just like the other examples of grammatical morphology we've been considering. It is often redundant, but it is obligatory even when it is. So in standard English dialects, at least, it is ungrammatical to say Clark like Lois, even though the missing – s would convey no new information.

So does the – s in play in sentences 9 and 13 mean anything? Yes, it means that the subject of that verb is 3rd person singular. In addition, because this suffix only occurs on verbs in the simple present tense, it also marks that tense category. Under most circumstances, this information would be obvious from the subject itself and from the context. But if the Hearer missed the subject for some reason, that – s could help sort things out. Also there are gray areas where Speakers may choose to use a verb in the 3rd person singular with a plural subject. Compare these two sentences.

A hundred students are in this course.

A hundred students is more than this room can hold.

In sentence 15, the subject is viewed as an individual quantity rather than a collection of individual things, so the verb is singular.

# 2.2 American Sign Language

The grammars of sign languages may be just as complex as those of spoken languages.

Finally let's consider agreement morphology on verbs in a sign language. We have already seen one example of this in the discussion of mutation morphology. ASL has a category of verbs that sign linguists call «directional verbs». These are verbs designating transfer events, or information transfer events, or other events viewed as having a direction. These verbs have a basic handshake and a position on the body, but their direction has to agree with the source and the goal (often the recipient) of the event. The agreement is with what corresponds to person in ASL, the position in signing space of the participants. 1st and 2nd person have the position of the signer and the sign interpreter, and other participants are «placed» in signing space by the signer as they come up.

For example, to produce the sign for 'give' in ASL when the source/agent is neither the signer nor the sign interpreter and the recipient is the signer, the signer uses the basic handshake for 'give', moving one hand from the position of the giver in signing space to the signer's own chest. The direction would be the opposite if the roles were reversed.

Another form of agreement in ASL makes use of classifiers. Classifiers in ASL take the form of particular handshakes that represent general properties of things. For example, an index finger pointing upward represents a standing person, a cupped hand represents a container, and the extended thumb and first two finger represents a vehicle One use of classifiers is as morphemes agreeing with the subjects of verbs designating move events and be at states. In this case the agreement is the opposite of what happens with verbs of giving and telling. It is the handshake that represents the agreement morpheme and the movement of the hand(s) that represents the content of the verb. For example, to sign a sentence meaning 'the car is here', the signer would make the sign for 'car', then with the 'vehicle' classifier handshake sign 'be here', that is, move the hand downward in front of the body.

How is verb agreement in ASL like the verb agreement in the spoken languages we have considered? At least in many cases agreement in ASL is obligatory, as it is in spoken languages. It may also be redundant, as in the 'vehicle' example.

Agreement in ASL, in fact morphology in sign languages generally, is strikingly different from spoken language morphology in one way. It is invariably iconic; all of these examples we have seen «make sense». With respect to form alone, sign language grammatical morphology differs in another way from most spoken language grammatical morphology in that it occurs simultaneously with the root morpheme. Of course this derives from the potential in sign languages to maintain a particular handshake while a movement is executed.

One point of this section has been to show how much languages can vary in terms of what information gets represented on their verbs. It is on verbs that we see how different languages can get. Within our set of languages, we have seen a range of possibilities, but we still are not close to the extreme of some American Indian and Eskimo languages, like Inuktitut, where verbs frequently include more than ten morphemes. However, those words usually include morphemes that go beyond the functions we've discussed in this chapter. Such languages excel at creating new words from a small number of roots and extensive productive morphology. How this sort of process works is the topic of the next chapter.

## **2.3 The category of voice**

In English as in many other languages, the passive voice is the form of a transitive verb whose grammatical subject serves as the patient, receiving the action of the verb. The passive voice is typically contrasted with the active voice, which is the form of a transitive verb whose subject serves as the agent, performing the action of the verb. The subject of a verb in the passive voice corresponds to the object of the same verb in the active voice. English's passive voice is periphrastic; that is, it does not have a one-word form. Rather, it is formed using a form of the auxiliary verb be together with a verb's past participle.

Canonical passives

Passive constructions have a range of meanings and uses. The canonical use to map a clause with a direct object to a corresponding clause where the direct object has become the subject. For example:

John threw the ball.[[4]](#footnote-4)

Here, threw is a transitive verb with John as its subject and the ball as its direct object. If we recast the verb in the passive voice (was thrown), then the ball becomes the subject (it is promoted to the subject position) and John disappears:

The ball was thrown.

The original subject can typically be re-inserted using the preposition by:

The ball was thrown by John.

Promotion of other objects

One non-canonical use of English's passive is to promote an object other than a direct object. It is usually possible in English to promote indirect objects as well. For example:

John gave Mary a book. → Mary was given a book.

In the active form, gave is the verb; John is its subject, Mary its indirect object, and a book its direct object; in the passive form, the indirect object has been promoted and the direct object has been left in place. (In this respect, English resembles dechticaetiative languages.)

It is also possible, in some cases, to promote the object of a preposition:

They talked about the problem. → The problem was talked about.

In the passive form here, the preposition is «stranded»; that is, it is not followed by an object. (See Preposition stranding.) Indeed, in some sense it doesn't have an object, since «the problem» is actually the subject of the sentence.

# Promotion of content clauses

It is possible to promote a content clause that serves as a direct object. In this case, however, it typically does not change its position in the sentence, and an expletive it takes the normal subject position:

They say that he left. → It is said that he left.

Stative passives

The passives described so far have all been eventive (or dynamic) passives. There exist also stative (or static, or resultative) passives; rather than describing an action, they describe the result of an action. English does not usually distinguish between the two. For example:

The door was locked.

This sentence has two meanings, roughly the following:

[Someone] locked the door.

The door was in the locked state. (Presumably, someone had locked it.)

The former meaning represents the canonical, eventive passive; the latter, the stative passive. (The terms eventive and stative/resultative refer to the tendencies of these forms to describe events and resultant states, respectively. The terms can be misleading, however, as the canonical passive of a stative verb is not a stative passive, even though it describes a state.)

Some verbs do not form stative passives. In some cases, this is because distinct adjectives exist for this purpose, such as with the verb open:

The door was opened. → [Someone] opened the door.

The door was open. → The door was in the open state.

# Adjectival passives

Adjectival passives are not true passives; they occur when a participial adjective (an adjective derived from a participle) is used predicatively For example:

She was relieved to find her car undamaged.[[5]](#footnote-5)

Here, relieved is an ordinary adjective, though it derives from the past participle of relieve In some cases, the line between an adjectival passive and a stative passive may be unclear.

Passives without active counterparts

In a few cases, passive constructions retain all the sense of the passive voice, but do not have immediate active counterparts. For example:

He was rumored to be a war veteran. ← \*[Someone] rumored him to be a war veteran.

(The asterisk here denotes an ungrammatical construction.) Similarly:

It was rumored that he was a war veteran. ← \*[Someone] rumored that he was a war veteran.

In both of these examples, the active counterpart was once possible, but has fallen out of use.

# Double passives

It is possible for a verb in the passive voice – especially an object-raising verb – to take an infinitive complement that is also in the passive voice:

The project is expected to be completed in the next year.

Commonly, either or both verbs may be moved into the active voice:

[Someone] expects the project to be completed in the next year.

[Someone] is expected to complete the project in the next year.

[Someone] expects [someone] to complete the project in the next year.

In some cases, a similar construction may occur with a verb that is not object-raising in the active voice:

The project will be attempted to be completed in the next year. ← \*[Someone] will attempt the project to be completed in the next year. ← [Someone] will attempt to complete the project in the next year.

(The question mark here denotes a questionably-grammatical construction.) In this example, the object of the infinitive has been promoted to the subject of the main verb, and both the infinitive and the main verb have been moved to the passive voice. The American Heritage Book of English Usage declares this unacceptable but it is nonetheless attested in a variety of contexts

# Other passive constructions

Past participle alone

A past participle alone usually carries passive force; the form of be can therefore be omitted in certain circumstances, such as newspaper headlines and reduced relative clauses:

Couple found slain; Murder-suicide suspected.

The problem, unless dealt with, will only get worse.

A person struck by lightning has a high chance of survival.

With get as the auxiliary

While the ordinary passive construction uses the auxiliary be, the same effect can sometimes be achieved using get in its place: Jamie got hit with the ball.

This use of get is fairly restricted. First of all, it is fairly colloquial; be is used in news reports, formal writing, and so on. Second of all, it typically only forms eventive passives of eventive verbs. Third of all, it is most often (but not necessarily) used with semantically negative verbs; for example, the phrase get shot is much more common than the phrase get praised.

# Ergative verbs

An ergative verb is a verb that may be either transitive or intransitive, and whose subject when it is intransitive plays the same semantic role as its direct object when it is transitive. For example, fly is an ergative verb, such that the following sentences are roughly synonymous:

The airplane flew.

The airplane was flown.

[Someone] flew the airplane.

One major difference is that the intransitive construction does not permit an agent to be mentioned, and indeed can imply that no agent is present, that the subject is performing the action on itself. For this reason, the intransitive construction of an ergative verb is often said to be in a middle voice, between active and passive, or in a mediopassive voice, between active and passive but closer to passive.

Reflexive verbs

A reflexive verb is a transitive verb one of whose objects is a reflexive pronoun (myself, yourself, etc.) referring back to its subject. In some languages, reflexive verbs are a special class of verbs with special semantics and syntax, but in English, they typically represent ordinary uses of transitive verbs. For example, with the verb see:

He sees her as a writer.

She sees herself as a writer.

Nonetheless, sometimes English reflexive verbs have a passive sense, expressing an agentless action. Consider the verb solve, as in the following sentences:

He solved the problem.

The problem solved itself.

One could not say that the problem truly solved anything; rather, what is meant is that the problem was solved without anyone solving it.

Gerunds and nominalization

Gerunds and nominalized verbs (nouns derived from verbs and referring to the actions or states expressed by them), unlike finite verbs, do not require explicit subjects. This allows an object to be expressed while omitting a subject. For example:

The proof of the pudding is in the eating.

Generating electricity typically requires a magnet and a solenoid.

# Usage and style

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Many English educators and usage guides, such as The Elements of Style, discourage the use or overuse of the passive voice, seeing it as unnecessarily verbose (when the agent is included in a by phrase), or as obscure and vague (when it is not). This perception is exacerbated by the occasional intentional use of the passive voice to avoid assigning blame, such as by replacing «I made mistakes» with «Mistakes were made.»

Nonetheless, the passive voice is frequently used for a number of other reasons:

Certain verbs frequently appear in the passive – for example, be born, be smitten, and be had are all more common in certain senses than their active counterparts – though in many cases these might be better analyzed as adjectival passives (see above) than as true passives.

The passive voice serves to emphasize the patient; if the agent is comparatively unimportant to the point, or if the agent is obvious from context, then the passive voice might serve a rhetorical purpose.

Since in English, the subject nearly always comes before the object in a sentence, using the passive voice (i.e., promoting the patient from object to subject) moves the patient earlier in the sentence. If the patient has been mentioned in a previous sentence, this can serve as a marker of the connection between the two sentences.

Scientific writing has traditionally used the passive voice rather than mentioning a researcher in every sentence; this may be changing, however.

In journalistic writing and law, two areas where it can be essential to state only established facts, use of the passive voice allows uncertain agents to be omitted; again, however, use of the active voice is on the rise, with other mechanisms being used to avoid insupportable claims.

## **2.4 The category of mood**

In linguistics, many grammars have the concept of grammatical mood (or mode), which describes the relationship of a verb with reality and intent. Many languages express distinctions of mood through morphology, by changing (inflecting) the form of the verb.

Because modern English does not have all of the moods described below, and has a very simplified system of verb inflection as well, it is not straightforward to explain the moods in English. (The English moods are indicative, subjunctive, and imperative). Note, too, that the exact sense of each mood differs from language to language.

Grammatical mood per se is not the same thing as grammatical tense or grammatical aspect, although these concepts are conflated to some degree in many languages, including English and most other modern Indo-European languages, insofar as the same word patterns are used to express more than one of these concepts at the same time.

Currently identified moods include conditional, imperative, indicative, injunctive, negative, optative, potential, subjunctive, and more. Infinitive is a category apart from all these finite forms, and so are gerunds and participles. Some Uralic Samoyedic languages have over ten moods; Nenets has as many as sixteen. The original Indo-European inventory of moods was indicative, subjunctive, optative, and imperative. Not every Indo-European language has each of these moods, but the most conservative ones such as Avestan, Ancient Greek, and Sanskrit have them all.

It should be noted that not all of the moods listed below are clearly conceptually distinct. Individual terminology varies from language to language, and the coverage of (e.g.) the «conditional» mood in one language may largely overlap with that of the «hypothetical» or «potential» mood in another. Even when two different moods exist in the same language, their respective usages may blur, or may be defined by syntactic rather than semantic criteria. For example, the subjunctive and optative moods in Ancient Greek alternate syntactically in many subordinate clauses, depending on the tense of the main verb. The usage of the indicative, subjunctive and jussive moods in Classical Arabic is almost completely controlled by syntactic context; the only possible alternation in the same context is between indicative and jussive following the negative particle lā.

Classification

Realis

Realis moods are a category of grammatical moods which indicate that something is actually the case, or actually not the case. The most common realis mood is the indicative mood or the declarative mood.

Declarative

The declarative mood indicates that the statement is true, without any qualifications being made. It is in many languages equivalent to the indicative mood, although sometimes distinctions between them are drawn. It is closely related with the inferential mood (see below).

Generic

The generic mood is used to make generalizations about a particular class of things, e.g. in «Rabbits are fast», one is speaking about rabbits in general, rather than about particular fast rabbits. English has no means of morphologically distinguishing generic mood from indicative mood, however the distinction can easily be understood in context by surrounding words. Compare, for example: rabbits are fast, versus, the rabbits are fast. Use of the definite article the implies specific, particular rabbits, whereas omitting it implies the generic mood simply by default.[[6]](#footnote-6)

Ancient Greek had a species of generic mood, the so-called gnomic utterance, marked by the aorist indicative (normally reserved for statements about the past). It was used especially to express philosophical truths about the world.

Indicative (evidential)

The indicative mood is used for factual statements and positive beliefs. All intentions that a particular language does not categorize as another mood are classified as indicative. In English, questions are considered indicative. It is the most commonly used mood and is found in all languages. Example: «Paul is reading a book» or «John reads books».

Negative

The negative mood expresses a negated action. In many languages, this is not a distinct mood; negation is expressed by adding a particle:

Before the verb phrase, as in Spanish No está en casa;

Or after it, as in archaic and dialectal English Thou remembrest not or Dutch Ik zie hem niet, or in modern English, I think not;

Or both, as in French Je ne sais pas or Afrikaans Hy kan nie Afrikaans praat nie.

Standard English usually adds the auxiliary verb do, and then adds not after it: «I did not go there». In these instances, «do» is known as a dummy auxiliary, because of its zero semantic content.

In Indo-European languages, it is not customary to speak of a negative mood, since in these languages negation is originally a grammatical particle that can be applied to a verb in any of these moods. Nevertheless, in some, like Welsh, verbs have special inflections to be used in negative clauses.

In other language families, the negative may count as a separate mood. An example is Japanese, which conjugates verbs in the negative after adding the suffix – nai (indicating negation), e.g. tabeta («ate») and tabenakatta («did not eat»).

It could be argued that Modern English has joined the ranks of these languages, since negation in the indicative mood requires the use of an auxiliary verb and a distinct syntax in most cases. Contrast, for instance, «He sings» → «He doesn't sing» (where the auxiliary to do has to be supplied, inflected to does, and the clitic form of not suffixed to derive the negative from «He sings») with Il chante → Il ne chante pas; French adds the (discontinuous) negative particle ne… pas, without changing the form of the verb.

Irrealis

Irrealis moods are the set of grammatical moods that indicate that a certain situation or action is not known to have happened as the speaker is talking.

Cohortative

The cohortative mood (alternatively, hortatory) is used to express plea, insistence, imploring, self-encouragement, wish, desire, intent, command, purpose or consequence. It does not exist in English, but phrases such as «let us» are often used to denote it. In Latin, it is interchangeable with the jussive.

Conditional

The conditional mood is used to speak of an event whose realization is dependent on a certain condition, particularly, but not exclusively, in conditional sentences. In Modern English, it is a periphrastic construction, with the form would + infinitive, e.g. I would buy. In other languages, such as Spanish or French, verbs have a specific conditional inflection. Thus, the conditional version of «John eats if he is hungry» is:

John would eat if he were hungry, in English;

Jean mangerait s'il avait faim, in French;

Juan comería si tuviera hambre, in Spanish.

In the Romance languages, the conditional form is used primarily in the apodosis (main clause) of conditional clauses, and also in a few set phrases where it expresses courtesy or doubt. The main verb in the protasis (dependent clause) is either in the subjunctive or in the indicative mood.

This is not a universal trait; in Finnish, for example, the conditional mood is used both in the apodosis and the protasis. An example is the sentence «I would buy a house if I earned a lot of money», where in Finnish both clauses have the conditional marker – isi– : Ostaisin talon, jos ansaitsisin paljon rahaa.

In English, too, the would + infinitive construct can be employed in main clauses, with a subjunctive sense: «If you would only tell me what's troubling you, I might be able to help».

Imperative

The imperative mood expresses direct commands, requests, and prohibitions. In many circumstances, using the imperative mood may sound blunt or even rude, so it is often used with care. Example: «Paul, do your homework now». An imperative is used to tell someone to do something without argument.

Many languages, including English, use the bare verb stem to form the imperative. Other languages, such as Seri, however, use special imperative forms.

In English, second-person is implied by the imperative except when first-person plural is specified, as in «Let's go» («Let us go»).

Interrogative

The interrogative mood is used for asking questions. Most languages do not have a special mood for asking questions, but Welsh and Nenets do.

Jussive

The jussive mood is similar to the cohortative mood, in that it expresses plea, insistence, imploring, self-encouragement, wish, desire, intent, command, purpose or consequence. In some languages, the two are distinguished in that cohortative occurs in the first person and the jussive in the second or third.

Sometimes this is called a «desiderative mood», since it indicates desires. Occasionally distinctions are made between different optative moods, e.g. a mood to express hopes as opposed to a mood to express desires. (Desires are what we want to be the case; hope generally implies an optimism toward the chances of a desire's fulfillment. If someone desires something but is pessimistic about its chances of occurring, then one desires it but does not hope for it.)

Subjunctive

The subjunctive mood, sometimes called conjunctive mood, has several uses in dependent clauses. Examples include discussing hypothetical or unlikely events, expressing opinions or emotions, or making polite requests (the exact scope is language-specific). A subjunctive mood exists in English, but native English speakers need not use it. Example: «I suggested that Paul read some books», Paul is not in fact reading a book. Contrast this with the sentence «Paul reads books», where the verb «to read» is in the present tense, indicative mood. Another way, especially in British English, of expressing this might be «I suggested that Paul should read some books», derived from «Paul should read some books.»

Other uses of the subjunctive in English, as in «And if he be not able to bring a lamb, then he shall bring for his trespass…» (KJV Leviticus 5:7) have definitely become archaic. Statements such as «I will ensure that he leave immediately» often sound archaic or overly formal, and have been almost completely supplanted by constructions with the indicative, like «I will ensure that he leaves immediately».

The subjunctive mood figures prominently in the grammar of Persian and the Romance languages, which require this mood for certain types of dependent clauses. This point commonly causes difficulty for English speakers learning these languages.

In certain other languages, the dubitative or the conditional moods may be employed instead of the subjunctive in referring to doubtful or unlikely events (see the main article).

**2.5 The category of tense**

Grammatical tense is a way languages express the time at which an event described by a sentence occurs. In English, this is a property of a verb form, and expresses only time-related information.

Tense, along with mood, voice and person, are four ways in which verb forms are frequently characterized, in languages where those categories apply. There are languages (mostly isolating languages, like Chinese) where tense is not expressed anywhere in the verb or any auxiliaries, but only as adverbs of time, when needed for comprehension; in the same condition, grammatical tense in certain languages can be expressed optionally (such as Vietnamese), for example, «sinh» meaning «birth» and «sanh» meaning «birthed»; and there are also languages (such as Russian) where verbs indicate aspect in addition to or instead of tense.

The exact number of tenses in a language is often a matter of some debate, since many languages include the state of certainty of the information, the frequency of the event, whether it is ongoing or finished, and even whether the information was directly experienced or gleaned from hearsay, as moods or tenses of a verb. Some grammarians consider these to be separate tenses, and some do not.

Tenses cannot be easily mapped from one language into another. While all languages have a «default» tense with a name usually translated as «present tense» (or «simple present»), the actual meaning of this tense may vary considerably.

English tenses

Viewed in the strictest linguistic sense, English has only two tenses: nonpast tense and past tense, which are shown with the verb endings – Ø and – ed.

The following chart shows how T/M/A (tense/modal/aspect) is expressed in English:

Tense Modal Aspect Verb

Perfect Progressive

– Ø (nonpast)

– ed (past) Ø (none)

will (future) Ø (none)

have – en (perfect) Ø (none)

be – ing (progressive) do

Since will is a modal auxiliary, it cannot co-occur with other modals like can, may, and must. Only aspects can be used in infinitives. Some linguists consider will a future marker and give English two more tenses, future tense and future-in-past tense, which are shown by will and would respectively. Also, in nonlinguistic language study, aspects and mode are viewed as tenses.

Tense, aspect, and mood

The distinction between grammatical tense, aspect, and mood is fuzzy and at times controversial. The English continuous temporal constructions express an aspect as well as a tense, and some therefore consider that aspect to be separate from tense in English. In Spanish the traditional verb tenses are also combinations of aspectual and temporal information.

Going even further, there's an ongoing dispute among modern English grammarians (see English grammar) regarding whether tense can only refer to inflected forms. In Germanic languages there are very few tenses (often only two) formed strictly by inflection, and one school contends that all complex or periphrastic time-formations are aspects rather than tenses.

The abbreviation TAM, T/A/M or TMA is sometimes found when dealing with verbal morphemes that combine tense, aspect and mood information.

In some languages, tense and other TAM information may be marked on a noun, rather than a verb. This is called nominal TAM.

Classification of tenses

Tenses can be broadly classified as:

Absolute: indicates time in relationship to the time of the utterance (i.e. «now»). For example, «I am sitting down», the tense is indicated in relation to the present moment.

Relative: in relationship to some other time, other than the time of utterance, e.g. «While strolling through the shops, she saw a nice dress in the window». Here, the «saw» is relative to the time of the «strolling». The relationship between the time of «strolling» and the time of utterance is not clearly specified.

Absolute-relative: indicates time in relationship to some other event, whose time in turn is relative to the time of utterance. (Thus, in absolute-relative tense, the time of the verb is indirectly related to the time of the utterance; in absolute tense, it is directly related; in relative tense, its relationship to the time of utterance is left unspecified.) For example, «When I walked through the park, I saw a bird.» Here, «saw» is present relative to the «walked», and «walked» is past relative to the time of the utterance, thus «saw» is in absolute-relative tense.

Moving on from this, tenses can be quite finely distinguished from one another, although no language will express simply all of these distinctions. As we will see, some of these tenses in fact involve elements of modality (e.g. predictive and not-yet tenses), but they are difficult to classify clearly as either tenses or moods.

Many languages define tense not just in terms of past/future/present, but also in terms of how far into the past or future they are. Thus they introduce concepts of closeness or remoteness, or tenses that are relevant to the measurement of time into days (hodiernal or hesternal tenses).

Some languages also distinguish not just between past, present, and future, but also nonpast, nonpresent, nonfuture. Each of these latter tenses incorporates two of the former, without specifying which.

Some tenses:

Absolute tenses

Future tenses. Some languages have different future tenses to indicate how far into the future we are talking about. Some of these include:

Close future tense: in the near future, soon

Hodiernal future tense: sometime today

Post-hodiernal future tense: sometime after today

Remote future tense: in the more distant future

Predictive future tense: a future tense which expresses a prediction rather than an intention, i.e. «I predict he will lose the election, although I want him to win». As such, it is really more of a mood than a tense. (Its tenseness rather than modality lies in the fact that you can predict the future, but not the past.)

Nonfuture tense: refers to either the present or the past, but does not clearly specify which. Contrasts with future.

Nonpast tense: refers to either the present or the future, but does not clearly specify which. Contrasts with past.

Not-yet tense: has not happened in present or past (nonfuture), but often with the implication that it is expected to happen in the future. (As such, is both a tense and a modality). In English, it is expressed with «not yet», hence its name.

Past tenses. Some languages have different past tenses to indicate how far into the past we are talking about.

Hesternal past tense: yesterday or early, but not remote

Hodiernal past tense: sometime earlier today

Immediate past tense: very recent past tense, e.g. in the last minute or two

Recent past tense: in the last few days/weeks/months (exact definition varies)

Remote past tense: more than a few days/weeks/months ago (exact definition varies)

Nonrecent past tense: not recent past tense, contrasting with recent past tense

Nonremote past tense: not remote past tense, contrasting with remote past tense

Prehesternal past tense: before hesternal past tense

Prehodiernal past tense: before hodiernal past tense

Preterit: past tense not marked for aspect or modality

Present tense

Still tense: indicates a situation held to be the case, at or immediately before the utterance

Absolute-relative tenses

future perfect tense: will have completed by some time in the future, will occur before some time in the future

Future-in-future tense: at some time in the future, will still be in the future

Future-in-past tense: at some time in the future, will be in the past

Future-perfect-in-past tense: will be completed by some time which is in the future of some time in the past, eg., Sally went to work; by the time she should be home, the burglary would have been completed.

Past perfect tense: at some time in the past, was already in the past

Relative tenses

Relative future tense: is in the future of some unspecified time

Relative nonfuture tense: is in the past or present of some unspecified time

Relative nonpast tense: is in the present or future of some unspecified time

Relative past tense: is in the past of some unspecified time

Relative present tense: is in the present of some unspecified time

**2.6 Palmer’s and mind’s discussion on English modality**

Historically in language descriptions, the grammatical terms «modality» and «mood» have lacked truly definitive categories of meaning. For that reason, linguistic dictionaries have often treated them as synonyms, cross referencing their entries and in some cases, describing how different theories or authors have used the terms.

In this book, Palmer treats «modality» as a valid cross-language grammatical category that, along with tense and aspect, is notionally concerned with the event or situation that is reported by an utterance. However, he says that unlike tense and aspect which are categories associated with the nature of the event itself, modality is concerned with the status of the proposition that describes the event.

Palmer then goes on to define two basic distinctions in how languages deal with the category of modality: modal systems and mood. He believes that many languages may be characterized by one or the other. He also claims that typology related to modality cannot be undertaken on purely formal grounds because of the complexity of cross-linguistic differences in the grammatical means used to express what he terms «notional» categories. This claim is substantiated by the great variety of forms and structures evident in the data from 122 languages that he uses to illustrate the expression of modality.

Palmer distinguishes two sorts of modality: propositional modality and event modality. These notional systems express the following categories:

Propositional modality

Epistemic – speakers express their judgment about the factual status of the proposition

Speculative: expresses uncertainty

Deductive: expresses inferences from observable data

Assumptive: expresses inferences from what is generally known

Evidential: speakers give evidence for the factual status of the proposition

Reported – evidence gathered from others

Sensory: evidence gathered through sense perception, e.g., seen, heard

Event modality

Deontic: speakers express conditioning factors that are external to the relevant individual

Permissive: permission is given on the basis of some authority, e.g. rules, law, or the speaker

Obligative: an obligation is laid on the addressee(s), also on the basis of some authority

Commissive: a speaker commits himself to do something; the expression may be a promise or a threat

Dynamic: speakers express conditioning factors that are internal to the relevant individual

Abilitive: expresses the ability to do something

Volitive: expresses the willingness to do something

These notional categories are discussed and illustrated throughout the book.

The illustrative data reveal many of the formal means for expressing the notional categories in a variety of languages. According to Palmer, three grammatical categories predominate in the expression of the notional categories: (1) affixation of verbs, (2) modal verbs, and (3) particles. Many of the languages from which Palmer chose data use more than one grammatical category to express the notions.

This is probably not unusual. In fact, the two Austronesian languages with which I am most familiar spread the notions across all three grammatical categories, and the lexical and morphosyntactic patterns are completely unlike English patterns, although the similarity of notions is fairly obvious. I would expect to see a closer correlation of the grammatical means of expessing modality among related languages.

Palmer discusses the use of modal verbs and their association with possibility and necessity in chapter 4. He draws together issues involving epistemic modality, i.e., a speaker’s attitude to the truth value or factual status of a proposition in contrast to deontic and dynamic modality that refer to unactualized events. Although notionally there is a difference, Palmer explains that in English and many other languages, the same modal verbs are used for both types. He gives three English sentences as examples:

(1) He may come tomorrow.

(2) The book should be on the shelf.

(3) He must be in his office.

He states that each of the modal verbs in the sentences can express either epistemic or deontic modality. However, he goes on to say in a later section that there are some formal differences: deontic must and may can be negated whereas epistemic must and may cannot be; if may and must are followed by have in a clause, they always express epistemic modality, never deontic; another formal difference between may and must is that deontic may is replaceable by can and would still express deontic modality, but if replaced by can’t it would then likely express epistemic modality, i.e., a truth value. This type of illustration and explanation is used throughout the book.

Palmer discusses the links between mood and modal systems with particular respect to languages that express mood formally, or in combination with modal notions. Although Palmer suggests that there is basically no typological difference between indicative/subjunctive and realis/irrealis since both are instances of mood, he does state that there are considerable differences between the functions of what have been labeled «subjunctive» and «irrealis» For that reason he deals with them in three separate chapters.

Although Palmer’s notional categories make sense, I found that it was difficult to process the grammatical patterns in the language data used to illustrate the categories. Part of my difficulty may be attributed to the fact that I believe modality needs to be studied in the context of use, i.e., natural texts, not isolated sentences; and also, I believe, that a thorough study of all grammatical expressions of modality and mood must be done within a single language before the results are compared and contrasted cross-linguistically. Perhaps the authors of the papers and grammars that Palmer used had done just that, but the contexts were lost through the excerpting of sentences to illustrate his notional categories.

In spite of this criticism, I found Palmer’s categories, his compilation of data from many different languages, and explanations of terminological usage very helpful in my own work, as well as thought provoking. I wholeheartedly recommend the book for your reference shelf, particularly if you are a linguist or translator who needs to do an in-depth study of modality in a single language or a cross-language comparison of modality.

In his preface, the author explains that this volume is a complement to an earlier

volume, titled An Empirical Grammar of the English Verb: Modal Verbs, published in 1995 by the same publisher. The present volume clearly aims to provide an inventory of the various verb combinations within the English verb phrase. This is done on the basis of the study of a large amount of corpus data. I am not so sure whether the term grammar in the title is entirely justified, for even though information about distribution and frequency of occurrence of the various patterns is provided, the book hardly ever goes beyond providing this kind of information. The author writes in his introduction that «all instances of verbs and verb phrases can be explained as cases of rule-governed grammatical behavior,» but what these rules are is not explained anywhere. I will come back to this below.

The book definitely has a number of strong points, but it also has quite a number of serious shortcomings. Let me first discuss the general contents of the book. It is divided into seven chapters: «Introduction» «General Categories» «Verb Forms».

«Verb Phrases» «Finite Verb Phrases» «Non-finite Verb Phrases» and «Time Orientation».

In the introduction, the author explains the inductive approach he has followed.

Basically, there are three steps: from language to verb patterns and their contexts, from database creation (i.e., storing the verb patterns identified) to linguistic analysis of verb patterns, and from the results of these analyses to a grammar of the English verb. He also states (6) that the grammar is based on authentic English and that there has been no borrowing from previous grammars. This is probably also why there is no reference section. They are useful for a quick first impression. In the prototypes, the author claims, the users of the book will find the most frequent patterns they are likely to encounter «in texts or in contact with speakers of the language» (12). The details, finally, give information on form (full vs. contracted forms, which the author persistently calls «elided» forms), meaning, and context. In the latter, contextual information is given on affirmative and negative contexts, declarative and interrogative contexts, combination with subjects, combination with verbs, and other syntactic information.

Some of this information is certainly useful, but a lot of it is repetitive and could well have been stated generally. For instance, in the contexts of nearly all the patterns, it is said that affirmative contexts are far more frequent than negative contexts and that declarative contexts are far more frequent than interrogative contexts, the percentages being roughly 90 for affirmative and 10 for negative and another 90 for declarative and 10 for interrogative, give or take a point or two. This information could have been formulated once, under a general heading, after which contexts with a clearly deviant distributional pattern could have been appropriately highlighted and commented on, as in the case of be allowed to, which occurs in a negative context in 23 percent of all cases (400). Incidentally, the author apparently only considers the occurrence of the word not (or n’t) to be an indication of a negative context, for on the same page he quotes the sentence nobody should be allowed to forget it as an example of an affirmative context (400). This, and the lack of comment, makes the book really little more than a mere listing of examples of the various patterns distinguished.

«General Categories,» briefly discusses the concept of time, temporal orientation, and temporal reference. Temporal orientation can be past, present, or future, while time reference can be preceding, simultaneous, following, or neutral.

Thus, the sentences below (listed on page 19) all have past time orientation but have preceding, simultaneous, following, and neutral reference, respectively, the reference indicated by the highlighted verb phrases.

Lee, I noticed, had asked for a Coca-Cola

But what he saw was an ageing Australian woman

She was glad that he would be with her

He won because he’s forty years younger than you

Only time orientation, however, is indicated for the various verb phrase patterns distinguished «because of the intricacies of time reference» (19). It makes sense to make an inventory of the time orientation of the verb phrase patterns because after all this orientation is somehow expressed by the tense of the verb phrase (although this does not apply to nonfinite verb phrases). It makes equal sense to make an inventory of real and nonreal states or events referred to by the verb phrase patterns because, again, this is indicated by the tense or modality expressed by the verb phrase. I find it less natural to make an inventory of restrictive or nonrestrictive meaning expressed particularly by nonfinite verb phrases (21), for this distinction is not inherent in the verb phrase itself. Moreover, it can only refer to a relatively small subset of nonfinite clauses–namely, those with an attributive function.

The final category that Mindt distinguishes as relevant to the description of the verb phrases is the nature of the subject with which they are associated. Mind distinguishes between intentional and nonintentional subjects (22), but he does not really explain the difference at all convincingly. He merely provides a few examples of each, giving the reader the impression that the distinction more or less coincides with human and nonhuman subjects, for he then says, «Because of the relation between verb phrase and intentional and non-intentional subjects, the distinction between intentional and non-intentional has to be made no matter whether the subject is acting intentionally or not» (22). Thus, in most patients are taught to do this, we have an intentional subject, whereas in more techniques are taught, we have a nonintentional subject. It would seem to me that Mindt has thought of a category, then found that it is not useful at all in many cases but has decided to hang onto it in spite of this.

«Verb Forms» is a very straightforward chapter spelling out the details of verb forms, verb morphology, inflection, spelling rules, and patterns of irregular verbs. This chapter concludes with a learning list of irregular verbs, based on the rank list compiled, one assumes, on the basis of the corpora listed in the appendix.

Fortunately, there is also an alphabetical list of irregular verbs.

«Verb Phrases,» discusses verb phrase types. Mindt uses a three dimensional graphic representation of verbal elements that can occur in a verb phrase and the order in which they occur. This model was introduced in An Empirical Grammar of the English Verb: Modal Verbs (Mindt 1995). The model enables Mindt to account for a great variety of verb phrase patterns, in which all kinds of combinations of modals, auxiliaries, so-called catenative verbs, and main verbs can be combined in specific ways. The main problem with this chapter (as with the following two) is the justification of (or rather the failure to justify) the existence of the category of catenative verbs. The catenative verbs are said to be a group of «chaining» verbs (which is exactly what the term catenative means) whose function is apparently to link elements in a verb phrase together. Catenative verbs do not share any characteristics with modal verbs and very few with primary auxiliaries. Examples of catenative verbs are seem or begin. While there are admittedly very good reasons for wishing to distinguish a category such as catenative verbs, Mindt fails to present any convincing arguments for this. Moreover, he includes verbs in this category that should not be included by any standard, such as want, avoid, mean, enjoy, or be important. Worst of all, in his illustrations of how so-called catenative verb phrases are distinguished from «noncatenative» verb phrases, he seems to ignore elements of well-established modern descriptive grammars of English.

For instance, in the sentence we want you to come with us (112), the main clause is said to be we want you and the subclause to come with us, and you is said to be the object of the main clause and the «semantic subject» of the subclause. This appears to take us right back to Zandvoortian times and to ignore the fact that there are very simple constituency tests that would tell you that in this case, for instance, it does not make sense to ask who do we want? but it would make sense to ask what do we want? – thus ruling out you as an object of the main clause.

In the sentence he wanted to talk to Armstrong (111), wanted to talk is a catenative verb phrase, with wanted a catenative verb, but in the sentence quoted above (we want you to come with us), want and to come are separate verb phrases, with both want and come as main verbs. Mindt argues (471) that the distinction of the category of catenative verbs reduces the number of nonfinite verb phrases, implying that this makes the description of sentences more straightforward. I am not convinced that that is true. Moreover, an important generalization is missed – namely, that verbs such as want are simply complemented by infinitive clauses, with or without a subject of their own.

Another example of a catenative verb occurs in the sentence the authorities failed to respond speedily (111). Again, no argumentation is provided. Mindt could have argued that failed cannot be assigned main verb status (e.g., because failed basically means no more than did not) and therefore should be looked on as a catenative verb, making up a single verb phrase with the following main verb respond.

In the book, we can only guess what traditional descriptions and which previous grammars he means. But what he claims is not quite true, of course, for Quirk et al. (1972) do distinguish a separate category of semi-auxiliary verbs, including verbs such as seem and happen (in Quirk et al. 1985, these verbs are also termed catenative verbs, by the way).

I find the discussion of catenative verbs particularly problematic because Mindt does not provide any proper syntactic arguments, a state of affairs that leads him to include an excessive number of verbs in this category. For instance, the verb want is included (see the example above) on the strength of the argument that catenative verbs «allow overlap of two meanings within one verb phrase. This overlap cannot be achieved by modals alone, because a verb phrase cannot contain more than one modal verb. Thus, Mindt claims, possibility/high probability can be expressed by might, as in fever might kill him. Volition/intention can be achieved by will, as in I will not be a soldier. If we want to combine these two, Mindt argues, we cannot simply combine might with will, but instead we can combine might with the catenative want to express volition/intention, as in they might want to kill us. The flaw in this argument, I think, is that want does not simply express volition/intention but desire, which is not the same thing.

Mindt overlooks the rather basic fact that propositional content is expressed by the lexical verb in a clause and that all subordinate verbs in the verb phrase do not add any propositional content, but only such things as modality, aspect, and so on.

This can easily be tested by comparing active and passive counterparts, which should express the same proposition. For instance, on the basis of the sentence pair Harry kissed Jane/Jane was kissed by Harry, we can equate the following pairs:

Harry has kissed Jane = Jane has been kissed by Harry

Harry will kiss Jane = Jane will be kissed by Harry

Harry may have kissed Jane = Jane may have been kissed by Harry

Harry appeared to kiss Jane = Jane appeared to be kissed by Harry but not the following:

Harry wanted to kiss Jane ≠ Jane wanted to be kissed by Harry which shows that want adds propositional content to these sentences and should therefore be looked on as a lexical, rather than a catenative, verb.

Mindt also distinguishes a group of catenative verbs followed by present participles, suchas continue, start, keep, and so on (321 ff.). Here too, a number of verbs are included that clearly do not belong there, such as consider, enjoy, avoid, mean.

Again, Mindt does not use a rather simple constituency test to make the distinction.

It would be simple enough to compare he kept going for ten hours to he enjoyed possessing his knowledge on his own by applying a pronominalization test, which would show that it is impossible to paraphrase the former sentence above by he kept it but perfectly possible to paraphrase the latter by he enjoyed it, thus giving separate constituency status to the bit that follows enjoy but not to the bit following keep.

Finally, there is a category of catenative adjective constructions, such as be able to and be likely to (404) (incidentally, these are called semi-auxiliaries in Quirk et al. 1985). Regrettably, Mindt erroneously includes a number of cases of extraposed subject clauses here, such as it is necessary to go back in time and it could be important to record facts, where the supposed catenative verbs are be necessary to and be important to. This kind of error should not have occurred in a book like this. on nonfinite verb phrases, a three-way distinction is made between verbal to-infinitives, verbal to-infinitives preceded by be, and gerundial to infinitives.

This amounts basically to the clause functions of adverbials, subject complements, and subjects of NP modifiers, respectively. However, in the first group, we find the example it’s impossible to be accurate about these things (472 – highlighting Mindt’s). One wonders why be possible to is listed earlier, as a catenative adjective construction while be impossible to is apparently something else. Of course, this is again a case of an extraposed subject clause and should therefore, if anything, have been listed as a gerundial to-infinitive.

Mindt discusses the patternVERBPHRASE + DIRECT OBJECT + TO-INFINITIVE. This makes one think of Zandvoort’s (1945) Accusative with Infinitive constructions. Again, Mindt is not very careful here, for here he lists verbs suchas want, ask, tell, allow, expect, persuade, cause. These are precisely the verbs that grammarians and generative linguists alike have used over the years to demonstrate different types of verb complementation, based on the differences in syntactic behavior of the complements of these verbs.

The concept of meaning, like other concepts, is not explained but rather exemplified.

This leads to distinctions that are fairly arbitrary, such as the distinction of the two meanings of the catenative constructionHAVE (TO) (298), which is said to express either necessity or obligation. The following examples are given, without any further comment:

Necessity: I have to speak to you about Pepita’s education among other things you’ll have to stand up for yourself Obligation: the man had to retire at sixty one of us will have to go in the end This leaves one wondering what the distinction is based on. Is it based on the possibility of paraphrasing the former two by it is/was necessary that… and the latter by there is/was an obligation/order…? I do not know, and frankly, the examples do not even convincingly point in this direction.

In the discussion of the prototypes of the progressive (254 ff.), Mindt distinguishes four types, expressing incompletion, temporariness, iteration/habit, and highlighting/prominence, respectively. He then goes on to describe each of these prototypes in more detail. Curiously, hardly any of the prototypes are found to be pure types: they nearly always combine with elements of other prototypes. So what is meant by the «prototypes» is probably aspects of meaning. Incidentally, in the discussion of incompletion, it is said that in 30 percent of the cases, it is combined with temporariness (257)[[7]](#footnote-7). In the discussion of temporariness (258), it is said that in 50 percent of the cases, it combines with incompletion. It is hard to compare these figures to each other since no absolute figures are provided. Also, Mindt does not indicate whether there is possibly a difference between the combination temporariness + incompletion and incompletion + temporariness. However, what is clear from these examples is that the really typical progressive form combines the aspects of incompletion and temporariness. But this conclusion is not in the book.

All in all, there are too many of these infelicities in this book. What exactly is a verb phrase is not clarified. The book would have been so much more valuable if the classifications had been shown to have been made on the basis of syntactic arguments.

It would undoubtedly also have meant that certain erroneous classifications would have been avoided. As it is, the book can be no more than an inventory of examples of English verbal patterns, which may be used as a resource for course book designer.

In syntax, a verb is a word belonging to the part of speech that usually denotes an action (bring, read), an occurrence (decompose, glitter), or a state of being (exist, stand). Depending on the language, a verb may vary in form according to many factors, possibly including its tense, aspect, mood and voice. It may also agree with the person, gender, and/or number of some of its arguments (subject, object, etc.).

The number of arguments that a verb takes is called its valency or valence. Verbs can be classified according to their valency:

Intransitive (valency = 1): the verb only has a subject. For example: «he runs», «it falls».

Transitive (valency = 2): the verb has a subject and a direct object. For example: «she eats fish», «we hunt deer».

Ditransitive (valency = 3): the verb has a subject, a direct object and an indirect or secondary object. For example: «I gave her a book,» «She sent me flowers.»

It is possible to have verbs with zero valency. Weather verbs are often impersonal (subjectless) in null-subject languages like Spanish, where the verb llueve means «It rains The Tlingit language features a four way classification of verbs based on their valency. The intransitive and transitive are typical, but the impersonal and objective are somewhat different from the norm. In the objective the verb takes an object but no subject, the nonreferent subject in some uses may be marked in the verb by an incorporated dummy pronoun similar to the English weather verb (see below). Impersonal verbs take neither subject nor object, as with other null subject languages, but again the verb may show incorporated dummy pronouns despite the lack of subject and object phrases. Tlingit lacks a ditransitive, so the indirect object is described by a separate, extraposed clause. [citation needed].

English verbs are often flexible with regard to valency. A transitive verb can often drop its object and become intransitive; or an intransitive verb can be added an object and become transitive. Compare:

I turned. (intransitive)

I turned the car. (transitive)

In the first example, the verb turn has no grammatical object. (In this case, there may be an object understood – the subject (I/myself). The verb is then possibly reflexive, rather than intransitive); in the second the subject and object are distinct. The verb has a different valency, but the form remains exactly the same.

**Conclusion**

In many languages other than English, such valiancy changes aren't possible like this; the verb must instead be inflected for voice in order to change the valency. [citation needed]

A copula is a word that is used to describe its subject, [dubious – see talk page] or to equate or liken the subject with its predicate. [dubious – see talk page] In many languages, copulas are a special kind of verb, sometimes called copulative verbs or linking verbs.

Because copulas do not describe actions being performed, they are usually analysed outside the transitive/intransitive distinction. [citation needed] The most basic copula in English is to be; there are others (remain, seem, grow, become, etc.). [citation needed]

Some languages (the Semitic and Slavic families, Chinese, Sanskrit, and others) can omit the simple copula equivalent of «to be», especially in the present tense. In these languages a noun and adjective pair (or two nouns) can constitute a complete sentence. This construction is called zero copula.

Most languages have a number of verbal nouns that describe the action of the verb. In Indo-European languages, there are several kinds of verbal nouns, including gerunds, infinitives, and supines. English has gerunds, such as seeing, and infinitives such as to see; they both can function as nouns; seeing is believing is roughly equivalent in meaning with to see is to believe. These terms are sometimes applied to verbal nouns of non-Indo-European languages.

In the Indo-European languages, verbal adjectives are generally called participles. English has an active participle, also called a present participle; and a passive participle, also called a past participle. The active participle of give is giving, and the passive participle is given. The active participle describes nouns that perform the action given in the verb, e.g. a giving person. [dubious – see talk page] The passive participle describes nouns that have been the object of the action of the verb, e.g. given money Other languages apply tense and aspect to participles, and possess a larger number of them with more distinct shades of meaning. [citation needed]

In languages where the verb is inflected, it often agrees with its primary argument (what we tend to call the subject) in person, number and/or gender. English only shows distinctive agreement in the third person singular, present tense form of verbs (which is marked by adding «– s»); the rest of the persons are not distinguished in the verb.

Spanish inflects verbs for tense/mood/aspect and they agree in person and number (but not gender) with the subject. Japanese, in turn, inflects verbs for many more categories, but shows absolutely no agreement with the subject. Basque, Georgian, and some other languages, have polypersonal agreement: the verb agrees with the subject, the direct object and even the secondary object if present.

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