

Events and Two Types of Aspect

(Smith 1991, Bhatt & Pancheva's LSA course)

1. Events and two types of aspect.

- Aspect is concerned with the way events relate to time.
- Two types of aspect:
 - Aktionsart (also called inner aspect, lexical aspect)
 - Grammatical aspect (also called outer aspect, inflectional aspect, viewpoint aspect)
- AKTIONSPORT is concerned with the internal temporal constituency of events.

- (1) (I want) Mary to be happy.
(I want) Mary to know French.
- (2) (I want) Mary to dance.
(I want) Mary to walk in the park
- (3) (I want) Mary to build a boat.
(I want) Mary to walk to the park.
- (4) (I want) Mary to recognize Sue.
(I want) Mary to reach the summit.

To see the differences among these event types, consider...

- whether the event takes time / lasts in time (+) or the event is instantaneous (-)
- whether the event has a natural endpoint (+) or has an arbitrary endpoint (-)
- whether the event is divisible into sub-events of the same type (+) or not (-)
- whether the event is stative (= represents a state) (+) or dynamic (= involves an action) (-)

(5)

	event takes time	natural end point	divi- sible	stative	EVENT TYPE	Depiction (Smith 1991)
<i>be happy</i> <i>know French</i>					STATE	
<i>dance</i> <i>walk in the park</i>					ACTIVITY	
<i>build a boat</i> <i>walk to the park</i>					ACCOMPLISHMENT	
<i>recognize Sue</i> <i>reach the summit</i>					ACHIEVEMENT	

■ GRAMMATICAL ASPECT locates an event or part of an event relative to a reference time. It functions like the lens of a camera: it focuses on an entire event or on a part of an event and makes it "visible", that is, semantically relevant. (Smith 1991:91,99)

- Progressive/imperfective

(6) Mary was walking to the park.

↳ It focuses on part of the event, excluding I(initial point) and F(inal point). What is in focus is thus an "open" event. (Smith 1991)

↳ Event time contains reference time (B&P 2005)

- Perfective

(7) Mary walked to the park.

↳ It focuses on the entire event, including I(initial point) and F(inal point). What is in focus is thus a "closed" event. (Smith 1991)

↳ Event time is contained in reference time (B&P 2005)

- Neutral (see later)

■ Aktionsart and grammatical aspect are traditionally treated as two independent layers of aspect. This means that a form from one layer can combine with different forms from the other layer.

(8) a. They built a sandcastle. Accomplishment + Perfective
b. Jane swam in the river. Activity + Perfective

(9) a. Mary was dancing. Activity + Imperf/Progressive
b. Mary danced. Activity + Perfective

2. Grammatical Aspect: Semantic Tests

There are several tests that distinguish Imperfective/Progressive from Perfective.

■ Test ①: Entailment patterns concerning F (the final point).

- (10) a. Mary was walking to school but she didn't actually get there. ⇒
b. Mary walked to school but she didn't actually get there. ⇒
- (11) a. A: Martin was walking to school B: Did he get there? ⇒
b. A: Martin walked to school. B: Did he get there? ⇒

QUESTION 1: Apply this test to the following predicates:

- (12) a. fix the clock
b. ~~reach the summit~~
c. open the door
d. touch the door

■ Test ②: Interpretation of certain adverbials.

- (13) a. Between 10 and 11, Maya was walking to the park. ⇒
b. Between 10 and 11, Maya walked to the park. ⇒
- (14) a. Between 10 and 11, Maya was dancing. ⇒
b. Between 10 and 11, Maya danced. ⇒

■ Test ③: Temporal relation to *when*-clauses.

- (15) a. John was singing when Mary knocked at the door. ⇒
b. John sang when Mary knocked at the door. ⇒

■ Test ④: Acceptability with *after*-clauses.

For *after*-clauses to be acceptable, the main clause has to express a "closed" event. The minimal requirement to say that an event e' succeeds an event e" is that the endpoint of e' follows the endpoint of e". (Smith 1991:102)

- (16) a. ?? Maya was walking to the park after the earthquake hit.
b. Maya walked to the park after the earthquake hit.

3. Perfective

- Perfective grammatical aspect presents events as punctual: "a simple, closed structure which appears at a point of time" (Smith 1991:104).

(17) I F
 //////////////

- This punctual presentation is independent of whether the event is instantaneous or involves duration in its inherent Aktionsart.

(18) Juan fue feliz en su juventud.
 J was-Perf happy in his youth
 'Juan was-Perf happy in his youth'

(19) The king reigned for thirty years.

(20) Lily wrote the report in three hours.

(21) Ann reached the summit.

- English, Spanish, French, etc.

(22) I **F** Termination point for states (18) and activities (19)
 ////////////// ↗
 ↘ Completion point for accomplishments (20) and achievements (21)

- Chinese

Two perfects: Perfect1 *-le* indicates termination for any event type
 Perfect 2 *-wan-* indicates completion

(23) Wo zuotian xie-le yifeng xin, keshi mei xie-wan
 I yesterday write-LE oneCL letter, but not write-finish
 'I wrote a letter yesterday but didn't finish it'

(24) Wo zuotian xie-wan-le yifeng xin
 I yesterday write-WAN-LE oneCL letter
 'I wrote (and finished) a letter yesterday'

4. Imperfective / Progressive.

- General schema:

(25) I F
 ////

- Imperfective proper: it focuses on a part of the event that excludes I and F, no matter what type (Aktionsart) the original event belongs to.

(26) French:

- La mer était calme
The sea was-IMP calm
- L'enfant pleurait
The child was-crying-IMP
- Ils bâtissaient une cabine
They were-building-IMP a cabin

- Progressive: it focuses on a part of the event that excludes I and F, with the precondition that the type of the original event (Aktionsart) be non-stative.

(27) English:

- Kelly was singing.
- Ros was climbing a tree.
- * Bill was knowing the answer.

QUESTION 2: What happens with achievements? Can we put them in the progressive? Discuss.

5. Neutral

- Neutral grammatical aspect includes I (the initial point) and at least one stage of the event.

(28) I . F
 ///

- Examples from Chinese

(29) A: Mali xie gongzuo baogao

Mali write work report

B: Ta hai zai xie ma?

she still ZAI write MA?

'Is she still writing?'

⇒ In test ①, it patterns like Imperf/Progressive

(30) Zhangsan dao jia de shihou, Mali xie gongzuo baogao

Z arrive home DE time, Mali write work report

a. When Z arrived at home, Mali was writing the work report'

Simultaneous

b. 'When Z arrived at home, Mali wrote the work report'

Successive

⇒ In test ③, it patterns both like Imperf/Progressive and like Perfective