

Aspect

Readings: Portner, Ch. 8.2

I. Aspectual classes

- We distinguish two broad classes of *eventualities*: *states* and *events*.

I.1. States

- States obtain (while events occur).
- Examples: *know, believe, have, love, be proud, fear*
- States are *homogeneous* (i.e., they have no internal structure).
- States have the *subinterval property*: if a state is true at an interval I , then it is also true at any subinterval $I' \subset I$.
- With states, usually no *volition* (i.e., purposeful action on part of the subject) is implied.

I.2. Events

I.2.1. Activities

- Activities are events that take time, but don't culminate.
- Examples: *run, walk, talk, sing, drive a car, watch birds*
- For activities, a limited version of the subinterval property holds: if a state is true at an interval I , then it is also true at any subinterval $I' \subset I$ **up to a certain level of granularity**.
- Usually imply volition.

I.2.2. Accomplishments

- Accomplishments are events that take time and culminate.
- Examples: *paint a picture, deliver a sermon, build a house*
- The subinterval property does not hold.
- Usually accomplishments imply volition.
- Internal structure: accomplishments consist of three parts, *preparation* (an activity), *event/culmination*, and *result* (a state).

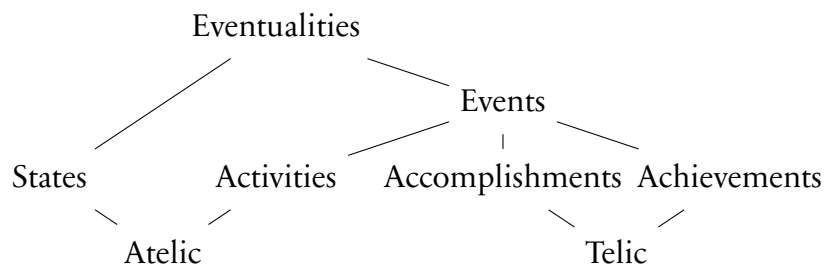
I.2.3. Achievements

- Examples: *recognize, spot, find, lose, die*
- The subinterval property does not hold.
- Usually achievements imply no volition.
- Internal structure: achievements don't have a preparation phase. They consist of a two parts: *event* and *result* (state).

1.3. Telicity

- States and activities are *atelic* (they have no set terminal point), accomplishments and achievements are *telic* (they have a set terminal point; in the case of accomplishments: the culmination point).

1.4. Summary of aspectual class distinctions



1.5. Diagnostics for distinguishing between aspectual classes

In-class Exercise 3

- Judge whether the following uses of *in*-adverbials and *for*-adverbials are acceptable. Based on your judgments, come up with a generalization about which of these two kinds of adverbials is compatible with which predicates.

- (1) a. Carla ran for fifteen minutes.
b. Carla ran in fifteen minutes
- (2) a. Carla arrived for fifteen minutes.
b. Carla arrived in fifteen minutes.
- (3) a. Carla did her homework for fifteen minutes.
b. Carla did her homework in fifteen minutes.
- (4) a. Carla was happy for fifteen minutes.
b. Carla was happy in fifteen minutes.

- Your generalization:

In-class Exercise 4

- Judge whether the following uses of *finish* are acceptable. Based on your judgments, come up with a generalization: verbs of which aspectual class(es) can *finish* combine with?
 - Which property/properties of this aspectual class do you think is the decisive one?
- (5) Arnold finished noticing the car.
- (6) Arnold finished crossing the street.
- (7) Arnold finished being afraid of spiders.
- (8) Arnold finished writing the essay.
- (9) Arnold finished petting a dog.
- Your generalization:

In-class Exercise 5

- Judge whether the following uses of *carefully/deliberately* are acceptable. Based on your judgments, come up with a generalization: verbs of which aspectual class(es) can be modified by these adverbs?
 - Which property/properties of this aspectual class do you think is the decisive one?
- (10) Arnold carefully/deliberately noticed the car
- (11) Arnold carefully/deliberately crossed the street.
- (12) Arnold carefully/deliberately was afraid of spiders.
- (13) Arnold carefully/deliberately petted a dog.
- Your generalization:

1.6. Bonus diagnostic

In-class Exercise 6

- Judge whether the following entailments go through. Based on your judgments, come up with a generalization: for verbs of which aspectual class(es) do the entailments go through?
- Which property/properties of this aspectual class do you think is the decisive one?

(I4) Arnold was noticing the car.
 → Arnold noticed the car.

(I5) Arnold was writing the essay.
 → Arnold wrote the essay.

(I6) Arnold was petting a dog.
 → Arnold petted a dog.

- Your generalization:

1.7. Summary of diagnostics

2. Viewpoint aspect

- Reminder: three times approach; speech time S , event time E , topic time T .
- Tense expresses the relationship between T and S .
- The relationship between T and E is expressed by *viewpoint aspect* (*simple, progressive or perfect* in English).

2.1. The perfect

- The perfect can combine with different tenses:

- (17) a. Fiona **has arrived**. *present perfect*
b. When Omar got to London, Fiona **had** already arrived. *past perfect*
c. Fiona **will have arrived** by 10am tomorrow. *future perfect*

- The perfect expresses $E < T$ in all three sentences.

In-class Exercise 1

- For each of the sentences below, identify tense and aspect of the bolded predicate and specify the contribution of the tense and aspect, using the three-times approach. An example is given in (18a).

- (18) a. Lisa **had finished** making the soup by 6pm yesterday.
past perfect, $T < S \wedge E < T$
b. Omar **has done** his homework.
c. When Lisa came to the greenhouses, the seeds **had sprouted**.
d. When my parents arrive, Fiona **will have left**.

- But the perfect doesn't always express $E < T$: (19) says that Omar became sick two days ago, and that he is still sick (let's say $T = S$), so it's not the case that $E < T$:

(19) Omar has been sick for two days.

- The use of the perfect in (19) is called *continuative perfect*, and only arises with states.

2.2. The progressive and simple aspect

- Let's now look at the English progressive:

- (20) a. Tweety **is flying**. *present progressive*
b. Tweety **was flying**. *past progressive*
c. Tweety **will be flying**. *future progressive*

- The progressive expresses that the event is ongoing at the time indicated by the tense. This suggests that the progressive expresses $T \subseteq E$. In non-progressive sentences with non-state predicates, the relationship will be $E \subseteq T$:

- (21) a. Tweety was flying to London. *past progressive*
 $T < S \wedge T \subseteq E$

b. Tweety flew to London. *simple past*
 $T < S \wedge E \subseteq T$

- $T \subseteq E$ also holds for states, as in (22). This shows that states and event progressives have something in common.

(22) Fiona knew the answer. *simple past*
 $T < S \wedge T \subseteq E$

In-class Exercise 2

- For each of the sentences below, identify tense and aspect of the bolded predicate and specify the contribution of the tense and aspect, using the three-times approach.

- (23) a. Lisa **was cooking** a soup from 5pm to 6pm yesterday.
 b. Omar **will do** his homework tomorrow.
 c. When Fiona comes back, Omar **will be doing** his homework.
 d. Omar **is sick**.
 e. Fiona **founced** out.

- One famous puzzle concerning the progressive is *the progressive paradox*, pointed out by David Dowty. Consider:

(24) Max was crossing the street when he was hit by a bus.

- According to event semantics as we've learned it so far, the truth conditions of the underlined sentence require the existence of an event in which Max crossed the street.
- But although Max was *crossing* the street, he never actually *crossed* it.
- Dowty's suggestion is to appeal to possible worlds, saying that in the worlds in which Max was not interrupted by a bus there is an event of him crossing the street.
- In other words, according to Dowty, the progressive in (24) is used to express a modal meaning. We'll talk about modality later this semester.

Summary of viewpoint aspect

Simple for non-states	Perfect for non-states	Progressive and Simple for states
$E \subseteq T$	$E < T$	$T \subseteq E$

What you need to know

Key notions: (viewpoint) aspect, aspectual class, states vs. events, activities vs. accomplishments vs. achievements, atelic vs. telic, perfect, continuative perfect, progressive, progressive paradox

Skills:

- For any given sentence, identify
 - its tense (present, past, future);
 - its viewpoint aspect (simple, progressive, perfect);
 - and the aspectual class of its main predicate (state, activity, achievement, accomplishment)
- Express the contribution of tense and viewpoint aspect in a given sentence using the three-times approach.
- Use tests to distinguish between states, activities, accomplishments and achievements.