

## Events, Time and the Simple Form

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Article abstract

This is an attempt to discern more clearly the underlying or POTENTIAL meaning of the simple form of the English verb, described in Hirtle 1967 as 'perfective'. Vendler's widely accepted classification of events into ACCOMPLISHMENTS, ACHIEVEMENTS, ACTIVITIES, and STATES is examined from the point of view of the time necessarily contained between the beginning and end of any event, i.e. EVENT TIME as represented by the simple form. This examination justifies the well known dynamic/stative dichotomy by showing that event time is evoked in two different ways, that, in fact, the simple form has two ACTUAL significates. Further reflection on the difference between the two types thus expressed—developmental or action-like events and non-developmental or state-like events—leads to the conclusion that the simple form provides a representation of the time required to situate all the impressions involved in the notional or lexical import of the verb.

# EVENTS, TIME AND THE SIMPLE FORM

Walter H. Hirtle

A linguistic system is the subconscious organization the mind imposes on its own representations. (Guillaume 1984: 103)

## Introduction

Even a cursory survey of the literature shows an extraordinary variety of observations concerning the use of the simple form of the English verb. Insofar as this variety reflects the reality of discourse, it suggests that we are getting a far more precise view of usage than that presented in most grammars. Nonetheless when confronted with so many diverse observations — and we can expect to have more such facts as our observation of discourse becomes more refined — the grammarian-linguist cannot have a feeling of satisfaction. On the contrary he feels a certain frustration because inherent in his approach to language is a desire to understand it as a phenomenon, not merely describe its various manifestations. And a set of concrete facts such as these does not explain anything, but rather calls for an explanation since 'in itself the concrete may be observed, but not understood', as Guillaume (1984: 43) points out.

The problem then is to reach an understanding of how it comes about that the verb in the simple form can be used in so many different ways. The approach adopted here will not be to generalize on the basis of observed facts, to formalize observations as some scholars have done (cf. Leech 1969, Dowty 1977), but rather to attempt to discern the conditions giving rise to the various uses of the verb, an attempt based both on the observed facts and on what appear to be necessary components of any verb. Although this approach, which is based on the Psychomechanics of Language (cf. Guillaume 1984 *passim* for the main tenets), is by no means easier than other approaches, it is preferred because, being of an operational

type — it seeks what precedes and leads up to the observed facts — it holds more promise of throwing light on how the speaker produces a given effect and hence of providing an explanation of usage of the type found in other sciences based on observation.

In our approach it is assumed that each grammatical form has one underlying meaning through which it entertains systematic relations with other forms in the system. This underlying, or more precisely, POTENTIAL meaning (cf. Hirtle 1982: 40) may be actualized in different ways in usage, but the resulting senses are then seen as ACTUAL meanings, i.e. as the several consequences of the single prior condition. This approach differs radically from one 'founded on the assumption that grammatical features ... can have more than one SEPARATE meaning' (Leech 1969: 152; my emphasis). It provides an elegant means of dealing with the crucial problem of polysemy (cf. Hirtle in press) and so permits us to understand how a single morphological form can have several senses in discourse and yet serve as an effective instrument for thought and communication. The main aim of the present paper then is to examine different uses of the simple form, the different types of event it can express, in an effort to bring to light the meaning potential of the form that gives rise to these observed contextual senses.

Before turning to a discussion of the different uses of the simple form mentioned by various observers, a terminological problem must be settled: how to designate something which is common to all verbs. The term EVENT, although used in a more restricted sense by some authors, will be used here in this broad sense. Thus we can say that every verb expresses an event and, as it will become clear, only verbs can express events. This view is based on the commonly accepted notion that an event necessarily involves time and on the idea, which comes to us from Aristotle (cf. Michael 1970: 56), that this is precisely what distinguishes a verb from other types of word: besides its lexical meaning, a verb incorporates a formal (= grammatical) representation of time, or in the more elegant terminology of the Middle Ages (cf. Padley 1976: 35ff.), a verb CONSIGNIFIES time. It is by exploring and extending this initial insight, and particularly by focusing on the time involved in the duration of the event, that we can gain some understanding of how the surprising variety of usage of the simple form comes about.

## Vendler's Types

ACCOMPLISHMENTS AND ACHIEVEMENTS. The well known article by Vendler 'Verbs and Times' resumed previous work on types of verb and prompted much further discussion so it provides a convenient starting point. He sets out to examine how particular verbs 'presuppose and involve the notion of time' above and beyond the obvious past, present and future distinctions (p.97). (This time will be called EVENT TIME here because it is involved in, contained in, every event.) He attempts therefore to focus attention 'primarily upon the time schemata presupposed by various verbs' (p. 98). To this end he distinguishes four types of event, two of which, ACCOMPLISHMENTS and ACHIEVEMENTS<sup>1</sup>, provide a clear view of the time involved. Accomplishments 'proceed toward a terminus' (p. 101) as in:

*He ran a mile.*

*I drew a circle.*

where the verbs depict events as fully realized; one could say an accomplishment represents the beginning, middle and end of an event in time. He describes achievements on the other hand as events that 'occur at a single moment' (p. 103), as in:

*We reached the top at noon sharp.*

*She spotted the plane at 10:53 A.M.*

Here too the verbs depict events as fully realized, with their beginning, middle and end in time. From the point of view of consigned time, the difference between the two types is clear: whereas accomplishments last for an appreciable time, achievements are of extremely short duration, so short in fact that they cannot be represented as divided. Consequently achievements are not found in the progressive, as Vendler points out, nor, as Dowty brings out (1979:181), with *finish* :

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1. Although Mourelatos (1978) rightly characterizes Vendler's terminology as implying human agency, these terms will be retained here for the moment since our aim is to distinguish between them on the grounds, not of agent, but of the representation of time.

*\*She finished spotting the plane at 10:53 AM.*

In terms of event time, of the time constituting the duration of the event, the middle, separating the initial and final instants, is reduced to a minimum in achievements, whereas in accomplishments the period between the beginning and the end of the event is greater than minimal. The interesting point here is that the two types are distinguished on the basis of something inherent in every event, namely its duration or event time. Since it is represented in every verb, event time is sufficiently general to provide a basis for examining all uses of the verb.

Before going on to discuss other types, however, it will be useful to point out with Mourelatos (1978) that the distinction between accomplishments and achievements should not be taken as reflecting types of verb lexeme, 'hard and fast categories into which we can split verbs once and for all', as Dowty (1979: 182) puts it. Rather, it characterizes how a verb is used in a given context to evoke a particular experience of the speaker. That is to say, this first distinction shows how the lexeme is like the matter of a verb which is variously moulded by the grammatical forms of the verb in view of the message to be expressed. Thus we can contrast the above example of *reached* expressing an achievement with the following:

*We finished reaching the top at noon sharp.*

Here the speaker represents the event as taking an appreciable time (as when a straggling group is involved in the experience he wishes to express), so the verb here expresses an accomplishment. Similarly in:

*I crossed the border at noon.*

the event's duration is depicted as minimal, whereas it is more than minimal in:

*It took the battalion twenty minutes to cross the border.*

Calling this sentence an 'oddity' (cf. Vendler 1967: 104n) arises from mistakenly considering the achievement/accomplishment distinction as an inherent characteristic of the lexical elements involved rather than, as argued here, two ways of fitting the lexical import to the different grammatical frames provided by the event time. In

short, it is misleading to classify verbs according to these types; only uses in particular sentences can be so categorized.

Also requiring comment here is the notion of duration as applied to achievements. Can we properly speak of event time in such cases? Some authors in fact speak of 'instantaneous' events, like those in:

*He shoots!*

*Walker ducks!*

as 'having no duration' (Leech 1971: 15), 'not even duration of a very short period' (Comrie 1976: 42). This way of viewing achievements creates a serious difficulty: how can one imagine (or even perceive!) an event which occupies no time, that is, an event whose end does not come after its beginning? On the other hand if we accept with the OED that an instant is 'an infinitely short space of time', or that it is the shortest perceivable or imaginable space of time (cf. Valin 1971: 35f.), then we can speak of such events as having a minimal duration, as involving the shortest possible space of time. And indeed the happenings depicted in the above examples of sports commentaries can, in a slow motion replay, be seen to occupy time.

Perhaps the extreme case in the representation of short events is provided by those involving an abrupt transition from one state to another, as in:

*The power went off at midnight.*

Even though in our experience the transition has no duration — the situation of the power being off follows immediately that of it being on — to represent this transition by means of a verb requires us to depict both the final instant of the prior situation and the initial instant of the succeeding situation. It further requires that the limit between the two states be represented. In order to imagine a limit, however, we must give it a minimal space in time. Thus even here the event is represented with a beginning, a middle and an end, because the infinitesimally small can be represented only by means of a positive quantity. The point here is that we cannot represent an event without some duration, some event time.

ACTIVITIES. Achievements and accomplishments have been grouped by some authors into a single type, PERFORMANCES, characterized by the fact that they are end-oriented, telic. As such, performances can be contrasted with Vendler's third type of event, ACTIVITIES, because events of this type are open-ended. They do not 'proceed toward a terminus' but 'consist of successive phases following one another in time' (p. 99); they 'go on in time in a homogeneous way' (p. 101). Thus verbal notions such as 'running, walking, swimming, pushing or pulling something and the like are almost unambiguous cases of activity' (p. 107). As a consequence of its having no inherent conclusion, an activity can be said to have taken place regardless of whether it goes on for a long time or a short time. Thus what appears to distinguish an activity from the first two types in Vendler's eyes is that any point in its development could serve as a final instant, whereas the finalist or telic nature of performances calls for a representation of their point of completion as their final instant.

This is why some scholars distinguish activities from the first two types (performances) on the basis of their respective lexical import. However a problem arises when one tries to give examples of activities in the simple form. For example, Mourelatos (1978: 427) is of the opinion that the sentence:

*He pushed the cart.*

'could, doubtless, without any other adverbial, have the import of a process [= activity] predication in a suitable context.' Unfortunately a suitable context is not immediately obvious, and in fact when one tries to imagine a plausible context for the sentence, one ends up with either an achievement sense of 'gave it a push' (cf. *Why did you hit your little brother? He pushed the cart after I told him not to touch it.*) or an accomplishment sense like 'propulsing it over a certain distance' (cf. *How did you get everything here? He pushed the cart and I pulled it.*) Even in an example like:

*He pushed the cart for hours.*

one could hardly claim that the event is seen as open-ended because there is a lexical expression of the event's total duration. If one can judge by the resulting message,

the speaker had in mind the whole action from beginning to end. This is why even a sentence like:

*He pushed the cart twice for hours.*

can make sense in a suitable context (as for example when trying to give reasons for the subject's heart attack), and in that situation can hardly be considered 'nonsense' (Mourelatos 1978: 427).

A similar restriction arises when we try to situate another example of the simple form sometimes given as expressing an activity:

*He swam on Thanksgiving.*

Every time one tries to imagine this as a real sentence (i.e. spoken in a particular situation), the verb carries us through to the end of the stretch of time occupied by the event. One might understand it in the sense of 'participated in a race' (if the subject is in competition swimming) or of 'had a swim' (if the subject simply wished to show his courage on a cold day) or in some other way, but the simple form always evokes the complete space of event time. As a consequence it can take adverbials like *three times* which, according to Mourelatos, characterize performances.

It seems then that examples of activities in the simple form are, to say the least, suspect. The problem here is by no means uncommon and calls for the often repeated but seldom heeded warning about commenting on self-made examples quite fictitiously isolated from any situation or speaker. In reality, a sentence is always the expression of some experience of a speaker and can only be safely observed and analyzed as such. In this respect, examples of activities like the following can easily be situated by the reader in an appropriate context and so are quite acceptable:

*He is thinking about Jones.*

*It is snowing.*

However, since such examples involve the progressive form they cannot be profitably examined within the confines of this article.



The point of all this is not to deny that there is a lexical distinction to be made between activities and performances which is useful for those whose major concern is the notional import signified by verbs. Rather it is to suggest that unless more convincing evidence from real usage is brought forward the distinction between activities and performances cannot be considered valid for the grammatical analysis of the simple form because it is not based on different time schemata, different formal representations of event time consigned by the verb. Our discussion has nonetheless served a double purpose. First, it has shown how the simple form imposes its own organization on the lexical representations presented to it. More important, it has brought out a crucial grammatical point concerning the representation of event time: that whenever an achievement, an accomplishment or an activity is thought in — is represented by means of — the simple form, we are obliged to see it from the beginning to the end of its duration.

This point has been brought out in other studies. Smith (1983) remarks that the simple form evokes the three event types with 'endpoints'. A more extended discussion of examples is found in Hirtle 1967, where it is shown that, besides the 'instantaneous' type mentioned above, a number of other uses of the simple form evoke the complete duration of an event as either seen or foreseen at the moment of speech, for example:

*I resign!* (performative)

*The Queen walks slowly to the throne.* (comment of a ceremonial act)

*Here they come!* (comment of an expected event)

*The story is about a man who goes to London and makes his fortune.*  
(summary)

*She takes up her hat, puts it on and walks across the room.* (stage direction)<sup>2</sup>

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2. Among other uses discussed in this study was that of the simple form to express future events as scheduled, for example:

*He retires next year.*

More recent research (Hirtle and Curat 1986) has shown that it was a mistake to consider that this use evokes the duration of the event from beginning to end.

In fact if there were no other event types one would be tempted to characterize the simple form as a perfective in the sense that it calls to mind the full extent of the event's duration in time. However the fourth type of event soon shows that this view of the simple form would be untenable.

STATES. The fourth type mentioned by Vendler is STATES which 'last for a period of time' (p. 103) and 'can be broken down into time instants' (p. 114). That is to say, states are represented with duration and so must be considered to be events. However states 'are not processes going on in time' (p. 102) and so differ from other types of event in excluding any development, change or successive realization. Even activities, which in some respects involve a uniform process, 'consist of successive phases following one another in time' as in the repeated movements of running. Consequently performances and activities all resemble actions in that they are carried out, they occur in time, whereas states can only be said to exist in time and the subject does nothing. The distinction between these two basic types of event is today widely accepted under various names such as dynamic/stative, action-like/state-like, and so on.

From the point of view of event time, the striking thing about verbs expressing a state is the fact that the simple form does not generally evoke a state's total duration. To say:

*The air smells of jasmine.*

calls to mind neither the beginning nor the end of the state, but merely evokes the situation at the moment of speaking. As has been pointed out elsewhere (cf. Hirtle 1967: 45ff, Dowty 1979: 71) it is this representation of just one moment of the event's duration that characterizes verbs expressing a state and distinguishes them from verbs expressing action-like events.

The moment of event time evoked by a verb expressing a state may belong to events which, in terms of extra-linguistic reality, are of various lengths. In the above example the represented moment, which coincides with the moment of speech, belongs to an event with a vaguely defined duration which is felt to extend beyond the moment depicted, as suggested by other elements in the sentence ( e.g. the relative impermanence of the smell of jasmine in the atmosphere). Although this is

by far the most common expressive effect, it is not the only one found. On occasion the moment evoked by the simple form may in fact correspond to the total duration of some extra-linguistic situation, as in the following example:

*It is exactly midnight.*

On the other hand the moment evoked grammatically by the verb may be implied to belong to a situation of limitless duration, as in:

*The Earth is round.*

The difference of expressive effect between examples like the last two is quite considerable and it is no doubt this which has led to widely varying views of the simple form. It is sometimes described as expressing all time, past, present and future, in total disregard of its tense, and sometimes as expressing no duration (cf. Freed 1979: 75), in spite of the fact that, as mentioned above, we cannot represent an event as requiring no time. This diversity of sentence meaning to which the simple form expressing a state can contribute should not lead one to propose that there is, for each such expressive effect, a different time schema underlying the form. Rather it is being proposed here that the same representation of event time is involved in all such uses because what is expressed here is a state, an event involving no change or development. Because a state is absolutely homogeneous, a single moment may be seen either as the total duration of an event which lasts only a moment or as typical of all the other moments of a more lengthy event. The important point here is the need to distinguish carefully between the stretch of event time represented by means of the verb and the total sentence meaning or expressive effect arising from combining the import of each of the elements in the context. (The need to take into account all elements in a context to explain the expressive effect can be illustrated by replacing *the Earth* in the last example with *the bubble*; although there is no change in the verb, the suggestion of an 'eternal truth' no longer arises.) Unfortunately this distinction is often neglected in the literature with misleading results.

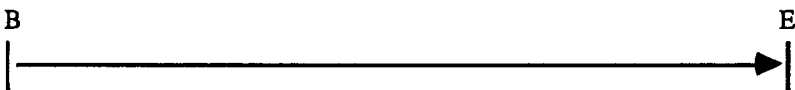
All of this is not intended to imply that the distinction between the two major types of event is as clearly visible in every use of the simple form as our illustrative examples might suggest. Human experience being endlessly varied, some situations call clearly for representation and expression as a dynamic event, others as a stative

event, but there are situations which permit both interpretations and may well give rise to sentences where the distinction is barely discernible. This is often the case with the verbs of perception. Nevertheless if the two major types of event reflect two manners of representing event time — and that is the thesis being proposed here — then the speaker, influenced perhaps by the most subtle and fugitive impressions arising from his experience, must opt for one or the other and so represent either the carrying out, the happening, of the event or simply some moment of its existence, thereby giving rise respectively to the expression of a dynamic, rapid-cadence event or a stative, slow-cadence event.

### Two Types of Event

Our discussion so far has by and large confirmed the findings of other grammarians, a number of whom agree that states constitute a type of event quite different from the action-like type seen in achievements, accomplishments and activities. We have also attempted to get behind impressionistic descriptions like 'stative' or 'slow-cadence' and 'dynamic' or 'rapid-cadence' in order to see the time schemata giving rise to such impressions. It has been observed that, underlying the various types of verb lexeme found in discourse, there are two ways of representing event time:

1) a 'full-length' representation found in action-like events, including their beginning (B) and their end (E), as in the following schema:



2) a 'momentary' representation found in state-like events which could be schematically depicted as follows:



The impression of moving rapidly from beginning to end in the former type gives rise to the dynamic, rapid-cadence effect, whereas the evoking of a single moment in the latter suggests that there is no movement involved (other than that of time in general, of universe time) to produce a stative or slow-cadence effect. Such would seem to be the formal representations of event time, the time schemata, underlying the two types of event expressed by the simple form.

The four uses discussed by Vendler do not exhaust all the possibilities of the simple form. To help show that the two time schemata proposed above underlie other uses, we shall examine briefly one mentioned by numerous writers, that involving repetition or habit. Again it will be important to distinguish between what the lexical component and what the grammatical component of the verb contribute to this use — between what is signified and what is consigned — in order to discern just how the event is represented in terms of our constant grammatical parameter, event time.

The expression of iterativity is complicated by the fact that it seems to have two facets, repetition and habit. The former involves a series of repeated actions, the actual occurrence of a set of identical processes as in:

*He walked to work all last summer.*

Here one gets the impression of an accomplishment, walking to work, repeated daily over a given period of time. This is quite different from what is usually considered habit in the grammars. For example in:

*He walks to work.*

there is no suggestion of a stretch of time within which the walking to work is realized over and over again. On the other hand, expressed in the progressive this sentence would suggest a limited or temporary set of repetitions, not a habit.

Considerations of this sort concerning iterative uses lead to the distinction between verbs expressing a repeated action, a series, and those expressing a habit. The distinction becomes much clearer when the term 'habit' is understood in the sense of a disposition or tendency to carry out the action periodically. In contrast, a series of repeated actions evokes the effectual carrying out of the action on successive

occasions, the actualizing of the disposition or tendency. The interesting thing about regarding iterative events in this twofold fashion is that it leads us back to the familiar ground of event types already known. In effect, a disposition or tendency is a characteristic and so is attributed to the subject as a state. As in any other expression of a state, the simple form here evokes what exists at the moment, any impression of development or change being excluded. This is why the progressive form cannot evoke a habit in this sense. In this respect Vendler's suggestion (p. 108) that occupations and abilities, like dispositions, are states appears to be well founded. However since a habit is of the nature of a potential oriented toward actualization in the performance or doing of a series of actions, some hesitate to consider a habit as an ordinary state. To mark this distinction, which is purely lexical, one should perhaps speak of a habit as a STATE-LIKE EVENT, in the sense that its event time is represented just as in ordinary states. A series of repeated actions, on the other hand, can be justly described as consisting 'of successive phases following one another in time' as Vendler describes activities. That is to say, a repeated action involves a certain uniformity in its realization, reminiscent of that observed in activities. Furthermore such events, like activities, are represented in the full span of their event time when in the simple form, but in the progressive depict merely a moment of their development, leaving their duration open-ended.

All of this suggests that, from a grammatical point of view (i.e. from the point of view of event time), the expression of iterativity involves no new type of representation. Represented through its conditions of potentiality, an iterative event is expressed as a state-like habit one moment of whose existence is depicted by the simple form. Represented through its actualization as a series of repeated actions, it is depicted by the simple form as an action-like event evoked from beginning to end. From a lexical point of view, of course, there is good reason for distinguishing iterative events from others, as does Freed.

Each of the uses examined above has been shown to involve either a total-duration representation of event time or a momentary representation of event time giving rise respectively to an action-like or a state-like event in discourse. Similar remarks might be made of the various other uses of the simple form observed so far (cf. Gordon 1986 and Hirtle 1967). Thus all the evidence examined to date shows that each use of the simple form embodies one of the two time schemata.

### Meaning and the Simple Form

At first sight this result suggests that there is no single potential meaning discernible behind the simple form since it sometimes evokes the whole of the event's duration, sometimes only a moment of it, in a fashion reminiscent of what in other languages has been called 'perfective' and 'imperfective'. To conclude that the simple form has two basic, irreconcilable meanings would hardly be satisfactory because it would amount to proposing two quite distinct simple forms of the English verb, a proposal for which there is absolutely no evidence on the level of the morphological sign. And yet this conclusion, which is based, as we have seen, on the examination of many verbs and uses, would seem to be quite inescapable — at least until a curious fact concerning states is taken into account. Thanks to this frequently overlooked fact, a unified view of the simple form can be obtained — a single meaning underlying the single morphological sign — a view which ultimately leads to the realization that the simple form is primarily concerned not with the evoking of event time in and for itself, but with evoking event time insofar as it is a necessary condition for situating the lexeme in time, i.e. for the representation of something as an event.

The curious fact just alluded to came to light as a result of reflecting on why a verb expressing a state is not found in the progressive form:

*This book deals with the Renaissance.*

*It floats!*

An action-like event can, of course, be represented in the progressive, in which case it is evoked as incomplete:

*He is dealing with the Renaissance.*

*Look, it's floating!*

Even examples of the progressive with verbs that usually express a state can be seen, upon close examination of the context, to express a developmental sense, as in:

*What's he wanting this time, I wonder?*

*What I am really meaning is...*<sup>3</sup>

Examination of usage like this brings to light the fact that a state cannot be seen as incomplete. That is to say, whether one represents the whole duration of a state-like event, or only a portion of its duration, one has the impression that the state as an indivisible whole is somehow evoked. In other words, whatever constitutes a state must exist as such at each and every moment of its duration. On reflection it soon appears that this characteristic is a necessary consequence of the very nature of an entity admitting of no development or change: all its constituent elements must be present in time at its very first instant and must persist throughout its every instant. A dynamic, action-like event, on the other hand, is developmental by nature and since every instant of its duration offers the possibility of change, at no single instant can all the impressive elements constituting an action be seen to exist. It follows that to obtain a view of all that is involved in a dynamic event one must represent its total duration. In short, a state-like event exists as a whole in each of its instants, an action-like event only in the complete series of instants making up its duration.<sup>4</sup>

It seems then that all uses of the simple form have this in common: they evoke the time required to represent the lexeme as a whole in time, as an event.

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3. See Hirtle 1967, pages 52 and 76 for comments on the last six examples.

4. In Hirtle 1967 (p. 26) these two ways of representing event time are depicted in the following way, where  $I_1$  stands for the first instant,  $I_2$  the second instant, etc., and the figure 1 symbolizes the whole:

$$\text{for state-like events: } I_1 = I_2 = I_3 = \dots = I_n = 1$$

i.e. the situation at the first instant (the content of Instant One) is the same as that at Instant Two, etc., and the whole lexical content of the verb is realized in any one of the instants of the event's duration;

$$\text{for action-like events: } I_1 + I_2 + I_3 + \dots + I_n = 1$$

i.e. a different element of the lexical content may be realized in each instant of the event's duration. For an interesting application of this distinction to a problem in Spanish, see Chevalier 1977, especially pages 13-15.



Granted this view of the simple form, its two time schemata appear as necessary consequences of two relations between lexeme and time: the impressions constituting the lexeme are seen either to coexist in time or to arise successively. The resulting momentary and full-length representations of event time, which recall the representation of space by means of the point and the line, appear to be the only representations made possible by this form because there seems to be no other relationship possible between a lexeme and its time of duration.

This view of the simple form as embodying the relation between lexical type and time can be illustrated and somewhat refined if we turn our attention for the moment to extremely short events. We have already seen that a sentence like:

*The power went off at midnight.*

evokes a sudden transition from one situation to another because *went* expresses the event's complete duration — beginning, middle (reduced to an instant) and end in rapid cadence. A very different effect is produced by a sentence like:

*It was exactly midnight.*

Here there is no impression of something happening suddenly, but rather of the momentary existence of a state with no view of its coming into existence or going out of existence. That is to say, even here where we know from other sentence elements that the state cannot last more than an instant, there is no representation of its beginning or ending. As noted above, this same impression — the existence of an event, not its happening — characterizes all states so there appears to be good grounds for suggesting, as in Smith (1983) that event time as represented in any verb expressing a state-like event excludes a view of the beginning and the end of the event.

The verb *to know* provides us with another illustration of this difference between the two types of time representation. In a typical use such as:

*He knew the answer.*

*knew* merely evokes a moment in the existence of the state of being aware, of having knowledge. However in Vendler's example (p. 112):

*And then suddenly I knew!*

*knew*, thanks to a lexical shift, evokes the transitional, achievement-type event of becoming aware with its beginning, middle and end, giving the impression that something happened. This is a good example of how, through polysemy, most any verb can express now one type of event, now another, as mentioned above.<sup>5</sup>

Such examples lend confirmation to the analysis of time schemata presented above but they also raise a question: why does a state-like event, even a very short one, exclude any representation of its beginning and ending? A moment's reflection on the nature of a state and of these two liminal instants suggests why they are incompatible. Of all the instants constituting the duration of an event, two necessarily involve change: the instant when the event comes into existence and the instant when it goes out of existence. Since a state is by nature absolutely homogeneous offering no possibility of development or change, its event time cannot include any representation of the inherently transitional instants of beginning and end.

Thus if the impressive elements constituting the lexical content of a state-like event remain unchanged from instant to instant there appears to be no possibility of evoking the two liminal instants of transition as part of the event. By the same token, the heterogeneous, developmental nature of an action-like event, whose impressive constituents are variable from instant to instant, calls for a representation of these two instants precisely because they involve transition. Furthermore this development from one phase of the event to the next is not limited to the initial and final phases — the onset and the coda, to borrow Freed's terminology — but may be found from moment to moment throughout the middle or nucleus of the event. That is to say, since any instant of a developmental event involves, or at least may involve, change, it must be represented as transitional, as allowing for development, as providing the conditions producing the situation that prevails at the next instant. In short, each instant is represented as conditioning the following instant in action-like events.

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5. A different interpretation of such uses is found in Smith (1983: 485), where they are classified as states even though they do not exhibit those characteristics on which this type of event was originally based.

This way of viewing event time suggests a fundamental difference between the two types of event, a difference which helps account for a fact noted above: that the subject is often felt to carry out an action-like event but never a state. Because each phase or even instant prepares for and gives rise to the succeeding one in a dynamic event, its event time involves a sort of causal linkage to constitute a closely knit series of phases or instants making up the event's duration. In the case of stative events on the other hand there is no conditioning link between one phase or instant and the next because there is nothing to change or bring about. That is, each instant of a state exists on its own without any influence on the following instant; as a consequence the continuation of a stative event depends solely on the existence of the subject continuing unchanged insofar as the particular circumstances evoked by the verb are concerned. The subject does not 'perform' or 'do' a state; by merely persisting without alteration it ensures the persistence of the event. Hence statives are not agentive. This differs markedly from action-like events where the chain of conditioning relationships through which the event is realized is attributed to the subject with the result that the subject is often felt to do something, to perform the action or bring about the event.

Representing the duration of an event in this way — either as one of a series of independently existing instants or as a set of instants each conditioning the following — permits us to account for an even more marked effect on the level of usage. In the former case any moment of the event can be evoked without presupposing anything about the existence or non-existence of other moments of the event: each moment is seen in and for itself, although other elements in the sentence may suggest that the event is lengthy or short, as we saw above. In the case of action-like events however, each moment gives rise to the following in a chain of conditioning moments so that the subject is seen as actualizing the whole event from beginning to end. Often however there is the impression arising from our experience that the subject's role in producing an action-like event has been cut short. To represent a dynamic event where the subject has not exploited all the conditioning links involved — has not realized the event from beginning to end — English must resort to another form, the progressive. By the same token, in situations where each

moment is self-sufficient the impression of unrealized conditioning factors cannot arise. This is why verbs expressing a state are not found in the progressive.<sup>6</sup>

If the foregoing considerations give a faithful reflection of the time schemata consigned by the simple form, that is, of how the duration of an event is represented grammatically, then we can get some idea of the fundamental unity of this form as a way of thinking an event, as a mental mould. In both types of event the simple form evokes a sufficient stretch of its duration for all the impressive constituents, the lexical import, signified by the verb to be situated in time. The fact that in stative events these constituents are seen to exist simultaneously whereas in dynamic events they are seen to come into existence successively gives rise to two different ways of representing event time, but it remains that in both cases the simple form provides the means for representing the total lexical import as an event, and in this sense it is a perfective. When one considers a verb in the simple form from this point of view one gets the impression of a lexico-grammatical whole, of a one-to-one correspondence between the lexical and the durational, of an integral view of the impressive constituents and the time required to ensure their existence as an event. This very integrality of the lexical and the grammatical is what the form itself, as a single word, evokes. Moreover this is basically what distinguishes it not only from the progressive but from every other form of the verb. In fact if the views presented here are well founded, we are finally in a position to examine the most far-reaching and least understood of the dichotomies in the English verb, that between simple and compound forms.

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6. The attempt by some scholars to account for the infrequent use of such verbs as *to know* in the progressive by calling them 'stative progressives' not only clouds the issue of usage but conflicts with the expressive effects observed here. The whole question merits more detailed discussion than can be given it in this article. (Cf. Hirtle 1967:69-84 for a summary treatment)

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