

SEMANTIC VERB CLASSES IN ROMANIAN AND ENGLISH

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Abstract: One of the major problems in English and Romanian linguistic literature is that they offer very similar definitions of semantic verb classes, but the analysis and the classification of English and Romanian verbs is completely different, mainly because different parameters for classification are used. Detailed analysis of semantic verb classes in English and Romanian has revealed that linguistic traditions of the two languages are completely different. On the other hand, contemporary grammars prove that similarities do exist, which offers a basis for a more general analysis of semantic verb classes.

This research has shown that Romanian language offers a substantial number of verb classes, which can semantically be connected to English verbs classes. The research has also shown that despite the obvious differences there are similarities and general definitions which can encompass both English and Romanian verbs and offer a base for a further scientific research and comparison.

Key words: English, Romanian, semantic classification of verbs, Aktionsart

1. Introduction

Aktionsart is considered a lexical aspect which is connected with the meaning of verbs and semantic categories of verbs (Rothstein 2004:1). It is often referred to as a verbal category dealing with the way the action is realized (Evseev 1974:86), as well as the nature of the situation, thus representing its objective characteristics (Novakov 2005:26).

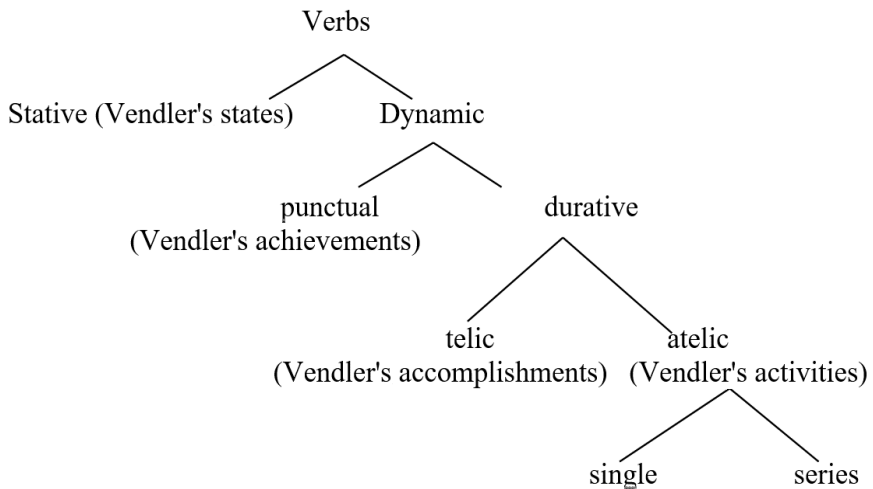
Vendler (1967:97-121) considers Aktionsart to be a lexical, i.e. semantic category according to which verbs can be classified into: activities, states, achievements and accomplishments.

Dahl (1987:26) classifies verbs based on the inherent aspectual meaning into: events, processes and states. Dahl also differentiates dynamic situations and states. Dynamic situations imply movement and change, while states do not (Dahl 1987:28). Dynamic situations can be further divided into bounded and unbounded situations. Bounded situations are

bounded by a goal, which means that the goal is always reached, while with unbounded the goal either does not exist, or it is not reached. Similar division of situations was offered by Declerck (1979:761-794).

Lambalgen and Hamm (2000:88) define Aktionsart as types of situations. They write about five types of situations: states, activities, accomplishments, achievements and points.

Furthermore, Brinton (1988:54) offers a more complete classification of verbs which is based on Vendler's classification. Brinton's types of verbs can be presented as follows:



2. Semantic verb classes in English

Vendler's classification (Vendler 1967: 97-121) into activities, states, achievements and accomplishments is more or less accepted in the relevant English linguistic literature. Namely, in order to classify situations it is important whether the situation implies a process or a development, whether it consists of different segments, and whether they are of equal quality or there is a segment which represents a terminal point or a goal after which the situation cannot be continued. It can be argued that verbs can be classified according to their semantic characteristics into four groups:

Activities (Activități)

Activities imply process and development, therefore can last in time. They have homogenous segments which means that any part of the process is of the same nature as the whole, in the sense that there is no terminal point

or goal to be reached. Thus, activities are atelic and dynamic, they consist of different stages and can occur in the progressive.

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

For example:

(1) a. *He ran for 5 minutes.*

b. *A alergat 5 minute.*

Romanian linguistic literature (Brăescu et al. 2005:326) also mentions activity verbs (*verbe de acțiune*). For example: *a alerga (run)*, *a înota (swim)*, *a învăța (study)*, *a mânca (eat)*, *a repara (fix)*, *strânge (collect)*, *a trimite (send)* etc. Thus Romanian activities require a conscious agent and can imply a change which must not necessarily be a change of state. Romanian activity verbs are in fact Vendler's activities, achievements and accomplishments.

States (Stări)

States last in time, they cannot be divided into segments, they do not denote a process and development, and therefore they do not have a goal. States simply indicate that a characteristic or a situation exists. They are stative and homogeneous, which means that all parts of a state are of equal quality. Thus, states have only one stage, because they do not imply any change.

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

For example:

(2) a. *She loves him.*

b. *Ea îl iubește.*

States (*verbe de stare*) are also mentioned in Romanian relevant literature: *a iubi (love)*, *a se mira (to be amazed)*, *a durea (ache)*, itd. Romanian verbs of state do not imply a change nor a conscious agent (Brăescu et al. 2005:326).

Achievements (Împliniri)

Achievements are punctual and telic. The whole situation expressed by an achievement verb happens in one moment.

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

Achievements are not homogeneous since they do not have an internal structure. They represent momentary changes of state which can be

preceded by a preparatory activity which is not a part of the meaning of the achievement.

Achievements rarely occur in the progressive since it is contradictory to talk about momentary situations which last in time. However, there are examples which prove otherwise:

- (3) a. *The train is arriving at the station.*
 b. *Trenul sosea în gară.*

Accomplishments (Înfăptuiri)

Accomplishments are telic durative situations. They are not homogenous in nature, because they involve a terminal point after which the situation naturally ends and cannot continue.

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

Some linguists (Rothstein 2004) consider accomplishments to be activities heading towards a goal. For example:

- (4) a. *Mary built a house.*
 b. *Mary a clădit o casă.*

The accomplishment in (10) consists of an activity event of *building the house* and of the reached goal *the built house*. Accomplishments must have a terminal point in order to indicate the quality of the whole situation.

Apart from activities and states, contemporary Romanian grammar (Brăescu et al. 2005:326) mentions events (*verbe de eveniment*). For example: *a se usca (dry)*, *a crește (grow)*, *a îmbătrâni (grow old)*, etc. Events imply a change of state, but without a conscious agent.

Romanian events are similar to English achievements and accomplishments which can imply a conscious agent as well.

Semelfactive situations

Some linguists (Rothstein 2004:28-29,183-187, Lambalgen and Hamm 2000:83, Smith 1991:21) write about the fifth type of verb situations called semelfactives. Such verbs are: *kick (a lovi cu piciorul)*, *jump (a sări)*, *wink (a face din ochi, clipi)*...

Semelfactives are mentioned in Romanian literature as well, but they have a different meaning. Namely, Romanian semelfactives are situations which happen only once. In English literature, however, semelfactive situations are momentary situations which can be telic or atelic. There are two accounts on the nature of semelfactive situations. Some linguists consider them achievements and other activities.

Rothstein (2004:29) defines semelfactive situations as minimal intervals of an activity. For example:

- (5) a. *John kicked the door for half an hour.*
 b. *John a lovit ușa cu piciorul jumătate de oră.*

They can occur in the progressive, which is also a characteristic of activities, not achievements:

- (6) a. *John was kicking the door.*
 b. *John lovea ușa cu piciorul.*

This is why Rothstein (2004:29) argues that semelfactive situations should not be considered a separate verb type, but a subgroup of activities.

On contrary, Smith (1991) defines semelfactive situations as atelic achievements. She points out that achievements represent dynamic, momentary, telic situations which have only one phase. While semelfactives also have only one phase, they are dynamic, but atelic.

However, Rothstein (2004:185) argues that semelfactives are not momentary situations, since they have an internal structure. For example, the verb *wink* consists of minimal elements which make the whole situation expressed by the verb. It implies that one must close the eye and open it again. Thus, semelfactives do not have the same structure as achievements, since they do not denote a change of state, or a goal. Therefore, semelfactive situations are similar to activities like *run / a alerga*, *swim / a inota*, because they consist of minimal elements which make the whole situation expressed by the verb.

3. Semantic verb classes in Romanian

In Romanian, Aktionsart is treated and defined as a lexical category which denotes the way the action is realized as well as the type of situation.

Romanian linguists agree that Aktionsart can be expressed at morphological, lexical and syntactic level. Furthermore, the meaning of the verb plays the most important role in classification of verbs.

The following types of verbal situation can be distinguished in Romanian language:

1. Durative situations (*Aktionsart durativ*)

Some linguists (Poghiric 1953:18) call these situations linear (*liniar*), because they denote a process which lasts in time, but there is no information about its beginning and end.

Luchian (2007:97-99) argues that Romanian durative verbs are in fact activities: *a ajuta* (*help*), *a alerga* (*run*), *a bea* (*drink*), *a zbura* (*fly*), *a vorbi*

(talk), states: *a avea* (have, possess), *a crede* (believe), *a iubi* (love), *a vrea* (want), *a (se) teme* (be afraid) or accomplishments: *a crea* (make, create), *a zidi* (build) *a popula* (populate), *a sorta* (sort, classify).

Romanian durative verbs are similar to English activities because in both languages such situations denote duration and do not tend towards a goal of any kind.

2. Momentary situations (*Aktionsart momentan*)

Momentary situations happen in one moment. Their beginning and end are rolled into one moment. Such verbs are: *a (se) abate* (come by), *a admite* (confess), *a afla* (find), *a aluneca* (slip), *a cădea* (fall), *a clipi* (blink), *a exploda* (explode), *a găsi* (find), *a (se) încrunta* (frown), *a (se) mira* (be surprised), *a simți* (feel), *a sparge* (break), *a (se) speria* (be startled), *a uita* (forget), *a (se) trezi* (wake up), *a tăia* (cut off), (Luchian 2007:101).

Since they have the same characteristics, Romanian momentary verbs can be connected to English achievements and momentary activities (which are called semelfactives by Rothstein 2004:28-29,183-187, Lambalgen and Hamm 2000:83, Smith 1991:21)

3. Inchoative and ingressive situations (*Aktionsart inchoativ și ingresiv*)

In Romanian, inchoative situations denote a gradual change of state. They are telic and momentary, since they denote that the beginning of the situation is completed. Such verbs are: *a aprinde* (light), *a iniția* (initiate), *a (se) imbarca* (come on board), *a (se) îndrăgosti* (fall in love), *răsări* (spring out) (Luchian 2007:104,105).

In traditional literature the term *inchoative* was often used synonymously with the term *ingressive*. Ingressive verbs denote momentary atelic situations (Nedioglu 1952:12), for example: *a cădea* (fall), *a sări* (jump), *a apăsa* (push), *a arunca* (throw). Such situations are similar to semelfactive situations or momentary activities mentioned by Rothstein (2004:28-29,183-187, Lambalgen and Hamm (2000:83), Smith (1991:21).

4. Terminative situations (*Aktionsart terminativ*)

Terminative verbs are: *a abandona* (abandon), *a acoperi* (cover up), *a convinge* (convince), *a demola* (demolish), *a dovedi* (prove), *a invita* (invite), *a imigra* (immigrate), *a obosi* (tire), *a (se) scufunda* (sink), *a trăda* (betray) (Luchian 2007:104,105).

Luchian (2007:86) argues that terminative verbs denote situations which have a result: *a cumpăra* (buy), *a telefona* (telephone), *a merge* (go), *a desena* (draw), etc. However, listed verbs neither denote a resultative situation nor imply an end point. They are activities. It is not until the direct object is added that they are completed. Thus, mentioned verbs must be used

together with their direct object in order to denote a terminal situation. It is the direct object, not the verb itself, which denotes the end point: *a cumpăra o casă* (buy a house), *a merge la munte* (go to the mountains), *a desena un peisaj* (draw a landscape), etc. This makes Romanian terminative verbs similar to English accomplishments.

On the other hand, one cannot argue that terminative verbs are the same as resultative verbs, because resultative verbs imply a result, while terminative do not, they just imply the situation came to an end.

On the other hand, there are verbs which semantically imply terminativity: *a termina* (finish), *a sfârși* (finish), *a isprăvi* (complete, end), *a găta* (finish), *a înceta* (stop). This makes Romanian terminative verbs similar to English achievements.

Within the group of Romanian terminative verbs we can distinguish a subgroup called *ingressive verbs* (Popescu 2000:63). They denote the end of a situation, for example *a se opri* (stop). Similarly, Savin-Zgardan (2001: 36) mentions *finitive situations* which denote situations which are interrupted or finished, for example: *a da de capăt* (finish, come to an end).

5. Iterative situations (*Aktionsart iterativ*)

Iterative situations denote repetition. Thus they show similarities with English iterative achievements.

Such situations are: *a pulsa* (pulse), *a pupăi* (chirp), *a realege* (reelect), *a reanaliza* (reanalyze), *a reface* (redo), *a bocăni* (hammer, knock), *a păși* (pace), *a pedala* (pedal) (Luchian 2007:107,108).

6. Semelfactive situations (*Aktionsart semelfactiv*)

The term *semelfactive* originates from Latin and means *once* or *one time*. Thus, semelfactive situations are those which happen only once, they are unique and momentary. Some linguists (Savin-Zgardan 2001: 36) argue that semelfactive situations are those which happen at once, instantly. For example: *a bufni râsul* (burst with laughter), *a fura cu ochiul* (sneak a peak), *a-i trece prin minte* (come to mind). Nevertheless, the examples show that semelfactive situations are not those which happen only once, but momentary atelic situations.

Savin-Zgardan (2001: 38) mentions a subgroup of semelfactive situations which she calls *monosequential* (*acțiune monosecvențială*), such situations happen in one swing: *a da o palmă* (slap), *a face un semn* (make a sign).

Semelfactive verbs in Romanian are: *a apăsa* (push), *a (se) apleca* (bow), *a arunca* (throw), *a găsi* (find), *a izbucni* (start), *a pocni* (burst), *a (se) scufunda* (sink), *a sparge* (break), *a uni* (unite), etc.

7. Intensified situations (*Aktionsart intensiv*)

Intensified situations are more intensive than normal situations. For example: *a se topi de fericire* (be extremely happy), *înnegri de amar* (be very angry).

8. Limitative situations (*Aktionsart limitativ*)

Limitative situations are temporally limited, i.e. last a certain period of time which is usually expressed by an adverbial: *un timp, câtva, o vreme* (for a while). For example: *a se odihni un timp* (rest for a while), *a locui o vreme* (live for a while), etc (Luchian 2007:92,93).

9. Multiplicative situations (*Aktionsart multiplicativ*)

Romanian multiplicative verbs are: *a balansa* (balance), *a ciripi* (chirp), *a pipăi* (touch), *a săpa* (dig), *a tremura* (tremour), *a străluci* (flicker), *a pulsa* (pulse), *a vibra* (vibrate), etc (Luchian 2007:109,110).

A multiplicative situation consists of segments which cannot be separated and whose beginning and end cannot be clearly distinguished and therefore do not have a structure.

Their characteristics are similar to English activities.

10. Progressive situations (*Aktionsart progresiv*)

Romanian progressive verbs are: *accelera* (speed up), *a albi* (become white), *a ameliora* (ameliorate), *a cufunda* (sink), *a (se) dezvolta* (develop), *a (se) învechi*, *a îmbătrâni* (become old), *a înainta* (progress), *a (se) îndepărta* (become distant), *a (se) întuneca* (darken), *a lungi* (lengthen), *a mări* (become bigger), *a rări* (become more rare), etc.

Progressive verbs are durative and telic, they imply a change of state. Therefore are similar to English accomplishments.

11. Transformative situations (*Aktionsart transformativ*)

Transformative situations denote a change of state (Avram et al. 2001:65-68). For example: *a slăbi* (lose weight, become thin), thus they are similar to English accomplishments.

12. Anticipative situations (*Aktionsart anticipativ*)

Anticipative situations denote anteriority (Evseev 1974:86-94). For example: *a predestina* (predestine), *a pregăti* (prepare), *a presimți* (have a presentiment).

13. Intensive situations (*Aktionsart intensiv*)

Such situations denote the intensity of a situation (Evseev 1974:93). For example: *supraaglomera* (overcrowd), *supraîncălzi* (overheat), *a striga* – *a țipa* (shout – scream), etc.

14. Reciprocal situations (*Aktionsart reciproc*)

Reciprocal situations require at least two subjects which are patients at the same time. For example: *a se săruta* (kiss – kiss one another), *coabita* (cohabit), *colabora* (collaborate), *conlucra* (work together), *a se întrevedea* (meet), etc.

15. Augmentative situations (*Aktionsart augmentativ*)

Augmentative situations denote processes which intensify: *a se intensifica* (intensify), *a se înfoca* (heat up).

It is evident that there are many verb types in Romanian language. The difference between some of them can hardly be distinguished (terminative, resultative, ingressive). Therefore, a simpler and clearer classification is needed, which can be based on a fewer number of semantic characteristics and which will consequently bring fewer verb types.

Contemporary Romanian literature (Brăescu et al. 2005:326) distinguishes three types of verb situations, which can be connected to Vendler's classification of English verbs. Romanian semantic classification is based upon two distinctive features of verbs [agentivity] and [change]. According to the mentioned characteristics Romanian verbs are classified into activities (*verbe de acțiune*), states (*verbe de stare*) and events (*verbe de eveniment*).

1. Activities (*verbe de acțiune*)

Romanian activity verbs are: *a alerga* (run), *a înota* (swim), *a învăța* (study), *a mânca* (eat), *a repara* (fix), *strânge* (collect), *a trimite* (send) etc.

Romanian activities require a conscious agent and can imply a change which must not necessarily be a change of state, it can be a change of a position. Romanian activity verbs are in fact Vendler's activities, achievements and accomplishments.

2. States (*verbe de stare*)

Romanian states are: *a iubi* (love), *a se mira* (to be amazed), *a durea* (ache), itd. Romanian verbs of state do not imply a change nor a conscious agent. This semantic category of verbs are equivalent to Vendler's states.

3. Events (*verbe de eveniment*)

Apart from activities and states, contemporary Romanian grammar (Brăescu et al. 2005:326) mentions events (*verbe de eveniment*). For example: *a se usca* (dry), *a crește* (grow), *a îmbătrâni* (grow old), etc. Events imply a change of state, but without a conscious agent: *Râul a secat*. (*The river dried.*)

Romanian events are similar to English achievements and accomplishments which can imply a conscious agent as well.

4. Conclusion

This research has shown that English and Romanian linguistic traditions differ in the approach and analysis of the category of Aktionsart. The research has also shown that despite the obvious differences there are similarities and general definitions which can encompass both English and Romanian verbs and offer a base for a further scientific research and comparison.

English and Romanian linguistic literature offer very similar definitions of Aktionsart, but the analysis and the classification of English and Romanian verbs is completely different mainly because different parameters for classification are used. The classification of English verbs is based on the distinctive features, while in Romanian the classification is based upon the meaning of verbs.

Detailed analysis of Aktionsart, i.e. semantic verb classes in English and Romanian has revealed that linguistic traditions of the two languages are completely different. On the other hand, contemporary grammars prove that similarities do exist, which offers a basis for a more general analysis of Aktionsart.

This research has shown that Romanian language offers a substantial number of verb classes, which can semantically be connected to English verbs classes.

For example, Romanian momentary situations are similar to English achievements due to the same semantic characteristics.

Similarly, Romanian inchoative verbs can be connected to English semelfactive situations or momentary activities if they do not denote a change of state, but if they do then they are similar to English achievements.

Romanian ingressive verbs are atelic and momentary, thus show some similarities with English achievements.

Romanian terminative verbs are similar to English accomplishments, since in both languages the terminative meaning is introduced by the direct object not by the verb itself.

Romanian iterative verbs denote repetition and as such can be connected to English iterative achievements.

Semelfactive situations exist in both languages they are momentary and can be telic or atelic. Atelic momentary situations are activities, while telic momentary situations are achievements.

Based on their semantic characteristics Romanian multiplicative verbs can be connected to English activities.

Romanian transformative verbs denote a change of state, thus they are similar to English accomplishments.

Romanian progressive verbs last in time and tend towards a goal, i.e. denote a change of state, thus they are similar to English accomplishments.

To sum up, Romanian semelfactive and multiplicative situations are similar to English activities, while English achievements can be connected to Romanian inchoative, ingressive, iterative and semelfactive situations. On the other hand, Romanian terminative, progressive and transformative situations have similar characteristics to English accomplishments.

On the other hand, contemporary linguistic research offers quite a different perspective.

Verbal classification (Aktionsart) and the semantic characteristics it is based on in Romanian language can be presented as follows:

	[+ change]	[+ agentivity]
States (Stări) (Vendler's states)	-	-
Events (Evenimente) (Vendler's achievements)	+	-
Activities (Activități) (Vendler's activities, achievements and accomplishments)	+	+

Verbal classification (Aktionsart) and the semantic characteristics it is based on in English language can be presented as follows:

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

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