Advanced Course: *Revisiting Events Semantics*

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**Handout 3**

**Classifications of Events and Event Predicates**

**1. Vendler classification**

Activities (*walk, talk*), accomplishments (*build a box*), achievements (*reach the summit, jump*), states (*sit, lie, sleep, own a house*)

Telic: having a natural endpoint

Accomplishments, achievements

Atelic: not having a natural endpoint

States, activities

Achievements

perceived as punctual: do not permit *in*-adverbials

1. Achievements as culminations of actions:

*reach the summit, arrive at the station*

2. ‘Lucky’ achievements, ‘happenings’:

*win the lottery, miss the bus, recognize a friend*

Semelfactives

achievements that permit repetitions

(3) a. ??? John jumped in a second.

b. John was jumping for an hour.

A major question

What is being distinguished?

Events (eventualities, which include states), verbs, VPs, sentences?

Bach (1986): untensed sentences

Evidence for the latter:

(4) a. John walked for an hour / ??? in an hour.

b. John walked to the house ??? for an hour / ok in an hour.

(5) a. Suddenly / ??? For an hour, a cloud appeared

b. For an hour new clouds appeared.

c. ??? For days a person / someone committed suicide.

d. For days people committed suicide.

(Some) linguistic criteria for the distinctions

For a more complete list: Dowty (1979)

Tests for telicity

1. Activities and states take *for*-adverbials, but not so achievements and accomplishments

(7) a. John walked / stood / was satisfied for an hour.

b. ??? John built the box / fell down for a while.

Related test; *spend an hour*:

(8) John spent an hour walking / talking / standing / ??? building the box / ??? recognizing

Mary.

Moltmann (1989)

*For*-adverbials are not an indication of telicity, rather they act as quantifiers ranging over a contextual division of a time (or space), simply requiring events to cover them whether telic or atelic:

Contrast left unexplained

(8) a. For two hours, John made mistakes.

b. ??? For two hours, John made some mistakes.

Progressive

(9) a. John was walking –> John walked.

b. John was building a box. -/- > John built a box.

2. Accomplishments take *in*-adverbials, but not so states, activities, achievements:

(10) a. John built the box in an hour.

b. ??? John slept / jumped / fell down / reached the summit in a second.

Related test: *take an hour*

(11) a. John took an hour to build the box.

b. ??? John took a few seconds to sleep / jump / reach the summit.

*Stop* and *finish*:

(12) a. John stopped walking / talking / sleeping / building the box.

b. ??? John stopped reaching the summit.

(13) a. ??? John finished walking / talking / sleeping / reaching the summit.

b. John finished building the box.

States

Stative sentences are true at each moment during an interval in which they are true.

(14) a. At that point Mary owned a house / resembled her sister

b. At that moment Mary ??? walked toward the house / ok was walking toward the house.

c. At that moment, Mary ??? jumped up and down / was jumping up and down.

Stative verbs allow for simple present, but not activities (unless on a habitual reading), achievements, accomplishments don’t:

(15) a. John knows French / owns a house.

b. ??? John walks / jumps.

Stative verbs do not permit the progressive, unlike activities and accomplishments:

(16) a. ??? Mary is owning a house.

b. ??? Mary is resembling her mother.

c. John is walking.

d. John is building a box.

(17) a. Mary is very engaged in the project.

b. ?? Mary is being very engaged in the project.

(18) a. ??? Joe is knowing French.

b. Joe speaks French. (dispositional)

c. Joe is speaking French. (episodic)

Concrete state verbs:

(19) a. John is sleeping / standing / sitting.

b. ??? John is being asleep / is being upright.

States are ‘non-dynamic’

States do not involve changes, but may be based on changes, that is, may obtain in virtue of something dynamic.

States do not require energy to be maintained, activities do (Comrie 1976)

(20) a. the state of war, the state of Mary’s training

b. Joe’s very being active /engaged / attentive

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**3. Bach (1986): *The Algebra of Events***

**Mass, singular count, and plural in the nominal domain**

Singular count:

(21) a. Mary ate the apple

Plural:

(21) b. Mary ate the apples / apples.

Mass:

(21) c. Mary put apple in the salad.

A fairly standard view about mass-count:

1. Singular count noun N:

N denotes a set of atoms

For any x in the extension [N] of N, no proper part of x is in [N].

Consequence:

[N] does not contain proper sums: for no x, y in [N], x ≠ y, the sum of x and y is not in N

2. Plural noun Nplural:

Nplural denotes the set of all sums of nonempty subsets of N.

[Nplural] is closed under sum formation.

3. Mass noun N:

[N] is not atomic / not necessarily atomic / not perceived as atomic.

[N] is closed under sum formation, not (necessarily) atomic

Can atomicity be the right characterization of the content of singular count nouns?

Problem cases: lines, portions, fences, sums

Alternative: Aristotle, Fine, Koslicki, Moltmann (1996), Langacker, Jackendoff:

Singular count means coming with a boundary form, structure

Entity + form (possibly contextually given form)

Constitution:

The statue - the clay constituting the statue

*Clay*: mass noun

*Statue*: singular count noun

The clay makes up / constitutes the statue.

Identity?

Important fact: differences in properties

(22) a. The statue is new.

b. The clay is new.

(23) a. The statue is tall.

b. ??? The clay is tall.

(24) a. The statue is brown.

b. The clay is brown.

Bach (1986):

Singular count, mass, plural analogues for events

Accomplishments, achievements: singular count

Criterion: describe atomic events

Activities, processes, states: mass

Criterion: do not describe atomic events

Processes making up accomplishments correspond to matter making up an object.

Plural events:

Repetition reading:

(25) John jumped for an hour.

Plural participants:

(26) a. Mary ate the apples.

b. John and Mary walked home.

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**References**

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