

ASPECTUAL CHARACTERISTICS OF SEMELFACTIVE LIGHT VERB CONSTRUCTIONS

Formulation of the scientific problem. In the study of semantics, the aspectual verb classification attempts to identify the internal temporal constituency of verbs used in varying situations. This basically means that we divide verbs into what are four main classes, depending on the semantic meaning associated with them when used in sentences that represent different situations in the world. These, for the most part, undisputed classes are states, activities, achievements, and accomplishments.

While these four aspectual verb classes are for the most part undisputed among semanticists, some have proposed that there are a few remaining verbs that do not seem to fit into these categories. The proposed fifth aspectual class called *semelfactives*.

Analysis of the latest investigations of the question. The difference between aspectual classes of achievements and accomplishments was heatedly discussed by scientists, but the aspectual class of semelfactives is still more contradictory. Semelfactives were interpreted as an achievement. The first, who noticed peculiarities of this class was B. Comrie [8]. But it became liberal interpretations in the investigations of K. Smith [20]. The author defined semelfactives as atelic achievements [20, p. 180–181]. The classification of M. Moens and M. Stedman [15] gives us the fifth class of verbs, which are called momentary verbs. They are similar with semelfactives in qualities and examples.

The quality of some verbs to express the semelfactive meaning, which in opinion of S. Rothstein is limited and momentary, doesn't distinguish them as a separate aspectual class. According to the judgments of scientist semelfactives, which undergo the cumulative operation, form verbs of the category of activity and they are unlimited [18, p. 183–186].

The **aim** of the article is to analyze and give a precise description of the the semelfactive light verb constructions. It also consists in the complex study of semelfactive verbs as the separate class of predicates.

Presentation of the basic material and interpretation of the results of the investigation. Semelfactives express information bit/quantum about the multiplicative verb. In the Ukrainian language single, momentary realization of the action expresses morphologically, e. g.: стрибати (to jump) – стрибнути (to give a jump), кричати (to shriek) – крикнути (to give a shriek). This meaning actualizes in English by means of lexemes such as *suddenly, quickly, rapidly, at once*:

“Lettie, smart and tweedy battle axe suddenly glimpsed in flanne lettenigh tie and a hairnet, is a figure of fun who would beutterly loath some if she really existed” [BNC BO3 2913].

Lexical-syntactical means of expressing single, momentary action are LVCs (light verb constructions), which components are formed by means of multiplicative verbs: *to give a jump, to make a crack, to give a crack, to give a shriek, to take a glimpse, to give a glimpse, to have a glimpse, to get a glimpse* [18; 20].

“Occasionally the train would swing near the coast and give a glimpse through the trees of a cold sea” [BNC ABS 983].

“Take a glimpse into the future of rail travel with British Rail’s up-to-the-minute exhibit” [BNC B3K 113].

“Here we may have a glimpse of the future shape of organization and management theory and practice which is worth on-going consideration in relation to schools” [BNC AM7 263].

“Great pity we couldn’t even get a glimpse of her” [BNC HOD 1927].

The nominal component of LVCs is a predicative noun and, as S. Langer points out, denotes either an action or a state. As a rule, only verbal and deverbal nouns (the distinction made by Quirk et al. [1985]) have a predicative power.

The verbal component of LVCs is known as a “light verb”, a term coined by Jespersen (1965) to refer to verbs which, having full semantics in one context, can be used in combinations with a noun (or a verb), where their contribution to the meaning of the whole construction is reduced in some way [Newson et al. 2006]. F. Liefrink [12, p. 31] points to the set of verbs which in comparison with synthetic verbs are semantically simple and classifies them as “prime verbs”. This group comprises such verbs as: *be, make, get, take, have, put, give, become* which correspond to the set offered by Kircher (1952) (Hauptverben – according to the author’s terminology) with the exception of *become* and the addition of *do*. In the analysis we stick to Kirchner’s list. These are verbs of broad semantics (“broad semantics” means not polysemy but highly generalized meaning). The generalized meaning predetermines the collocational properties of light verbs. Thus, for instance, the light verb *do* denotes the process of the action being carried out. This explains high productivity of such constructions as *do gardening, do reading, do hunting* in which the nominal component, a verbal noun, contains a processual seme, are valent to the verb *make*.

Structurally LVCs can be divided into three groups: 1) verb – noun units, such as *take a sleep, make a call, do a dance*; 2) verb – noun – preposition units: *take delight in, put an end to, take sight of*; 3) verb – prepositional phrase units: *put in danger, put in execution, put in force* [7, p. 75]. As C. Clarige [7, p. 75] has noted, the borderline between the first and the second group is “rather fuzzy and permeable”. The author states that only the combinations where the preposition is obligatory enter group 2. However, even this explanation is not sufficient since there are some expressions which in one meaning are used without preposition and in a different one with it: *take care – be careful* (group 1), *take care of – look after* (group 2). As it has been already mentioned, the nominal component of LVCs can be represented either by deverbal or verbal noun or the noun diachronically prior to the verb. It is necessary to mention one more group of nouns that function as nominal components of LVCs. These are the lexemes of the type *a kiss, an answer, harm, fear*. Despite their formal

similarity with correlating verbs they cannot be classified as deverbal nouns formed by conversion since they appeared as a result of reduction of inflections in the Middle English period at approximately the same time as verbs [3, p. 126].

Semelfactive LVCs are represented among all constructions, with the exception of LVCs with such operators as *put* and *keep* that is explained by means of a broad meaning of these verbs.

We interpret semelfactive as limited verbs, but their basis is not the change of condition, but natural atomicity [-change]. It is their first difference from achievement. Moreover it is interesting that semelfactives mostly have clear motion trajectory, e. g., *to give a flap* → *to flap: if a bird flaps its wings, it moves them up and down in order to fly* (LDCE). One wing-beat foreknows the motion trajectory up and down, it also concerns LVCs such as *to give a blink*, *to give a wink*. This fact suggests an idea that semelfactives have more complicated inner structure, contain stages [+stage] and have more common characteristics with accomplishments than with achievements. However exception analysis shows us that semelfactive LVCs are used in continuous aspect very seldom, but if they are even used in the sentences, they have the meaning of slow motion and express an action going on at the short period of time:

“Then she was making a dash for the huge carved stair case” [BNC JXT 1785].

The instantaneousness of semelfactive actions often expressed by means of various modifiers: *brief, sudden, swift:*

“Just once, as the waves came up over her feet, she hesitated and gave a short gasp, as anyone might have done at the sudden cold” [BNCCDE 2166].

This fact makes the quality [+stages] a little technical, thus we will keep to the classic interpretation of semelfactives as momentary activities with quality [-stage]. On this basis we suppose that LVCs such as *to do a somersault*, *to do a cartwheel* are also semelfactives. This idea follows not only from the same inner structure of nominal components, but from the fact that they have also the cumulative feature, that is they undergo the cumulative operation and form multiplicatives:

“When he arrived home from school, he immediately took off shoes and did somersaults through out the house” [BNC BM1 1457].

These constructions are similar to LVCs such as *to do a dive*, *to do a dance*, but they foreknow the change of condition and on this basis they are classified as an accomplishments, and LVCs such as *to do a somersault*, *to do a cartwheel* have the quality [-change] – the final stage of the first action is the beginning of identical next action (we understand one action as the realization of semelfactive, which is information bit/quantum of multiplicative). Monolexemic equivalents of these LVCs, which are derivative from substantives, possess also semelfactive meaning, as far as they have dictionary definition such as *“to perform a somersault, to perform a cartwheel”* (Dictionary.com). However they get in the sentence multiplicative meaning:

“The Twins slipped out of the webs and somersaulted lightly down the steps” [BNC CJA 3054].

Semelfactive LVCs have unlimited meaning owing to plural of nominal component, while the achievement and accomplishment permit the ambiguous interpretation [+telic ambiguity].

“An hour and a half into the debate all four for the first time gave succinct answers in agreement to one question and were rewarded with a cheer from the floor!” [BNC C88 108] – [+telic].

“When asked questions he gave one word answers, though he used two words on occasion, as in “boys swimming”, “wet play” [BNC CRS 1506] – [-telic].

“The SNP has had Labour doing somersaults for months on Opposition cross-party co-operation” [BNC K5M 976] – [-telic].

Such an ambiguity we find also in correlative verbs in plural form of subject or direct object. If the action has distributive interpretation, then it is unlimited. Cumulative interpretation of situation gives it a meaning of a limit:

“Guests arrived for hours” (distributive interpretation).

“Guests arrived in an hour” (cumulative interpretation) [18, p. 45].

Cumulative verbs of semelfactive LVCs are multiplicative, which in the sentences can also realize semelfactive action: *to jump*, *to bark*, *to knock*, *to snort*, *to yell*.

“Mr Cottle blushed and then snorted into a handkerchief to hide his confusion” [BNC AVC 953].

“The smallest girl, Eternia, suddenly jumped forward and grabbed Cleo’s foot” [BNC GW2 2758].

Conclusion. Perspectives for futher investigations. Semelfactive Light Verb Constructions (LVCs) of the type *take a walk*, *give a smile*, *make a suggestion* have become the focus of attention in literature on analytical constructions. The variety of denominations of the class under study testifies to the fact: LVCs are also known as fixed verbo-nominal phrases, support verb constructions, complex/composite predicates, multi-word verbs, frame verbs, formulaic sequences, take-have phrasals, periphrastic verbal constructions. They show the growing tendency of English to nominalization, the process in which a verb is replaced by a noun construction, a gerundive or nominal form of the verb. Due to the complexity of their argument structure and aspectual shades of meaning, LVCs trigger constant errors in machine translation and thus present special interest for computational and cognitive linguistics.

Taking into consideration all the above mentioned, semelfactive light verb constructions are lexical-syntactical means that are used to describe a momentary action. The modern aspectual analysis of semelfactive LVCs opened new perspectives for the investigation of categorical semantics of the verb, involving into the analysis not only the lexical semantics, but also its combinatorial analysis, which is an argument structure on the deep level of syntax.

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Summary

L. SOROKA. ASPECTUAL CHARACTERISTICS OF SEMELFACTIVE LIGHT VERB CONSTRUCTIONS

The paper explores the aspectual analysis of semelfactive verbs and verbal phrases. It also provides an initial examination of the semelfactive light verb constructions, especially in terms of its telicity features and which deverbal nouns can combine with to form a complex predicate. The observations and conclusions made in the course of the survey are illustrated by the examples from the British National Corpus.

Key words: semantics, aspectuality, telicity, semelfactive, predicate, verbo-nominal phrases.

Анотація

Л. СОРОКА. АСПЕКТУАЛЬНА ХАРАКТЕРИСТИКА СТАЛИХ ДІЄСЛІВНО-ІМЕННИКОВИХ СЛОВСПОЛУЧЕНЬ КЛАСУ СЕМЕЛЬФАКТИВІВ

У статті проводиться аспектуальний аналіз дієслів класу семельфактивів і дієслівних конструкцій. Проаналізовано сталі дієслівно-іменникові словосполучення з погляду граничності предикатів як основного параметра, який визначає аспектуальну значимість досліджуваної одиниці. Спостереження й висновки, зроблені в ході дослідження, обґрунтовані прикладами з Британського Національного Корпусу.

Ключові слова: семантика, аспектуальність, граничність, семельфактив, предикат, дієслівно-іменникові фрази.

Аннотация

Л. СОРОКА. АСПЕКТУАЛЬНАЯ ХАРАКТЕРИСТИКА УСТОЙЧИВЫХ ГЛАГОЛЬНО-ИМЕННЫХ СЛОВСОЧЕТАНИЙ КЛАССА СЕМЕЛЬФАКТИВОВ

В статье проводится аспектуальный анализ глаголов класса семельфактивов и глагольных конструкций. Проанализированы устойчивые глагольно-именные словосочетания с точки зрения предельности предикатов как основного параметра, который определяет аспектуальную стоимость исследуемой единицы. Наблюдения и выводы, сделанные в ходе исследования, обоснованы примерами из Британского Национального Корпуса.

Ключевые слова: семантика, аспектуальность, предельность, семельфактив, предикат, глагольно-именные фразы.