EVENT AND ITS ASPECTS

HOW DO DIFFERENT LANGUAGES TALK ABOUT EVENTS WITH THEIR VERBS?

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- We use language to describe the world and express ourselves. An important part of our language (and thought) is **event** expression.

EVENT	NON-EVENT
I eat. I walk (or cycle). I smile. I dance.	food, a bike, salsa (or zumba)…
I am happy. I sit still. I love syntax.	happiness, seats, sentences…
I grow. I change. I die.	adult, often, finally…

Verbs   **Non-Verbs**

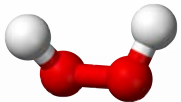- Event = what we do, how we are, how we change…

- Event defines verb.

- Event is so important that we need our language to be more expressive.

- Sometimes we do this by separate words.
  - Examples: I walk fast. I am very happy. I change a lot.   [adverbs]

- Sometimes we add stuff to the verb itself.
  - Examples: I outgrow my clothes. I babysit.   [complex verbs]

How do different languages achieve such expressiveness with their verbs?

OUTLINE

1. We create complex events from simple ones.   [event composition]
   - Like $1+1=2$, $2H_2+O_2 \rightarrow 2H_2O$?

2. We make the basic event more colorful.   [event modification]
   - Is it still the same event though?

3. We add perspectives to our events.   [event perspectivization]
   - What are the perspectives?

These are all relevant to the term **Aspect** (in its modern sense).

Event composition: create complex events from simple ones

- Example: *to* *break* *the window* --- what type of event is *break*?

    1) There must be someone (or something) to **do** the action. [a DO event]

    2) The window must **be** broken as a result.   [a BE event]

    ➢ So *break* = a DO event + a BE event (hence a complex event)

But not all languages create
complex events in the *break* way!

Chinese

- DO and BE are always expressed separately.

  Example: *dǎ-pò* 打破 "hit-broken" (= *break*).

- Therefore in Chinese an action does not entail a result.

  Example: when you kill (*shā* 杀) someone, they are not necessarily dead (*sǐ* 死), unless you explicitly say so (*shā-sǐ* 杀死 "to kill-dead").

  ❑A杀了B好几次，B都没死。 *A shā-le B hǎojǐcì, B dōu méi sǐ.*

    literally "A killed B several times, but B didn't die."

  ❑最后B杀死了A。 *Zuìhòu B shā-sǐ-le A.*

    literally "Eventually B killed-dead A."

Japanese

- You can regularly stack DO + DO in a visible manner.

  - The meaning is something like "make/let (someone) do (something)".

    kau 買う "to buy" → *kawaseru* 買わせる "to make/let buy"

    taberu 食べる "to eat" → *tabesaseru* 食べさせる "to make/let eat"

- You can also stack DO + DO + GO if you like.

    oshi-taosu 押し倒す "to push-topple; to push down" = to push and make-fall

    arai-otosu 洗い落とす "to wash-let drop; to wash off" = to wash and make-drop

Event modification: make the same basic event more colorful

- Example: Hungarian verb *mos* "wash" with various prefixes

*fel*mos "up-wash; mop (the floor)"   *be*mos "in-wash; (flood) wash…into (river)"

*le*mos "down-wash; wash off (stain)"   *meg*mos "MEG-wash; wash (body)"

*ki*mos "out-wash; wash out (clothes)"   *el*mos "away-wash; wash up (dishes)"

Verbal prefixes are a common strategy to modify basic events.

- What other languages can you think of?

This is how our vocabulary can be expanded!

Event perspectivization: talk about events from certain angles

- For example, in English one can say:

  I *am* danc*ing*.   (progressive)   *I began to dance.*   (inchoative)

  I *have* danc*ed*.   (perfective)   *I danced again and again.*   (iterative)

  I *used to* dance.   (habitual)   *I danced for a while.*   (durative)

- In Chinese, one can further say:

  - *Wǒ tiào-guò wǔ.* 我跳过舞。   "I have (ever) danced before." (experiential)

- Japanese: *odori-dasu* 踊りだす "begin to dance"   (inchoative)

- Hungarian: *eltáncol* "away-dance; dance for a certain time"   (durative)

Compare: ENG *begin/for a while* (separate words) vs. JAP *-dasu*/HUN *el-* (part of the verb)

SUMMARY

- Verbs express events: an important part of human language.

- Events are organized in various aspects:

    1) Simple events can combine into complex ones: *dǎ-pò* "hit-broken; break".

    2) Events can be modified: *fel/le/ki/be-mos* "up/down/out/in-wash".

    3) Events can be embedded in different perspectives: *I'm dancing/I've danced.*

- Different languages use different strategies to organize verbal events.

- There is still much more to say…such as SIGN LANGUAGE!

TALK WITH YOUR HANDS, **25-30 Oct, Espresso Library, Cambridge**

THANK YOU!

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