

Aspect tutorial

<http://www-rohan.sdsu.edu/~gawron/semantics>

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Overview

- 1 Introduction
- 2 Classes
- 3 From tests to classification
- 4 Complications
- 5 Things that go wrong
- 6 Semelfactives

Outline

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Aspect

Goals

- Explain basic classification

Goals

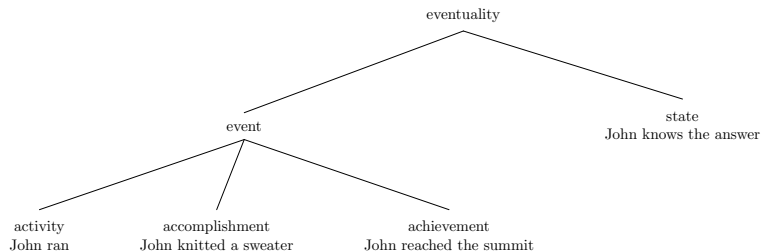
- Explain basic classification
- Explain tests

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Four classes

- State
- Activity
- Accomplishment
- Achievement



The classification of eventualities

Telic or not?

in/for temporal: Does it have a natural endpoint?

- John swam the length of the pool *in an hour*.
- ? John swam the length of the pool *for an hour*.
- # John swam *in an hour*.
- John swam *for an hour*.

For phrase	Telic	Duration
Good	-	+
Bad	+	+

In phrase	Telic	Duration
Good	+	+
Bad	-	+

Not that positive results for either *for* and *in* indicate an event with **Duration** (+ Duration). However, due to **onset readings** (discussed below), it is possible for an achievement to have an acceptable reading with an *in*-PP.

The progressive

Progressive	Dynamic	Duration
Good	+	+
Bad	-	-

- John was drawing a circle.
- John was running.
- John noticed the mark on the wall.
- # John was noticing the mark on the wall (when I entered).
- # John was owning a Buick.

Achievements and the Progressive

- 1 # John was recognizing the woman (when she sneezed).
- 2 # John was noticing the mark on the wall when the doorbell rang.)
- 3 # John was losing his key when I spotted him.

Failing the progressive test

Failing this test is a characteristic of both achievements and states. States are - Dynamic, Achievements are - Duration. Either feature creates a problem for the progressive. But sometimes achievements and states have acceptable progressives, making this test unreliable. See below.

States and Progressive

- 1 # The road was being 25 feet wide.
- 2 # John was being tall.
- 3 # John was fearing heights.

Failing the progressive test

Failing this test is a characteristic of both achievements and states. States are - Dynamic, Achievements are - Duration. Either feature creates a problem for the progressive. But sometimes achievements and states are acceptable progressives, making this test unreliable. See below.

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	Dynamic	Duration	Telic	In	For	Prog
Activity	+	+	-	-	+	+
State	-	+	-	-	+	- [†]
Achievement	+	-	?	-	- [†]	- [†]
Accomplishment	+	+	+	+	-	+

Achievements are marked ? for Telic because they dont really **have** endpoints; rather they **are** endpoints.

[†] These test results have some problems discussed in the Section 4.

Entailments: Subinterval property

A sentence (like *John ate a sandwich* or *John ran*) has the subinterval property if whenever it is true of an interval of time I , it is also true any subinterval of I .

1 entails 2 because *John ran* has the subinterval property.

- ① John was running. (At time t John was the agent in a subpart of a running event).
- ② John ran.

3 does not entail 4 because *John drew a circle* does not have the subinterval property.

- ③ John was drawing a circle. (At time t John was the agent in a subpart of a circle-drawing event).
- ④ John drew a circle.

Subinterval (Entailment from progressive)

The progressive past says that a bounded event was in progress, but not that it was completed. The simple past says it was completed. However, an unbounded event does not have an endpoint, so this distinction does not hold for unbounded events.

- 1 John was drawing the circle. \nRightarrow John drew the circle.
- 2 John was pulling the cart. \Rightarrow John pulled the cart.
- 3 John was pulling the cart to the wall. \nRightarrow John pulled the cart to the wall.
- 4 Activity: NP Progressive-past-VP \Rightarrow NP Simple-past VP
- 5 Accomplishment: NP Progressive-past-VP \nRightarrow NP Simple-past VP

It is hard or impossible to use this test with states and achievements, since both are usually bad with the progressive.

Subinterval Entailment

Does *X was Q-ing* entail *X Q-ed*?

Entailment	Telic
Yes	-
No	+

What X did was . . .

Test for Agentivity

Bad with States, Achievements

- 1 What John did was push a cart.
- 2 What John did was draw a circle.
- 3 # What John did was know the answer.
- 4 ? What John did was notice the spot.

Practically speaking: Another test for +Dur/+Dyn

Summary: The default conclusions, no complications

in-PP	yes	+Dur, +Dyn, +Tel
	no	-Tel
for-PP	yes	+Dur, -Tel
	no	?? (could be an achievement OR accomplishment)
progressive	yes	+Dyn, +Dur
	no	Either - Dyn or - Dur
subinterval	yes	-Tel, +Dur (progressive good)
	no	+ Tel, +Dur (progressive good)
what x did	yes	+Dyn, +Dur
	no	Either - Dyn or - Dur

Comment: If you look at the *in/for* results carefully, it's clear you should always apply **both** to get clear results. Note: *it takes 10 minutes ...* test is equivalent to *in PP*; needs *for-PP* test as partner.

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Sometimes states pass the progressive test (unexpected!)

- 1 John was being an idiot.
- 2 The obelisk was occupying the top of the hill. (attributes temporariness)
- 3 John was standing at the entrance to the park.
- 4 ? The statue of Washington was standing at the entrance to the park.
- 5 The Beakers are living in Rome (temporrorary state of affairs).

In each case there is some sort of suggestion of temporariness, and where that doesn't work, the progressive is less natural.

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Achievements as Activities (Culmination Achievements)

Sometimes, natural achievements can be turned into processes (activities) by using the progressive

- 1 John was winning/losing for the first three laps. (cf. John was running.)
- 2 John was dying for months.
- 3 They are reaching the summit now.
- 4 Flight 34 is now arriving at Gate 19.
- 5 To my amazement, John was solving the problem easily.

In all these examples the achievements have natural processes that lead up to them (compare *notice*, *remember*, *forget*). Intuitively, the verb describes the culmination point of a larger event, that **could** be described by an accomplishment. In the right context, what is naturally an **achievement** is simply **coerced** into an **activity** describing the process leading up to the culmination by the presence of a *for*-phrase.

Culmination achievements (ctd.)

A progressive with a *when*-clause requires an event with internal structure. Achievements shouldn't have this, but culmination achievements do.

- 1 # John was recognizing the woman when she sneezed.
- 2 # John was noticing the mark on the wall when the doorbell rang.
- 3 John was reaching the summit when Bill called him on his cell.
- 4 The Cubs were winning the game when the umpires called it on account of darkness.

Achievements with **clearly identified processes leading up to them** may still involve instantaneous transitions and pass this test. *win the game, reach the summit* describe culminations of events with structure of accomplishments.

Resultant state for phrases

When an action has a salient resultant state, sometimes a *for*-phrase measures the duration of the resultant state (leading to the false conclusion that sentence is an activity).

- 1 John put the beer in the fridge for 3 hours.
- 2 Silly iterative reading: John kept putting the beer in the fridge over and over for three hours, because John was a robot on the fritz.
- 3 Sensible resultant state reading: John put the beer in the fridge (Achievement). As a result, it was in the fridge (State). It stayed in the fridge for three hours.
- 4 John remembered my birthday for three hours.

Event delay readings

- John will draw the circle in ten minutes.
- Reading one The act of drawing the circle will take John 10 minutes.
Reading Two John will draw the circle after a delay of 10 minutes. starting now.
- Reading two is called the **event delay** reading.
 - ① Most robust in future tense; paraphrasable with *after*
 - ② Promoted by fronting the *in*-phrase:
We saw John drink the potion at 3. In ten minutes, he began changing.
 - ③ Can carry over to *It takes [Duration]...* construction.
 - ① It will take 10 minutes for John to draw the circle.
 - ② It will be 10 minutes before John draws the circle.

Event delay readings: Achievements

Event delay *in*-PPs can measure a time interval before the culmination described by the achievement or the duration of the process that leads to the transition to the state.

- 1 John reached the summit in an hour. (~ It was ten minutes before John reached the summit)
- 2 The cheese was rancid in an hour. (~ It was an hour before the cheese was rancid.)

Event delay readings are most natural with culmination achievements and states with a natural processes leading up to them, but they are basically always possible: Event delay

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Unmodified sentences ...

- 1 ... can denote one single event. [Telic]
 - 1 John rapped the table (once).
 - 2 John blinked (once).
 - 3 The light flashed (once).
 - 4 John coughed (once).
- 2 ... can denote an unspecified number of iterations of the same event. [Atelic]

Semelfactive entailments

Because they can denote an unspecified number of iterations they pattern with atelic predicates

1 entails 2

- 1 The light was flashing.
- 2 The light flashed.