

**Alina REȘCEANU**



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**ENGLISH GRAMMAR: THE VERB PHRASE**

**Curs universitar pentru învățământul la distanță**



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## Unitatea de învățare 1

### INTRODUCTION - INFLECTIONAL MORPHOLOGY

#### Unități de învățare:

- Levels of representation
- Morphology: features
- Traditional vs modern approaches (structuralist, generative)

#### Obiectivele temei:

- înțelegerea conceptelor teoretice și formarea perspectivei asupra analizei morfologice în limba engleză;
- cunoașterea nivelelor de reprezentare;
- dezbateră particularităților ce țin de abordările moderne;
- analizarea diferențelor formale și a trăsăturilor;

**Timpul alocat temei:** 3 ore

### INTRODUCTION - INFLECTIONAL MORPHOLOGY

The present course will deal with the traditional parts of speech, in particular with the grammatical categories/inflectional categories traditionally associated with the verb such as tense, aspect, and mood.

Language as an object of study has been approached from different perspectives: traditional (descriptive; meant to observe and enumerate aspects of language); structuralist (descriptive; an attempt to reflect the systematic character of language); generative (language is a body of rules by means of which all the sentences can be obtained).

The structure of language can be analyzed in terms of levels of representation. For any utterance there are:

- a phonological level - strings of phonemes
- a morphological level - morphemes and words
- a syntactic level - phrases and sentences
- a semantic level - semantic concepts: events, objects, states, processes

“Morphology” is a term based on the Greek words *morphe* (=form/structure) and *logie* (=account/study). In fact, the term can apply to any domain of human activity that studies the structure or form of something. In linguistics, morphology is the sub-discipline that accounts for the internal structure of words.

There are two types of complexity of word-structure: one is due to the presence of inflections and another due to the presences of derivational elements. Both operations add extra elements to what is known as the base.

Derivation refers to word formation processes such as affixation, compounding and conversion. Derivational processes typically induce a change in the lexical category of the item they operate on and even introduce new meanings (- er adds the meaning of agent/instrument).

Inflection encompasses the grammatical categories/markers for number, gender, case, person, tense, aspect, mood and comparison. It is defined as “a change in the form of a word to express its relation to other words in the sentence”. Inflectional operations do not change the category they operate on (goes or grammars are just variants of one and the same word go and grammar). Actually, they are formal markers that help us delimit the lexical category of a word, i.e. the parts of speech. In this respect, lexical items (words) that are distributionally similar (i.e. have the same distributional properties) form classes. (Traditionalists: parts of speech, structuralists: form/morpheme classes; generativists: lexical categories). All these terms are intended to designate elements from the same pool - N, V, A, Adv, P etc. - but the different terms are associated with the theoretical frames in which they were used and, hence, with methods of doing lg. research specific for that theoretical framework.

Inflectional affixes have the following characteristics:

- They produce closure upon words (can no longer attach a derivational element to them)
- Inflected forms are organized in paradigms, i.e. they are in complementary distribution; for instance, nouns occurs in pairs hat - hats, book - books.
- The elements of a paradigm may evince the phenomenon of suppletion - one of the forms is not phonologically related to the other: went for go, better for good.
- A paradigm can be defective - lacks a form: can - \*cans, trousers - \*trouser.
- Inflections are formal markers (semantically they are empty, abstract); they help us delimit the lexical category of the word to which they attach. In other words, each lexical category (major part of speech) is characterized by specific inflectional markers. Case, number, gender, and determination characterize nouns. Tense, aspect, mood, number and person characterize verbs. Person, number and -in some cases - gender characterize pronouns. Adjectives and adverbs are characterized by comparison. Although all of them lack descriptive content, they pass on the descriptive content of the category they depend on.

Traditional approaches:

The basic unit of analysis was the word. Words operated as signs, i.e. as instruments for the description and understanding of reality. They were classified into parts of speech and set into paradigms of declension and conjugation.

Traditional theories described words in terms of the traditional list of Aristotelian categories. Aristotle assumed that the physical world consisted of things (substances), which had certain properties (called accidents). Transferred to morphology, the substance of a word (its meaning) had to be distinguished from its accidents, i.e. the different forms it assumed in linguistic context. Thus, certain accidental categories were considered to be typical for particular parts of speech: nouns (inflected for case, number, gender; verbs for tense, number, person, mood, aspect). Hence, what are traditionally referred to as grammatical categories correspond to the accidental categories, and this explains the older term ‘accidence’ for what is also known as inflectional variation.

The Aristotelian opposition matter vs. form also helped grammarians distinguish between major and minor parts of speech. Only major parts of speech (nouns, adjectives, verbs and adverbs) were meaningful. The other parts of speech (conjunctions, prepositions, pronouns, determiners, quantifiers, etc.) known as minor

parts of speech did not signify anything of themselves but merely contributed to the total meaning of sentences by imposing upon them a certain form or organization.

Thus, in delimiting parts of speech, traditionalist grammars, called 'notional', employed three criteria: meaning, inflectional variation and syntactic function. Meaning was basic and it was correlated with the other two criteria. The last two criteria are based on formal properties, so they define parts of speech in terms of their distribution. Notional definitions were incorrect in that they were circular - a term was explained by resorting to the same term. For instance, the noun was defined as the name of a living being or lifeless thing. But 'virtue' is neither a lifeless being, nor a living being, the only reason for saying that 'virtue' is a thing is that the word that refers to it is a noun.

Structuralist approaches:

It is a formal approach. Language was regarded as a system of relations, the elements of which had no validity independently of the relations of equivalence and contrast that held between them (syntagmatic and paradigmatic relations). It excluded meaning from its analysis and was based only on the distribution of the items analyzed. In structuralism, the lexical items (the traditional major parts of speech) and the grammatical items (typically the minor parts of speech and inflectional affixes) are distinguished in terms of paradigmatic oppositions and fall into two classes: open vs. closed classes of items.

Open classes (nouns, adjectives, verbs and adverbs) have large numbers of items and new members can be added by coining or borrowing.

Closed classes (conjunctions, prepositions, determiners, pronouns, etc. and inflectional affixes) include terms that have no descriptive content, having a fixed/limited number of items.

Generative approaches:

They are similar to the structuralists approaches in the sense that the lexical/grammatical categories can be defined only through their roles in the rules and principles of grammar. NB grammatical categories in generative approaches no longer refer to inflectional markers, but to syntactic categories (sentence, noun phrase, verb phrase etc.). Generative grammars operate with two types of categories: lexical and grammatical/syntactic categories. Lexical categories (N, V, A) coincide with the traditional parts of speech and the structuralist open classes, and grammatical categories (NP, VP, AP) correspond to phrases or syntagms - specific sequences of words.

Each lexical category has a corresponding syntactic phrase -  $N \wedge NP$ . In other words, syntactic phrases are projections of lexical categories. Then we translate the syntactic information in  $N \wedge NP$  into functional information (i.e. the subcategorisation frame  $[_ \text{ NP}]$  which is characteristic of a transitive verb is converted into functional information by stating that direct objects are characteristic of transitive verbs).

According to this theoretical model, it is not lexical categories (N, V, A etc.) that correspond to semantic categories, but major syntactic categories (NP, VP, AP etc.) The syntactic categories are in a relation of correspondence with semantic categories such as events, processes, states, individual objects etc. We shall clarify this later on when we discuss number, aspect etc. As we shall see, events are represented by the syntactic category of verb phrase, e.g. read a novel, paint a picture. Objects will be represented by the syntactic category of noun phrases: the chair, a chair, my chair, this chair etc. In other words, the ontological (semantic) categories are represented by major syntactic phrases, not by lexical categories.

The lexical categories are defined in terms of features to be found in their lexical entries in the lexicon. These features include morpho-syntactic categories, i.e. inflections.

Various parts of speech display certain categorical similarities, which can be represented in terms of shared features.

The most important opposition for the parts of speech system is the opposition between verbal and nominal categories. Parts of speech are analyzed along the dimension [+/- V] or [+/- N]. The [+/- N] categories (A, N) are marked for gender, number and case, while the [+/- V] categories are not characterized by these features. Adjectives and adverbs share the inflectional/functional category of comparison.

Another important opposition is between lexical categories and functional categories. This opposition is in part the same as the structural distinction between open classes (N, V, A etc.) and closed classes (Determiner, Inflection, Complementizer etc.) of items. The open classes are defined as classes with descriptive/semantic content (N, V, A) containing indefinitely many items and which allow conscious coining, borrowing etc. On the other hand, functional categories include free morphemes: determiners, quantifiers, pronouns, auxiliary verbs, complementizers etc. and bound morphemes/inflectional affixes: inflections for tense, aspect, agreement/number. Hence the term 'functional categories' covers minor parts of speech and inflectional categories. They form a closed set of items which

- never occur alone,
- have a unique Complement and can't be separated from it,
- lack descriptive semantic content,
- act as operators placing the Complement in time, in the world
- are heads of lexical categories.

Information expressed by inflection is not always dictated by syntactic structure. There are two types of inflection:

- Inherent/morphological inflection (not required by the syntactic context): number with nouns and pronouns, person for pronouns, gender for nouns.

- Contextual/syntactic (which follows from syntax): number and person in verbs, case in nouns.

For instance:

They are running in the field now.

He is running home now.

They - 3rd p.pl. - information contained in the lexical meaning of they. Hence, inherent. Are running vs. is running is contextual information provided by the context in which the verb is used and triggered by the presence of an agreement between the subject and the verb.

Gender for nouns is inherent. E.g. queen.

Case for nouns is contextual (triggered by the type of verb - double transitive as in ask somebody a question or a verb with dative and accusative as in lend money to someone).



## Unitatea de învățare 2

### THE CATEGORY OF ASPECT

#### Unități de învățare:

- Tense, Time and Aspect
- The category of aspect
- Aspectual classes of the verb

#### Obiectivele temei:

- înțelegerea conceptelor teoretice și formarea perspectivei asupra categoriilor verbale în limba engleză;
- cunoașterea și însușirea noțiunilor generale privind categoria aspectului;
- dezbateră particularităților ce țin de clasele aspectuale ale verbului.

**Timpul alocat temei:** 3 ore

#### THE CATEGORY OF ASPECT

Aspect - a notion of time, distinct from tense, which describes the internal temporal structure of events

What Tense and Aspect have in common: both are functional categories delimiting the lexical category Verb, they are related morpho-syntactically (realized by verb inflections and auxiliaries) and semantically (both partake of the notion Time but in distinct ways).

Where Tense and Aspect differ:

Tense - represents the chronological order of events in time as perceived by the speaker at the moment of speaking; it locates the time of the event in the sentence relative to NOW.

Aspect - gives info about the contour of the event as viewed by the speaker at a given moment in time.

Traditional grammars: aspect is used for the perfective - imperfective opposition, referring to different ways of viewing the internal temporal constituency of a situation The perfective - provides a holistic view upon the event, looking at the situation from outside The imperfective - is concerned with the internal phases of the situation, it looks at the situation from inside

Current approaches: aspect covers two perspectives. It is still used to refer to the presentation of events through grammaticized viewpoints such as the perfective and the imperfective (viewpoint / grammatical aspect). In addition, the term also refers to the inherent temporal structuring of the situations themselves, internal event structure or Aktionsart (situation/eventuality-type aspect). Situation/eventuality type aspect refers to the classification of verbal expressions into states, activities, achievements, accomplishments and semelfactives (how we conceive of situations or states of affairs).

Both viewpoint aspect and situation type aspect convey info about temporal factors such as the beginning, end and duration of a state of affairs/situation. However, we need to draw a clear line between them as situation types and viewpoint aspect are realized differently in the grammar of language, i.e. they differ in their linguistic expression:

- viewpoint aspect (perfective vs imperfective) is signaled by a grammatical morpheme in English (be -ing); it is an overt category

- situation type aspect is signaled by a constellation of lexical morphemes. Situation types are distinguished at the level of the verb constellation (i.e. the verb and its arguments (subjects and objects) and the sentence (adverbials)). Situation types lack explicit morphological markers. Situation type aspect exemplifies the notion of a covert category.

Compare:

She ate an apple.

She was eating an apple.

She walked to the park.

She was walking to the park.

The two components of the aspectual system of a language interact with each other in all languages, although across languages, aspectual systems vary considerably, especially the viewpoint subsystem. Situation types can be distinguished as covert categories in all languages.

Since Aspect can be assumed to be defined as the interaction of the lexical meaning of the verb, the nature of its arguments (subjects and objects) and grammatical inflection, aspectual meaning holds for sentences rather than for individual verbs or verb phrases. Sentences present aspectual info about situation type and viewpoint. Although they co-occur, the two types of info are independent. Consider:

Mary walked to school. (perfective - past tense, goal / natural endpoint)

Mary was walking to school. (imperfective – be -ing, goal not reached)

Mary walked in the park. (perfective, no goal; the event was simply terminated)

Conclusion:

Aspectual info is given by the linguistic forms of the sentences: situation type is signaled by the verb and its arguments, while viewpoint is signaled by a grammatical morpheme, usually part of the verb or verb phrase. The perfective viewpoint gives info about endpoints (beginning and end) while the imperfective gives info about internal or other stages or phases.

The domain of aspect offers choices within a closed system to the speakers of a language. There is a small, fixed set of viewpoints and situation/eventuality types. One of each must be chosen whenever a sentence is framed. In other words, speakers' choices in presenting actual situations are limited by conventional categorization, conventions of use and the constraints of truth.

ASPECT - Conceptual features of the situations types

There are three semantic features that help us distinguish among situation types: [+/- stative], [+/- telic] and [+/- durative]. They function as shorthand for the cluster of properties that distinguishes them.

[+/- STATIVE] covers the distinction between 'stasis' and 'motion' and separates situation types into the classes of states and events (activities, accomplishments, achievements and semelfactives).

States are the simplest of situation types, consisting of undifferentiated moments. States are said to 'hold' whereas events occur, happen, take place or culminate. Events are doings; they are [+ dynamic] or