

The VERB:
General Characteristics.
Person & Number

Lecture 5.

General Survey of Verb

1. The verb has an intricate morphological system, which is based on different morphological categories.
2. The verb has a wide set of analytical categorial functions.
3. The system of the verbs is represented by two sets of forms – **finite** and **non-finite**.
4. The verb performs the unique role in the sentence structure.

Verbiality - the ability to express actions, processes and states:

The meaning of state can be rendered:

1. *he is **sleeping*** – the verb;
2. *he is **asleep*** – the stative;
3. *his **sleep** was interrupted* – the noun.

The **categorial meaning** of the **verb** – the process presented dynamically (developing in time).

The morphological properties of the verb

1) The system of verb derivational means:

- affixation (*un-/undo, -ize/organize*)
- conversion (*a doctor – to doctor*)
- reversion (*proof-reader – to proof read*)
- compounding (*blackmail – to blackmail*)
- sound-replacive type (*blood – to bleed*)
- semantic stress (*'transport – to trans'port*)
- composing (*to look for/down/through*)
- phrasal verb derivation (*to have a swim*).

2) The system of grammatical categories.

The syntactic valency of the verb -

the combining power of verbs in relation to other words in syntactically subordinate groups.

- **Obligatory valency** is necessarily realized for the sake of grammatical completion of syntactical constructions: *I saw **the film***.
- **Optional valency** is not necessarily realized in grammatically complete syntactical constructions: *I saw an interesting film **yesterday***).

SUBCLASSIFICATIONS OF VERBS

Morphological types

are predetermined by two formal criteria:

1) the type of verb stem (morphological composition):

- **simple** (consisting of mere roots),
- **derived** (root+affix),
- **compound** (non-verb stems),
- **composite** (verb stem+lexical grammatical element) .

2) the type of verb conjugation:

- **weak** (regular).
- **strong** (irregular),
- **of mixed double nature.**

Lexico-syntactic classifications

1) the **valency** of the verbs:

- aivalent (to snow);
- monovalent verbs: ***She*** *is smiling*.
- bivalent : ***He*** *has taken the* ***book***.
- polyvalent: ***She*** *has given* ***me*** *a* ***book***.

2) the **type of predication**:

- complete predication: *the boy* ***walks***;
- incomplete predication: *I* ***saw*** (*what?*) *the film*.

3) the **semantic** and the **syntactic function** in the sentence:

- notional (lexical);
- siminotional / functional (modal, auxiliary, link-verbs, etc.)

The Verb as a Part of Speech

Verb - the only part of speech that has a highly developed system of grammatical (morphological) categories and numerous analytical forms.

Complex nature of the English verb system:

- finite forms of the verb express grammatical categories;
- non-finite forms (infinitive, gerund, participle).

According to the threefold approach the verb:

- **Semantically**: has the meaning of process (action or state) developing in time.
- **Formally**: has seven morphological (inflectional) categories: tense, mood, person, number, voice, aspect & phase, expressed synthetically & analytically.
- **Functionally**: has the category of finitude (a set of opposed finite & non-finite forms) or representation & specific combinability.

Syntactic function

- finite forms of the verb perform the function of the **predicate**, while non-finite forms perform **any other function** in the sentence, but that of the predicate.

Combinability

- finite & non-finite verbs can be modified by an adverb (*to study **diligently / hard***), combined with nouns, pronouns, adjectives, numerals, prepositions, conjunctions, and each other:

This girl began to study linguistics.

She is twenty.

She is smart.

She can look after herself.

The verb - a notional part of speech

1. has the **meaning of process** (action or state) developing in time;
2. has the **morphological categories** of:
 - tense,
 - mood,
 - number,
 - person,
 - voice,
 - aspect,
 - phase (expressed synthetically or analytically).
3. is characterized by **syntactic category of finitude** with specific functions for finite forms (the predicate) & non-finite forms (all the rest),
4. enters into **combinations** with most other parts of speech.

DIFFERENT CLASSIFICATIONS OF THE VERB

Semantic classifications:

The foundation of the division	Oppositional types	
the character of the process	Actional verbs (<i>act, make, read</i>)	Statal verbs (<i>be, live, worry</i>)
the mode of existence	Verbs of physical process (<i>see, hear</i>)	Verbs of mental process (<i>think, believe</i>)
aspective character	limitive verbs (<i>arrive, come, leave, find</i>)	unlimitive verbs (<i>move, continue, live, work</i>)
lexical-syntactic character of the verb	transitive verbs (<i>to write a letter</i>)	intransitive verbs (<i>to live in Moscow</i>).

Formal (morphological) classifications:

- **regular verbs** (*play, work, walk, etc.*);
- **irregular verbs** (*sing, write, see, etc.*).

H. Sweet's classification of verbs:

1. **consonantal** (*look-look**ed***),
2. **vocalic** (*write-wro**te**-wro**tt**en*),
3. **mixed** (*show-show**ed**-show**n***),
4. **anomalous** (*can, will, need, be, etc.*).

Morphological (morphosyntactic) categories:

tense, mood, person, number, voice, aspect, phase

Functional classification

The functional division of verbs:

- 1) **finite** - perform the function of the **predicate** in the sentence:
 - a) verbs of **complete predication**: *She works*;
 - b) verbs of **incomplete predication** (auxiliary verbs, link verbs, modal verbs, etc.): *She **is** working. She **is** a worker. She **can** work*
- 2) **non-finite** - do not perform this function (infinitives, gerunds, participles)

Conclusion

- different classifications of the verb are based on a **combination of principles** (semantic-syntactic or morphological-syntactic).
- This proves the fact that the **functional** plane of the verb as the center of the sentence is **crucial** for understanding this complex phenomenon.

MORPHOSYNTACTIC CATEGORIES OF THE VERB

Verbal categories of Person & Number

Introduction

The morpheme **–s** is the **formal sign** of both categories

The common feature – **syncretism**: *the bird flies, the telephone rings.*

M.Y. Bloch: ‘a complete blending’.

B.A. Ilisch: one ‘combined’ number-person category

The grammatical meaning of number

- in the opposition of ‘**oneness**’ & ‘**more-than-oneness**’, or singular & plural.
- the difference between one & more-than-one subject of the sentence:
- *This **dog costs** a fortune* (singular) – *Bigger **dogs cost** more* (plural).

The grammatical meaning of person

- the distinction between **the participants & non-participants** in the process of **communication**.
- The participants (1st & 2nd persons respectively: *I, we say – you say*).
- Non-participants (3rd person: *he, she, it plays; they play*).

The **personal & numerical semantics** are not **process-related**.

It can be understood only in relation to the **subject** of the sentence, because it is reflected in the verb only through grammatical features & semantics of the subject:

- *I, we, you (girls, cats) exist – he, she (the boy, the cat) exists;*
- *The wheat **is** ripe – The oats **are** ripe;*
- *My family **is** small – My family **are** early risers.*

Conclusion

- The verbal categories of person & number are realized only in the **sentence** - they are **morphosyntactic**.
- They are more morphosyntactic than the other verbal categories, as they are **induced by the same categories in nouns & pronouns, which perform the function of the subject**.
- They are dependent or 'relational' (Bloch) subject-related categories.

The category of person

The verbal category of person - a meaningful set of two opposed form classes:

- *(I, you) grow* – **the non-third-person-singular** (unmarked, extensive),
- *(he, she,) grows* - **the third-person-singular** (marked, intensive).

‘third person – non-third person’ - in the singular number.

The **plural number** of the **verb is not opposed relative to the category of person** (*we, you, they, the girls*) *grow*.

This opposition exists only in the **non-past tense & indicative mood**.

To be has a **threefold** system of verbal persons formed with the help of suppletion: *I am – you are – he, she, it is*.

Modal verbs (*can, may, must* & the like) **do not form** the opposition of persons and lack this category.

The category of number

Two opposed form classes:

1. *(they) go* - **3rd person plural number (unmarked)**
2. *(he, she, it) goes* - **3rd person singular number (marked).**

The verb *to be* exposes the **1st person** opposition as well: *I **am** – we **are**.*

Modal verbs *can, may, must* & the like **do not have** the category of number.

Singular & plural number **refer** to **the person or thing denoted by the subject:**

*My friend **works** at a bank –*

*My friends **work** at a bank.*

It is a **morphosyntactic** category.

The use of the singular or plural number of the verb is **syntactically conditioned & induced by the subject.**

Types of relations between the subject & predicate-verb singular & plural forms

1. Formal agreement:

- *The wheat **is** ripe* (Singularia Tuntum).
- *The oats **are** ripe* (Pluralia Tuntum).

2. Formal agreement & semantic correspondence:

- *The book **is** interesting.*
- *The books **are** interesting.*
- *Her brother works.*
- *Her brothers work.*

3. Semantic correspondence:

- **A collective noun vs. a noun of multitude:** *The crowd **was** cheerful – The crowd **were** pushing.*
- **Pronouns:** *All **is** well that ends well – All **are** present.*
- **Word-combinations:**
 - With a **numeral attribute:** *Ten years **is** a long time. Three miles **is** not very far.*
 - Characterized by **coordination:** *Time, effort & money **were** needed – Time & money **is** what you need.*
- **Pronouns who & that in relative clauses:**
- *I, who **am** unacquainted with the theory, can hardly suggest an alternative solution.*