

TEMPORAL CATEGORIES AS A MEANS OF DISTINGUISHING EVENTUALITY TYPES IN BULGARIAN AND ENGLISH

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Bulgarian imperfective verbs can express states and activities as defined in Zeno Vendler's classification. However, some imperfective verbs can also express accomplishments in certain contexts. This article examines the categories that can be used to distinguish the use of Bulgarian imperfective verbs as activities or accomplishments. It offers a comparison of the applicability of linguistic tests for distinguishing verbs in Bulgarian and English that belong to different eventuality types and provides an explanation for the different test results in the two languages.

Key words: eventuality types, activities, accomplishments, Bulgarian verbal aspect, linguistic tests

1. Introduction

The classification of situation types (called also eventuality types) into static and dynamic goes back to Aristotle (Kenny 1963: 173 – 183; Dowty 1979: 52 – 53, etc.), and more recently Zeno Vendler's classification (Vendler 1957) has emerged as the starting point for the division between **states**, **activities**, **accomplishments**, and **achievements**, based on the following properties: Change with the values dynamic and non-dynamic; temporal duration with the values durative and punctual; and a defined endpoint with the values telicity and atelicity.

States¹ are thus characterised by [– dynamic] [+ durative] [– telic]. States are homogeneous: States are the same in every temporal subinterval of their durative slice and are not characterised by termination: *зная* (know), *обичам* (to love), *гранича* (to border), *рус съм* (I am blonde), *висок съм* (I am tall).

Activities are [+ dynamic] [+ durative] [– telic]. Activities are also homogeneous: Activities are the same in each temporal subinterval of their durative slice, but are characterised by an action or a movement, i.e. each temporal subinterval is dynamic: *тичам* (to run), *плувам* (to swim), *играя* (to play), *карам кола* (drive a car).

Accomplishments are [+ dynamic] [+ durative] [+ telic]. Accomplishments are not homogeneous: they have a preliminary stage as an activity that ends with a change of state: *да построя къща* (to build a house), *да нарисувам картина* (to paint a picture), *да изям ябълка* (to eat an apple), *да начертая квадрат* (to draw a square).

Finally, **achievements** are [+ dynamic] [– durative] [+ telic]. Achievements are not homogeneous either: they express themselves in a momentary (punctual) change of state: *да мигна* (to blink), *да стигна* (to arrive), *да вляза* (to enter), *да умра* (to die).

Figure 1 below shows a simple schematic representation of the basic situation types.²

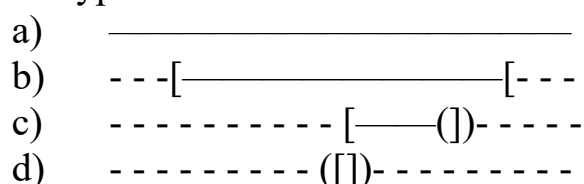


Figure 1. Schematic representation of states (a), activities (b), accomplishments (c), and achievements (d)

Classifying verbs into situation types seems simple at first sight, but when a larger number of verbs or, even more difficult, a larger number of situation types (eventualities) described by real examples have to be classified, the task turns out to be quite difficult. Such a task also requires an answer to the question of what is classified into situation types: the verbs themselves referring to the situation types, the verb phrases within which the verb-telicity is realised or not realised, or the whole sentence by which a

¹ This brief description summarises the theoretical statements of many scholars: Z. Vendler (1957), D. Dowty (1979), H. Filip (2002); S. Rothstein (2008), etc.

² Similar representations have already been presented, e.g. by C. Chauvin (2020).

certain situation type is represented. For this reason, our aim in this study is to establish (part of) the parameters that allow a correct classification of Bulgarian verbs into situation types (in comparison to English) and to determine the scope of the syntactic units that are the subject of this description: Verbs, verb phrases or clauses.

2. Linguistic tests for eventuality types

A common method of categorising English verbs into situation types is to use linguistic tests to distinguish verbs that belong to different aspectual classes. However, one of the differences between English and Bulgarian, as well as between English and other Slavic languages, is the verbal aspect category. The verbal aspect category in Bulgarian is a lexical-grammatical category that is a feature of every verb and refers not only to the expressed meaning but also to the morphological and syntactic properties of the verb (Kutsarov 2007: 551). Verbal aspect is one of the reasons why the linguistic tests developed for English cannot be easily transferred to Bulgarian in many cases. To illustrate this, the linguistic tests summarised by D. Dowty (1979: 55 – 56, 60) and also proposed by other authors (Kenny 1963, etc.) have been selected.

For example, the Imperative test for English states that:

Test 1. State predicates do not have imperative forms, but activities and accomplishments do.

No imperative test for achievements is formulated for English, but some achievement verbs have imperatives, e.g. *Умирай трудно! Уми трудно!* (Die hard!).

Table 1. contains some examples of states, activities and accomplishments in English and Bulgarian in the imperative. It should be noted that an English verb can be translated by a Bulgarian perfective or imperfective verb:

- 1.a. *Run away from the people!* (activity with an undefined endpoint)
- 1.b. *Тичай далеч от хората!*
- 2.a. *Run away from the people!* (accomplishment with a defined endpoint)
- 2.b. *Изтичай далеч от хората!*

The reason for this is that the Bulgarian verbal equivalents of English have several parameters that need to be taken into account: aspectual, grammatical or contextual (as in these examples).

- 1.c. *Run away from the people! Stop when you are alone!*
- 1.d. *Тичай далеч от хората! Спри, когато си сам!*

2.c. *Run away from the people! Hide quickly!*

2.d. *Изтичай далеч от хората! Бързо се скрий!*

Table 1: *Illustration of the Imperative test for English and Bulgarian*

<i>зная</i> <i>know</i>	state 'have knowledge in a particular field'	* <i>Знай отговора!</i> * <i>Know the answer!</i>
<i>тичам</i> <i>run</i>	activity 'move very fast'	<i>Бързо тичай към къщи!</i> <i>Run home quickly!</i>
<i>изтичам</i> <i>run</i>	accomplishment 'move quickly to a certain place'	<i>Бързо изтичай към къщи!</i> <i>Run home quickly!</i>
<i>строя</i> <i>build</i>	activity 'construct a building, bridge, etc.'	<i>Строй моста, не спирай!</i> <i>Build the bridge, do not stop!</i>
<i>построя</i> <i>build</i>	accomplishment 'build something to the end'	<i>Построй къщата!</i> <i>Build the house!</i>

The Bulgarian examples with the imperative appear parallel to their English correspondents:

States do not have imperative forms, but activities and accomplishments do.

However, there are a number of verbs such as *седя* (sit), *стоя* (stand), *лежа* (lie), which are not activities that form imperatives. The difference in behaviour is explained by a hidden event argument.

It is assumed that events (and activity verbs as events) have an additional hidden event argument by which the event can be characterised in terms of the manner, place and time in which it occurs (Davidson 1967: 92 – 93). A transitive activity verb thus introduces not a two-place but a three-place relation between a subject, an object and a hidden event argument (which can be realised in the form of adverbial modifiers that characterise the event).

The state predicates are categorised into two types: stative predicates, represented by verbs such as *sit, stand, lie*, which denote situations in the sense of Donald Davidson's theory (Davidsonian states), and state predicates, represented by verbs and adjectives such as *know, weigh, possess, resemble, be beautiful, be blonde*, which do not denote situations in the sense of Donald Davidson (Kimian states) (Maienborn, 2007: 2).

The following diagnostics are offered to determine hidden event arguments (Maienborn, 2019: 30) and thus to distinguish between Davidsonian and Kimian predicates:

Davidsonian predicates can be infinitive complements (in English) and *da* (da)-clauses (in Bulgarian) to perception verbs; they can be combined with locative adverbial expressions and manner modifiers.

Kimian predicates cannot occur in such a context.

The Imperative test can be added to this diagnostic procedure in both English and Bulgarian:

Davidsonian predicates can form imperatives. Kimian predicates cannot occur in such a context.

3. Temporal categories as part of linguistic tests for eventuality types

We will consider only a few cases, namely the continuous tenses in English and the imperfect tense in Bulgarian, without claiming to be exhaustive, but to show that various morphological categories associated with the notion of temporal categories, presuppose the adoption of different linguistic tests for the distinction of eventuality types (we use the term temporal categories as a unifying term for the categories traditionally associated with the term verbal tense in Bulgarian and English in order not to go into additional distinctions that are important in themselves but are not the focus of the study).

To distinguish state predicates from other eventuality types, a second test was proposed (Dowty 1979: 60).

Test 2. State predicates have no progressive forms in English, whereas activities and accomplishments do. In the case of achievements, the progressive forms can be used under certain conditions.

This linguistic test is specific to English, as the category of progressive tense does not exist in Bulgarian. Verbs that are used in the progressive tense in English are usually translated in Bulgarian with imperfective verbs in the present, imperfect and future tenses, which correspond to the English

present, past and future progressive (rarely otherwise) (Table 2 shows examples of past progressive).

The translation of English progressive tenses with Bulgarian imperfective verbs correlates with the observation that predicates of activities or indefinite processes (Paducheva 1996: 92) are imperfective verbs (Nitsolova 2008: 248; Koeva 2021: 141 – 142).

Table 2: Illustration of the Progressive test for English in Past Progressive

<i>зная</i> <i>know</i>	state 'have knowledge in a particular field'	<i>*He was knowing the truth.</i> <i>Той знаеше истината.</i>
<i>мичам</i> <i>run</i>	activity 'move very fast'	<i>He was running.</i> <i>Той мичае.</i>
<i>измичам</i> <i>run to</i>	accomplishment 'move quickly to a certain place'	<i>He was running home.</i> <i>*Той измичае към къщи.</i> (<i>He was running</i> cannot be translated with <i>измичам</i> .) <i>He ran to his mother.</i> <i>Той измича при майка си.</i>
<i>строя</i> <i>build</i>	activity 'construct a building, bridge, etc'	<i>He was building a house.</i> <i>Той строее къща.</i>
<i>построя</i> <i>build</i>	accomplishment 'build something to the end'	<i>He was building a house.</i> <i>*Той построее къща.</i> (<i>He was building</i> cannot be translated with <i>построя</i> .) <i>He built a house.</i> <i>Той построи къща.</i>

Although state verbs do not form progressives by default, it has been shown that when some English state verbs are used with progressives, a different interpretation is required, which can usually be explained as a transfer or reclassification of the verb as dynamic, e.g. as having a processual

or agentive meaning (Quirk et al. 2010: 202): in the next example, the stative meaning is transformed into a process meaning.

3. *Tina is resembling her sister more and more.*

As far as Bulgarian present and future tenses are concerned, it can be said that only the Bulgarian imperfective verbs correspond to the progressive present and future tenses in English; and the semantics of the Bulgarian imperfect can be correlated with the semantics of the progressive past tense in English only for the Bulgarian imperfective verbs.

4.a. *Вчера по това време **играехме** футбол в парка.* (activity that continues)

4.b. *This time yesterday we **were playing** football in the park.*

5.a. *Говорех с брат ми, когато започна да вали.* (background activity)

5.b. *I **was talking** to my brother when it started to rain.*

In some rare cases, perfective verbs in Bulgarian can be used in the imperfect; however, these are never translated with the English progressive, as they express conditional semantics, as the following examples show.

6.a. *Това щеше да му спечели време, дори да **изчакаше**.* (conditional)

6.b. *That would buy him time, even if he had to wait.*

7.a. *Всичко щеше да тръгне по-добре, само да **стигнаше** отново у дома.* (conditional)

7.b. *Everything would go better if he could just get back home.*

A third test has been formulated in connection with the use of continuous tenses in English (Dowty 1979: 60):

Test 3: The use of activity predicates in progressive forms in the past tense *He was running* implies *He ran*, whereas the use of **accomplishment predicates** – *John was building a house* – does not imply that *John built a house*.

This difference has been observed for English and is known as the imperfective paradox (Hamm and Bott 2018).

However, as we have seen, the English progressive tenses are translated into Bulgarian with imperfective verbs, which are characteristic of activities but not of accomplishments (Table 3).

The Bulgarian translations show that in both cases we are dealing with activities, which in Bulgarian are translated with *муча* and *српую* and not with *измуча* and *носпую*. In Bulgarian, therefore, a perfective or imperfective verb is sufficient in many contexts to distinguish a situation of activity or accomplishment, whereas in English grammatical categories such as progressive tenses and, in many cases, the context, always play a role.

The application of the test to Bulgarian shows that the Bulgarian imperfective translation equivalents can be defined as activity predicates.

Table 3. The Imperfective Paradox

<i>мичам</i> <i>run</i>	activity 'move very fast'	<i>He was running. implies</i> <i>He ran.</i> <i>Той мичаше. implies</i> <i>Той (вече) мича (е мичал).</i>
<i>измичам</i> <i>run to</i>	accomplishment 'move quickly to a certain place'	<i>*Той измичаше в парка.</i> <i>Ако измичаше ...</i> <i>(He was running cannot be translated with измичам.)</i>
<i>строя</i> <i>build</i>	activity 'construct a building, bridge, etc'	<i>He was building a house. implies</i> <i>He built a house.</i> <i>Той строеше къща. implies</i> <i>Той (вече) строи (е строил) къща.</i>
<i>построя</i> <i>build</i>	accomplishment 'build something to the end'	<i>*Той построеше къща.</i> <i>Ако построеше ...</i> <i>(He was building cannot be translated with построя.)</i>

According to the test for English, progressive tenses are also possible with verbs that are normally defined as accomplishments. In Bulgarian, perfective verbs can express accomplishments or achievements, but cannot be translated with progressive tenses in English.

As already mentioned (Hamm and Bott 2018), the verb *arrive* in 8.a.

8.a. *Chapman arrived.*

8.b. **Chapman arrived all night.*

is an achievement, as the ungrammaticality of 8.b. shows. However, when a bare plural is used as a subject it becomes an activity, and sentence 9. is grammatically correct.

9. *Visitors arrived all night.*

Similar contexts can be defined for English verbs of accomplishment.

4. Semantic and syntactic representation of Bulgarian imperfective and perfective verbs in comparison with English

The Progressive test is often used to illustrate the differences in behaviour between telic and atelic predicates. In many cases, telicity is defined on the basis of lexical aspect, distinguishing between predicates with a potential endpoint (accomplishments) and those referring to potentially unbounded events (activities) – events with no inherent temporal limit. It is generally agreed that telic predicates are characterised by two linguistic properties: co-occurrence with expressions that provide information about how long an event lasted before it ended, and progressive use, which gives rise to the so-called imperfective paradox. Atelicity, on the other hand, is characterised by co-occurrence with adverbials such as *for X time*, and the progressive use does not lead to the imperfective paradox (Rothstein 2008: 48). This is illustrated by the following contrast in terms of the logical inferences (entailments) that each type of predicate generates:

10.a. *When Mom called, Peter was looking for the book.* **implies** *Peter looked for the book.* (atelic)

10.b. *When Mom called, Peter was reading the book.* **does not imply** *Peter read the book.* (telic)

Applying the Progressive test to Bulgarian reveals that the most suitable equivalent for the English Past progressives is the imperfect tense of the imperfective aspect verbs in Bulgarian. Since the imperfect has other uses (iterative, habitual, or unbounded), the best way to verify its correlation with the English progressive is through a *когато* ‘when’-clause, which imposes a progressive interpretation, directly corresponding to the English progressive (Borik 2006: 18):

11.a. *Когато мама се обади, брат ми търсеше книгата.* **implies** *Брат ми вече търси (е търсил) книгата.* (atelic)

11.b. *Когато мама се обади, брат ми четеше книгата* **does not imply** *Брат ми вече чете (е чел) книгата.* (telic)

As O. Borik (2006: 26) argues, the notions of progress or development never exclude the possibility that there is a point at which the event ends; however, the perfective aspect in accomplishments (as in achievements) expresses not only the idea that the event has ceased to take place or has ended, but also (and this is crucial) that it cannot continue beyond the point

of completion (Depraetere 1995: 2 – 3)³. Bulgarian thus confirms that there is no direct correlation between grammatical aspect and telicity, which means that perfectivity can only mark telicity in certain verb classes. Since there is no perfective-imperfective distinction in English, there is a stronger correlation between lexical aspect/telicity and eventuality type: unmodified activities and states are atelic, while intransitive achievements are telic, as are the accomplishments with singular direct objects (*read a book*). However, as mentioned above, achievements sometimes also yield atelic readings, as in *Guests arrived all night*, provided the subject is a bare plural.

O. Borik (2006: 32 – 35), while arguing against the usefulness of the natural endpoint approach, emphasises the importance of the notion of homogeneity. In our opinion, the difference in telicity between activities and accomplishments in Bulgarian perfective contexts can be better addressed with the notion of homogeneity vs. heterogeneity. Z. Vendler defines homogeneity as “any part of the process is the same as the whole” (1957: 101) grouping activities and achievements as homogeneous in opposition to states and accomplishments. This again is relevant only for English, where the opposition of perfective and imperfective aspects is missing.

If a predicate applies to a certain time interval, it also applies to every subinterval of this interval, which leads to a homogeneous interpretation of the temporal properties of the predicate. If this is not the case, the predicate is heterogeneous. Following a definition of homogeneity based on the subinterval property (Borik 2006: 26), according to which “all parts and sums of the interpretation or denotation of the predicate can also be described as the same predicate”, we can conclude that imperfective intransitive activity predicates are homogeneous (and thus atelic) because they correspond to a single event (parts of the running event ‘бягам/run’ can also be described as running). Accomplishments are more complex because their semantic description includes different parts of interpretation (all parts and sums of ‘build a house/ да построя една къща’ cannot be described by the same predicate); accomplishments are therefore heterogeneous, and this is because they are marked as perfective (in Bulgarian). Heterogeneity always involves some kind of measuring-out of the referential properties of the object. And this is the reason why the object can never be omitted, cf.

³ It is well known that perfective verbs in Slavic refer to a boundary, while imperfective verbs represent a given situation without regard to boundaries: The latter can denote both bounded and unbounded situations (Mehlig 2008: 258). According to this author, activities are atterminative, i.e. they are homogeneous in that they conceptualise the event as arbitrarily divisible, while accomplishments are terminative.

**Петър пробяга от 5 до 8 ч.* In other words, transitive perfective verbs in Bulgarian are necessarily transitive change of state verbs.

Many researchers (Verkuyl 1972, 1993; Rothstein 2004; etc.) have argued that the classification of Z. Vendler is not relevant at the V-level, but at the VP-level, and discuss other properties of verbs that contribute to the determination of their lexical aspectual properties. Thus, according to Rothstein (2008: 51 – 63), while all VPs have their denotation in the domain of counting, the difference between telic and atelic VPs is that only the former contain an explicit measure of what counts as an event in the set. Telicity is determined at the VP level, and thus telicity vs. atelicity is a crucial property of VPs (verb phrases).

These distinctions are particularly important in the context of a group of verbs that have given rise to numerous descriptions and explanations. Verbs of consumption and creation (*eat, drink, build, read, write, paint*, etc.) are also referred to as verbs of the incremental theme (Verkuyl 1972, Tenny 1994, Krifka 1992, 1998, Dowty 1991). Such verbs are characterised by the fact that they are lexically ambiguous, i.e. they can be interpreted as both activity (atelic) and accomplishment (telic) verbs in a given context. Such verbs are a very strong argument in favour of a VP analysis of telicity. It has been argued that in English the aspectual value of these predicates depends on whether the Theme is cumulative or quantised: Predicates with cumulative Themes (bare plurals, mass nouns) yield an atelic interpretation, e.g. *Mary ate apples for five minutes*. Predicates with quantised Themes⁴ (singular, definite or quantificational NPs) lead to a telic interpretation: e.g. *Mary ate three apples in five minutes*.

For Bulgarian, given the above observations on verbal aspect, it is important to check the predictions regarding the input of the object Theme for the telicity of the VP. The following examples show that the incremental theme in such predicates can be definite or indefinite in the telic/ accomplishment/perfective reading, while the atelic/activity/imperfective reading requires only an indefinite theme. In the semantic literature (Jackendoff 1990, Filip 1993, etc.), bare plurals are often regarded as mass predicates (cumulative predicates) in the nominal domain that refer homogeneously, in the sense that the entities they refer to are not singled out

⁴ Quantised direct objects (Krifka 1989) lead to telic VPs since the event can be said to be over when the whole of the object (or sum of objects) specified by the nominal can be said to be ‘used up’ by the verb, and thus the endpoint of the event has been reached. If an apple is ‘used up’ gradually in an event of eating an apple, then the event cannot be over until the apple has been eaten, and it must be over when the apple has been eaten.

individually and are thus not measurable, but are represented as an indivisible sum. The same probably applies to indefinite singular objects, which are marked with zero in Bulgarian. In the telic/accomplishment reading, on the other hand, which can only be formed with the perfective verbs, the incremental theme is necessarily quantised. This is shown not only by the possibility of marking the object as definite, but also by the possibility of introducing a cardinality quantifier phrase as part of the DP. This possibility is concrete evidence that the object in the telic/accomplishment reading must be “atomic” (Chierchia 1998), otherwise it cannot be counted. Therefore, we propose whenever a zero-marked indefinite object shows up in the same telic reading, there is a hidden (null) quantifier referring to the numeral one (when it is in the singular, i.e., $\emptyset$ книга, where $\emptyset = 1$) or a hidden (null) quantifier when it is in the plural, i.e. $\emptyset$ книги, where $\emptyset = \text{много}$ or some other imprecise quantity expression). The presence of the quantifier is necessary to atomise the nominal predicate, in line with Krifka’s (1989) description of what a quantised DP predicate can be: singular, definite or universal DPs or expressions of the form (exactly) n(umber) N:

12.a. Той писа книга/книги цяла година. (activity)

12.b. Той написа (една) книга/(много) книги/книгата/книгите/5 книги за една година. (accomplishment)

The aspectual composition of the two types is shown in the following trees (Figure 2 and Figure 3).

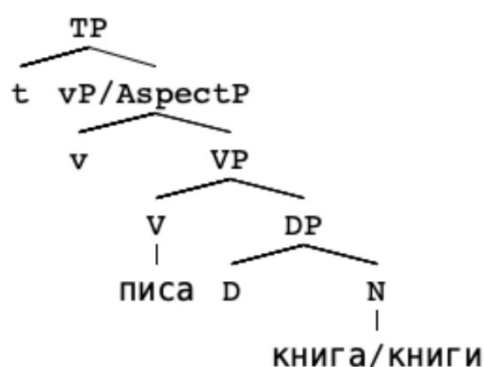
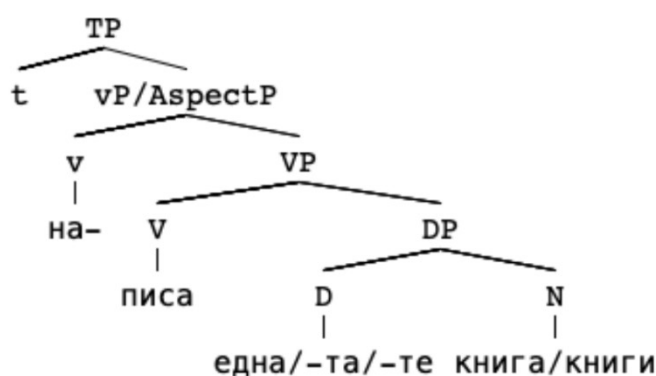


Figure 2. Imperfective Bulgarian verb **Figure 3.** Perfective Bulgarian verb

5. Conclusion

Bulgarian imperfective verbs can express states (Koeva 2021: 141 – 142) and activities according to Zeno Vendler’s classification.

Additional evidence was provided by applying two linguistic tests developed for English based on the use of progressive tenses and their translation equivalents with Bulgarian imperfective verbs.

The difference between lexical aspect, grammatical aspect and situational aspect has been commented on several times, but Vendler's classification refers to situational types, since each predicate expresses the meaning of the situation not independently but simultaneously with the participants characterising that situation. In real use, additional categories such as tense, grammatical aspect (or lexical-grammatical aspect) in Bulgarian as well as the specific realisation of the noun arguments (implicit/explicit for the object; the values of definiteness: definite, indefinite, existential, weak/strong distinction, specificity) are important for the overall expression of the situation type. Within this complex picture of lexical, morphological and syntactic interaction, one and the same verb, even with the same lexical meaning, can express a different situation type, and the possible shifts are widely described: Activities can express both accomplishments and states under certain conditions.

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