

## A New Approach to Aktionsarten in Role and Reference Grammar

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The RRG system of Aktionsarten is somewhat Anglocentric, unlike most other aspects of RRG: the tests used for the identification of Aktionsarten are based on English, often on categories that need not (and often do not) exist in other languages, e.g. the progressive aspect (Van Valin 2005: 39). Significantly, the imperfective and perfective, which English lacks, do not play a role in the tests used for the determining Aktionsarten. Moreover, it is assumed that the same Aktionsarten, that were posited on the basis of the analysis of the English verbal system, are present in every language, i.e. that they are universal. Although the system of Aktionsarten posited by RRG has evolved over the years (e.g. by including Semelfactives, as a new Aktionsart, in Van Valin 2005), it is still essentially based on the original, English-derived system, posited by Vendler more than fifty years ago (Vendler 1967). This paper will present some new evidence from a number of languages, typologically very different from English, that appears to challenge the RRG system of Aktionsarten, and show how the theory can be modified to accommodate it. The paper relies chiefly on the works of Breu (1994), Johanson (2000), Sasse (2002), Tatevosov (2002, 2016) and the bidimensional approaches to actionality, which assume that Aktionsart (actionality) is expressed in verbal forms modified by aspectual grams, and that the interaction of aspect and Aktionsart is crucial for a typology of actionality.

Firstly, building on our previous work (Matasović 2018), we will argue that the Aktionsart system can be represented hierarchically, with only three actionality features: [force], [duration] and [telicity], and that such a system is more economical than the current RRG system of Aktionsarten.

Furthermore, we will examine verbal lexemes that show systematic ambiguity with respect to their Aktionsart, in particular the so-called “two-phase verbs”. In English, such verbs are rare, but *to hide* is a good example: it can refer to the change of state from not being hidden to being hidden, or just to the state of being hidden. However, in Bagvalal (NE Caucasian), there are many two-phase verbs, and they are systematically ambiguous in the imperfective (they can refer to both phases of the event, as in (1)), but in the perfective they do not refer to either of the phases, but rather to the transition between them, as in (2), Tatevosov 2002: 388:

- (1) *maHammad helli-rā-x*                      *ek'oa*  
Mohammad lie\_down-IPF-CONV      AUX.PRS  
I “Mohammed is lying down”  
II “Mohammed lies / is lying”

- (2) *maHammad helli*  
Mohammed lie\_down.PFV.PST  
“Mohammad lay down”

Such verbs cannot be identified with accomplishments or active accomplishments, which never show this type of ambiguity (e.g. English *to melt* cannot mean both ‘to be in the process of melting’ and ‘to be melted’). Hence RRG must show how this class of verbs can be accommodated into its system of Aktionsarten. We will argue that they do not require positing additional Aktionsarten or

primitive actionality features. Rather, we have to assume that in many languages some verbs are lexically underspecified for some actionality features, and that additional features are “coerced” or expressed in certain contexts or grammatical categories (particularly in combination with certain aspectual modifiers).

Lastly, we will look at the data from languages that lexicalize inceptivity (e.g. Adyghe, a NW Caucasian language, cf. Arkad’ev 2009: 215). The inceptive meaning is observed in certain activity verbs in the perfective past (Arkad’ev 2009: 215):

- (3) *č’ale-r wəna-m ča-ʋe*  
boy-ABS house-OBL run-PFV.PST  
“The boy started running to the house”

In the (present) imperfective the verb *čan* ‘run’ is a plain activity verb (with no inceptive meaning):

- (4) *č’aler- wəna-m ma-ča*  
boy-ABS house-OBL DYN-run  
“The boy is running to the house”

To deal with such facts, we propose to introduce an operator **INC’** (for “inceptivity”) that should be included in the lexical representation of such verbs. It is not a basic actional feature (like “duration” or “telicity”) – its theoretical status is more akin to the status of the operator **DO’** for agentivity. It can modify the logical structures of both stative and activity verbs and it interacts with aspectual systems of different languages in somewhat predictable ways (e.g. this operator is normally eliminated, by lexical rules, in the imperfective aspect).

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