## The semantics of events

Nick Riches

Newcastle University

January 30, 2019

## The semantics of events

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## Tense

## Tense

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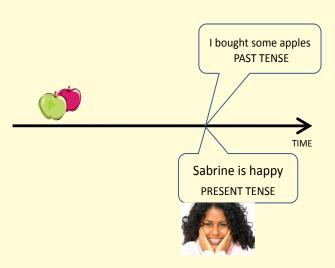
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## What is tense?

"Tense" refers to when an action took place in relation to the time of speaking, e.g.



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Future tense?

- I { will am going to } help you to carry that shopping.
   I think England { will are going to } win the match on Tuesday.
- England are winning 3-nil with only five minutes of extra time. They  $\left\{\begin{array}{c} will \\ are going to \end{array}\right\}$  win.
- 4. The train \{ \begin{aligned} \line{is going to leave} \\ is leaving \\ \line{leaves} \end{aligned} \text{ at 6.15.} \end{aligned}
- 5. Next year, \begin{cases} 'm going to go \ 'm going \ willoo \end{cases} \text{on holiday somewhere hot.} \end{cases}
- 6. Tonight I \ \begin{align\*} & 'm going to have \ & 'm having \ & will have \end{align\*} & dinner with some friends.

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Future tense?

- I { will ?am going to } help you to carry that shopping. OFFER
   I think England { will are going to } win the match on Tuesday.
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## Future tense?

- I { √will / (?am going to)} help you to carry that shopping. OFFER
   I think England { √ √ will / (are going to)} win the match on Tuesday. **PREDICTION**
- 3. England are winning 3-nil with only five minutes of extra time. They  $\left\{\begin{array}{c} will \\ are \ going \ to \end{array}\right\}$  win.
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# PREDICTION BASED ON STRONG EVIDENCE

- 4. The train \{ \begin{align\*} \text{is going to leave} \\ \text{is leaving} \\ \text{leaves} \end{area} \} \text{at 6.15.}
- 5. Next year, \begin{cases} 'm going to go \ 'm going \ willgo \end{cases} on holiday somewhere hot.
- 6. Tonight I \ \begin{align\*} 'm going to have \ 'm having \ will have \} \ \ \dinner with some friends.

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## Future tense?

- I { √will / (?am going to)} help you to carry that shopping. OFFER
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- 3. England are winning 3-nil with only five minutes of extra time. They  $\begin{cases} ??will \\ \sqrt{are\ going\ to} \end{cases}$  win.

## PREDICTION BASED ON STRONG EVIDENCE

## TIMETABLE FUTURE

- 5. Next year, \begin{cases} 'm going to go \ 'm going \ willgo \end{cases} on holiday somewhere hot.
- 6. Tonight I \ \begin{align\*} 'm going to have \ 'm having \ will have \} \ \ \dinner with some friends.

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## PREDICTION BASED ON STRONG EVIDENCE

4. The train { ?is going to leave ?is leaving √ √ leaves } at 6.15.

## TIMETABLE FUTURE

5. Next year,  $\begin{cases} \sqrt{\ 'm \ going \ to \ go} \\ \sqrt{\ 'm \ going} \\ * \ will go \end{cases}$  on holiday somewhere hot.

## PLAN

6. Tonight I \ \begin{align\*} & 'm going to have \ & 'm having \ & will have \end{align\*} & dinner with some friends.

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## Future tense?

- 1. I  $\left\{ \begin{array}{c} \sqrt{will} \\ ?am \ going \ to \end{array} \right\}$  help you to carry that shopping. OFFER
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## PREDICTION BASED ON STRONG EVIDENCE

4. The train  $\left\{ \begin{array}{l} ?is \ going \ to \ leave \\ ?is \ leaving \\ \sqrt{\checkmark leaves} \end{array} \right\} \ \text{at 6.15}.$ 

## TIMETABLE FUTURE

5. Next year,  $\begin{cases} \sqrt{\ 'm \ going \ to \ go} \\ \sqrt{\ 'm \ going} \\ * \ will go \end{cases}$  on holiday somewhere hot.

## PLAN

6. Tonight I  $\begin{cases} \sqrt{m} \text{ going to have} \\ \sqrt{\sqrt{m} \text{ having}} \\ \text{? will have} \end{cases}$  dinner with some friends.

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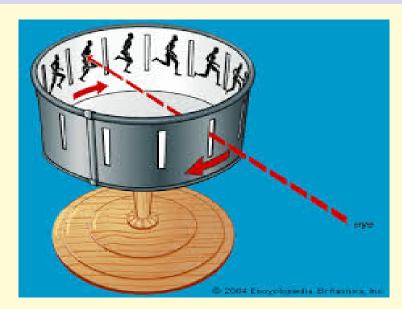
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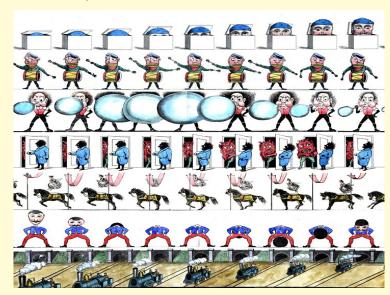
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# Which of the following verbs would make a good zoetrope?

- 1. swim
- 2. crash
- 3. laugh
- 4. dive
- pop
- 6. dance
- 7. exist

## Eadweard Muybridge (1830 - 1904)













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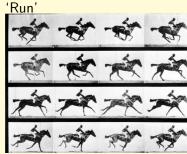
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## 'Internal structure'





# (a) States versus non-states

Existing verbs, be, live, exist,

Experiencer-theme verbs, e.g. like, love, hate Mental State verbs, e.g. believe, know, hope. The semantics of events

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(a) States versus non-states

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# Tests...

- 1. States are difficult to define
- 2. State verbs sound odd in the progressive (-ing form), e.g. ??she is existing, ??she is liking the food, ??I am believing in fairies.
- 3. State verbs sound odd as reponses to the question what happened?, e.g. Q. What happened? ???A. She liked the food

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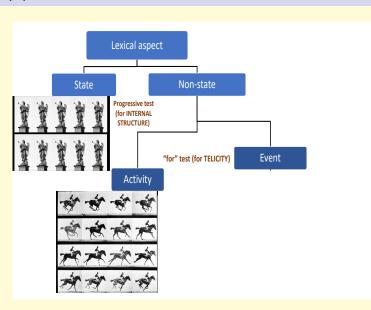
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Activities do not have a natural end point (they are "atelic").

Events have a natural end point (they are "telic").

Examples of activities are run, walk, wash, work

Examples of events are break, collapse, crash, fall

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# (b) Activities versus events

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Activities sound good when used with time expressions which imply an incomplete activity e.g. *I've been walking for an hour (and I may continue to walk for another hour).* 

Events sound odd when used with such time expressions, e.g \* It collapsed for an hour.

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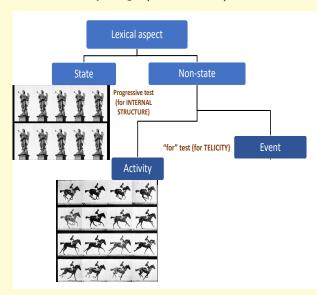
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Events sound good with time expressions which imply a complete activity, e.g. The bridge collapsed in five seconds.

Activities do not sound good with such time expressions, e.g.

\* He walked in five minutes

## Eadweard Muybridge (1830 - 1904)



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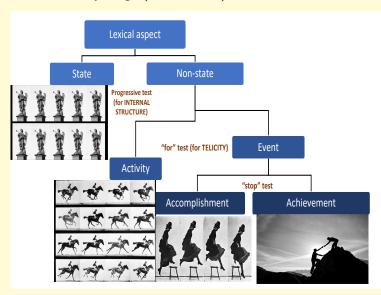
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# Achievements are defined in terms of an endpoint, e.g.

- ► She reached the top.
- ► The glass smashed

## Therefore we cannot use them in the progressive, e.g.

- \*She is reaching the top
- \*She glass is smashing.

We cannot stop the event in the middle, e.g.

\* She stopped reaching the top of the mountain

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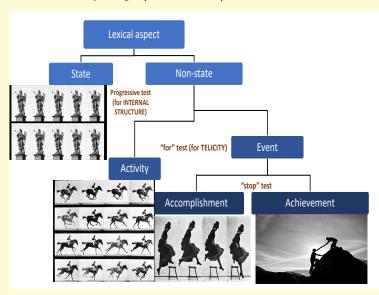
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Accomplishments are not defined in terms of an endpoint.

Because they are not defined in terms of an endpoint, we can use them in the progressive

- $\triangleright$  She jumped over the chairs  $\Rightarrow$  She stopped jumping over the chairs
- ightharpoonup He is building a house  $\Rightarrow$  He stopped building the house.

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# Lexical Aspect Table

Example verbs	Durativity: can the event last for a period of time?	<b>Dynamism:</b> does the event have 'internal structure'	<b>Telicity:</b> is there a clear end point?	Label
want, believe, exist		X	X	State
Dance, sing, work	$\sim$	$\checkmark$	X	Activity
pour, bake, write			$\checkmark$	Accomplishment
flash, drop, realise	×	$\checkmark$	$\checkmark$	Achievement

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# Now what is the lexical aspect of the following verbs?

- 1. wash
- 2. cheat
- flatten
- 4. paint
- 5. open
- 6. possess
- 7. deliver

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- 1. Definition test: States are relatively hard to define.
- 2. What happened test: Doesn't sound good with States
- Present progressive (-ing form): States and Achievements do not sound good in the progressive
- "for" test: Activities sound good with a "for" expression, but not events.
- "in" test: Events sound good with "in" but not activities
- "Stop" test: Achievements do not sound good with "stop", e.g. she stopped reaching the top of the mountain

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# Tense/aspect and

- 1. I **like** cheese
- 2. She **liked** my post on facebook (i.e. pressed "like")
- I have a car
- 4. She's **having** a good time
- 5 I **love** that dress
- 6. I'm **loving** this book
- 7. Be quiet. I'm thinking
- 8. I **think** you're really rude

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- 1. I **like** cheese (STATE)
- 2. She **liked** my post on facebook (i.e. pressed "like") (ACHIEVEMENT)
- I have a car
- 4. She's **having** a good time
- I love that dress
- 6. I'm **loving** this book
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# Multiple lexical aspects

- 1. I **like** cheese (STATE)
- She liked my post on facebook (i.e. pressed "like") (ACHIEVEMENT)
- 3. I have a car (STATE)
- 4. She's **having** a good time (ACTIVITY)
- 5. I **love** that dress
- 6. I'm **loving** this book
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- 1. I like cheese (STATE)
- She **liked** my post on facebook (i.e. pressed "like") (ACHIEVEMENT)
- 3. I have a car (STATE)
- 4. She's **having** a good time (ACTIVITY)
- 5. I love that dress (STATE)
- 6. I'm **loving** this book (ACTIVITY???)
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- 3. I have a car (STATE)
- 4. She's **having** a good time (ACTIVITY)
- I love that dress (STATE)
- 6. I'm **loving** this book (ACTIVITY???)
- 7. Be quiet. I'm thinking (ACTIVITY)
- 8. I **think** you're really rude (STATE)

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# 1. Each verb has two meanings (or 'senses')

2. Each verb has a primary meaning and secondary meaning

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## What is grammatical aspect?

Grammatical aspect refers to grammatical devices to signal one's perpsective on an event.



David Brent is **dancing**.

Progressive aspect shows we are still <u>inside</u> the event (it is not finished)



King Kong has **fallen Perfective aspect** shows we are 
outside the event
(it is finished)

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Aspect 'tense'

- 1. By this time next week, I will have eaten all of the tins of baked beans in my cupboard
- 2. She sleeping when the earthquake happened was

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Pres. tense combs. Prog. asp. combs.

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#### Tens

What is tense?

A future

#### Lexical Aspect

Inherent temporal properties of events

- (a) States versus non-s
- (b) Activities versus events
- (c) Accomplishments versu

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## aspect

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# Lexical and grammatical aspect are closely 'aligned'

- ► Activity verbs + progressive grammatical aspect The horse is running
- Accomplishment/achievement verbs + perfective grammatical aspect
   He has just jumped off the roof
   She has reached the top of the mountain

3. He smashes things (he's clumsy or aggressive)

1. She sings every day. 2. He works in a call centre Nick Riches

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- 1. She sings every day.
- 2. He works in a call centre
- 3. He smashes things (he's clumsy or aggressive)

A habitual interpretation

# (b) Progressive grammatical aspect and achievement verbs

The semantics of events

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1. The light is flashing

2. He's flattening boxes

# (b) Progressive grammatical aspect and achievement verbs

1. The light is flashing 2. He's flattening boxes

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Children with SLI have difficulties marking tense, e.g.

1. He went there  $\Rightarrow$  Him go there

Morphological or conceptual difficulty?

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## Young children, when acquiring tense, conflate tense and lexical aspect.

They are more likely to mark past tense on Achievement and Accomplishment verbs, because these tend to describe COMPLETED events.

e.g. Van Horne et al. 2007; Johnson & Morris, 2007.

Can we manipulate lexical aspect when teaching tense endings?

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## Johnson & Morris design

Table 3 Imitation sentence-pair stimuli categorized by lexical aspect and phonological composition

Phonological composition	Accomplishments	Activities
Non-obstruent coda	She chewed up a green grape.	She chewed a piece of gum.
	He rolled a ball into the box.	He rolled a ball on the box.
	She crawled into the box.	She crawled around in circles.
Obstruent coda	She skipped out the door. He walked out the door. He jumped into a box.	She skipped on the rug. She walked in circles. She jumped up and
		down.

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What is unusual about the following sentence?

"Here be dragons"

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