CATEGORY OF TENSE AND VERB SEMANTICS IN THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE

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ABSTRACT

In the present article the dependence of the use of 13 tense forms of the verb on two factors – type of texts and verb semantics – is analyzed. The obtained results show that past tenses are preferred in fiction, the Present Indefinite tense is preferred in scientific prose, while present and future tenses are preferred in journalistic texts. The dependence between verb semantics and the use of tenses is characterized by the intensity of connections between their grammatical and lexical meanings and the selectivity sense collocations. Various tenses of the verb have different degrees of the selectivity of compatibility with the semantic verb groups (subclasses).

Keywords: notion, reality, semantics, communication, sensation, publication office, journalism, communication

Абстракт

В настоящей статье исследуется зависимость употребления 13 временных форм глагола от двух
факторы – тип текстов и семантика глаголов. Полученные результаты показывают, что в художественных текстах предпочтение отдается прошедшему времени, в научной прозе - настоящее неопределенное время, а в публицистических текстах - настоящее и будущее время. Зависимость между семантикой глаголов и употреблением времен характеризуется интенсивностью связей между их грамматическим и лексическим значением и избирательностью смысловых словосочетаний. Различные времена глагола имеют разную степень избирательности сочетаемости с смысловыми группами глаголов (подклассами).

Ключевые слова: понятие, действительность, семантика, коммуникация, ощущение, издательство, журналистика, коммуникация.

Izoh

Ushbu maqolada fe'lning 13 zamon shakllarining qo'llanilishining ikkitaga bog'liqligi

omillar – matnlar turi va fe'l semantikasi tahlil qilinadi. Olingan natijalar badiiy adabiyotda oʻtgan zamon, ilmiy nasrda hozirgi noaniq zamon, publitsistik matnlarda esa hozirgi va kelasi zamon afzalligini koʻrsatadi. Fe'l semantikasi bilan zamon qo'llanishi o'rtasidagi bog'liqlik ularning grammatik va leksik ma'nolari va tanlab ma'no birikmalari o'rtasidagi bog'lanishning intensivligi bilan tavsiflanadi. Fe'lning turli zamonlari semantik fe'l guruhlari (kichik sinflar) bilan mos keluvchilik darajasining turlichaligiga ega.

Kalit so'zlar: tushuncha, voqelik, semantika, aloqa, sensatsiya, nashriyot idorasi, jurnalistika, aloqa

INTRODUCTION

The category of tense in modern English has been studied quite well. The linguists very often discuss the following problems: the origin of tenses and their semantics (Quirk et al., 1985; Ward, 1966), paradigmatic relations, correlation between tense category and the category of time

and other categories (Morochovska, 1993). The frequency of the use of tenses in different texts are less studied (Korsakov, 1979). We also do not have enough information about the factors influencing the tense occurrences in different texts. In some research works carried out at the University of Cˇernivci it was determined that the usage of grammatical forms of the verb could be connected with its lexical semantics (Ivanjuk & Levickij, 1990) or with the usage of verbs and adverbs (Levickij & Romanova, 1997). In the present paper the task is to investigate the dependence of the use of tenses of the English verb on two factors: (a) type of the text; (b) lexical

semantics of the verb.

MATERIAL

It is accepted that texts are grouped according to certain characteristics into some sets, which, depending on the position of the researcher, are designated by the terms

''register'' (Heringer, 1978), ''sublanguage'' (Andreev, 1967) or ''functional style'' (this term and the appropriate

concepts have received a wide circulation in the Soviet linguistics). The amount of selected functional styles depends on the sets into which all investigated texts will be divided. Some scholars distinguish the style of fiction, including prose, drama, and poetry, while the others prefer to distinguish prose as a separate functional style. We were studying three sets of texts:

Fiction:
John le Carre´, The Spy Who Came in from the Cold; Dick Francis, Reflex; Fletcher Knebel and Charles Bailey, Seven Days in May; David Guterson, Snow Falling on Cedars; Iris Murdoch, The Good Apprentice; Richard Ford, Independence Day; John Updike, In the Beauty of the Lillies; Cormac McCarthy, All the Pretty Horses; Irving Wallace, The Miracle; Arthur Clarke and Gentry Lee, Cradle. Journalistic texts: Articles taken from magazines TIME, US News and World Report,
and newspapers, The Salt Lake Tribune, The New York Times.

Scientific texts:
Articles from Science, Physical Review Letters, university textbooks on economics. These types of texts are designated as fiction, journalistic style and scientific style accordingly. The length of the texts under study is about 259,000 words (fiction – 150,000 words, journalistic texts – 55,000 words, scientific texts – about 55,000). As for the grammatical forms of time (tenses), taking into consideration the most authoritative classifications, we accepted the following list of tenses:

1. Present Indefinite
2. Present Continuous
3. Present Perfect
4. Present Perfect Continuous
5. Past Indefinite
6. Past Continuous
7. Past Perfect
8. Past Perfect Continuous
9. Future Indefinite

10. Future Continuous

11. Future Perfect

12. Future Perfect Continuous

13. Future Indefinite in the Past

14. Future Continuous in the Past

15. Future Perfect in the Past

16. Future Perfect Continuous in the Past

TENSE FORMS AND VERB SEMANTICS

Semantic Classifications of the English Verb To study the dependence between the use of tenses of the verb and its semantics it is necessary to divide all verbs into certain semantic

subclasses (groups). There are no formalistic methods (ways) of such division today. There are many different semantic classifications of the verbs (see Sil'nickij, 1966; Jurcˇenko, 1985). Our division is based on the classification presented by Beth Levin (Levin, 1998). The classification contains 49 syntactically relevant, semantically coherent verb classes of English. These classes are described individually. A list of as many members of each class as possible is given; however,

additional class members are likely to exist in many instances. A representative verb is used to exemplify the characteristic properties of the class, including argument-taking properties, behavior with respect to diathesis alternations and occasional morphological properties

(Related nominals and adjectives). Some verbs have several meanings and therefore B. Levin included them in several classes. Taking into consideration this classification, we have divided all obtained verbs into 20 semantic subclasses (groups):

1. Exchange Verbs (barter, buy, sell, exchange, pay, trade).
2. Measure Verbs (bill, charge, cost, estimate, fine, measure, price,value, weigh).
3. Change of Ownership Verbs (give, take, receive, borrow, lend, steal, return).
4. Change of Position (fall, drop, throw, slide, float, roll, fly, rotate, shift).
5. Change of Physical State (melt, redden, soften, freeze, harden, dry, break).
6. Circumstance Verbs (begin, start, stop, repeat, commence, continue, finish, halt, complete, quit, initiate, end, keep).

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7. Impact/Effect Verbs (cut, stab, crush, smash, pierce, bite, shoot, kill).

8. Directed Motion Verbs (enter, come, go, arrive, descend, ascend, raise, lower, exit, rise, depart, return, leave).

Selectivity Contingency of Lexical and Grammatical Meanings

Determined semantic verb classes are a certain number of lexical meanings while tense forms can be regarded as grammatical ones. We understand these meanings as the meanings which have different degrees of richness in the content components of semantics. The data presented in Table 7 show that the relations between lexical and grammatical meanings have a selective character. The most frequently occurring subclass of the Verbs of Existence has many connections with the grammatical meaning of the Past Indefinite tense; but this subclass is not used in Future Continuous, Future Perfect or Future Perfect in the Past. Such irregular distribution of the joint occurrence of both lexical and grammatical meanings depends on two major factors: denotative (logical) compatibility of these senses and their language compatibility. The interaction of both factors – logical (denotative) and language compatibility – causes the possibility of combination of lexical and grammatical meanings from almost unlimited joining to full prohibition. We can determine this ability of lexical or grammatical meaning to combine

selectively with other lexical or grammatical meanings as the selectivity of meanings combinability. It is necessary to find a way to measure combinatory selectivity in linguistics. Usually, the studies of such a possibility (e.g., classification of phraseological units) are conducted on the intuitive basis. This study can, of course, be accomplished by quantitative methods. In general, the mechanism of the measurement of selectivity can be described as follows: the more the empirical frequencies of joint occurrence of two meanings differ from the expected values, the higher is the degree of selectivity of combinability of these meanings. Consequently, the task is to calculate the distinctions between empirical and theoretical frequencies. The easiest way to solve this problem is to use the w2 criterion. However, the calculated sums of w2 may be replaced with some relative values, e.g., ranks (the sum w2 depends on the number of observations and degrees of freedom in every statistical experiment). The selectivity can be also calculated with the help of the contingency coefficient F. In this case we have to take into account both positive and negative

coefficient values, i.e., consider not only the cases where empirical frequencies are higher than the theoretically expected ones, but also those cases where the prohibition of compatibility is observed (empirical frequencies are much lower than what is theoretically expected).

CONCLUSION

The frequencies of the use of tenses in English depend on at least two factors – type of text and verb semantics. The Past Indefinite, Past Continuous, Past Perfect, Past Perfect Continuous tenses and the Future Indefinite in the Past, Future Perfect in the Past tenses are used more frequently than expected in fiction; the Present Indefinite tense dominates in scientific texts; while in journalistic texts the present (Present Indefinite, Present Continuous, Present Perfect, Present Perfect Continuous) and future (Future Indefinite) tenses are used more often. The frequency of the use of tenses is different in both the author's speech and dialogues: the Past Indefinite and Past Perfect tenses are used more often in the author's speech, while the Past Continuous and Future Indefinite in the Past – in dialogues. Comparing the frequency of occurrence of the 13 tenses, we may conclude that the greatest similarity is observed between scientific and journalistic texts, while the lowest – between scientific texts and fiction. The discovered dependence between verb semantics and the use of one or another tense form of the verb can be expressed with the help of several parameters, the most important of which are the following: the intensity of connection between a certain semantic subclass and a certain grammatical form and the selectivity of compatibility of grammatical and lexical meanings. The Present Continuous, Past Indefinite, Past Perfect and Future Indefinite in the Past tenses have the highest degree of selectivity in the

conventional invariant style. The Present Perfect Continuous, Past Perfect Continuous, Future Continuous, Future Perfect and Future Perfect in the Past tenses have the lowest degree of selectivity. The highest degree of the selectivity of compatibility of grammatical and lexical meanings is observed in journalistic texts, while the lowest – in scientific texts. The degree of the selectivity of compatibility does not obligatorily depend on the frequency of the joint occurrence of two meanings.

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