Linguistic Supertypes

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Editors

Paul Cobley
Kalevi Kull

De Gruyter Mouton

Linguistic Supertypes

A Cognitive-Semiotic Theory
of Human Communication

By

Per Durst-Andersen

De Gruyter Mouton

Contents

Part II: Grammar and communication

Part III: Language inside out

Preface

Books don't just happen – least of all this one, which has been particularly long in the making. Yet it could not have been finished before.

Back in 1990, while doing research for a monograph on Russian aspect (*Mental Grammar. Russian Aspect and Related Issues*), I was trying to figure out how the Russian perfective aspect differed from the English perfect and the Turkish perfect, and what were the relations between perfective aspect and ergative case. Before long, I had worked myself into an overwhelming maze of typology. Suddenly I thought I saw a connection between categories which are normally thought to belong to different worlds. For some reason the idea stayed with me, and since 1992 I have been working more or less intensely on the hypothesis that language can be categorized into three supertypes: *reality-oriented languages* (Russian and Chinese), *speaker-oriented languages* (Bulgarian, Turkish and Georgian), and *hearer-oriented languages* (English and Danish), the assumption being that there is a determinant or dominant category in language which can be either *aspect* as in Russian and Chinese, *mood* as in Bulgarian, Turkish and Georgian, or *tense* as in English and Danish. In my efforts to prove this hypothesis I embarked on what was to become a long, difficult and above all, lonely journey. Although people always seemed to think that the notion of supertypes was a fascinating idea, very few were convinced that it was anymore than just that. The journey has been not only upwind, but uphill as well. Insights that I first believed to be central, turned out to be dead-ends. Consequently, my theory on supertypes has evolved considerably over the years, from an oversimplified and speculative first version to its present more inclusive and understanding form. I do not know what kind of label to put on my kind of linguistics. What I *do* know is who my sources of inspiration are.

Henning Andersen trained me as a Jakobsonian structuralist and taught me that language is based on invariant meaning and functional coherence. Russian typologists taught me to look at a language from a holistic point of view and Russian linguists such as Apresjan, Melchuk and Zholkovskij taught me that meaning can be accessed only through paraphrasing. The past twenty years have also lead me back in time, first to Bühler, then Bakhtin and finally, Peirce, in order to understand the role language plays in the processes of sign and communication. While studying the works and ideas of these three scholars, I often wondered why they had never really been put to work by other linguists. Not even Jakobson's ideas on language have obtained the widespread recognition and use that they deserve. I suspect that the world wars have something to do

with it; it seems to me that linguists have taken each of the two postwar periods as an opportunity to start afresh, putting all the old insights behind them.

The book consists of three parts. The first part, "Language and Beyond", deals with i) the relationship between language and situations as represented by verbal types, aspect types and syntactic types, which all form groups of three; ii) the relationship between language and perception as seen through the distinction between naming strategies and framing strategies (since eye-tracking can reveal only the latter), and iii) the relationship between language and cognition, where it seems necessary to distinguish between input, intake and outcome if we are to understand how people process visual stimuli. No doubt, we all verbalize outcome, i.e. what we store in our memory, but it appears that the grammar of a given language must choose its point of view among either input (via experience), intake (via situation) or outcome (via information). Reality is represented in the human mind by these three modalities.

The second part of the book, "Grammar and Communication", looks at the role that grammar plays in written and oral language, and at its importance to direct and indirect requests. In fact, where languages like English and Danish rely heavily on metonymy, this is not at all the case in Russian and in Chinese. The chapter on pragmatics stresses the social function of language and presents the view that any speech act is like the negotiation of a contract. Focus is turned away from its usual point of interest, the hearer, and towards the speaker, which gives us more room to see how the speaker expresses his or her empathic sides. The chapter on semiotics uses Peirce's triadic line of thought to show that a linguistic sign is an image-idea pair in need of a mediator. The lexeme is born static and therefore needs an index which can make it dynamic – grammar is the index and the vehicle. Once again we are faced with three possibilities: grammar is either a model of a situation, a symptom of the speaker's experience of a situation, or a signal to the hearer to look for the situation behind the information given. The idea of three linguistic supertypes stems from exactly these three possibilities. Since Bühler's organon model turns out to be the hearer's model, we need to split it up into a speaker's model – what I call *the Grammatical Triangle* – and a hearer's model – termed *the Semiotic Wheel*.

In the third and last part of the book, "Language inside out", I explain what the three supertypes are. The result is a number of language descriptions which differ radically from what we are used to. In the chapter "The Basic Voice of Language" I analyze the basic grammatical system in Russian, Chinese, Bulgarian, Turkish, Georgian, English and Danish in relation to the determinant categories of the three supertypes and the apparent harmony created by these determinant categories. The concept of *time perspective* introduced in this chapter proves its considerable explanatory force by showing for instance that the three supertypes

are in fact transversely split into classes. The chapter "Linguistic Expansion" shows how aspect in Russian, mood in Bulgarian and tense in Danish have expanded their territory at the expense of other categories, which explains why Russian is pervaded with aspect, why Bulgarian abounds with mood and how Danish can manage with just tense – all other competing categories have been dislodged. In the final and, I hope, most interesting chapter "The Principal and Secondary Voice of Language", I set out to prove not only that all languages distinguish between a public and a private voice, but that they do so according to one of the three supertypes. These two voices, the principal and the secondary, are particularly important because the speaker may in fact choose between them, which means that they provide the speaker with more latitude than does the notion of basic voice. Danish, however, offers yet another choice between first, second and third person, which I try to show with the example of the two different translations of J.D. Salinger's *The Catcher in the Rye* into Danish. Faced with this choice between first, second and third person we are back where we started, namely with the three supertypes which guide this choice as well as all the others.

The book is addressed to everyone interested in language, communication, semiotics and cognition, but not all chapters may prove equally accessible or relevant to everyone. However, it is possible to read the chapters chronologically or separately, since none of the chapters require the reader to have read any of the preceding chapter(s), or for that matter, any of the succeeding ones. A reader particularly interested in communication and/or semiotics but less enthusiastic about linguistics may profit from reading just chapters 4 and 5. For a reader more interested in psychology or cognitive science, chapters 2 and 3 will suffice, while a reader more concerned with philosophy in general and philosophy of language in particular may very well start with chapter 1 and then proceed to chapters 4 and 5. Literary scholars would do well to read chapter 6, which offers a summary of the preceding chapters' main points in order to introduce the three supertypes, and then read chapter 9 dealing with the principal and secondary voices of a language and the choice between subvoices corresponding to first, second and third person. Linguists might start with chapter 1, and then jump to chapters 5 and 6, if they are not too keen on the non-linguistic aspects. Chapters 7, 8 and 9 are meant to be accessible to all – I have made an effort to use simple examples that would not scare off anyone. And if you are mostly interested in knowing about a particular language such as Russian, Chinese, Bulgarian, English or Danish, these three chapters would be a good place to start.

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Per Durst-Andersen
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Part I

Language and beyond

Chapter 1
Language and situations

1.1. Preliminary remarks

In this chapter I shall attempt to describe how languages relate to the concept of situation at various levels: 1) the lexico-grammatical level; 2) the purely grammatical level; and 3) the morphosyntactic level. In order to do so we have to take our point of departure in a typology of situations. This typology will be experientially based. For human beings a situation is basically perceptual, pictorial: we perceive situations in reality by forming concrete mental sensomotoric representations (pictures) of them with diverse figure-ground constellations and recognize them as belonging to different categories according to correspondingly stored abstract percepts (images) (Lorenz 1973: 108 ff.). I shall argue that the stability and instability of a picture give rise to the distinction between states and activities, and that the number of pictures, one or two pictures, is used to differentiate two major classes of situations, i.e. simple situations (states and activities) and complex situations (processes and events). These two perceptually based distinctions play a fundamental part in situation typology, but in order to distinguish processes and events, we need a couple of relative concepts, i.e. causation and finality, which apply to the two possible relations between a real activity and a real state. Later, I will show that the state vs. activity distinction, the event vs. process distinction, and the simple vs. complex situation distinction make good sense when applied to different aspectual types (English aspect, Russian aspect and French aspect) and to different syntactic types (the so-called active, ergative and accusative languages).

1.2. Previous approaches to situation and verb typology

The characteristic feature of existing verb and situation classifications is that they all take their starting point in the conceptual notion of time. The still most popular one goes back to Vendler (1967), who himself was inspired by Ryle (1949). His verb classification consists of four coordinated verb classes, or, as he preferred to call them, four time schemata. State terms or states (*possess, have, be polite*, etc.) were said to last for a period of time and to involve time instants

in an indefinite and nonunique sense (p. 106). Activity terms or activities (*walk, push, be smoking*, etc.) were claimed to go on in time in a homogeneous way and to call for periods of time. Accomplishment terms or accomplishments (*build, recover, paint, give a class*, etc.) were seen as proceeding toward a terminus, thus calling for unique and definite time periods in opposition to achievement terms or simply achievements (*win, start, stop, recognize, realize, lose, find, die*, etc.) involving unique and definite time instants – they occur at a single moment of time. Several linguists have adopted the Vendlerian classification and his time-based principle of classification (e.g., Brinton 1988; Dowty 1979; Herweg 1990; Shiraj and Andersen 1995; Smith 1991; Timberlake 1985, 2004; Voorst 1993; Saeed 2009).

Others such as Langacker (1991, 2008) and Givón (1984), and all linguists with a logical approach to language, for instance, Bach (1981), Barwise and Perry (1983), Verkuyl (1989, 1993), Parsons (1989, 1994) and Klein (1994) have adopted the old-Aristotelean typology, viz. states, processes and events, but, nevertheless, define them by temporal notions. It should be noted that the term event is normally taken as a primitive that cannot be divided. Conversely, the term process is defined in terms of events, i.e. as sequences of events (a walking process is just a bunch of overlapping walking events, cf. Parsons 1989: 235), which are exactly what makes processes extended in time (cf. Jackendoff 1992; Hinrichs 1986; Bach 1986; Verkuyl 1988; Pustejovsky 1992). In the present theory, the notion of an event is used in accordance with Von Wright (1974), i.e. as a past action successfully brought about, but I shall define it in a slightly different way in order not to confine it to the past.

I shall argue that although time notions like *point in time* and *time period* play an important role in the mental universe of adult people, it is not necessarily the case that they do so in the mental universe of a child who is acquiring his or her mother tongue. It is suggested that perceptual notions like *picture*, *stable vs. unstable picture*, and *single picture vs. double picture* are more salient for a child. Moreover, these fundamental experiential notions make it easier to explain the child's interiorization of the concept of situation and various situation types: the latter are simply concomitant effects of the former. It is true, however, that various time notions can be attached to different verb classes, but they are not primary, i.e. basic, but secondary, i.e., derived properties of situation types. Because a stable picture can be equated with a snapshot of a state situation, it is readily associated with the notion of point in time. Similarly with an unstable picture: since it can be equated with a short film strip of an activity situation, it gets easily associated with the notion of period of time.

1.3. The present approach

1.3.1. Situation typology

There are two kinds of picture, static (stable) and dynamic (unstable). I shall argue that human beings are able to form only one situational picture on the perceptual screen at a time. A single situational picture is thus a simple situation – a stable picture is a *state*, an unstable one is an *activity* (cf. Durst-Andersen 1992, 2000, 2006a).

It goes without saying that our mental processing of situations goes beyond identifying simple situations by means of perception – a situation may be conceived of as being possibly integrated with another situation thus yielding a complex situation. A snapshot of what at first sight seems to be only a state or an activity may in reality turn out to be the endpoint or the starting point of what I shall call an *action* – the qualitative equivalent to the more quantitatively defined notion of a complex situation. In the first case, the state in focus is preceded by a *causal* activity. In the second case, the activity in focus is succeeded by a *resultant* state in the normal course of events. The state-focused action will be termed a *past event*, whereas the activity-focused action will be termed an *ongoing process* (cf. Durst-Andersen 1992; Durst-Andersen, Smith and Nedergaard Thomsen in press).

The basis of my situation typology is the perceptual notion of a picture and its abstract mental counterpart, the notion of *image*. Vision is fundamental to human cognition and language, but in principle all senses perform the same function of acting as a mediating link between reality and mind (for the function of all five senses in communication, see Finnegan 2002). Situations in reality are grasped by human beings in the shape of some kind of picture and are then interpreted to form conceptual structures. Vision plays a crucial role in perception by giving structured form, namely images, to the outside substance. Images frame reality into different wholes while foregrounding and backgrounding different elements within them, thus giving rise to various ideas (for more about that, see Chapter 5).

In short, situations are classified into simple and complex situations. Simple situations are states and activities – both are identified and distinguished by means of perception: states evoke stable pictures (when "someone is sitting on a chair"), while activities evoke unstable pictures (when "someone is jumping up and down on a trampoline") on our perceptual screen. Complex situations (also called *actions* – one may perform an action, but not a complex situation) are fundamentally different, although they consist of an activity and a state: the action of killing consists of X's activity involving some kind of an instrument and a state in which Y is not at world-location anymore. Whereas states and activities

are perceivable, i.e. real world situations, actions are merely *conceivable* – they are partly a mental construct. They are never grasped in their totality at once, i.e. in one single macro-picture containing at the same time both a causal activity and a resultant state. They are only experienced *either* as an activity produced by X (whereby Y's being on non-world-location must be inferred), *or* as a (resultant) state in which Y is found dead (whereby X's causal activity must be inferred). The former is an ongoing *process*, whereas the latter is a past *event*. This yields the following four types of situations – two simple and two complex (see Table 1).

Table 1.   The hierarchical structure of situations

		States - a stable picture
	Simple situations one single picture	
		Activities - an unstable picture
Classes of Situations		
		Processes - an activity intended to cause a state
	Complex situations two single pictures	
		Events - a state caused by an activity
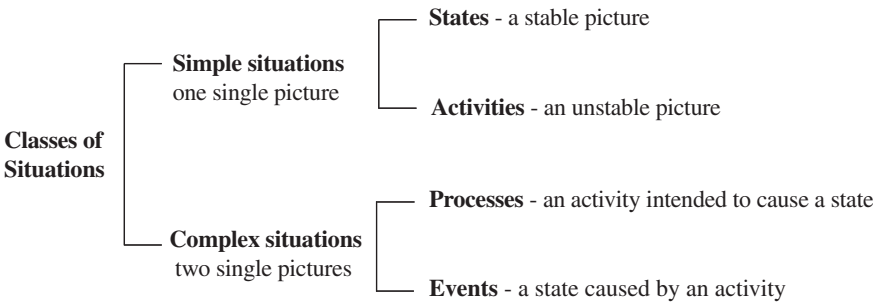
I emphasize that I sharply distinguish between an activity and an ongoing process. An activity is a simple situation and has no time perspective built in. An ongoing process is a complex situation and is born with a present–future perspective: a present activity that is intended by the Agent or by the World to cause a future state. A past event is born with a present–past perspective which involves a present state that is caused by the performance of a past activity. Only ongoing processes and past events can be referred or pointed to *per se*, whereas what unites ongoing processes and past events, i.e. actions, cannot be indexed: an action is a *collective concept* of processes and events. It is defined as an activity that has a relation of telicity to a state.

   In Chapter 3 we shall return to processes and events and their corresponding mental models. We will examine how they are identified on the basis of different pictures, how they are assimilated into the human mind although only a part of them is seen or experienced and how they are accommodated to the human mind in the shape of motion and still pictures. Thus the processing of visual stimuli seems to involve three stages, viz., experiencing, understanding, memorising and storing.

1.3.2. Verb classification

If we compare the four situation types, i.e. states, activities, processes and events, to the ways in which languages express them, the result is striking. While all languages may refer by *grammatical* means to states, activities, ongoing processes, and past events, they are not capable of naming by *lexical* means all four types of situations: they may only name states by using *state verbs*, activities by using *activity verbs*, and actions by using *action verbs*, i.e. the common denominator of events and processes (see Table 2).

Table 2.   The hierarchical structure of verb classes and verbal forms

```
                                   ┌──── State verbs
                  Simplex-verbs ───┤
                  Non-action verbs │
                  (One situation)  └──── Activity verbs
Classes of ───┤
Verbs
                                   ┌──── Imperfective form
                                   │     an activity intended to cause a state
                  Complex-verbs ───┤
                  Action verbs     │
                  (Two situations) └──── Perfective form
                                         a state caused by an activity
```
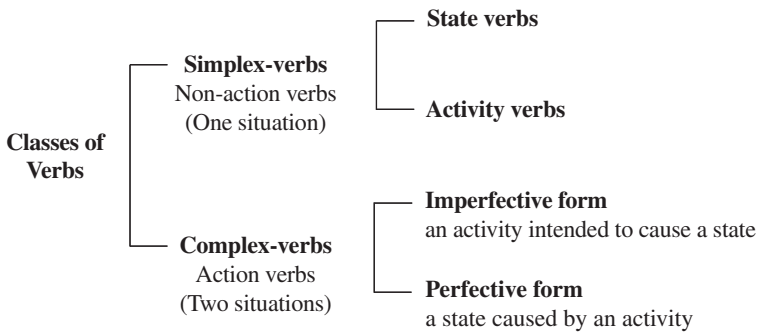
An action may be symbolized only by an aspect-neutral infinitive such as Da. *gå ud* 'leave', or by an underlying, morphophonological form of what is common to a perfective and an imperfective infinitive, as it is the case in Russian: *rasskazat'* (pf) 'tell (so that smb. has an experience of it)' and *rasskazyvat'* (ipf) 'tell (in order for smb. to have an experience of it)'. In other words, four situation types seem to correspond to three verb classes at the lexico-grammatical level where we are dealing with the *naming properties* of verbs. Only at the grammatical level where we are concerned with the propositional properties of finite verb forms languages may distinguish between processes and events. In English, for instance, *She is/was telling him a story* will refer to a process, while *She told/has told/had told/will have told him a story...* will all refer to an event. *To tell* will be an aspect-neutral infinitive that names an action, X BRING Y TO Z's EXPERIENCE VIA WORDS, the common lexical meaning of all finite forms.

   According to the present framework, language is viewed as being the mediating link between perception involving images and conception involving ideas. This means that a prototypical name is an image–idea pair corresponding to Peirce's object and interpretant, cf. Chapter 5. If we apply this approach to verbs, the image-level corresponds to situations and the idea-level to propositions.

But since we are dealing with naming properties I shall call them *ground-situations* and *ground-propositions*, respectively. In short, a verbal lexeme is said to pair a certain ground-proposition with a certain ground-situation. At the ground-situational level we find various *figure–ground constellations* and various semantic roles, such as Actor and Undergoer in the case of activities, or Agent, Patient and Recipient in the case of actions. At the ground-propositional level we find various underlying subjects, called *q-themes* in the case of state descriptions and *p-themes* in the case of activity descriptions. All other modifying elements are called *q- or p-modifiers*. All figures are themes and all grounds are modifiers (for an illustrative example, see Figure 1).
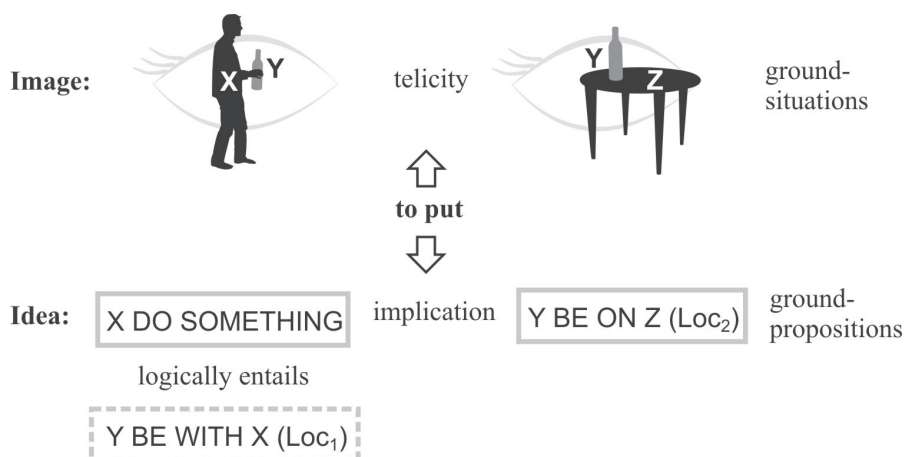
Figure 1.   An action verb as an image-idea pair

1.3.2.1. State verbs

All state verbs (e.g., Eng. *be, have, sit, lie, hang, stand, relate, contain, correspond, see, hear, want, like, wish,* etc.) are used to name a single situation which involves no activity, i.e. a state corresponding to a stable picture. State verbs name states by creating a ground-proposition based on a state description, *q*, which is paired to a ground-situation based on a stable image. I shall use *q-classifiers* for different kinds of state relations or different domains, viz. location, possession, experience, and quality. These classifiers constitute types of the class of state verbs. They can be subdivided into what I call *q-modes*, i.e. various manifestations of a type. The lexico-grammatical meaning of a verb can be depicted in what I call a *verb model*, i.e. a model that is suited to represent the

lexico-grammatical properties of verbs – in this case a specific verb for states (see Figure 2).
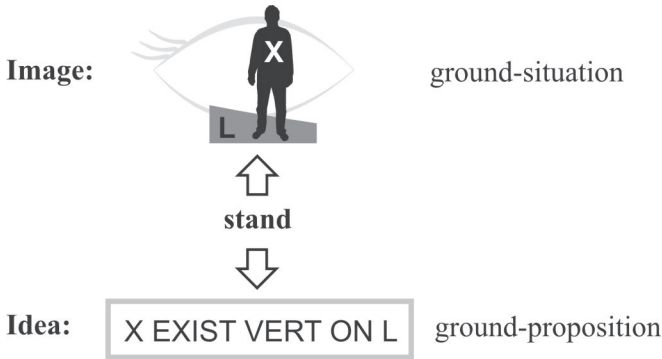
Figure 2.   A verb model of a location-based state

The verb *stand* is a location-based state verb which involves the mode [vertical]. A verb like *lie* will belong to the same classifier (posture verbs), but will involve the mode [horizontal], whereas a verb like *have* will be possession-based. The mode involved here is the feature [ownership], with respect to which *have* is unmarked in the Jakobsonian sense, in contrast to *own*. The state verb *see* will be experience-based with the mode [visual], while *be afraid* or *be red* will be quality-based (English does not seem to have quality-based state descriptions as genuine state verbs – many other languages, e.g., Russian, have).

The four dimensions not only play a part in the structure of the verbal lexicon of a language, but are also reflected in the syntactic organization of a language. In English, for instance, location and quality are represented by *be*, whereas possession and experience are represented by *have*. In Russian, for instance, location and possession (external reality) are represented by *existential be* requiring an adverbial, whereas experience and quality (internal reality) are represented by *copula be* requiring a predicative determiner. Different languages may draw the line at different places.

1.3.2.2. Activity verbs

All activity verbs (e.g., Eng. *carry, drive, walk, swim, beat, creep, crawl, cry, play, iron, speak, hammer, sing, smile, watch, work*, etc.) are used to name a single situation which involves activity corresponding to an unstable picture. Activity verbs name activities by creating a ground-proposition based on an activity description, *p*, which is paired to a ground-situation based on an unstable image. It turns out that all activity verbs involve an underlying state description,

q – in the case of *creep* a description which tells that a certain person or animal is in a lying or flat position. Thus we realize that all activity verbs *logically entail* a certain state description, be it a description of location, possession, experience, or quality (if p is true, then q is true; if p is false, then q is false; if q is true, then p is true or false; if q is false, then p is false). This is the main reason why it does not make sense to call *activity verbs* 'nonstatives'. As a matter of fact, it is stative in the sense that an activity verb is a certain state verb component plus a specific activity description. The entailment of such a description explains the fact that a person or an animal could not be creeping without being in a lying or flat position. The lying position thus constitutes the necessary, although not the sufficient condition for *creeping* to be true.

Image: ground-situation

walk

Idea: X PRODUCE AN ACTIVITY   ground-proposition

logically entails

X EXIST VERT ON L
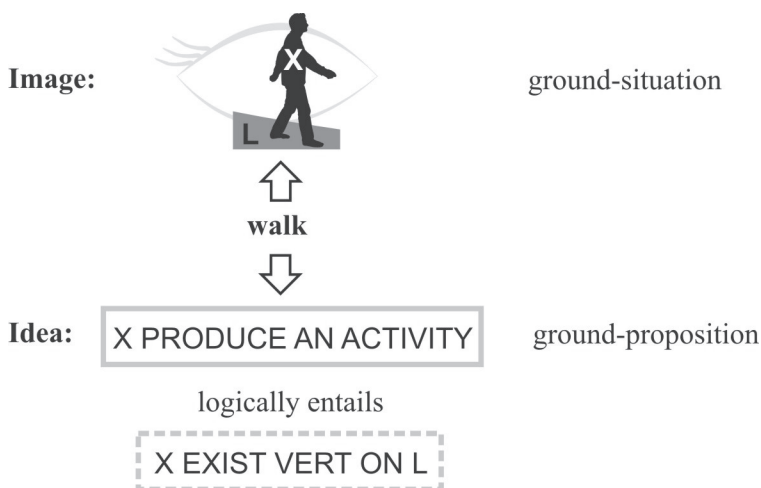
Figure 3.   A verb model of a location-based activity verb

Another possible and related activity verb is *walk*. As shown by Figure 3, the verb model of *walk* involves a single ground-situation, which is unstable, and a ground-proposition which describes the unstable element, i.e. that a certain person is doing something (producing an activity) while being in a certain state – the so-called *entailment structure*. I shall use the same four classifiers for different kinds of activities based on different state relations, i.e. location, possession, experience, and quality. The verbs *walk* and *creep* are both location-based activity verbs, *walk* involves the mode [vertical], *creep* involves the mode [horizontal] (relative to surface). Activity verbs such as *administer* will be possession-based, *watch* experience-based, and *smile* quality-based.

In the case of *walk* (see Figure 3), the activity description logically entails 'X is standing on L'. However, this description can also be said to imply 'X is at L' and the latter to imply 'X exists at world-location'. In other words, in many cases a specific activity description may entail a series of interrelated state descriptions. This applies in particular to *quality-based* activity verbs: *smiling* logically entails 'X is glad', which implies that 'X has an experience of something, Y', which implies that 'X exists on L' and 'Y exists on L', and so on and so forth. In short, by saying that a certain verb such as *smile* is a quality-based activity verb I imply that the entailment structure is filled in with a description of a quality – all other possible state descriptions derived from this are implied, but they will not interest us, because they do not seem to have grammatical or morpho-syntactic reflexes.

1.3.2.3. Action verbs

All action verbs (e.g., Eng. *kill, give, sell, buy, lose, win, leave, stop, find, sit down, lie down, carry out, drive to, creep to, hammer into, look at, scare, walk to*, etc.) are used to name not one, but two situations. They name simultaneously one situation involving activity and another situation involving no activity, i.e. a state. This means that action verbs (or complex verbs) create two ground-propositions, one describing an activity, *p*, and another describing a state, *q*, which are paired, respectively, to a ground-situation that is unstable and a ground-situation which is stable. If we look at Figure 4, we see that the logical relation of implication marks the relation between the two ground-propositions, *p* and *q*, whereas *telicity* is used to denote the relation between the two ground-situations (all telic verbs are thus action/complex verbs). The function of telicity is to point from the unstable ground-situation to the stable one and in doing so tie them together (Just as an *action* is the collective concept of an *event* and a *process*, *telicity* is the collective concept of *causation* and *finality*). Whereas *walk* is a location-based activity verb, *walk to* is a location-based *action* verb, i.e. the latter implies the former, but not the other way around (see Figure 4).

Once again I shall use classifiers for different types of action verbs. *Give* is a possession-based action verb – it describes (in this case, not an entailed, but an autonomous) state based on possession; the mode involved here is once again the feature [ownership], with respect to which *give* is unmarked in contrast to verbs like *lend* or *donate*. Whereas *creep* itself is an activity verb, *creep to L* is a complex-verb, i.e. a location-based action verb. *Look at Y* is experience-based, while *scare Y* is quality-based. Note that complex-verbs or action verbs cover both *accomplishments* and *achievements*. Accomplishments are lexicalized by using a prospective viewpoint, i.e. from the activity towards the state (cf. ongoing
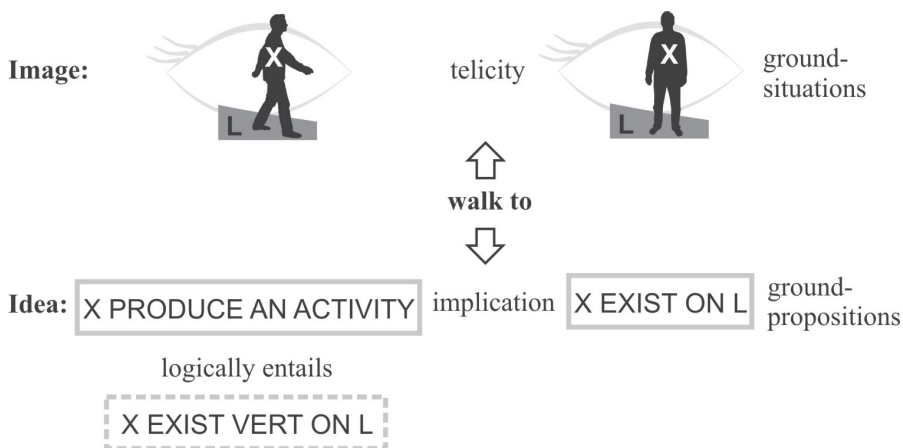
Figure 4.   A verb model of a location-based action verb

processes), while achievements (or *punctual* verbs) are lexicalized by using a retrospective viewpoint, i.e. from the state back to the activity (which then becomes irrelevant, because punctual).

1.3.2.4. Concluding remarks

After having established and examined the three above-mentioned lexico-grammatical verb classes, which are supposed to carry the common meaning of all tense, aspect, and mood forms of a verb, we are in fact prepared to take a closer look at the grammatical category of aspect as it appears in English, Russian and French. But before doing so, I shall propose that verb class be regarded as a grammatical category, if by grammatical category is understood an obligatory category. I shall name the "new" grammatical category *verbal gender*. I am aware that it might have bad connotations, but I have chosen it for two reasons. First, I want to make the reader think in a different way than the tradition offers. Secondly, I have chosen it to draw a parallel to nominal gender, which is known from several languages. Just as any German noun is ascribed a *gender*, be it masculine, feminine or neuter, any verb in any language – the universality is crucial – is ascribed a verbal gender, be it state, activity or action. This appears, for instance, from lexical borrowing in Russian. Here English simplex verbs such as *conflict* (state) and *applaud* (activity) are borrowed into Russian as imperfectives, *konfliktovat'* and *aplodirovat'*, while English complex verbs such as *arrest* and *realize* are borrowed into Russian as perfectives, *arestovat'* and *realizovat'* – later the corresponding imperfectives, *arestovyvat'* and *realizovyvat'*, were derived thus constituting a so-called pure aspectual pair (for further evi-

dence, see Durst-Andersen 1992: 73–75). In order to be able to assign different aspects to different verbs we must assume that people have at their disposal a sharp distinction between simple situations (corresponding to imperfective simplex verbs) and complex situations (corresponding to perfective complex verbs). I shall argue that *verbal gender* is the only universal verbal category of natural languages, but as such the individual members are normally not signaled – they seem to be "too" obvious. In many languages, however, prefixation and suffixation are used to derive complex verbs from simplex-verbs (Rus. *govorit'* 'speak' → *ugovorit'* 'persuade'; Eng. *creep* → *creep to L*). Thus both Russian and English signal the complex nature of action verbs.

Sometimes, verbal gender is called *Aktionsarten* (for instance, in the French linguistic tradition) or *lexical aspect* (for instance, by Smith 1991). As a specialist of Russian, I hesitate to use both: Aktionsarten in Russian denote many possible lexico-grammatical derivations of state and activity verbs (but not of action verbs) and lexical aspect interferes with the discussion of assigning Russian aspect a lexical or grammatical status.

1.3.3. The three distinctions relevant for typology

Languages may relate differently to the three distinctions which follow naturally from the proposed typology of situations:

- *Activity vs. state* within simple situations (non-actions) corresponding to a distinction between unstable and stable pictures
- *Event vs. process* within complex situations (actions) corresponding to a distinction between a mental model of events involving 'causation' (a state caused by an activity) and a mental model of processes involving 'finality' (an activity intended (either by the Agent or by the World) to cause a state)
- *Simple vs. complex situation* corresponding to a distinction between one picture, i.e. one situation (a non-action), and two pictures, i.e. two situations (an action)

These three distinctions seem to be important typological determinants. In the following I shall attempt to demonstrate that they seem to be responsible for three different aspectual types and three different syntactic types.

1.4. Aspectual types

1.4.1. Introduction

If one looks at the different approaches to English, Russian, and French aspect, it is obvious that the majority are based on the same conceptual framework: the semantic features or parameters [±completedness], [±closure], and [±totality] occur frequently, not only within Russian linguistics (see Durst-Andersen 1992: 29–37), but also within English linguistics (see Durst-Andersen 2000) and French linguistics (see Durst-Andersen 2008b). The difference is that the English progressive is viewed as the marked member of the opposition, while the Russian imperfective and the French *imparfait* are viewed as the unmarked ones. This suggests that the English progressive, the Russian imperfective, and the French *imparfait* are treated as tokens of the same type. The universalistic approach to the category of aspect can be traced back to the traditional view that aspect is concerned with the internal time structure of a situation. It is this view that makes it possible to view the English progressive and the Russian and French imperfective aspects as being tokens of the same type – a type which is called *imperfectivity* by Comrie (1976), Brinton (1988), and Freed (1979), or *durativity* by Friedrich (1974) and Verkuyl (1972).

1.4.2. External evidence for differentiating three types

By taking the English progressive, the Russian imperfective, and the French *imparfait* as different manifestations of a universal semantic primitive (be it *imperfectivity* or *durativity*), one ignores important pieces of linguistic evidence from first language acquisition, i.e. so-called external evidence, which I consider important. It shows that the progressive vs. non-progressive distinction in English (e.g., *he is always smoking* vs. *he always smokes*) is learnt within the *present* tense system of what I call *simplex verbs*. In the very beginning, English children have two present tense forms: an ING-form (the progressive aspect) and a NON-ING-form (the non-progressive aspect). The ING-form occurs with activity verbs, while the NON-ING-form occurs with state verbs. It is not until later that the ING-form is extended to complex-verbs and state verbs. In the English child's initial grammar at around 2,6 years, simplex verbs occur only in the present tense, while complex verbs occur only in the past tense (cf. Atkinson 1982; Brown 1973; Bloom et al. 1980; Fletcher 1985; Gathercole 1986; Johnson 1985; Rispoli and Bloom 1985; Shiraj and Andersen 1995; Li and Shirai 2000). This split has not only been observed in the acquisition of the English language,

but also of several other languages including Italian (cf. Antinucci and Miller 1976), Turkish (cf. Aksu-Koç 1988), Greek (cf. Stephany 1985), and Danish (cf. Durst-Andersen 1984). The importance and naturalness of this distinction is furthermore justified by phenomena observed by Bickerton (1981). In several unrelated creoles he found that certain verbs have *zero*-forms in the present tense (i.e. simplex verbs), whereas others have it in the past tense (i.e. complex verbs).

The Russian perfective vs. imperfective distinction is learnt within the *past* tense system of *complex verbs* (cf. Gvozdev 1949; Pupynin 1996, 1998), whereas the French *passé simple* vs. *imparfait* distinction is learnt much later, because the distinction is only in use within written language (*Passé simple* corresponds to what is called *aorist* in other languages). The *passé composé* has taken over the functions of the *passé simple* form in oral language. This means that French written discourse has a distinction between three forms, viz. *passé simple*, *passé composé* and *imparfait*, whereas its oral discourse system is restricted to *passé compose* and *imparfait*. To argue that *passé composé* in oral discourse has taken over the functions of *passé simple* without integrating *passé composé* in the written discourse system (which traditionally is done) does not make sense – we must assume that they have something in common, i.e. are part of the same category one way or the other. The different number of members of the aspectual systems is the main reason why Russian aspect and French aspect in written discourse cannot be compared – the French oral system is, however, directly comparable to that of Russian although it has fewer aspectual features. The distinction between the perfective and imperfective aspect is found everywhere in Russian: in the past tense, in the present tense, in infinitives, in imperatives, in participles, in gerunds and in nouns, too. The three-way aspectual distinction between *passé simple, passé composé* and *imparfait* is only found in one place, namely in the past tense of written texts, while the two-way distinction in oral discourse is found in the past tense as well as in the future tense (*future* vs. *future prôche*) (for a detailed analysis, see Durst-Andersen 2008b).

As we can see, the initial English and Russian child-grammar involves two oppositions: one of tense, and another of aspect which is restricted either to the present tense or to the past tense. The Russian system can be regarded as the representative of a well-known prototype system. This appears very clearly from the great number of languages examined by Dahl (1985) on the basis of identical questionnaires. But since the initial English child-grammar (at approximately 2,6 years) has the aspectual distinction within the present tense and no such distinction in the past sense, it seems as if this system represents another prototype which should be distinguished from the Russian one.

The initial Russian child-grammar has the aspectual distinction anchored in the past tense of complex verbs (i.e. action verbs), whereas the English aspectual distinction is rooted in the present tense of simplex verbs (i.e. state and activity verbs) and is learnt before the past vs. non-past distinction. Since this is the case and as the aspectual distinction made by the Russian child occurs simultaneously with the past vs. non-past distinction, it makes sense to claim what has been generally accepted since Slobin (1977), namely that aspectual notions have greater accessibility to children than temporal distinctions. As a matter of fact, languages need not have tense forms, but can manage with aspect alone, as appears from Arab and Chinese. It seems, however, that the progressive vs. non-progressive distinction in English is more accessible than the perfective vs. imperfective distinction in Russian – the grammar behind the semantic distinction in English must be more natural and obvious for children. This is furthermore supported by the fact that the English child does not overgeneralize the use of progressive forms (cf. Kuczaj 1978; Mapstone and Harris 1985): English children do not seem to extend progressive forms to state verbs which seldom or never take this form, e.g. *believe*, *belong*, *contain*, *hate*, *know*, *like*, *need, want* and – with less probability because we are dealing with child language – *correspond, equal, own, possess*, *relate*, etc. (Li and Shiraj 2000 contains some counterexamples to Kuczaj's hypothesis).

1.4.3. Internal pieces of evidence

Let us turn to the tense-aspect-mood systems of English, Russian and French, which form a certain and not random order. Let us take some illustrative examples in order to show it:

(1)   a.   *He is/was always smoking*. [Situation description]
        b.   *He always smokes/smoked*. [Characterization]

(2)   *On vsegda kurit* (ipf/pres)*/kuril* (ipf/pret). [Ambiguous]

(3)   *Il fume* (pres)*/fumait* (imparfait) *toujours*. [Ambiguous]

The above-mentioned examples from English, Russian and French clearly show that whereas English makes a sharp distinction between a *situation description* (cf. 1a) and a *characterization* (cf. 1b), neither Russian, nor French are capable of doing so. Both the Russian and the French examples are ambiguous and may thus be read as both a situation description and a characterization. This appears clearly from the following example from French which should be compared to the English translation:

(4)   *Je faisais le taxi de nuit, pendant que je terminais mes études*.
        'I drove a night taxi, while I was finishing my degree.'

While English uses the non-progressive form to give a characterization (i.e. he was a taxi-driver) and the progressive form to give a situation description (i.e. he was in the process of finishing his degree), French uses the imparfait to convey both meanings. The same would have been true of the Russian imperfective aspect. This suggests that the progressive vs. non-progressive distinction in English is a specification made within what has been called imperfectivity (For a detailed account, see Durst-Andersen 2000). This makes good sense from the point of view of language acquisition, which shows that the progressive vs. non-progressive distinction is learnt in the present tense of state and activity verbs, and only later it is extended to the past tense and action verbs (cf. above).

Let us therefore leave English and concentrate on French and Russian which seem to have something in common. This appears from the following example which corresponds to the English utterance *He was writing the letter, when I entered the room* (Note the reverse order in the Russian example (5) – it is the only way to convey the indefiniteness of *pis'mo* 'letter'):

(5)   *Kogda ja vošel* (pf) *v komnatu*, *on pisal* (ipf) *pis'mo*.

(6)   *Il écrivait* (imparfait) *une lettre*, *quand j'entrai* (passé simple).
        [Formal French]

(7)   *Il écrivait* (imparfait) *une lettre, quand je suis entré* (passé composé).
        [Informal French]

The imperfective part of the entire utterance in (5), (6) and (7) refers to an ongoing process, i.e. an activity (p) having a state (q) as its goal, whereas its perfective part refers to an event, i.e. a state (q) caused by an activity (p). The reason why Russian has two forms of the same verb, e.g., *pisat'* (ipf)/*napisat'* (pf) for "write" has something to do with the fact that an action manifests itself either as a process or as an event, but never as an action per se: it can never be true of the same world that somebody is writing a certain letter and that the same letter exists as completed. It will either be so that (1) somebody is producing a letter-writing activity and the letter does not exist at world-location or that (2) a letter exists at world-location, but the specific activity that caused such a state does not exist (cf. Durst-Andersen 1992, 1994).

If we look more closely at the French examples from this perspective, it becomes evident why the *passé composé* in (7) is capable of substituting for the *passé simple* form (or *aorist)* from (6): both forms refer to an event, i.e. a state caused by an activity. In other words, both French forms assert exactly the same

as does the Russian perfective aspect. If this is true, we may conclude that the two forms differ at least with respect to presentation, i.e. they present the event referred to in different ways. I shall argue that the *passé simple* form presents an action as an event without focusing on its parts, whereas the *passé composé* presents an action as an event by treating an event as consisting of two parts, i.e. an activity (p) and a state (q), and by foregrounding the state and backgrounding the activity. The *passé simple* has no foregrounding or backgrounding device simply because it presents an event in its totality, i.e. presents something that consists of two parts, an activity and a state, as if it consisted of only one part almost as in a motion picture where it is impossible to separate the activity where somebody enters a room from the state where the person is in the room. In short, the Russian perfective aspect is identical to the *passé composé* as it is used in oral (informal) discourse, but certainly not to the *passé simple* as it is used in written (formal) discourse (cf. Durst-Andersen 2008b).

1.4.4. The temporal meanings in French

If we leave the aspectual viewpoint for a short moment and instead look at the same from a temporal point of view, it becomes even more obvious that the *passé composé* in informal French is very different from the *passé composé* of formal French. Let us first take a look at the *passé simple*. It is a past tense form that places the activity as well as the state in the past world. This does not mean that the form cannot be used about an event the state of which still holds good. The only thing we definitely know from hearing (6) is that "I was in the room" is the case at the moment of past reference, but whether "I am in the room" at the moment of speech is a matter for the hearer to decide. The form itself does not indicate anything in that direction. If we look at (7), the same holds good for the *passé composé* in informal or oral French. In other words, when speaking of the *passé composé* of informal French, *suis* does not mean "true in the present world"– it means that the state is foregrounded, i.e. the state description is asserted, while the activity is backgrounded, i.e. the activity description is presupposed. This is indicated by the order of morphemes: *suis entré*. This is extremely important, and it is exactly this relationship that is lacking in formal French. Here the *passé composé* asserts that a state description holds good at the moment of speech, and it is exactly therefore it cannot be used in narration.

The three-way distinction in French written discourse is reminiscent of the Bulgarian direct mood system which posssesses the same three forms. In Chapter 9, Section 3 I shall argue that the aorist (another name for what corresponds to Fr. *passé simple*), the perfect and imperfect are the linguistic reflexes of the

three logical argumentation forms: induction, abduction and deduction. This is the reason why Bulgarian has three forms. And it seems to be the same reason why the French written discourse system has three and not only two forms (cf. Durst-Andersen 2008b).

1.4.5. Concluding remarks

On the basis of the above-mentioned pieces of internal evidence as well as pieces of external evidence from language acquistion I argue that the progressive vs. non-progressive distinction in English, the perfective vs. imperfective distinction in Russian together with the distinction between the French *passé composé* and *imparfait* in informal discourse, and the distinction between the French *imparfait*, *passé composé* and *passé simple* in formal discourse represent three different aspectual prototype systems. I argue that English aspect, Russian aspect, and French aspect in written discourse represent three different aspectual systems. The aspectual system of English is present tense based and is grounded on perception – in Peircian terminology, it belongs to Firstness. The aspectual system of Russian ignores the English aspectual distinction, i.e. it is not firstness, but secondness. It is past tense based and is grounded on conception. The French aspectual distinction presupposes, so to speak, Russian aspect. It belongs to thirdness and is grounded on a meta-conceptual level.

   The first distinction is founded on the activity vs. state distinction within simple situations which is coupled to the perceptual notion of *unstable* and *stable pictures*. The second distinction is grounded on the event vs. process distinction within complex situations which is coupled to the relative concepts of *causation* and *purpose*. And the third distinction is founded in the complex vs. simplex verb distinction which is related to the interrelative concepts of *telicity* and lack of telicity between two situations. This appears clearly from the use of *passé simple* in French written discourse: in connection with complex-verbs the form presents an action as an event – in connection with state and activity verbs it gets an inchoative meaning. Only action verbs have the ability to enter into logical argumentation, which always involves two premises, i.e. p and q, and a conclusion, *if p, then q* (just to give an example, in this case of an inductive argument) – state and activity verbs lack this ability due to their non-complex structure.

   The interesting changes that have been going on for several decades in French seem to be natural, since they have been observed before. The Old Russian TAM-system also consisted of the imperfect, the perfect and the aorist (the traditional, general linguistic term for Fr. *passé simple*), whereas that of Modern Russian only consists of the perfective and the imperfective aspects. The Old Russian

system is identical to that of formal or written French, while the Modern Russian system is (basically) identical to that of informal or oral French (For a detailed account, see Durst-Andersen 2006a).

It is, of course, a challenge for any theory to explain how two distinct systems can co-occur in the same language community at the same time. And French is not alone in this respect. If one takes a look at German, one observes the same, although, admittedly, German does not know of the distinction between an imperfect form and an aorist form: in written German the imperfect form is the narrative form, whereas in oral German it is the perfect (cf. Andersen and Hansen 2009). The split in function is exactly the same as in French. Why is it that one form has narrative functions in one medium, and another form has it in another medium? This question calls for an answer. I shall try to give one in Chapter 5 and 6. I will argue that oral discourse has a natural affinity to the third-person oriented notion of situation, which is common to the speaker as well as the hearer, whereas written discourse has a natural affinity to the second-person oriented notion of information, which the speaker and the hearer may or may not share.

1.5. Syntactic types

1.5.1. Introduction

While aspectologists traditionally see one prototype system and not three, syntactic typologists more or less agree that there are three syntactic types, viz. active, ergative, and accusative languages (cf. Comrie 1981; Croft 1990; Mithun 1991). A few, for instance, Givón (1984), view *active* languages as what he prefers to call 'off-ergative'. Let us see which languages belong to which types:

- Active languages, e.g., Choktaw, Pomo, Guaraní, Haida
- Ergative languages, e.g., Hindi, Gujarati, Basque, Lezgian
- Accusative languages, e.g., English, Russian, French, Italian

In the following I shall try to show that the three syntactic types seem to go back to the same three distinctions that characterize the aspectual types, viz. the activity vs. state distinction, the event vs. process distinction, and the simple vs. complex situation distinction. It seems reasonable to assume that syntactic structures represent situational structures and it seems just as reasonable to assume that languages may take different points of departure in their attempt to represent situations in reality (cf. Jackendoff 1996). Traditionally, the three types have been described more or less in syntactic terms by distinguishing between transitive

and intransitive verbs and the corresponding syntactic functions: intransitive subject, transitive subject and transitive object. As will appear from the following sections, I question the role of transitivity and intransitivity in all other languages than the so-called accusative languages. As Klimov (1977, 1983) demonstrates in his attempt to look at active and ergative languages by using the speakers' own glasses, they not only differ from accusative languages by their syntactic structures, but certainly also in other respects, lexically and grammatically (for a similar, holistic view on typology, see also Zaretsky 2009).

In my brief examination of the three syntactic prototype systems, I shall stick to what I call the *basic syntactic structures* of active, ergative and accusative languages. The notion of *basic system* is defined as that part on which the entire system is founded and later extended. It is important to emphasize that 'basic system' is not a construct – it has an equivalent in child language as well as in the historical development of a given language. In other words, we should ask: Where does this or that distinction of a given language appear for the first time during language acquisition and during its historical development? I assume that the activity vs. state distinction, the event vs. process distinction and the simple vs. complex situation distinction constitute the three alternatives. A basic system may thus be confined to simplex verbs or complex verbs or comprise all verb classes by dividing them into complex verbs and simplex verbs. The basic system is far more transparent than the extended system which operates within all classes of verbs because any linguistic notion tends to be globally represented in a language. This concerns, for instance, Russian aspect, which is an inherent property of complex verbs, but which has extended to state and activity verbs as well in the form of so-called procedural verbs, also called Aktionsart verbs (cf. Durst-Andersen 1992).

1.5.2. The syntactic reflexes of the activity vs. state distinction

The basic syntactic structures of active languages seem to be based on the state vs. activity distinction in the same way that the progressive vs. non-progressive distinction is the base of English. This means in practice that the syntactic representations of states and activities are treated differently in this type of language. Although active languages may signal the difference by case endings, it is more frequent for them to signal it by personal affixes attached to the verbs themselves as it appears from the following data from Lakhota, a Siouan language (the data are borrowed from Foley and Van Valin 1984: 41):

(8)   a.   ***Wa** – lowã*.
           I.ACT – sing
           'I am singing.'