

VERBS AND THE VERB:  
FROM MORPHOLOGY TO DISCOURSE AND BACK TO THE LEXICON

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### Abstract

This special issue on verbs shows that they continue to be a privileged avenue of access to central questions of language, from morphology and the lexicon to discourse structure.

Key words: aspect, discourse structure, reversative verbs, tense, second language learning, motion verbs.

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#### 1. Verbs and the verb

Aspect is central in several articles in this issue on verbs and the verb, ranging from morphology in Spanish reversative verbs (such as ‘deshacer’, destroy, break into pieces; cf. ‘hacer’, make) in Rodríguez Rosique’s article, to the developmental stages of verb

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finiteness (or inflection) in French as a second language in Michot's article; including the role aspect has in evidentiality, in Ecuatorian Andean Spanish past tenses in Pfänder and Palacios' article, and in Soto and Hasler's account of different categories in the perfect, antiperfect, evidential and mirative in Spanish and Mapudungun or Mapuche.

We go back to the lexicon in its context (where collocations are accountable meaning properties; Maldonado 2011) in the article of González and Serradilla on idiomatic constructions with motion verbs in Spanish, which provides yet another example of the trend to join the theoretical (Pustejovsky; see below) and the applied strands of lexical research (Garrido and Maldonado 2013).

Carlota Smith's interest in aspect included Chinese (Smith and Erbaugh 2005; see below for her book on discourse); the Tokyo conference scheduled for December 2013 will draw attention to Japanese verb morphology in particular and Asian languages in general, in the field of compound and complex verbs consisting of two verbs, from both language-internal and areal-typological perspectives.

Aspect is another reason to include a journal notice on a special issue of *Theoretical Linguistics*, on event structure, conceptual spaces and the semantics of verbs. Warglien, Gärdenfors and Westera present a semantic theory of verbs that includes a unified definition of aspect. Commenting on this paper on event structure and verbal semantics we find Croft and Krifka, among other authors. To this might be added Meir's article in the preceding issue of *TL*, on verb classes and verb agreement in sign languages, where she argues that "sign languages raise the issue of the relationship between language structure and modality including the ways in which the physical modality of transmission influences structure".

## 2. Aspect and discourse linguistics

The last twenty years have witnessed the emergence of discourse as envisaged by Harris in 1952, that is, as a linguistic object explained in a theoretically sound analysis. In 1993 Hans Kamp and Uwe Reyle provided a principled formal account of discourse. Before that, in 1986 Dan Sperber and Deirdre Wilson had developed their relevance approach defined by Stephen Levinson in 1983. So it was possible to claim that "lexical meanings and text meanings are both knowledge representations, the former being the building

elements of the latter; lexical units provide the speaker with flexible but ready-made cognitive models whose parameters for time, space, speaker role, communicative function, and so on, are to be given values in order to become (parts of) texts” (Garrido 1991); and a “discourse dictionary” would extend the scope of lexical items beyond the sentence (Garrido 1992), replacing relevance with connection (Garrido 2003) and providing constituent structure for discourse (Garrido 2013). James Pustejovsky opened another front in 1985 with his generative lexicon, that places in the lexical entry construction properties the meaning variation in context that has traditionally puzzled analysts of lexical meaning; and the work goes on (Pustejovsky and Strezek 2008).

Kamp and Reyle created a formal performance approach to the way one sentence is represented in terms of not only itself but also the preceding sentences in a text: a dynamic approach to semantics (continued today in Cann, Kempson and Gregoromiche-laki’s dynamic semantics). Twenty years later, Carlota Smith, an expert in aspect both in European and Asian languages, closed the circle founding the study of discourse on two main categories, nominal reference and verbal aspect, in her 2003 book *Modes of discourse*, the reason why a book notice on it appears in this issue. Extending Kamp and Reyle’s approach to conversation, Asher and Lascarides opened yet another window to discourse in their book, published in the same year of 2003. Smith’s book “rights the balance” between pragmatics and lexical meaning on the one hand, and what “is conveyed by linguistic forms”, that is, syntax, on the other, as she writes in her introduction, by proposing “a local level of discourse, the Discourse Mode, which has linguistic properties and discourse meaning” (Smith 2003, 1).

### 3. Conclusion

This special issue on verbs and the verb can only show the tip of the iceberg: verbs continue to be a privileged avenue of access to central questions of language, from typology to lexicography going through morphology and the relatively new syntax and semantics of discourse structure.

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