

PHASE SEMANTICS WITHIN ASPECTUALITY: A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF ENGLISH AND UZBEK

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Abstract

This article examines phase semantics as a core component of the functional-semantic category of aspectuality. Due to the absence of a unified methodological framework in linguistic theory, various approaches to defining and classifying phase meanings are analyzed. Particular attention is paid to a comparative investigation of the linguistic means used to express phase semantics in English and Uzbek. The study demonstrates that phase meanings constitute an independent semantic domain that interacts closely with aspectual categories. Despite typological differences between English and Uzbek, phase meanings in both languages are realized through a combination of lexical and grammatical resources, while their interpretation is determined by contextual and temporal factors.

Keywords: Phase semantics, aspectuality, phase meanings, inchoativity, terminativity, English, Uzbek, functional-semantic field, comparative linguistics

INTRODUCTION

Within modern linguistic theory, phase semantics—which concerns the internal temporal stages of an action or event, such as its onset, continuation, or completion—is generally considered a fundamental and universal category. It is most often analyzed as a core component of functional-semantic aspectuality, a field that studies how languages grammatically encode perspectives on time.

Despite its recognized importance, research into phase semantics faces a significant methodological challenge: there is no agreed-upon system for classifying its nuanced meanings (e.g., distinguishing inceptive from resumptive phases) or for systematically identifying the diverse linguistic tools—from verb prefixes and auxiliary verbs to specific syntactic constructions—that languages use to express them. This absence of a common analytical framework hinders cross-linguistic comparison and makes the establishment of consistent criteria an urgent priority for the field.

To advance this goal, a contrastive analysis of typologically unrelated languages, such as English (an analytic Germanic language) and Uzbek (an agglutinative Turkic language), is particularly instructive. By placing their aspectual systems side-by-side, we can isolate which features of phase semantics are likely universal cognitive concepts (e.g., the fundamental distinction between beginning and ending) from those that are language-specific realizations. This method not only clarifies shared conceptual foundations but also highlights profound structural and functional differences in how phase meanings are grammaticalized, offering a clearer path toward the unified model that current research lacks.

The functional-semantic nature of phase semantics

The functional-semantic category of aspectuality describes the temporal development of actions, processes, states, and events. It plays a central role in the linguistic representation of the beginning, continuation, and completion of actions. Within this framework, linguists analyze generalized notions

such as aspect, boundedness, and manner of action, along with the linguistic and extralinguistic means employed to express them.

In aspectological research, the distribution of phase meanings is not based on universally accepted criteria. Many scholars define “phase” as a stage in the temporal unfolding of an action (Maslov, 1978). However, opinions diverge when addressing the relationship between objectively existing phases of a process and their linguistic representation.

A commonly accepted approach distinguishes three main stages of a process: initial, medial, and final. Maslov (1978) identifies these as the beginning, middle, and end of an action. Oralbaeva (1971) similarly describes phases of beginning, continuation, and completion. Plungyan (2003) differentiates inchoative, continuative, and terminative phase meanings, while Butler (2003) proposes ingressive, progressive, and egressive stages. Titarenko (2016) defines phase as the relation of a verbal process to its beginning, completion, or repetition.

Expanded approaches to phase classification

Some scholars extend the classification of phase meanings beyond the traditional three-phase model. According to Rizayev (2013, 2019), several studies-particularly in German linguistics-distinguish between phase and non-phase actions and include such meanings as duration, repetition, instantaneous occurrence, interruption, and completion within the scope of phase semantics.

Khrakovskiy (1980) identifies five phase meanings-beginning, resumption, continuation, completion, and interruption-along with combinations of these phases. Tiunova (1986), analyzing English and Russian, identifies approximately twenty phase meanings, including complex combinations and subphases.

The diversity of interpretations and terminological variation reflects the multiplicity of theoretical perspectives in linguistics. Each approach attempts to systematize the semantic field of phase meanings based on specific assumptions about language structure and mechanisms of aspectual expression.

Phase semantics and aspectuality

Research by Rizayev (2019) and Latipov (2023) demonstrates that phase semantics cannot be fully explained through aspectual notions such as boundedness or result attainment. Phase meanings are not directly linked to the achievement or non-achievement of an action’s natural endpoint. Rather, phase semantics represents a distinct category with its own functional properties.

This distinction can be illustrated by comparing the sentences *He stopped crying* and *He finished crying*. The former expresses a phase meaning by marking the temporal cessation of the action without implying its internal completion. The latter indicates the attainment of a natural endpoint and therefore belongs to the domain of aspectual boundedness rather than phase semantics. This contrast highlights the importance of clearly distinguishing phase meanings from core aspectual categories.

Bondarko (2007) includes phase verbs within the functional-semantic field of phase and treats this field as a component of aspectuality. From this perspective, phase semantics occupies a central position within the broader semantic organization of language, interacting closely with aspectual relations while maintaining relative autonomy.

Comparative analysis of English and Uzbek

Phase semantics constitutes a key subcategory within the functional-semantic field of aspectuality. This framework enables a more detailed semantic analysis of phase verbs and their functions. Aspectological models typically describe processes through their critical temporal points, primarily the initial and final phases. However, the terminology used to label these phases varies across linguistic traditions.

Initial phases may be described as inchoative or ingressive, while final phases are referred to as terminative, egressive, resultative, or effective. Latipov (2023) emphasizes that phase meanings partially overlap with the semantic boundaries of temporality and reflect the internal temporal structure of a situation as interpreted within discourse.

Comparative analysis reveals that despite typological differences between English and Uzbek, both languages employ a combination of lexical and grammatical means to express phase meanings. The specific interpretation of these meanings depends on contextual factors and the internal temporal organization of the described situation.

Conclusion

The present study confirms the central role of phase semantics within the system of aspectuality and its importance in the linguistic representation of temporal characteristics. Despite ongoing debates concerning terminology and the number of distinguishable phases, phase semantics is increasingly recognized as an independent semantic category.

Comparative analysis of English and Uzbek demonstrates that phase meanings are realized through complex interactions between lexical items, grammatical structures, and contextual factors. Further research into phase semantics from comparative, cognitive, and pragmatic perspectives may contribute significantly to the development of aspectual theory and to a deeper understanding of temporal organization in discourse.

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