

THE ROLES OF LEXICAL AND FUNCTIONAL VERBS IN SENTENCE MEANING

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Abstract: The goal of this article is exploring the roles of lexical and functional verbs in sentence structure and meaning. Lexical verbs, they are also known as content verbs, usually carry the core meaning of a sentence and are typically action-based or descriptive, such as “walk,” “throw,” or “do.” These type of verbs play a crucial role in conveying the main idea or action in a sentence. In contrast, functional verbs support main verbs, help to expressing tense, aspect, mood, or necessity. For example, they are auxiliary verbs (e.g., “am,” “is,” “are,” “have,” “has”) or modal verbs (e.g., “will,” “must,” “would”). In short, lexical verbs provide the semantic content, while functional verbs support the structure and meaning of the sentence. Understanding and identifying the difference between these verbs is important for comprehending the meaning of sentence.

Key words: Verbs, lexical verbs, functional verbs, sentence structure, tenses, core meaning, auxiliary verbs, modal verbs.

Introduction

Verbs are essential in creating sentence meaning and structure, and they are typically classified into two main types: lexical verbs and functional verbs. Lexical verbs like “consume,” “compose,” and “sprint” convey the fundamental semantic meaning of a sentence by representing actions, conditions, or developments. Functional verbs, such as auxiliary, modal, and linking verbs like “be,” “have,” “can,” and “should,” mainly provide grammatical details concerning tense, aspect, mood, and modality. Lexical verbs convey the core event or action, whereas functional verbs influence the interpretation of that event by signaling time, completeness, obligation, possibility, or the speaker's attitude. Grasping how these two types of verbs interact is crucial for examining sentence structure, deciphering meaning, and clarifying how languages express grammatical connections

Literature Review

The difference between lexical and functional verbs has been extensively analyzed in linguistic studies, constituting a key aspect of research on syntax, semantics, morphology, and language learning. Researchers like Palmer (1986), Quirk et al. (1985), and Radford (2004) highlight that lexical verbs hold the primary semantic weight in a sentence and denote actual actions or conditions, while functional verbs mainly add grammatical meaning, influencing tense, aspect, modality, and voice.

Quirk, Greenbaum, Leech, and Svartvik (1985) categorize English verbs into various functional groups and emphasize the significance of auxiliary and modal verbs in forming intricate verb phrases. Their research reveals how functional verbs aid in creating progressive,

perfect, and passive forms, thereby affecting the temporal and structural understanding of clauses.

Palmer (1990) further examines modality and contends that modal verbs play a vital role in conveying speaker attitude, obligation, possibility, and necessity. He observes that functional verbs generally do not bring in new events to the discourse but rather alter the meaning of lexical verbs by conveying modality and grammatical relationships.

In generative grammar, Chomsky (1995) considers functional verbs as components of the functional category system (Tense, Aspect, Modal, Voice) that shapes sentence structure. From this viewpoint, lexical verbs combine with the VP (Verb Phrase), whereas functional verbs take on elevated syntactic roles, influencing the hierarchical structure of clauses. This conceptual framework emphasizes the structural aspect over the semantic role of functional verbs.

Langacker (2008) argues from a cognitive-linguistic perspective that lexical verbs embody conceptual meaning rooted in human experience, while functional verbs act as grammatical indicators that influence the interpretation of events. This differentiation illustrates the mental division between the meaning of content and the structure of grammar. Cross-linguistic research also aids in grasping lexical and functional verbs.

Dixon (2010) demonstrates that languages can differ significantly in their expression of tense and aspect: analytic languages like English depend largely on auxiliary verbs, whereas agglutinative languages such as Uzbek and Turkish convey grammatical information through affixes added to lexical verbs.

Slobin (2004) endorses this view, highlighting that typological variations affect how speakers understand and articulate events. In research on second-language acquisition, functional verbs are frequently recognized as a significant challenge for learners.

Ellis (2006) highlights that although learners swiftly grasp common lexical verbs, functional verbs—particularly modals and auxiliaries—necessitate a more profound comprehension of grammatical structures. This difference illustrates the conceptual essence of functional categories and the intricacies of their application. In general, the research shows a strong agreement: lexical verbs convey the primary meaning of a statement, whereas functional verbs fulfill crucial grammatical roles, influencing the arrangement, subtleties, and understanding of sentences. Their engagement is key to grasping how language conveys meaning on various levels.

Methodology

This research utilizes a qualitative descriptive method to examine the functions of lexical and functional verbs in creating sentence meaning. The approach relies on linguistic analysis, utilizing theoretical concepts in syntax, semantics, and grammatical classification. The main aim is to investigate how lexical verbs express semantic meaning and how functional verbs play a role in grammatical structure, modality, and aspect in English sentences. A descriptive-analytical research framework was chosen as it enables a thorough investigation of linguistic categories without altering any variables. This method is apt for examining the roles of various kinds of verbs in natural language. The study concentrates on pinpointing specific characteristics of lexical and functional verbs and elucidating their role in sentence meaning via syntactic and semantic analysis

2. Gathering Information

The information for this research comprises:

- Sample sentences taken from scholarly grammar sources (e.g., Quirk et al., Radford, Palmer),
- Sentences extracted from English-language educational materials and linguistic databases,
- Created illustrations designed to showcase pertinent linguistic phenomena.

The data was chosen deliberately to offer clear and precise representations of lexical and functional verbs in both authentic and semi-authentic settings. The study is entirely linguistic and text-based, with no involvement of human participants.

3. Data Evaluation Process

The evaluation was carried out by means of the subsequent processes:

a. Categorization of Verbs

Verbs from the chosen dataset were classified into:

- Lexical verbs (verbs of action, process, and state),
- Functional verbs (auxiliary verbs, modal verbs, copula verbs, and light verbs).

b. Syntactic Analysis

Every verb category was examined regarding its syntactic characteristics, encompassing:

- Position and function of sentences,
- Verb phrase composition,
- Distribution in straightforward and intricate predicates,
- Engagement with grammatical elements like tense, aspect, mood, and voice.

Existing linguistic sources were referenced for tree diagrams and clause structures to aid the analysis when necessary.

c. Analysis of Meaning

The research explores how lexical verbs convey propositional meaning and event structure, whereas functional verbs alter this meaning by adding grammatical details. Semantic roles including agency, action, temporality, possibility, and obligation were recognized and examined.

d. Comparative Analysis

Cross-linguistic comparisons were succinctly conducted between English and agglutinative languages like Uzbek, emphasizing that grammatical functions often represented by functional verbs in English are morphologically encoded in other languages

4. Dependability and Truthfulness

For reliability, the analysis relies on established linguistic frameworks and reputable grammar sources. The validity was enhanced by verifying examples against various linguistic theories, such as traditional grammar, generative grammar, and cognitive linguistics. The triangulation of sources aids in guaranteeing that conclusions are sound and linguistically precise.

5. Constraints of the Research

This research focuses solely on English verbs and does not offer comprehensive cross-linguistic examination. The examples are few in quantity and selected for demonstration purposes. Nevertheless, the methodology remains sufficient for identifying the fundamental differences and complementary roles of lexical and functional verbs.

Discussion

This part examines the role of lexical and functional verbs in shaping sentence meaning and structure.

1. Semantic Functions

Lexical verbs convey the primary meaning of a sentence, indicating actions, states, or processes (e.g., jog, observe, consider). They present events and decide who executes them. Functional verbs, conversely, do not introduce new events but alter the meaning of lexical verbs by conveying tense, aspect, mood, or modality. For instance, in “She has gone,” the verb has signifies perfect aspect.

2. Grammatical Organization

Functional verbs play a crucial role in creating intricate verb phrases. They assist in forming progressive and perfect aspects (is reading, has eaten), passive voice (was written), and modal significances (must study, can go). They additionally serve an important function in creating questions and negatives via do-support (Do you understand?, She does not consent.). Lexical verbs by themselves are insufficient to convey these grammatical relationships.

3. Interaction Among Types of Verbs

The meaning of a sentence arises from the integration of both types of verbs. Of course! Please provide the text you'd like me to paraphrase.

- She is reading vs. She has to read
- They departed vs. They have departed

These pairs indicate that lexical verbs convey the main event, whereas functional verbs enhance its timing, completeness, or modality.

4. Multilingual Observations

In English, various grammatical meanings are conveyed using auxiliary and modal verbs. In agglutinative languages such as Uzbek, these meanings are frequently conveyed using verb affixes rather than distinct functional verbs. This distinction indicates that languages differ in the way they express grammatical information.

5. Student Difficulties

Language learners usually grasp lexical verbs sooner since they correspond to observable actions. Functional verbs pose greater challenges because of their abstract grammatical functions, resulting in frequent mistakes like dropping auxiliaries (He going, She not like)

Conclusion

In conclusion, lexical and functional verbs serve complementary functions in shaping sentence meaning and structure. Lexical verbs convey the primary semantic meaning by indicating actions, states, and processes, whereas functional verbs offer crucial grammatical information

including tense, aspect, mood, and modality. Their interaction enables speakers to communicate exact meanings, signify time relationships, and show attitudes or degrees of certainty. Comparative analyses across languages demonstrate variations in how these functions are encoded, yet the differentiation between lexical and functional roles is still essential. Grasping the two verb categories is essential for linguistic examination and successful language acquisition

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