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AN APPROACH TO ACTION VERBS IN ENGLISH

Research on the nature of word meaning can be approached either from a global perspective or from a more specific one. Concerning the second approach, we have focussed on an interdisciplinary meaning analysis of *action verbs* in English.

Before all else, we should differentiate between *action*, meaning *doing* and *act*, meaning *result of doing*. What Luc Benoist emphasizes in his work, *Signes, symboles et mythes* 1975 it is the primacy of *action* over *act*, *the doing* having necessarily, in the case of verbs, a sense of orientation, a direction indicated by pre-positions and adverbs.

Action can be defined as a deliberate and purposeful behavior taken to achieve a specific goal or objective, result or effect, displaying a certain level of intentionality.

This description on the nature of *action* has, in some philosophers' opinion, its origins in Aristotle's judgement on the *four causes of action*. "[...action is not an exception to Aristotle's typical procedure: he has the resources to specify four causes of action, and thus to articulate a powerful theory of action unlike any other on offer."] [Reece, 2019:213].

Furthermore, Reece underlines Aristotle's contribution to the philosophy of action:

> "Current philosophy of action asks what actions are and how they are brought about. Aristotle does not systematically answer these questions, but he says enough to give resources for constructing responses on his behalf. The response typically constructed is a version of the standard causal theory of action. On that theory, what makes something an action rather than an accidental aggregate of movements is that it is brought about (efficiently caused) by a psychological attitude, such as a desire or intention, or an event involving it." [2019:213]

The four actions that Aristotle debates on are: *a material cause*, meaning "that out of which" it is made; *an efficient cause*, indicating "the source of the objects principle of change or stability"; *a formal cause*, describing "the essence of the object"; *a final cause*, indicating "the end or goal of the object, or what the object is good for".

Semantically, actions can be both physical and mental in nature. Physical actions involve bodily movements such as running, jumping, or lifting weights etc. Mental actions, on the other hand, involve cognitive processes such as problem-solving, decision-making, planning etc.

The morphological category that encompasses all these features is without doubt, *the verb*.

Traditional and modern studies on verbs have developed along various coordinates, underlying their central role in the analysis of sentence meaning as a product of the speaker's communicational goals, Jacob Grimm considering verbs, alongside nouns, the true levers of language.

In the same line of thought, Humboldt, asserted that "the idea abandons through the verb, its dwelling place and steps forth into the realm of reality", [...] "the verb alone is the midpoint which contains and propagates life to the remainder" of the sentence [1971:164]

With reference to English, there have been made whole inventories, charts, tables etc. of action verbs:

Act	Answer	Approve	Arrange
Break	Build	Buy	Coach
Color	Cough	Create	Complete
Cry	Dance	Describe	Draw
Drink	Eat	Edit	Enter
Exit	Imitate	Invent	Jump
Laugh	Lie	Listen	Paint
Plan	Play	Read	Replace
Run	Scream	See	Shop
Shout	Sing	Skip	Sleep
Sneeze	Solve	Study	Teach
Touch	Turn	Walk	Win
Write	Whistle	Yank	Zip

https://www.citationmachine.net/resources/grammar-guides/verb/list-verbs/

Literature in the domain includes research on both typologization of action verbs and their linguistic behaviour in a variety of contexts. A semantic subcategorization of English action verbs is done using lexical fields whose semantic dimensions reiterate Aristotle's causes of action:

Changing direction: *enter, exit, turn* etc.

(1) a. One of the intruders *must have exited through* a side door.

   b. The burglars *must have entered through* a window.

(https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/definition/english/)

In these examples, the agents *intruders* and *burglars* are efficient causes bringing about actions denoted by the verbs *must have exited* and *must have entered*, the preposition *through* indicating direction.

Changing state: *cry, laugh* etc.

(2) a. She *cried* all the way home from school that day.

   b. What *are* you *laughing* about?

(https://www.merriamwebster.com/dictionary/)

Agents'psychological attitudes (e.g. She, you) are formal causes giving actions their identity conditions, represented by the local context of the verbs *cried* and *are laughing*.

Creative doing: *draw, paint, write, edit, build* etc.

(3) a. Reynolds *had painted* child models before the 1770s, although notations in the sitter-books are sporadic.

(Cambridge English Corpus, retrieved in https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/paint)

   b. The abstracts *have* also *been edited* to convey the main message of each article even if the chapter itself focuses on a more specialist audience.

(Cambridge English Corpus, retrieved in https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/)

Final cause of action is identified in (3), contexts in which the agents have achieved the goals of creative actions: *had painted, have been edited*, marking the products for which actions have been performed: *child models* and *the abstracts.*

Doing by planning: *plan, arrange, prepare* etc.

(4) a. Using this medium, we originally *planned* to provide a sound treatment of side-effects that would be more effective than systematic residualization.

(Cambridge English Corpus, retrieved in https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/)

   b. The company *will arrange* transport from the airport.

(https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/arrange)

Doing by decision-making: decide, settle etc.

(5) a. The judge *decided* that the defendant was not liable for damages. (https://www.merriam-webster.com/thesaurus/decide)

   b. After *having settled* on a general approach, let us discuss the form of judgments.(Cambridge English Corpus, retrieved in https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/)

Doing by problem-solving: solve, clarify, elucidate etc.

(6) a. None of these solutions would altogether SOLVE the problem. (https://www.lextutor.ca/cgi-bin/conc/show_context.pl?really_old_store_dic=Eng_Eng&item=SOLVE&start=9971741&this_corp=BNC_soc_science.txt&gaps=no_gaps&sort_type=key&search_type=equals&unframed=true&lingo=English&ass=&store_dic=Eng_Eng&refire=1)

   b. Other books on the longlist *elucidate* complex historical and scientific events.—The New Yorker, 13 Sep. 2023
https://www.merriamwebster.com/dictionary/elucidate

Examples under (4), (5), (6) refer also to the final cause of action, having as linguistic source specialized discourse samples where *planning, decision-making* and *problem-solving* are necessary strategies for the well-functioning of companies, firms, etc. The verbs *planned, will arrange, decided, having settled, solve* and *elucidate* describe the steps taken to fulfill goals.

By way of concluding, actions are often associated with productivity and progress. They are seen as a means of moving forward and achieving success. For an action to be effective, it must be intentional, purposeful, and directed towards a specific outcome which agents envisage in different situational contexts where they can act either as vehicles of emotion or have different mindsets.

Initiatory for future research, the paper shows preference for matrical approaches.

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UNE APPROCHE DES VERBES D'ACTION EN ANGLAIS

Résumé : Une approche interdisciplinaire de la signification des verbes d'action en anglais qui met l'accent sur leur capacité à accepter différentes interprétations dans le cadre de la grammaire, de la lexicologie, de la sémantique et de la philosophie, démontrant une fois de plus la complexité du langage, dans lequel la pensée se réfère au mot et à la parole en l'action.

Mots-clés : *verbe, action, sens, causalité, interdisciplinarité.*

Abstract : An interdisciplinary approach to the meaning of action verbs in English which emphasises their capacity to accept different interpretations within the framework of grammar, lexicology, semantics and philosophy, demonstrating once again the complexity of language, in which thought refers to the word and speech to action.

Keywords: *verb, action, meaning, causality, interdisciplinarity.*