

The semantic analysis of action verbs in –ing forms in the structure of Modern English sentences .

(Akhmedova Guzal, KSU 2nd year master)

This article focuses on semantic features of action verbs in –ing forms in the deep structure of Modern English sentences according to a great Russian linguist A. M. Mukhin's theory of syntaxeme analysis.

In the field of general linguistics various definitions of syntaxeme can be found. This term has been used by E. Vanchikova [2016] to refer to the smallest part of syntax. She states that syntaxeme is three-dimensional. It has syntactical, morphological and semantical features. Syntaxeme gives the opportunity of sentence presentation as a set of syntaxemes, which allows studying it integrally, not dividing the sentence on syntactic and semantic levels. The first systematic study on syntaxeme was carried out by Russian scholar A.M.Mukhin. He defined this term as follows:

“Syntaxeme is the smallest indivisible meaningful unit. It is characterized by its different syntactic-semantic attributes, that is semantic attributes which indicated on the base of syntactic relations in the system of opposition or in paradigmatic plan.”

The term “syntaxeme” is generally understood to mean, differing from the components of a sentence, invariable unit expressed by the system of variants. Differing from syntactic attributes of components of a sentence, syntactic-semantic attributes of syntaxeme concerns with the inner side of a language.

According to prof. A. M. Mukhin, syntaxemes are divided into three main categories:

1) Substantial; 2) Processual; 3) Qualificative.

The majority of language units expressed by –ing forms has syntactic-semantic attribute of process syntaxeme. The reason of this is –ing forms belong to the special category of a verb and as we mentioned above they have verbal character, so in most cases –ing forms denote process or an action. It means that syntactic-semantic attribute of process syntaxeme is expressed by a verb. It denotes an action or process. Here are some examples:

Bathing Sasha is such a wonderful game. (GHM 11)

I have always tried my hand at *writing* a novel. (MED 1543)

This frantic *rushing* to France was a mistake. (ACHS 97)

In all of the sentences the –ing forms express action. We can prove it by the transformational method of linguistic experiment:

Playing and *working* outside, and *eating* good Yorkshire food, has made Mary feel strong. (VDA 374) → Mary *played* and *worked* outside, and *ate* good Yorkshire food... I have always tried my hand at *writing* a novel. (MED 1543) → I *have* always... *written* a novel.

Analyzing different examples, action verbs in –ing forms have been proved to be various types of syntaxemes, namely, processual object syntaxeme: the action verbs in –ing form as a dependent part can be in the function of an object in a sentence. The –ing forms in this function have the syntactic-semantic attribute of process object syntaxeme. Now we'll see it in the following examples:

She really enjoys *travelling* by train. (GHM 10)

They are talking about *taking* you to stay with them. (GHM 55)

I would like to try *walking* round London in the daytime. (GHM 100)

I even considered *going* away. (EGG 171)

We can prove these verbs to be an object in a sentence by the method of omitting of the linguistic experiment: She really enjoys *travelling* by train. (GHM 10) → She really enjoys *travelling* ... → she really enjoys ... They are talking about *taking* you to stay with them. (GHM 55) → They are talking about *taking*... → They are talking about ... I would like to try *walking* round London in the daytime. (GHM 100) → I would like to try *walking*... → I would like to try... I even considered *going* away. (EGG 171) → I even considered...

Action verbs in –ing form can be found to be process object continuative syntaxeme. These verbs have syntactic-semantic attribute of continuative syntaxeme when they are used with such verbs as *keep, keep on, go on, persist, continue*:

Father Wilson continued *walking*, looking carefully at the muddy path... (NFGS 43)

He kept on *crawling* until... (GHM 7)

Now we'll prove it by the transformational method of linguistic experiment:

Father Wilson continued *walking*, looking carefully at the muddy path... → Father Wilson was in the middle of *walking*, looking carefully at the muddy path... (NFGS 43). He kept on *crawling* until... (GHM 7) → He was in the middle of *crawling* until...

In the following examples action verbs in –ing form are considered to be process manner active instrumental syntaxeme. This syntaxeme is expressed by the preposition *by* or *in* in the expression *by V_{ing}* or *in V_{ing}*. [1972]

The burglars got into the house *by breaking* a window and climbing in. (RME 120)

You didn't solve anything *by running* away. (PAPTH 65)

We made the room look nicer *by putting* some pictures on the wall. (RME 345)

Students practice written English *by writing* composition. (BSFE 263)

Alex caught my attention *by waving* his arms in the air. (BSFE 34)

You can destroy bacteria in meat *by boiling*. (BSFE 234)

Kevin got himself into financial trouble *by borrowing* too much. (RME 234)

¹Мухин А.М. "Синтаксемный анализ и проблема уровней языка"

We'll prove the action verbs to be manner syntaxeme by putting question:

You didn't solve anything *by running* away. (PAPTH 65) → How didn't you solve anything? We made the room look nicer *by putting* some pictures on the wall. (RME 345) → How did we make the room look nicer? Students practice written English *by writing* composition. (BSFE 263) → How do students practice written English? Alex caught my attention *by waving* his arms in the air. (BSFE 34) → How did Alex catch my attention? You can destroy bacteria in meat *by boiling*. (BSFE 234) → How can you destroy bacteria in meat?

The results show that the action verbs in –ing form have not only syntactic-semantic attribute of process manner syntaxeme but active and instrumental syntaxemes.

Here action verbs in –ing forms have traits of process manner active negative comitative syntaxeme. Process manner active negative comitative syntaxeme is expressed by the form *without V_{ing}*.¹ Now we'll see it in the following examples:

Can't you stand... without *bothering* the police...? (NFGS 16)

She needs to work without people *disturbing* her. (RME 120)

As we proved the Gerund to be manner syntaxeme by putting questions before now we only prove it to be active negative syntaxeme by the transformational method of linguistic experiment: Can't you stand... without *bothering* the police...? (NFGS 16) → ...you...*didn't bother* the police.. She needs to work without people *disturbing* her. (RME 120) → ...people *don't disturb* her.

In conclusion we can state that our linguistic experiments which carried out on action verbs in –ing forms in deep structure reveal that they can be processual, object, active, manner, instrumental, comitative, negative, continuative and many other syntaxemes

Literatures

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