

# Bulgarian verbs of perception: aspect and situation types

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**Abstract:** This article is an attempt to apply general theoretical findings of typological-functional linguistics to phenomena of contemporary Bulgarian, specifically the interface of morphology, syntax and semantics in the usage of Bulgarian verbs of perception, particularly verbs of visual and auditory perception, as predicates in different sentences. I explore the correlation between the choice of a concrete verb and its semantics, aspect and the situation type of the sentence's predicate. The findings potentially can give us insights into the grammar and usage of Bulgarian verbs of perception and into the Bulgarian verbal system as a whole.

**Keywords:** aspect, situation type, Bulgarian verbs, verbs of perception, lexical semantics.

## **Introduction**

This article is an attempt to apply general theoretical findings of typological-functional linguistics to phenomena of contemporary Bulgarian, specifically the interface of morphology, syntax and semantics in sentences in which the predicates are verbs of visual and auditory perception. It is a direct continuation of Rangelov (2017) [1], which established some preliminaries for the study of Bulgarian predicates from the point of view of the universal category of situation type and its interaction with the category of aspect, an attribute of Bulgarian (and Slavic) verbs. The inspiration comes from my experience in teaching Bulgarian as a foreign language to learners who do not have any Slavic-language background and the challenges in front of them to master verb aspectuality of Bulgarian. I believe that revealing correlations between a morphological category (aspect) and a semantic category (situation type, Aktionsart) could benefit the theoretical understanding and explanation of this very complex phenomenon, as well as the practical application of linguistics in the field of foreign-language teaching and learning, translation and interpretation, etc. The research approach here is typological-functional. I make use of the concept of Aktionsart/situation type as described by Vendler (1957, 1967) [2], Comrie (1976) [3], Dowty (1979) [4], Smith (1997) [5] and especially Van Valin, Jr. (2005, 2006) [6], not the notion of "kinds of action" (sometimes called aktionsarten) in Slavistics, where the added meaning of aspect-changing prefixes is studied. Strictly speaking, situation types are attributes not only of verbs but of all predicating elements, and their identification normally depends on context.

In this paper I will use the Romanization currently used by the Bulgarian government for names, with the modification of using **â** for **ѡ** and **x** for **х**.

## **Theoretical preliminaries**

### **Defining aspect**

Aspect is a grammatical category that has been defined in different ways. Comrie's [7] definition is "aspects are different ways of viewing the internal temporal constituency of a situation". Aspect in some languages is expressed by syntactic means (constructions). In Bulgarian, as in all

Slavic languages, aspect is an inherent property of verbs. Every Bulgarian verb is either imperfective or perfective by aspect. Apart from a small number of biaspectual verbs, it is possible to tell the aspect of the verb from a single form, i.e. at the lexical level. It is not necessary to see the verb in a sentence. A lot of verbs come in aspectual pairs. An aspectual pair is two verbs with exactly the same lexical meaning which differ only in their aspect. A lot of common verbs do not form a pair; they are imperfective and, as we shall see, they normally describe an Activity or a State, i.e. they are [- telic] and [- punctual].

In this paper when I quote an aspectual pair I put the imperfective form first, e.g. **виждам/видя vizhdam/vidya** - ‘see’.

### Defining situation types

The semantics of predicates has been discussed from different viewpoints in linguistic literature for a very long time. Different semantic classifications of predicates/verbs exist in different traditions. In this study I follow a formal system of semantic representation of predicates developed in Van Valin, Jr. (2006) [8]. Earlier versions of the same system have been presented in Van Valin, Jr. & LaPolla (1997) [9] and Van Valin, Jr. (2005) [10]. As Van Valin, Jr (2006) [11] states, the “fundamental insight comes from Vendler (1967) [12], who proposed a classification of Verbs into states, achievements, accomplishments, and activities.” These four categories, later expanded to twelve in Van Valin, Jr. (2005) [13], are called Aktionsarten or situation types. [14] They correspond to a typology of states of affairs in the real world.

The concept of Aktionsart or situation type is first proposed by Zeno Vendler (1957, 1967) [15]. In his classification there are four types: States, Achievements, Accomplishments, and Activities [16]. Later a fifth type, Semelfactive, is added (Comrie 1976; Smith 1997) [17]. Van Valin, Jr. & LaPolla (1997) [18] introduce another type: Active accomplishment. Finally, in Van Valin, Jr. (2005) [19], the number reaches twelve as each of the six types has a causative counterpart: Causative state, Causative achievement, Causative accomplishment, Causative activity, Causative semelfactive, and Causative active accomplishment.

Situation types have been defined by different distinctive features across literature. I will use the features in Van Valin, Jr. (2006) [20]:

State:	[+ static] [- dynamic] [- telic] [- punctual]
Activity:	[- static] [+ dynamic] [- telic] [- punctual]
Achievement:	[- static] [- dynamic] [+ telic] [+ punctual]
Semelfactive:	[- static] [± dynamic] [- telic] [+ punctual]
Accomplishment:	[- static] [- dynamic] [+ telic] [- punctual]
Active accomplishment:	[- static] [+ dynamic] [+ telic] [- punctual]

The issue of developing adequate tests for Bulgarian has been addressed in Rangelov (2017) [21].

### Analysis

#### Verbs of visual perception

Verbs of perception show quite a diversity in situation types across languages depending on the concrete state of affairs they describe and on the way the speaker views or construes the situation they are talking about. Languages in Europe usually have at least two basic verbs for visual and auditory perception, respectively. For example, the single imperfective Bulgarian verb **гледам gledam** ‘watch; look (at)’ normally corresponds to the English verbs **watch** and **look (at)**, while the aspectual pair **виждам/видя vizhdam/vidya** ‘see’ normally corresponds to the English verb

**see.** The verbs for auditory perception parallel the verbs for visual perception: the single imperfective Bulgarian verb **слушам slusham** ‘listen (to)’ corresponds to the English verb **listen (to)**, while the aspectual pair **чувам/чуя chuvam/chuya** ‘hear’ corresponds to the English verb **hear**. Languages like Japanese and Korean normally have one basic verb for visual perception and one verb for auditory perception, e.g. Japanese **miru** ‘watch; look; see’ and **kiku** ‘listen; hear’, and Korean **po-** ‘watch; look; see’ and **tut-** ‘listen; hear’. Although the number of basic verbs is different, all languages manage to express a comparable variety of situation types associated with sentences describing perception.

The thematic relations in terms of the logical structure arguments of perception verbs are PERCEIVER and STIMULUS. With the basic Bulgarian perception verbs the PERCEIVER is normally coded as a subject and the STIMULUS as a direct object.

We will look at the Bulgarian verbs for visual perception now. The three verbs, **гледам gledam** ‘watch; look (at)’ and **виждам/видя vizhdam/vidya** ‘see’, are from two different roots but semantically they seem to form a triad not unlike the triads that were discussed in Rangelov (2017) [22], i.e. a triad of a single imperfective [– telic] verb and an aspectual pair that is typically [+ telic], e.g. **кихам kixam** ‘sneeze’ and **кихвам/кихна kixvam/kixna** ‘sneeze’. The importance of these triads for understanding verbal semantics of languages with verb aspect has been recently reinforced by Kuznetsova & Sokolova (2016) [23].

The verb **гледам gledam** ‘watch; look (at)’ in its typical unmarked usage is a transitive verb which is used as an Activity verb of “directed perception” (Van Valin, Jr. & LaPolla (1997)) [24] that can appear with an indefinite or a definite object. The verbs **виждам/видя vizhdam/vidya** ‘see’ in their typical unmarked usage are transitive verbs which require a referential object.

(1)

Снощи той гледа телевизия три часа.

Snoshti toy gleda televiziya tri chasa.

last.night he watch.Aor.3Sg television three hour.Pl

Last night he watched television for three hours.

(2)

Снощи той гледа филма.

Snoshti toy gleda filma.

last.night he watch.Aor.3Sg film.the

Last night he watched the film. (Accomplishment)

or Last night he watched some of the film. (Activity)

(3)

Снощи той гледа филма двайсет минути и заспа.

Snoshti toy gleda filma dvayset minuti i zaspa.

last.night he watch.Aor.3Sg twenty minute.Pl and fall.asleep.Aor.3Sg

Last night he watched the film for twenty minutes and fell asleep.

(4)

Той (из)гледа целия филм.

Toy (iz)gleda tseliya film.

he watch.(to.the.end.)Aor.3Sg whole.M.the film

He watched the whole film.

Sentence (1) is unambiguously Activity of directed perception with a non-referential direct object ([– telic], [– punctual]). Sentence (2) can also be construed as Activity, but an Accomplishment reading is also possible ([+ telic] [– punctual]). Sentence (3) is perceived as Activity only. The definite direct object should be known to the addressee. The addressee probably knows that the film is about two hours and that it can be watched in its entirety within twenty minutes. Sentence (4) is unambiguously Accomplishment. A perfective verb with the prefix **из-** **iz-** (which expresses reaching the end) could be used instead of the imperfective verb but with verbs of perception the usage is optional. The sentence can receive an Accomplishment reading with the imperfective verb. With most activity verbs, however, the usage of the secondary imperfective verb from the triad will be compulsory (see Rangelov (2017) [25] for examples with verbs of consumption).

(5)

\*Снощи той вижда телевизия три часа.

\*Snoshti toy vzhda televiziya tri chasa.

last.night he see(Ipf).Aor.3Sg television three hour.Pl

\*Last night he saw television for three hours.

(6)

\*Снощи той видя телевизия три часа.

\*Snoshti toy vidya televiziya tri chasa.

last.night he see(Pf).Aor.3Sg television three hour.Pl

\*Last night he saw television for three hours.

Sentences (5) and (6) show clearly that neither of the verbs from the aspectual pair **виждам/видя vzhdam/vidya** ‘see’ can be used in a sentence as an Activity verb of “directed perception”.

The intransitive use of **гледам gledam** ‘watch; look (at)’ has one of several meanings, including ‘keep eyes open and perceive visually the surroundings’ (subject: normally a living creature that has organs of visual perception), ‘be open in order to perceive visually the surroundings’ (subject: eye(s)), etc. The sentences tend to be States ([+ static], [– telic], [– punctual]).

The verb **гледам gledam** ‘watch; look (at)’ is also used colloquially instead of the imperfective verbs from aspectual pairs derived from it, especially in the Present and the Imperfect, e.g.

(7)

Те гледат картината внимателно. =

Te gledat kartinata vnimatelno.

they look.Pr.3Pl picture.the carefully

They are examining the picture carefully.

(8)

Те разглеждат картината внимателно.

Te razglezhdat kartinata vnimatelno.

they examine.Pr.3Pl picture.the carefully

They are examining the picture carefully.

(9)

Те гледат крави.

Te gledat kravi.

they look.Pr.3Pl cow.Pl

=

(10)

Те отглеждат крави.

Te otglezhdat kravi.

they raise.Pr.3Pl cow.Pl

They raise cows.

They raise cows.

In sentence (8) the imperfective verb from the pair **разглеждам/разгледам** **razglezhdam/razgledam** ‘examine; look at’ is used, while in (10) the imperfective verb from the pair **отглеждам/отгледам** **otglezhdam/otgledam** ‘raise’ is used. The meanings of (8) and (10) are similar to the meanings of (7) and (9), respectively. Of course, (7) and especially (9) could be construed to have alternative meanings as well.

The verbs from the aspectual pair **виждам/видя** **vizhdam/vidya** ‘see’ can be used as States in the meaning “perceive visually” or “be able to perceive visually”. Unlike **гледам gledam** ‘watch; look (at)’, these verbs do not imply “directed perception” or voluntariness. Sentences (11) and (12) are examples of this use.

(11)

Той вижда планината.

Toy vizhda planinata.

he see(Ipf).Pr.3Sg mountain.the

He sees the mountain. *or* He can see the mountain.

(12)

От прозореца той виждаше планината.

Ot prozoretsa toy vizhdashe planinata.

from window.the he see(Ipf).Imperf.3Sg mountain.the

From the window he saw the mountain.

*or* From the window he was able to see the mountain.

The perfective verb, especially in the aorist, can also be interpreted as [+ telic] and [+ punctual], i.e. Achievement, as in (13).

(13)

Той видя планината през прозореца.

Toy vidya planinata prez prozoretsa.

he see(Pf).Aor.3Sg mountain.the through window.the

He saw the mountain through the window.

In a broader study of perception verbs, it will be interesting to compare this use with the use of the aspectual pair **зървам/зърна** **zârvam/zârna** ‘glimpse’, which tends to be treated as non-dynamic Semelfactive.

In yet another type of sentences the imperfective verbs, especially **виждам vizhdam** ‘see’ and more rarely **гледам gledam** ‘watch; look (at)’, are used to mean ‘have the capacity of visual perception; be able to see (through organs of vision)’. In these sentences the verbs are intransitive and the situation type is State, as in (14)

(14)

Малкото кученце вижда.

Malkoto kuchentse vizhda.

little.the puppy see(Ipf).Pr.3Sg

The little puppy is able to see.

It must be noted here that in this sense, **виждам vizhdam** ‘see’ should be more appropriately treated as a single intransitive verb, as is the case with other secondary imperfectives, since **видя vitya** ‘see’ cannot be used as State in this particular case.

We can see that visual perception verbs can be used in a range of situation types depending on different semantic and pragmatic factors.

### **Verbs of auditory perception**

Verbs of auditory perception, just like the visual-perception ones, show quite a diversity in situation types. Similarly to visual-perception verbs, with the basic Bulgarian auditory-perception verbs the PERCEIVER is normally coded as a subject and the STIMULUS as a direct object. There is a symmetry in the number and aspect of the main three auditory-perception verbs. The three verbs, **слушам slusham** ‘listen (at)’ and **чувам/чуя chuvam/chuya** ‘hear’, are from two different roots but semantically they seem to form a triad not unlike the triads we mentioned above, i.e. a triad of a single imperfective [– telic] verb and an aspectual pair that is typically [+ telic].

The verb **слушам slusham** ‘listen (to)’ in its typical unmarked usage is a transitive verb which is used as an Activity verb of “directed perception” that can appear with an indefinite or a definite object. The verbs **чувам/чуя chuvam/chuya** ‘hear’ in their typical unmarked usage are transitive verbs which require a referential object. Sentences (15), (16), (17) and (18) correspond to sentences (1), (2), (3) and (4), respectively.

(15)

Снощи той слуша радио три часа.

Snoshti toy slusha radio tri chasa.

last.night he listen.Aor.3Sg radio three hour.Pl

Last night he listened to the radio for three hours.

(16)

Снощи той слуша симфонията.

Snoshti toy slusha simfoniyata.

last.night he listen.Aor.3Sg symphony.the

Last night he listened to the symphony. (Accomplishment)

or Last night he listened to some of the symphony. (Activity)

(17)

Снощи той слуша симфонията двайсет минути и заспа.

Snoshti toy slusha simfoniyata dvayset minuti i zaspa.

last.night he listen.Aor.3Sg twenty minute.Pl and fall.asleep.Aor.3Sg

Last night he listened to the symphony for twenty minutes and fell asleep.

(18)

Той (из)слуша цялата симфония.

Toy (iz)slusha tsyalata simfoniya.

he listen.(to.the.end.)Aor.3Sg whole.F.the film

He listened to the whole symphony.

Sentence (15) is unambiguously Activity of directed perception with a non-referential direct object ([– telic], [– punctual]). Sentence (2) can also be construed as Activity, but an Accomplishment reading is also possible ([+ telic] [– punctual]). Sentence (3) is perceived as Activity only. The definite direct object should be known to the addressee. Sentence (4) is unambiguously Accomplishment. A perfective verb with the prefix **из-** **iz-** (which expresses reaching the end) could be used instead of the imperfective verb but with verbs of perception the usage is optional. The sentence can receive an Accomplishment reading with the imperfective verb.

(19)

\*Снощи той чува радио три часа.

\*Snoshti toy chuva radio tri chasa.

last.night he hear(Ipf).Aor.3Sg radio three hour.Pl

\*Last night he heard radio for three hours.

(20)

\*Снощи той чу радио три часа.

\*Snoshti toy chu radio tri chasa.

last.night he hear(Pf).Aor.3Sg radio three hour.Pl

\*Last night he heard radio for three hours.

Sentences (19) and (20) show clearly that neither of the verbs from the aspectual pair **чувам/чужа** **chuvam/chuya** ‘hear’ can be used in a sentence as an Activity verb of “directed perception”.

The imperfective **чувам chuvam** is used as an Activity verb in some dialects of Bulgarian with the same meaning as *gledam* in (9):

(21)

Те чуват крави.

Te chuvat kravi.

they hear(Ipf).Pr.3Pl cow.Pl

They raise cows.

(9)

Те гледат крави.

Te gledat kravi.

they look.Pr.3Pl cow.Pl

They raise cows.

(10)

Те отглеждат крави.

Te otglezhdat kravi.

they raise.Pr.3Pl cow.Pl

They raise cows.

When used as in (21), the verb **чувам chuvam** ‘raise’ should be regarded as a single imperfective verb that typically has Activity reading.

The verbs from the aspectual pair **чувам/чужа** **chuvam/chuya** ‘hear’ can be used as States in the meaning “perceive auditorily” or “be able to perceive auditorily”. Unlike **слушам slusham** ‘listen (to)’, these verbs do not imply “directed perception” or voluntariness. Sentences (22) and (23) are examples of this use.

(22)

Той чува музиката.

Toy chuva muzikata.

he hear(Ipf).Pr.3Sg music.the

He hears the music. *or* He can hear the music.

(23)

От прозореца той чуваше музиката.

Ot prozoretsa toy chivashe muzikata.

from window.the he hear(Ipf).Imperf.3Sg music.the

From the window he heard the music.

*or* From the window he was able to hear the music.

The perfective verb, especially in the aorist, can also be interpreted as [+ telic] and [+ punctual], i.e. Achievement, as in (24).

(24)

Той чу музиката през прозореца.

Toy chu muzikata prez prozoretsa.

he hear(Pf).Aor.3Sg music.the through window.the

He heard the music through the window.

In yet another type of sentences the imperfective verbs, especially **чувам chuvam** ‘hear’ and more rarely **слушам slusham** ‘listen (to)’, are used to mean ‘have the capacity of auditory perception; be able to hear (through organs of hearing)’. In these sentences the verbs are intransitive and the situation type is State, as in (14)

(14)

Малкото кученце чува.

Malkoto kuchentse chuva.

little.the puppy hear(Ipf).Pr.3Sg

The little puppy is able to hear.

It must be noted here that in this sense, **чувам chuvam** ‘hear’ should be more appropriately treated as a single intransitive verb, as is the case with other secondary imperfectives, since **чужа chuya** ‘see’ cannot be used as State in this particular case.

We can see that auditory perception verbs, just like visual perception verbs, can be used in a range of situation types depending on different semantic and pragmatic factors.

### **Findings and Conclusion**

My analysis has shown that the basic verbs of visual and auditory perception have a somewhat more complicated correlation between aspect and situation type, which seems to be due to the specific semantics of the different “meanings” of the verbs, as well as to the idiomatic usage of these common verbs. There are parallels of the analysis of the visual perception verbs and the auditory perception verbs. The single imperfective verbs are typically realized as Activity predicates (as voluntary Activity verbs of directed perception) and as Accomplishment predicates. The verbs from the aspectual pair are typically realized as State predicates, as well as – especially the perfective members of the pairs – as Achievement predicates. The imperfective

members of the pair have a tendency to develop new derived meanings and be construed as single imperfectives typically realized as Activity predicates.

A further study of less common verbs of perception and verbs of cognition will bring about further insights into the intricate correlation between aspect and situation type in different semantic classes of Bulgarian verbs. The findings will enrich our understanding of the grammar-semantics interface in the Bulgarian language. They could be also useful in the fields of both theoretical and applied linguistics.

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- [13] Van Valin, Jr., R. D. (2005). *Exploring the Syntax-Semantics Interface*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 34.
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