Semantic and Pragmatic Interface in English Verbs of Vision

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Each meaning of a verb has its own semantic structure which is directly attached to signs. To the sphere of semantics also belongs the meaning   that holds good in truth conditions. The meaning of vision verbs under analysis is formulated as the description of truth conditions understandable to a common reader. These possible conditions are the description of the parameters of the denotative scene the change of which will change the linguistic sign. The example of formulation of one meaning in the   vision verb *stare* may be presented in the following way: *if you stare   You, influenced by some reason (peculiarities of the object that attracted your attention or your own state of mind), direct at this object or somewhere into the space a fixed and intensive look which may be full of emotions (surprise, fear, awe, bewilderment, etc.) – “They **stared** at the passing pebble in the sky with the emotions of sailors on a long sea voyage…” A. Clark., “At this sight Mrs. Marleham **stared** more like a figure-head intended for a ship to be called the Astonishment” Ch. Dickens.*

This definition as a description of the denotative scene in the natural language is based on the semantic structure of the verb presented in terms of metalanguage which are worked out specially for this group of verbs. Thus the semantic structure of this meaning has the following model:

Ql   + Intensive look

     + emotional look (surprise, fear, awe, bewilderment)

Sp   + Fixed look

     + unmovable look

R (X) + Actor at the final stage of the predicate

     + Application of force (biological)

     + Application of willing force

       -    control at the “initial” stage

       +   control at the “final” stage

(C)   + Cause of physical force application

         + (peculiarities of Y)

         + (X's state of mind)

Sem   + Process-action (potential action)

This   semantic structure is characterized by its own "syntax" which includes such premises as role relations [R] (actant positions of participants of the denotative situation – X, Y, Z) , locative [Sp], temporal-aspective [Sem – semantic type of the predicate], causative-consecutive [C], qualitative and quantitative [Ql] semantic axes that are basic semantic components in the verb centric model of the sentence.

    The semantic structure is characterized by its own "syntax" because the main (accented) semantic axes (Ql, Sp) are the source of lexical difference of the verb *stare* in opposition to other verbs of the group *look.* The difference in role relations may be the source of difference between variants of one meaning. Thus the verb *stare* may have variants of its meaning: *Your look being fixed and intensive is unconscious and directed at smb, smth or somewhere – Raglan stared at me for a moment or two uncomprehendingly.* A. Christie. The semantic components of Ql and Sp are the same (intensive and fixed, unmovable) while the role relations are different. R: Agent

              + Application of physical (biological) force

              -    Control at all stages of the predicate

"Control" as a   component in the semantic structure of the verb is checked by a number of tests, mostly imperative constructions, at initial, middle and final stages of the nucleus: *Stare at me! *Continue to stare*! But*: Don't stare at me!* [Shabanova, 1998]. "Control" is the expression of X's (Subject's) willing force. "Control" being a prototypical meaning informs about X's governing over the existence of the predicate at its different stages.

Vision verbs present in their semantic structure different aspects of visual perception. One group of verbs informs about the state of eyes without any direct correlation with an object (twinkle, blink, stare). The other groups of visual verbs inform about different stages of visual perception: they inform 1. about the direction of the look at somebody or something or somewhere (group *look*), 2. about getting information due to the perception of the object (Y) - group *watch* and 3. about the appearance of Y's image in the eyes of X as a result of visual perception.

It is important for the analysis of the interface of semantics and pragmatics to take into account whether the verb has a descriptive or communicative character or both. The question arises whether the information of *purpose* in verbs of vision belongs to the semantic presentation or it belongs to the intentional act of uttering, the sphere of pragmatics. In order to answer this question lets consider the inner structure of the predicative expression which consists of **onset** (a preliminary stage), **nucleus** with its 3 phases (**initial, middle** and **final**) and **coda** (a following stage). [Freed, 1979] The stage of onset gives the information not about the denotate of the predicate itself but about the possibility for X to express the initiative, volition. The initiative may be connected with X's wish to change the intensity of the look, its direction, its character in accordance with a certain **purpose**. Thus we may say that the information about purpose may be traced at the stage of **onset**.

Besides the verb **look** to the group of verbs which inform about the direction of the eyes at somebody or something or somewhere maybe referred all vision verbs which have the preposition **at** if there is an object (Y) in the scene or **out, out of, into**, etc. if there is no object for the perception. The verbs **look, stare** like **gaze, glance, ogle, gape** inform that somebody's look is directed at somebody, something or somewhere but the conditions of this direction are different. There is no information about any purpose in their semantic structure: the verb **gaze** informs that X'look is directed at Y and a lot of positive emotions may be found in it, the verb **glance** informs that X gave a quick look at smb or smth, the verb **ogle** reports about a very peculiar look at smb, while the verb **gape** informs only about X's bewildered look.

You usually *look, glance* and even *gaze* with a certain purpose the presence of which is tested with such phrases as "I want to…", "I'd like to…". The absence of restrictions with these phrases shows that the semantics of Purpose is not at the nucleus stage but at the onset stage.of the predicate. Consequently there are no restrictions with imperative constructions or the constructions "Will you …?", "Would you…?" which show that X controls the starting point of the action (the initial stage of the nucleus): *Look at her!, Will you gaze at this picture?, Would you glance at this?* But: **Gaze at this picture! * Glance at him!* These restrictions are connected not with the absence of Control but with the lexical meaning of these verbs.[Shabanova,1998] Besides, these verbs except the verb *look* have a descriptive character, they rarely participate in the conversation and naturally have restrictions for the use in the imperative form which has a communicative character.   That means

that the verbs *stare, gaze, ogle, gape* which have restrictions in the use with expressions of volition and imperative constructions haven't got a semantic component of Control at the initial stage of the predicate and the semantic role of X at this stage is not **Actor** but **Agent**. [Jackendoff, 1994] Though at the final stage of the predicate the semantic role of X includes the component of Control and it may be characterized as **Actor at the final stage.**

Thus we may say that the meaning of these verbs has certain pragmatic restrictions: no use in positive imperative constructions. But with the change of the **purpose** of utterance one may observe the change of the meaning of the verb and the appearance of a contextual variant of the meaning. E. g. The theatre director may give instructions to an actor, saying, *"Stare at him!", "Gape at him!", "Ogle at her!"* In these examples X is initiated to make his/her eyes look as if they were *staring, gaping or ogling.* In this context the use of imperative constructions is quite normative. The semantic component of Control appears in the semantic role of X, it becomes Actor at all stages and the semantic type of the predicate becomes Action and not Potential Action or Process. [Shabanova, 1998]

The accented information in the group *watch (observe, examine, scrutinize, study, survey, search, seek, scan)* is getting information about Y under different circumstances. There is no semantics of purpose in the meaning of these verbs. These verbs are mostly of the descriptive character but they are frequently used in communication. That is why the purpose of utterance may change the semantic role of X and the semantic type of the predicate.

Thus the verb *observe* has restrictions in such constructions as *"?I'm beginning to observe…", "?I started to observe…", "?I'm starting to observe…", "?I continue to observe…", "I stopped observing…"* Though there are no restrictions for the verb *watch* in the same linguistic conditions. This can be explained by the fact that the denotate of the verb *observe* is abstracted from the time axis and can not indicate the beginning, continuation or the end of the action. That is why the phrase *"?Don't observe!"* sounds rather funny. While the construction "Observe it!" sounds quite normative because it doesn't contradict to the abstract notion of the verb. But that doesn't mean that *observe* can't express concrete actions. If X **wants** to get professional information about Y it is possible to say *"I observed the car moving – I was interested in the way the engine worked"*.

As a semantic type of the predicate *observe* is an action because its semantic role is Actor which means Control of the application of force at the beginning of the predicate. But *observe* has restrictions in imperative constructions in the following linguistic context: *?Observe that they have been present. ?Observe a thousand little details!* It happens so because the semantic type of the predicate in these cases is of a very complicated structure: it is not only an action but also a resultative process and the semantic role of X is of double nature. First of all it is Agent which means that there is no component of Control at the initial stage of the predicate. In this case *observe* informs about the appearance of Y's image in X's eyes and the verb is of the same character as the verb *see* and its synonyms. At the same time *observe* in this variant preserves its primary meaning as the verb which carries analytical information but it is the next stage of the vision process.

The question arises whether this difference in the meaning is contextual or it is a separate variant of the meaning. The change in the meaning in this case is not connected with the change of the purpose of utterance but it is a development of the primary meaning, the appearance of the double semantic role of X. In the sentence *A scar was clearly visible on the neck, which Wainwright's trained eye had* <u>*observed*</u> *each time he and Vichad met. A. Haily* the verb has an accented meaning of "seeing" with its semantic role in which the application of force is not controlled by X at the moment of the appearance of Y's image.

Due to the fact that there is no stage of **onset** in the semantic structure of this meaning there can not be any semantics of purpose in initiating the process of observing.

As for the verbs of group *see (notice, spot, discern)* the meaning of some verbs may change under the influence of the pragmatic aspect of the utterance. These verbs in their primary meaning inform about the appearance of Y's image in X's eyes under different circumstances. These circumstances are the source of the lexical difference between these verbs. All of these verbs have restrictions for the use in imperative constructions, either positive or negative because X doesn't control the work of organs of vision. The denotate of the predicate of these verbs can not be divided into parts on the time axis. Its concept is a point without initial, middle and final stages: "*See him in the street!", "*Don't see him in the street!", "*I discontinued to see him", "*I finished seeing him" . The question arises whether there is an onset in these predicates and whether semantics of purpose can be correlated with these verbs.

In fiction one can come across examples with the verb *see* in imperative constructions: "See the beauty of the light and the shade". A. Haily.; "Go and see if there is anybody at the door." C. Cookson, "See if he is busy"; in combination with modal verbs of obligation: "I must see your pies" F. Knebel. The absence of restrictions with the verb *see* in these constructions is connected not with controlling over the process of creation Y's image but with the application of force of some other character than vision. The onset of the verb *see* includes the conditions which presume not only the vision itself but those which precede or accompany this vision. These other conditions may be perceived or not in the process of the nomination – it depends on the pragmatic aspect. Thus in case the onset with other than vision conditions is perceived it is possible to use the verb *see* in imperative constructions. In the example *Go and see if there is anybody at the door " go"* names the conditions of the possibility for Y's image to appear. In the example *See the beauty of the light and the shade* the onset includes such conditions as application of mental capacity in perceiving intellectual and esthetic aspects of the scene which overcomes the restriction for the imperative construction with *see.*

The use of the grammatical form with the verb *see* depends not on the lexical meaning of this verb but on what aspects of the situation are perceived in the pragmatic perspective. When there are no obstacles for the image to appear *see* has the meaning of **Spontaneous result** and can not be used in Progressive forms because semantics of Result can not be correlated with the development of the predicate on the time axis, it is always abstracted from the time axis. But if the pragmatic perspective is changed and coda of the verb *see* is perceived as well the verb besides the semantics of Result may express the idea of development: *I'm seeing it more clearly now. I will not tell what I see, for what I am seeing may not concern you. Imagine: at last I'm seeing Mona Lisa!.* In all these examples the use of Progressive forms is connected not with the semantics of Result but with the development of the period of time during which there happen acts of image's appearance. This period of time may have its initial, middle and final stages: …*he began to see the shapes of the things more clearly, She continued to see him in the crowd despite the increasing distance between the ship and the shore.*

Thus one can say that the restrictions of the use of grammatical forms connected with the meaning of verbs can be overcome due to the pragmatic perspective when there happen such changes in the semantic structure of the verb as the change in the

semantic role, perceiving different stages of the predicate, correlation of the predicate with the time axis.   The Speaker's (X's) intention may be the source of the meaning variety only if the semantic structure of the verb has this semantic potential. The analysis of contextual meanings of the verbs showed that *purpose* is the sphere of pragmatics. It may be   presented on the stage of *"onset"* in each variant of the meaning either in the accented variant (absence of restrictions in imperative constructions and in combination with words of volition)   or being potential (possibility of perception other aspects of the situation which transfer the verb into some other semantic type). In this case one can observe changes in the meaning which are closely connected with the semantic role of the subject and its prototype semantic components such as *force, type of force, controlled/uncontrolled application of force,* correlation with the time axis..

The analysis of the factual material shows the interface of semantics (semantic premises and its semantic axes potential) and pragmatics (contextual meanings) which gives us every reason to speak about the dynamic semantics as a scientific paradigm in the interpretation of word meanings.

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