Classifying Situations

• There are three dimensions along which you can classify situations: situation type, tense, aspect.

Situation type

• The type of situation that a sentence describes is encoded in the meaning of the main predicate in the sentence.

• The main intuitive distinction is that between static and dynamic situations.

(1) John drank a glass of water.

(2) John is sick.
Verbs and situation types

1. Stative verbs:

(3) John knows the answer.

(4) John loves Mary.

(5) Mary has a good job.

Definition of a stative verb: A stative verb is a verb that describes a state with no internal changes or phases. In particular, a sentence with a stative verb does not say anything about the beginning or the end of the state.

(6) Mary had a good car.

(7) Mary bought a good car.
First look at the properties of statives:

(i) incompatibility with the progressive:

(8) Mary was buying a good car.

(9) #Mary was having a good car.

(ii) incompatibility with the imperative form:

(10) Buy a good car!

(11) #Have a good car!

Sometimes, a stative verb allows the progressive in some sentences, but not in others:

(12) Mary has a sister in Boston.

(13) #Mary is having a sister in Boston.

(14) Mary is having a baby.
2. Eventive verbs

(a) **Activities: Unbounded events**

(15) John ran.

(16) John ran for two hours.

(b) **Accomplishments: Bounded events**

(17) John walked to school.

(18) #John drew a circle for two hours.

(c) **Achievements: Point events**

(19) John reached the top.

(20) #John reached the top for two hours.
• Contraries to statives, eventive predicates take the progressive.

(21) John is running.

(22) John is eating an apple.

(23) (?)John is reaching the top.

• Contrary to statives, when eventive predicates are put in the past, the sentence asserts that a particular event reached its end:

(24) ?Yesterday, John ran for two hours but he hasn’t stopped yet.

(25) #Yesterday, John drew a circle and he’s still drawing it.

(26) #Yesterday, John reached the top and he hasn’t reached it yet.
Differences among eventive predicates

(a) Activities take for NP adverbials, accomplishments and achievements don’t.

(27) John walked for two hours.
(28) #John ran a mile for two hours.
(29) #John won the race for two hours.

(b) Accomplishments and achievements take in NP adverbials, activities don’t.

(30) #John walked in ten minutes.
(31) John ran a mile in ten minutes.
(32) John won the race in ten minutes.
Vendler’s classification (Vendler 1967)

1. States
   desire, want, love, etc.

2. Activities (unbounded events)
   run, walk, drive a car, etc.

3. Accomplishments (bounded events)
   run a mile, draw a circle, walk to school, etc.

4. Achievements (point events)
   reach the top, win the race, start, find, etc.
Smith's classification (Smith 1991)

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<thead>
<tr>
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<th>Durative</th>
<th>Telic</th>
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<td>semelfactive</td>
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**Semelfactive**: instantaneous atelic events, e.g. **knock**, **cough** (while achievements are instantaneous telic events).