

UDC 81'42

## Teaching students to analyze the sense-making function of the semantic types of full verbs in the German language (as exemplified by German short stories)

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### Abstract

The article deals with teaching students to analyse the sense-making function of full verbs of different semantic types in the process of interpretation of a literary text using the German short story as an example. In the course of conducting the research, the author of the article divided full verbs into seven semantic types (action verbs, activities, process verbs, state verbs, internal actions, events, natural phenomena). Having analyzed this information, the author has come to conclusions regarding the functional and semantic roles of each type of full verbs and the inverse proportionality of the sense-making function of verbs of certain semantic types to their number.

The results of the research that has been carried out extend our knowledge of the possibilities of interpretation of the linguistic expression of the semantic structure of a fictional text. The author of the article points out that all semantic types of full verbs represent a macro-event as the main semantic event of a text: they bring various additional shades of meaning to the surface, describing individual characters, characterizing relationships between them and the whole situation, as well as performing the sense-making function.

**For citation**

Lapchinskaya T.N. (2015) Teaching students to analyze the sense-making function of the semantic types of full verbs in the German language (as exemplified by German short stories). *Pedagogicheskii zhurnal* [Pedagogical Journal], 6, pp. 225-239.

**Keywords**

German short story, full verb, semantic type of a verb, quantitative analysis, chain of events, "macro-event", sense-making function, interpretation.

## Introduction

The German short story (Kurzgeschichte) is known as a genre of German literature since the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Its interpretation is traditionally based on genre features and content analysis from the point of view of the reflection of reality, and the linguistic component is insignificant. Russian scholars have not studied it yet, although we are familiar with some of the works in the field of literary criticism and foreign literature [Akasheva, Rakhimova, 2014; Zhukova, 2009]. There are some distinctive features of the German short story – laconism, unambiguousness, double-meaning and encode message – that are underlined by many researchers [Brückner, 2000, 28; Meyer, 2002, 130; Doderer, 2004, 57; Bender, 2004, 80-82; Motekat, 2004, 71; Bellmann, 2004, 9]. All the specific features of the text of the short story are reflected in the language, which is of interest for the proper linguistic research. One of the main semantic peculiarities of the short story is the high degree of connotations of certain words and phrases, the meaning of which is revealed in a holistic context. The study of linguistic characteristics of the German short story in the works of German linguists and their opinions that each word in the text of the German short story is "sealed and loaded with value" [Durzak, 2004, 138] enabled us to assume that the disclosure of the key semantic event in the German short story is possible through the analysis of the lexical structure of a text, specifically through analyzing full verbs.

It should be noted that the verb with its extensive semantic and contextual meanings and a vivid text-forming potential is of great interest for linguists who want to carry

out research on its text-forming function [Grishaeva, 2006, 248-249; Pankina, 2004]. Here is an authoritative opinion of von Humboldt, who, appreciating the specific function of the verb, says that there is a difference between the verb and the rest of the words of a simple sentence. This difference excludes the same category for verbs, and all other words in a sentence are similar to the material which is waiting to be connected. The verb is the only link that contains and distributes life in itself [Humboldt, 2000, 199].

The aim of this article is to study the sense-making function of full verbs in the text of the German short story. To do this, it is necessary to trace the quantitative distribution of full verbs of various semantic types in single texts and project the results on their meaning, i.e. a key semantic event of a text.

### **Semantic types of full verbs in the German language**

To identify the semantic types of full verbs, we turned to four authoritative normative grammars of the German language in which the semantic classification of German verbs is more complete (W.Flämig, O.I. Moskalskaya, E.I. Shendels, G.Heibig, and J.Buscha).

W.Flämig classifies the verbs according to their semantic features and indicates the following groups of full verbs: Tätigkeitsverben – the verbs involve an active doer of an action (man arbeitet, wandert, turnt, tanzt, tobt, läuft, springt); Handlungsverben – the verbs denote actions aimed at an object (man baut Häuser, fängt Fische, erntet Obst); Ereignisverben (ES regnet, schneit, donnert; es zischt, knallt, pocht, raschelt); Vorgangsverben – the verbs express "a change in the state of things and beings" (wachsen, einschlafen, erwachen), while Zustandsverben represent their stable position (sein, bleiben, liegen) [Flämig, 1970, 839].

O.I. Moskalskaya, E.I. Shendels, referring to the well-known classification of G.Brinkmann, formulated five groups of full verbs: Tätigkeitsverben (Handlungsverben) – transitive verbs that denote active action "aimed at the outside world" (malen, beobachten); Vorgangsverben – verbs of process or changing state (wachsen, steigen); Zustandsverben – state verbs indicate a steady state of people and objects (blühen, schlafen, wohnen); Geschehensverben – verbs of event which represent "life as an event" and they may not be applied to individuals (geschehen, gelingen,

vorfallen); Witterungsverben – verbs of natural phenomena that are the most limited group and "do not allow the noun as a subject" (Es regnet, blitzt, donnert, dämmert, stürmt) [Moskal'skaya, 1988, 62; Shendel's, 1988, 16].

G.Helbig and J.Buscha offer the following verbal semantic subclasses: Tätigkeitsverben express that the doer actively performs an action (arbeiten, aufschreiben, sich bemächtigen, bewegen, essen, helfen, gehen, kämpfen, lesen, öffnen, singen); Vorgangsverben indicate the change and process that the subject suffers from and which changes the subject in its condition or quality (erfrieren, erkranken, ermüden, erwachen, einschlafen, fallen, hinfallen, verfaulen); Zustandsverben express the permanent state and presence (sich befinden, liegen, sein, stehen, umgeben, wohnen). They also distinguish Ereignisverben (verbs of event: ES regnet, schneit, zieht, kracht) and specific semantic types of verbs of internal action: Verben des Wahrnehmens (verbs of perception: sehen, hören, empfinden), des Wissens (verbs of mental activity: wissen, verstehen, glauben), allgemeiner Relationen (verbs of internal attitude: lieben, hassen) [Helbig, Buscha, 1988, 69-71].

Semantic classifications of full verbs presented in the grammar books include the following set of 7 semantic types (names of the authors indicating them are given within brackets): 1) action verbs: transitive verbs indicating the actions aimed at an object (W.Flämig, O.I. Moskalskaya, E.I. Shendels); 2) verbs of internal action: verbs of perception, mental activity, internal attitude (G.Helbig, J.Buscha); 3) verbs of activity: verbs involve an active doer of an action (W.Flämig); 4) verbs of process: verbs that express change in the state of people and objects (W.Flämig, G.Helbig, J.Buscha, E.I. Shendels, and O.I. Moskalskaya); 5) state verbs: verbs indicating a steady state of people and objects (W.Flämig, G.Helbig, J.Buscha, E.I. Shendels, and O.I. Moskalskaya); 6) verbs of event: their forms are limited by the third party (W.Flämig, G.Helbig, J.Buscha, O.I. Moskalskaya, and E.I. Shendels); 7) verbs of natural phenomena (O.I. Moskalskaya, E.I. Shendels).

### **An analysis of the sense-making function of full verbs in short stories**

The data of the study was 7 German short stories written by 6 authors from 1959 to 2004 [Bichsel, 1997; Böll, 1973; Blumenberg, 1995; Grass, 1994; Kaschnitz, 2001; Stamm, Der Besuch, 2004; Stamm, Am Eisweiher, 2004].

A quantitative analysis of full verbs was carried out according to their semantic types in each single text (we illustrate it by the example of the short story *Die Tochter* by P.Bichsel):

– first, we identified all full verbs in all lexical and grammatical forms:

warteten, arbeitete, arbeitete, aßen, gegessen, warteten, warteten, gewachsen, hatte, sagte, warteten, hatte, brachte, wusste, sang, hatte, holte, sah, bestaunte, sagte, sich bedankte, blieb, aß, sagte, raucht, fragten, getan, wusste, sagen, sich vorzustellen, aufschlägt, vorweist, geht, sich unterhält, erwidert, stellten sich vor, heimkommt, sich setzt, essen, nehmen, wussten, essen, lesen, stand, sagte, hat, erinnerst dich, singen, rauchen, sagte, sagte, gesagt, geheiratet, sagte, heiraten, dachte, wohnen, gebeten, sag, wiederholt, sag, wusste, sagen, stenografieren, dachte, sagten, stellte, gehört, sagte;

– then they were calculated and grouped into 7 semantic types:

I. Action verbs (13):

aßen, gegessen, brachte, holte, aß, getan, aufschlägt, vorweist, nehmen, essen, essen, lesen, stellte.

II. Verbs of internal action (10) including:

1) verbs of mental activity (7): wusste, sich vorzustellen, stellten sich vor, wussten, erinnerst dich, dachte, dachte;

2) verbs of perception (3): sah, bestaunte, gehört;

3) verbs of internal attitude (0).

III. Verbs of activity (32) among which there are verbs of speech (20):

arbeitete, arbeitete, sang, raucht, geht, heimkommt, sich setzt, singen, rauchen, geheiratet, heiraten, stenografieren; глаголы речевой деятельности: sagte, sagte, sich bedankte, sagte, fragten, sagen, sich unterhält, erwidert, sagte, sagte, sagte, gesagt, sagte, gebeten, sag, wiederholt, sag, sagen, sagten, sagte.

IV. Verbs of process (1): gewachsen.

V. State verbs (11): warteten, warteten, warteten, hatte, warteten, hatte, hatte, blieb, stand, hat, wohnen.

VI. Verbs of event (0).

VII. Verbs of natural phenomena (0).

Table 1 shows the results of the quantitative analysis of full verbs selected from 7 short stories.

**Table 1. Distribution of full verbs according to semantic types**

Title of a short story	Verbs of action	Verbs of internal action				Verbs of activity / Verbs of speech	Verbs of process	State verbs	Verbs of event	Verbs of natural phenomena	Total
		Perception	Mental activity	Internal attitude	Total						
1. <i>Gespenster</i> M.L. Kaschnitz	60	42	45	3	90	128/51	17	68	5	1	369
2. <i>Monolog eines Kellners</i> H.Böll	45	6	20	0	26	41 / 22	4	8	5	0	129
3. <i>Die Tochter</i> P.Bichsel	13	3	7	0	10	32 / 20	1	11	0	0	67
4. <i>Am Eisweiher</i> P.Stamm	19	19	9	3	31	115 / 27	4	25	4	1	199
5. <i>Im Tunnel</i> G.Grass	18	2	13	1	16	16 / 5	4	15	1	1	71
6. <i>Gespräch</i> B.Blumenberg	9	0	0	0	0	8 / 0	0	8	0	2	27
7. <i>Der Besuch</i> P.Stamm	58	16	18	0	34	119/32	9	45	6	1	272
Total in figures	222	88	112	7	207	459 / 157	39	180	21	6	1134
– percentage	20%	8%	10%	1%	19%	40% / 13%	3%	15%	2%	1%	100%

The total number of full verbs in 7 German short stories was 1134 units. Quantitative analysis showed that the most numerous group consists of verbs of activity (459 – 40%), of which verbs of speech (257 – 13%); followed by (in descending order): action verbs (222 – 20%); verbs of internal action (207 – 19%) including verbs of mental activity (112 – 10%), verbs of perception (88 – 8%), verbs of internal attitude (7 – 1%); state verbs (180 – 15%); verbs of process (39 – 3%); verbs of event (21 – 2%); verbs of natural phenomena (6 – 1%).

To identify the sense-making function of full verbs belonging to a certain semantic type, we have projected the results of quantitative analysis on the key semantic event of a text. We call it a "macro event" which considering the characteristics of the semantic structure of the German short story can be related to the author's intention. Determination of a macro event stipulates a chain of text events and an axial event which involves all the elements and structures of the chain and summarizes it. We should specify that building a chain of event involves a) dividing the text into sections, which are interconnected within the meaning (the beginning of each subsequent segment is related to the change of scene, the beginning of a new time period,

the emergence of new characters, the change of the action); b) consistent presentation of their titles in the form of event chains. Now we turn to each semantic type of full verbs.

**Action verbs** are the second largest semantic type and represent transitive verbs i.e. verbs with objects. But in some texts, as quantitative analysis shows, this type is the most numerous group (*Monolog eines Kellners* by H.Böll, *Im Tunnel* by G.Grass, *Gespräch* by B.Blumenberg). In the short story *Monolog eines Kellners*, the tangible world of the protagonist (the waiter) is connected with his work. His success depends largely on the items, so he goes into detail why it is so important to him not to spill, not to break, and so on. The object of the majority of these verbs is expensive dishes, it is a hint that the action takes place in a restaurant of a luxury hotel. Through a variety of actions with different objects the waiter makes a naive but very brave thing – he drills out a hole for the game in the parquet floor of a hotel room. It is easy to relate his actions to the macro event of the text "Christmas Eve": a festive mood and the desire to make a holiday for the boy provoked the waiter to reckless act.

Tired of being alone, the character of the short story *Gespräch* offers a series of different items (cigarettes, drinks, etc.) to her visitor who dropped in for a couple of minutes. In such a way she tries to "prolong" his presence that directly leads to the macro event "Loneliness in a city".

The action verb "lessen" has the largest number of repetitions in *Im Tunnel*. It displays the action of the protagonist throughout the journey and leads to the macro event of the text "Es klemmt": the man sitting next to the lady wants to talk to her but cannot because he is very jammed and self-assured.

The action verb "essen" in the short story *Die Tochter* by P.Bichsel stresses that dinner is the only joint action of parents with their daughter in a uniform and static world. In the last sentence of the text, the author says that the mother, having heard a train, serves coffee, i.e. the object which gives a right to communicate with her daughter. It takes a symbolic meaning in this context.

A large number of action verbs illustrates the richness of symbolic meanings of words denoting objects of action, often in the form of an object. The sense-making function of action verbs is often manifested in the metaphorical meaning of the objects in the context of a single short story.

**Verbs of internal action** are frequent enough and reflect genre features: 1) the characters are portrayed indirectly through their thoughts and feelings; line of thinking, mood and emotions of the main characters are more important than external processes; 2) it is typical for a short story to synchronize an image through flashbacks, inner monologues, an opportunity to see different planes of reality at the same time. A large number of verbs of internal action, and sometimes their clear dominance over the action verbs in a single text conveys a meaning, emphasizing the intense inner life which is invisible (*Gespenster* by M.L. Kaschnitz, *Monolog eines Kellners* by H.Böll, *Im Tunnel* by G.Grass). It is obvious in the short story *Gespenster*: invisible life is "raging" throughout the story, invisible passion is seething. The protagonist Anton, who causes a storm of emotions and feelings of a young girl, does not know and will never know the consequences of his gentle dalliance with her.

Everything that the character of the short story *Im Tunnel* cannot put into words is accumulated and it culminates when he indulges in fantasies.

The above genre features are reflected primarily in verbs of mental activity which are present in every text. Very few verbs of internal attitude also lead to the genre features: feelings and attitudes of the characters in the German short story are revealed not directly but through their actions and author's hints.

As a rule, verbs of perception have a sense-making function and they are associated with macro events because an initial situation is related to an unexpected meeting, something that is seen, heard or felt for the first time. There is a striking example in the short story *Gespenster*: in most cases the verbs of perception are presented by the verbs "sehen" and "schauen". They directly lead to the macro event of the text "Means of establishing a contact" because the reason of the happening events is Anton's glance at Vivienne in a neighboring car while traffic jam on a mountain road. In such a way he wanted once again test the effect of his "spell" on beautiful girls. Therefore, verbs "sehen" and "schauen" as well as verbs "ansehen" and "anschauen" are active in the text, i.e. look at someone targeted.

**Verbs of activity** are the most numerous type. This is easily explained in terms of genre features of the short story, as people who perform various actions are always in the center of the story. To some extent, this is due to the large number of verbs of speech, which is associated with the peculiarities of the composition: the characters



are portrayed indirectly, through words and dialogues. Thus, the dialogues in the short story *Monolog eines Kellners* by H.Böll have an obvious sense-making function: the boy and the waiter having the dialogue on Christmas Eve were doomed to loneliness from the beginning. Becoming Christmas presents for one another, they spend the whole evening talking.

A large number of verbs of speech in the short story *Die Tochter* by P.Bichsel leads to the macro event "Waiting for the daughter": waiting for the daughter, parents keep talking about her.

Few or absence of verbs of speech in a single text also has meaning. For example, in the short story *Im Tunnel* it emphasizes a frustrated communication. There are few verbs of this type in the story. The protagonist yearns to meet an attractive elegant lady in a train compartment but he does not know what to say and he cannot maintain a conversation even at the moment when she speaks to him.

The short story *Gespräch* by B.Blumenberg is a dialogue of a single woman in a form of a monologue. Despite the fact that the title means "conversation", there are no verbs of speech and it represents its macro event "Loneliness in a city".

**Verbs of process** are much less likely in short stories and that attracts attention to their sense-making function. The verb "gewachsen", as the only verb of process in the short story *Die Tochter* by P.Bichsel, suggests that the only significant change in the family in recent years is the fact that the daughter has grown, but it is almost completely estranged her from the parents.

The recurrent verb of process "blieb stehen" represents the initial situation – meeting in a traffic jam in the story *Gespenster* by M.L. Kaschnitz.

Verbs of process reflect the changes in the lives of the characters which leads to genre features (*Gespenster* by M.L. Kaschnitz, *Monolog eines Kellners* by H.Böll, *Am Eisweiher* by P.Stamm).

**State verbs** are a bit less than the verbs of internal action. Quite numerous state verbs in the short story *Die Tochter* by P.Bichsel reflect monotonous state of the parents when they wait for their adult daughter to return home from work. Verbal noun "Warten" describes the macro event of the text – "Waiting for the daughter".

State verbs are forming quite a large group in the short story *Gespenster* by M.L. Kaschnitz. They also indicate the initial deeply veiled situation – a long, mo-

notonous state of the protagonists in the traffic jam on the highway. The state verb "sein" repeating more than ten times, has a global sense and reflects the presence in the being and the absence of Vivienne and her brother in the present.

In a single story state verbs reflect statics, lack of dynamics in the daily monotony, parochialism of characters' lives, emergency stop and thereby they carry a meaning through high quantitative characteristics.

**Verbs of event** are very few because of their sense-making function. They reflect genre, if they indicate a crucial episode or emergency signs. Verbs of event, especially verbs "passieren", "geschehen", indicate the fatal episodes, emergency and thereby perform sense-making function. In the short story *Monolog eines Kellners*, the author specifies what has happened: "Aber es ist passiert, und so hat mir der Heilige Abend die Kündigung beschert". This is a hint that the meaning of the story is a tradition to exchange gifts on Christmas Eve (Weihnachtsbescherung): the boy and the waiter become a kind of Christmas gifts for one another, since both of them had to spend the evening alone. To spend time in the bar, the boy's mother leaves the child alone, so she gets a Christmas gift on the merits.

Verbs of event are marginally personal and represent not a single action of a character but something important for the whole text. Thus, they often express its macro events.

The verb of event "Es klemmt" in the short story *Im Tunnel* by G.Grass is a macro event of the text. It is used by the author to describe the tightly sealed windows and it symbolises the inner state of the character, his inner stiffness, inability to look at life optimistically, with uncomplaining resignation of circumstances and hidden melancholy of everyday life.

The verb of event "Alles geht so schnell vorbei" depicts the macro event of the short story *Der Besuch* by P.Stamm.

There are no verbs of event in the short story *Die Tochter* by P.Bichsel and that illustrates the daily, monotony, lack of pleasing events.

**Verbs of natural phenomena** are very rare, thus their meaning is increasing. The only verb of natural phenomena "regnen" in the short story *Gespenster* by M.L. Kaschnitz plays a role of the macro event "Anknüpfungsmittel" ("Means to establish a contact"): the rain and the joint journey by taxi allow the main character Vivienne to invite the man she liked to her house.

The verb "scheinen" in short stories *Am Eisweiher* and *Im Tunnel* reveals additional shades of meaning: in the first case, the bright light of the moon does not allow the protagonists to hide the unseemly act, events take an unexpected turn, which is manifested in the macro event "In eine andere Richtung". In the second case, a conversation about the weather could be a life-saving straw for the main character who wants to meet the lady in the compartment but he cannot maintain conversation even when the lady starts speaking to him.

The macro event of the short story *Der Besuch* by P.Stamm "Everything goes so fast" is revealed through the fallen on Christmas but quickly melted snow, which pleases the heroine.

As a rule, verbs of natural phenomena acquire a symbolic meaning in a particular context: rain symbolizes tears, sadness, loss (*Gespenster* by M.L. Kaschnitz, *Gespräch* by B.Blumenberg); snow symbolizes fast variability of life (*Der Besuch* by P.Stamm); sun symbolizes rosy dreams (*Gespräch* by B.Blumenberg).

Lack of verbs of natural phenomena may indicate the limited space (*Monolog eines Kellners* by H.Böll, *Die Tochter* by P.Bichsel).

## Conclusion

Finally we came to the following conclusions:

- 1) each semantic type of full verbs has its function and meaning;
- 2) the text of the German short story is full of action verbs, and verbs of external action; verbs of event and natural phenomena are relatively rare;
- 3) the sense-making function of verbs of a certain semantic type is inversely proportional to their number;
- 4) full verbs of all types, regardless of the number, represent the content and compositional features of the German short story;
- 5) the meaning of verbs of different semantic types can be traced through quantitative indicators only in single texts;
- 6) all semantic types of full verbs represent macro events as the main meaningful events of a text: they reveal additional shades of meaning that describe the characters, their relationships and the situation in general and they also have a sense-making function.

As teaching recommendations arising from this study, we propose to pay attention to the following points in the analysis of full verbs' sense-making function in a literary text: an analysis of zero indicators (absence of verbs of certain semantic types in the text); an analysis of the symbolic function of individual verbs related to the semantic types with very low indices (as a rule, these are verbs of process, event, and natural phenomena); the ratio of action verbs and internal action verbs; identification and an analysis of the proportion of verbs of speech activity in the total number of active verbs; the possibility to establish the "statics" degree of the described events by quantitative index of state verbs.

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**Обучение анализу смыслообразующей  
функции семантических типов полнозначных  
глаголов в немецком языке (на примере  
немецкого короткого рассказа)**

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**Аннотация**

В статье обосновываются принципы обучения анализа смыслообразующей функции полнозначных глаголов в процессе изучения немецкого языка. Методическая целесообразность приводит автора к количественному распределению полнозначных глаголов по семи семантическим типам (глаголы действия, деятельности, процесса, состояния, внутреннего действия, события, природных явлений) в отдельно взятых текстах. В результате исследования были сделаны выводы о том, что каждый семантический тип полнозначных глаголов имеет свою функциональную и смысловую нагрузку, а смыслообразующая функция глаголов определённых семантических типов обратно пропорциональна их количеству. Результаты исследования расширяют знания о возможностях интерпретации языкового выражения смысловой структуры иноязычного художественного текста.

**Для цитирования в научных исследованиях**

Лапчинская Т.Н. Обучение анализу смыслообразующей функции семантических типов полнозначных глаголов в немецком языке (на примере немецкого короткого рассказа) // Педагогический журнал. 2015. № 6. С. 225-239.

**Ключевые слова**

Немецкий короткий рассказ, полнозначный глагол, семантический тип глагола, количественный анализ, событийная цепочка, «макрособытие», смыслообразующая функция, интерпретация.