

Types of Perception in the Constructions with Simple and Continuous Infinitives after Predicates of Seemingness

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Abstract. Since the shift from the structural to the anthropocentric paradigm in linguistics, more attention has been paid by linguists to a subjective aspect of the language, to how a person can understand and interpret the reality. Grammar and syntax appear to be the most underdeveloped in cognitive linguistics. In language, grammatical constructions do not exist independently or isolated from the speaker, though. The speaker uses these constructions in order to most completely and adequately describe the surrounding reality. This article makes an attempt to look into the constructions with simple and continuous infinitives after the predicates of seemingness ('seem' and 'appear') from the point of view of an observer and with regard to a type of perception (full or partial). In course of analyzing the texts from the British National Corpus, a conclusion was made that, for the most part, the continuous infinitive can be used after the predicate 'seem' and its synonym 'appear'. Based on the analysis of word definitions and the categories of seemingness and perception, the predicates of seemingness are recognized as the type of predicates of perception. So, there can be some relation between the predicates of seemingness and different types of perception – full (connected with thinking to a lesser extent) and partial (connected with thinking to a greater extent). An infinitive construction after predicates 'seem' and 'appear' can be developed into a subordinate clause, hence there is some evidence that the continuous infinitive's semantics can coordinate conventionally with the semantics of the finite verb's continuous aspect form, while, correspondingly, the simple infinitive's semantics – with the semantics of the simple aspect form. The finite verb's continuous and simple aspect forms can be used by the speaker in different situations of perception, which evidently results in choosing a construction either with a simple or continuous infinitive after predicates 'seem' and 'appear'.

Keywords: Simple infinitive, Continuous infinitive, Predicates of seemingness, Perception, Observer.

1 Introduction

Due to the shift from the structural to the anthropocentric paradigm in linguistics, more and more attention has been paid by scientists and linguists to a subjective aspect of the language. Correspondingly, it is of a greater interest to study grammatical constructions through the prism of the speaker's consciousness rather than grammatical constructions intrinsically, given that the speaker is at the same time the observer of both their own inner world and the reality around them.

Thus, the objective of this research is to look into the constructions with simple and continuous infinitives in English which can follow predicates of seemingness and be related to perception directly or indirectly (i.e. through the speakers cognizance). With this objective in mind, an attempt is made to identify and analyze these constructions within the framework of the cognitive linguistic theories which allow a broader view of such constructions not as sentence units, but rather in the context of cognizance and perception of the speaker. The constructions with continuous infinitive are considered and compared to those with simple infinitive.

2 Literature Review

The way the speaker can perceive and make sense of the world will certainly result in further categorization and verbalization of this process with the help of language means. As Kravtchenko argues, if we consider the speaker's role as a certain function, it can be evidently justified by the observer, as cognitive interactions and certainly representations of these interactions cannot exist without a process of onlooking. Therefore, the primary factor of or the key to understanding how language is organized should only be sought in the observer and the descriptions of interactions which are operated by the observer by means of language [1]. On the one hand, many dissertations and monographs have been published in the last decade [2, 3, 4] which study aspect and tense forms from the observer's point of view. On the other hand, there are still theoretical and practical grammar books and guides which comment on the usage of grammatical constructions, various verboid constructions in particular, based only on a situation without any observer. For example, simple and continuous infinitives are described as "non-perfect (simple) forms" which "express simultaneity or future with regard to the predicate or verb" [5, p. 193]. In this case, it might be concluded that an event verbalized by a notional verb is simultaneous with an event verbalized by an infinitive construction, though the event verbalized by the infinitive construction will occur later than the event verbalized by the notional verb. It should also be noted, the constructions with continuous infinitives are hardly ever mentioned in quite a number of grammar books [6], or, if they are, they are considered from the perspective of the structural paradigm and structural approach to language [7, 8].

3 Materials and Methods

In this article, we are trying to describe continuous infinitive constructions from the observer's perspective and taking into consideration the observer's perception of the real world [9, 10].

With this objective in mind, we used the British National Corpus of texts in this research to retrieve the constructions with simple and continuous infinitives and compare their usage after predicates of seemingness. The analysis of the fictional texts and publicistic writing of late 19th to early 21st century revealed that the predicates of seemingness (*seem*, *appear*) tend to use continuous infinitive, while simple infinitive can practically go with all lexical-semantic groups of predicates including the predicates of seemingness. According to the British National Corpus statistics, both continuous infinitive and simple infinitive are used with the predicate *seem* in 7688 / 2030 examples and with its synonym *appear* in 1750 / 827 examples, while other verbs, for example *want*, *claim* and others, number about 1000 examples with continuous infinitive and more than 1500 – with simple infinitive [8]. We can conclude from the data that the constructions with continuous infinitive and predicates *seem* and *appear* are prototypical constructions, i.e. they possess a certain set of features to make the speaker choose these constructions out of many others in order to categorize the real world situations [11].

We believe the observer and their attitude to the reality under observation to be the feature which differentiates between continuous infinitive and simple infinitive, since predicates *seem* and *appear* are classified as the means verbalizing the notion of seemingness [12] which, correspondingly, should have in their semantics all the features appropriate of the phenomenon. Arutiunova pointed out three indicators of a cognitive basis of seemingness: 1) ability to be two-dimensional or combine the real and seeming worlds, 2) presence of the observer or self-observation, 3) (sense) perception of the situation by the observer [2]. From these indicators we can conclude that predicates of seemingness represent a conceptual macrosphere of perception, though they refer to comprehension and interpretation, not to direct presentation of the reality. The overlap of perceptive and mental contents in statements of the mode of seemingness requires two types of features: observable features which are on the surface of the object and unobservable or intelligible features which reflect the impression formed in the agent's consciousness [13]. The following structure was worked out by Kolesov based on the semantics of the verbs *to seem* and *to appear* which also suggests the observer's presence: Y seems (appears) N (to X) where Y is an object of perception, N is a perceived situation, and X is an observer 'behind the scenes' who is implied in the predicate's semantics [14]. It appears from this that sentences with the predicates of seemingness should be conceptually associated with the predicates of both perception and presumption and, as a consequence, with the semantics of hesitation and uncertainty.

The statements with the verbs *to seem* and *to appear* signal that the speaker (being simultaneously the observer) forms an opinion relying on the response he has sensed. The verb *to seem* possesses a perceptive insight and consequently can convey all modes of perception including visual and auditory comprehension, tactile and taste sense, etc.,

while the verb *to appear* only expresses the idea of appearance as a perceptual event. Nevertheless, these verbs are very much alike semantically [13]. Thus, the constructions with predicates *seem* and *appear* can be studied with regards to the syntax of the constructions categorizing perceptual situations. We can assume that under the influence of the mode of seemingness there may be interrelatedness between infinitive's aspect forms, on the one hand, and aspect-and-tense forms used after the verbs of perception in a subordinate clause, on the other hand. Simple Tenses are not marked on grounds of 'observability' in English, hence are used by the observer (who is at the same time the speaker) to verbalize a perception connected with thinking to a larger extent – a full perception which lasts from beginning to end and encourages the observer to come to a definite conclusion about what is going on. Continuous Tenses marked by 'observability' can be used by the observer to verbalize a perception connected with thinking to a smaller extent – partial perception which did not last long or was complicated by some circumstances [15]. Based on this opposition between a finite verb aspect forms and operating the notions of 'observer', 'observation' and 'perception' we will analyze simple and continuous infinitive constructions in verboid structures with predicates *seem* and *appear* and try to explain the speaker's (observer's) line of thinking in the following examples of full and partial perception situations from pieces of fiction.

4 Discussion

Perception of the real world and its further interpretation is not always easy and might depend on different factors, time being one of them. To understand the situation appropriately and then digest the information received and sensed, the observer should be either a witness of the action from beginning to end or, if not the complete action but only part of it was observed, should have enough time to come to a correct conclusion. The duration of the space of time is to be determined by the observer because time is relative. In examples (1) and (2), it took the observers one hour to observe what was going on but the situations were verbalized with different forms of infinitive, for the observer had enough time for observation in one case, while in the other – had not. For each case and each observer, one and the same period of time can be either sufficient for full perception or miniscule. Thus, simple infinitive is used in the situations of complete perception when the speaker is confident of what he had seen and observed the situation from beginning to end. For continuous infinitive, on the contrary, there is a marked tendency to be used in the situations of partial perception when the speaker overlooked only a certain moment or part of action and, therefore, was not able to interpret the action completely and appropriately. In this analysis, we are not guided by the semantics of the words used in the constructions, because some words can be replaced by new words, which would not change the purport of the situation. It is the situation as a whole that we are trying to focus on and explore. If we try to point out the elements of the situation of perception which could influence the speaker's conscious choice of the forms of infinitive, we can infer the following.

In example (1), an obviously sustained and well-thought perception is verbalized with the help of simple infinitive:

(1) ***The drive from Narita airport took one hour, and Tanner was amazed by how Tokyo never seemed to change. In boom times and in depressions, the city always seemed to wear the same impassive face*** [16].

In this situation, the agent had enough time to digest what he had seen and draw the correct inference, which is evident from ‘*the drive from Narita airport took one hour*’, hence the constructions with simple infinitives *seemed to change* and *seemed to wear* are used.

The situation from the real world verbalized in example (2) is similar to the one in example (1), but the perception of this situation by the observer is not identical: in both cases the way from the airport to town took one hour, but in example (2), it is categorized in a different way – with the help of continuous infinitive. So, the speaker’s consciousness catches the difference between these two situations.

(2) ***The ride from the airport into the center of Kiev took the Intourist bus one hour, driving along the newly built highway. It was Robert’s first time in Kiev, and he was impressed by the ubiquitous construction along the highway, and the large apartment building that seemed to be springing up everywhere*** [16].

In example (1), the fact that the main character has been to Tokyo before (which is indicated by the adverb *always*) results in only an hour sufficient to draw the correct inference that it has not changed, and one can even suggest that it was his first visit to Tokyo that caused his perception of the city. In contrast, in example (2), the character has never been to Kiev (*It was Robert’s first time in Kiev*) and consequently, one hour was not a sufficient space of time to make sense of the reality well enough every minute there was something new and wonderful to see.

In the following excerpts (3) and (4) from ‘Dracula’ by Bram Stoker, the novel written in an epistolary format, the doctor narrated about the events from the observer’s point of view. Despite the fact that the narrator tried to interpret everything that went on quite exactly and appropriately, it turns out that the mode predicates of seemingness *seem* and *appear* were in most cases followed not by simple infinitives to categorize situations of full and well-thought perception, but by continuous infinitives to categorize situations in the least connected with thinking, which shows that the observer did not perceive the action fully and/or appropriately.

(3) ***Lucy has not walked much in her sleep the last week, but there is an odd concentration about her which I do not understand, even in her sleep she seems to be watching me. She tries the door, and finding it locked, goes about the room searching for the key*** [17].

In example (3), the finite verbs in the Present simple are used (*is, do not understand, tries, goes*) to illustrate the doctor’s full and cognitive perception of the events and enable him to take responsibility for his interpretation of what he has seen. On the other hand, the doctor uses the continuous infinitive *to be watching* to describe *Lucy in her sleep*. As *sleep* as a noun means a natural state in which you are unconscious for a time and implies that the sleeping person’s eyes should be closed, Lucy cannot watch the doctor (*she seems to be watching me*). The implied meaning of *watching* is that Lucy’s

eyes are open at the moment, so hypothetically, she can watch the doctor. But he hesitates to affirm that Lucy really sees and watches him, and the continuous infinitive used in this case might be interpreted as indication of the doctor's failure to give an account of events.

In example (4), a similar situation of a sleepy state can be observed with the difference that Lucy was sleeping in example (3) but was *in a half dreamy state* in example (4). The observer categorizes the situations identically – with the help of the continuous infinitive in both cases, though using *appear* in example (4) – another predicate of seemingness, synonymous to *seem*:

(4) *I slewed round a little, so as to see Lucy well without seeming to stare at her, and saw that she was in a half dreamy state, with an odd look on her face that I could not quite make out, so I said nothing, but followed her eyes. She **appeared to be looking** over at our own seat, whereon was a dark figure seated alone* [17].

Another similar situation of sleepiness is described in example (5) from 'Are you afraid of the dark' by Sidney Sheldon, but it is categorized by the observer in a different way.

(5) *They both slept badly that night. Kelly **was lying** in bed, worrying. If my plan **fails**, we're both going to die. As she **was falling** asleep, she **seemed to see** Tanner Kingsley's face looking down on her. **He was grinning*** [16].

It is interesting to notice the shift in the observers of the event: firstly, it is the narrator at the beginning of the excerpt; secondly, it is Kelly after the sentence "*Kelly was lying in bed, worrying*", and then, the observer's part is taken over by the narrator again. Such a shift in the observers is reflected in the finite verb tense shift from the continuous aspect (*was lying*) to the indefinite aspect (*fails*) and the reverse (*was falling*). In the sentence where "*she seemed to see Tanner Kingsley's face looking down on her*", the simple infinitive *to see* is used, though, logically and obviously from the previous examples, another continuous infinitive could have been used instead. This is basically because the significance lies not in the fact that Kelly *was falling asleep*, but in the fact that the observer formed his opinion on the ground of his observation. This, in its turn, is confirmed by the use of the simple infinitive and, what is more, by the sentence "*He was grinning*" which gives the description of the object perceived.

5 Conclusion

In summary, it is reasonable to conclude that the quality of the observer's perception (full or partial) can play a key role when choosing between a simple and continuous infinitive to use after the predicates of seemingness *seem* and *appear* in a verboid construction for categorizing a certain situation observed. It can be deduced that if there are any factors to impede the way the observed situation is perceived (for example, a period of time, possibility or failure to grasp and decipher the occurrence, etc.) when the observer cannot draw an appropriate conclusion, the continuous infinitive is preferable in the verboid construction, whereas the simple infinitive seems more suitable if the process of perception is not complicated.

It is worth mentioning that the conclusions of the research can be valid only for English, because in other Germanic languages, neither finite verbs nor verboids possess an aspect continuous form.

Eventually, it would be interesting to research the constructions with simple and continuous infinitives used with other semantic groups of verbs (e.g. ‘want’, ‘see’ in the meaning of ‘perceive, understand’ and other predicates) which do not semantically appear to be connected with perception or cognizance but are likely to have relevance to them.

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