Imperfect Aspect in English and Indonesian Verbs

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Abstract: This paper explores the imperfect aspect in English and Indonesian Verbs. The aim is to compare and analyze the use of this aspect, which frequently appears in various English texts for junior and senior high school students in the current Indonesian curriculum. The result of this study shows that this aspect serves as the background of an activity and it requires morphological and lexical problems in English but lexical problem in Indonesian. In addition, this exploration is useful for building up the learning materials for such courses as lexical semantics and advanced grammar.

Key words: imperfect, aspect, verbs

Abstrak: Tulisan ini menyelidiki aspek imperfek kata kerja Bahasa Inggris dan Indonesia. Tujuannya membanding dan menganalisis penggunaan aspek ini, yang sering muncul dalam aneka ragam teks berbahasa Inggris untuk siswa SMP dan SMA di kurikulum Indonesia. Hasil kajian menunjukkan fungsi aspek sebagai latar belakang aktivtas dan membutuhkan pelibatan masalah morfologi dan leksikal dalam bahasa Inggris dan masalah leksikal dalam bahasa Indonesia. Selain itu, kajian ini bermanfaat untuk menyediakan materi pembelajaran perkuliahan semantik leksikal dan tata bahasa lanjut.

Kata kunci: imperfek, aspek, kata kerja

INTRODUCTION

The topic above came up when I was reading a scientific article by Gianto in Basis, no 7-8, year 63, pages 48-50, the title of which is *Waktu dalam Bahasa: Kala dan Aspek*. I am for Gianto's statement that every language expresses the same idea in different forms which are idiosyncratic.

In this paper I try to describe the features of the imperfect aspect in English and Indonesian verbs as this aspect often appears in English and Indonesian texts, especially in texts of long and short functions such as narrative, recount, anecdote, and even in speeches. As I deal with such texts and those texts are learnt by students of Junior and Senior High Schools in Indonesia, the treatment of this aspect is of great significance.

Quirk c.s. (1972:90) defined aspect as *the manner in which the verb action is regarded or experienced*. They added that *the choice of aspect is a comment on a particular view of the activities*. English has two sets of aspectual contrasts: perfection/non-perfection and progressive/non-progressive (Crystal, 1991) as exemplified respectively in (1), (2), and (3), (4) below.

(1) The child jumped (once) for joy.

(2) The child was jumping (several times) for joy.

(3) I was reading a book that evening.

(4) I read a book that evening.

Sentences (1) and (4) show that the activities of jumping and reading were already completed, and so they indicate perfective aspect. However, sentences (2) and (3) show the incompletion, meaning the activities were still in progress; so the sentences indicate progressive aspect. Quirk c.s (1972:92-93) emphasizes that progressive aspect holds the idea of temporariness, continuation, that is, *an action in progress instead of the*

occurrence of an action or the existence of a state, in addition to *limited duration, incompletion, simultaneity, vividness of description, emotional coloring, and emphasis*. Downing and Philip (1972) termed progressive aspect as durative in contrast to punctual in perfective aspect. Similarly, Radford (2004) views aspect as *a term used to denote the duration of the activity described by a verb*, which is still ongoing or already completed as exemplified in sentences (5) and (6).

(5) He is taking the medicine.

(6) He has taken the medicine.

In different formulation Cowan (2008:351) states that *aspect expresses how the speaker views the action of the verb*. Further, Cowan holds an opinion that aspect falls into four kinds, namely, perfect aspect and imperfect aspect when an activity is considered as (un)bounded and (not)completed or non-progressive, and iterative and habitual aspects when an activity is viewed as occurring repeatedly and regularly respectively. In sentence (7) Cowan says that the activity of banging happened repeatedly; in sentence (8) Gianto (2014) says that the activity of throwing is/was done repetitively, while in sentence (9) the activity of running was still incomplete or in progress, meaning that the runner did not yet stop running.

(7) The shutter was banging against the wall.

(8) He is/was throwing rocks at the house.

(9) She was running an hour ago.

IMPERFECT ASPECT IN ENGLISH

Basically the term of *imperfect* refers to grammatical problem. It means that there must be a matter of morphology and syntax, especially in the formation of this aspect, which is different in languages. Crystal (1991) states that imperfect is *a term used in the grammatical analysis of aspect*.

In European languages of Latin origin, for instance, morphological features are dominant as declension and conjugation constitute the specification of such languages. One example of declension is the problem of *cases*. Latin and its sisters have at least six cases, namely, nominative, genitive, accusative, dative, vocative, and ablative. Each case is of different function and position in sentential construction or utterances. The nominative case may serve as subject and subjective complement while the accusative one deals with the direct object. Conjugation, on the other hand, is concerned with the morphological forms of verb. These very forms indicate the tense and aspect of the verb and at the same time affects the semantic aspect.

To begin with I quoted a concept of imperfect aspect retrieved from *en.wikipedia.org/wiki/**Imperfective_aspect*** as follows:

> The imperfective (abbreviated IPFV or more ambiguously IMPV) is a grammatical aspect used to describe a situation viewed with interior composition. The imperfective is used in language to describe ongoing, habitual, repeated, or similar semantic roles, whether that situation occurs in the past, present, or future. Although many languages have a general imperfective, others have distinct aspects for one or more of its various roles, such as progressive, habitual, and iterative aspects."

The adjective *imperfect* consists of two constituents, namely, the prefix *–im* meaning *not* and the adjective *perfect* standing for *completed*. So the word *imperfect* means not completed. This idea shows the fact that any activity expressed in the imperfect aspect refers to the idea of being in progress and repeated. The same email address above states this way:

> In narrative, one of the uses of the imperfective is to set the background scene ("It was midnight. The room was dark. The rain was beating down. Water was streaming in through a broken window. A gun lay on the table."), with the perfective describing foregrounded actions within that scene ("Suddenly, a man burst into the room, ran over to the table, and grabbed the gun.").

In general the imperfect aspect serves as the background of another activity in the past, present, or future time. Besides, this aspect contains the idea of progressiveness as long stated by Hairston and Ruskiewicz (1996) that *a progressive form is a verb form that shows continuing activity*, it takes the auxiliary verb to be and present participle. Other functions of this aspect are elaborated in the following paragraphs.

Downing and Philip (1972) elaborated the idea of imperfective aspect into progressive and habitual meaning. The latter may be understood from the context and the use of circumstantial expressions like adverbs of time as in sentences (10) and (11), where *at night* and *on Saturdays* are added as adverbs of time and at the same time indicate habitual activity every night and every Saturday respectively.

(10) He works (or worked) at night.

(11) On Saturdays he works on the night-shift.

If expressed in the past time, the verb phrase *used to plus infinitive* is used to indicate a past habit. Sentences (12) and (13) express the discontinued habit of mutual visiting and speaking.

(12) We used to visit each other quite often.

(13) He used to speak several languages.

Next, imperfect aspect also deals with the *internal structure of the situation or event* (Downing and Philip, 1972: 364) or in Sumarlam's view (2004) imperfect aspect is concerned with morphological phase, namely, affixation, and with syntactic phase, that is, the relationship between verb and other arguments like subject and object. However, not all verb forms can indicate imperfective aspect such as verbs of cognition and of involuntary perception (Downing and Philip, 1972). Thus, sentences (14) and (15) are incompatible to imperfective aspect, and they are grammatically wrong.

(14) The fish is not smelling too good.

(15) I am believing you are right.

Durative verbs, which are dynamic in character, can be compatible with imperfective aspect. They illustrate a process before the end-point, as exemplified in sentence (16). The process of writing the invitations is not yet completed. It ends when all the invitations are written out. Similarly, the activity is ripening in (17) is still in progress. The girl is still in progress into the state of being beautiful in sentence (18).

(16) We are writing out the invitations.

(17) The apricots are ripening well.

(18) She is growing up into a beautiful girl.

The three samples above refer to the present activity. If someone asks us what we are doing by offering this question "What are you doing?", we tend to reply this way: "We are switching off the answer-phone". The switching activity is being done.

The imperfect aspect, however, also deals with the past activity which was still in continuation. Sentences (19), (20), and (21) describe such activities. In sentence (19) the writer spent some time sitting down (on the sofa, for example) when another activity, namely, the ringing of the bell happened. In sentence (21), the old king did not yet die; instead, he was in the process of dying. In sentence (21) the soldiers kept firing repeatedly; they did not stop firing even a second.

(19) Just as I was sitting down, the doorbell rang.

(20) The old king was dying.

(21) The soldiers were firing on the rifle range nearby.

IMPERFECT ASPECT IN INDONESIAN

According to Sumarlam (2004: xi) aspectuality in Indonesian and Javanese can be manifested morphologically through affixation and reduplication as well as syntactically through formal markers of aspectuality – PFA (*pemarkah formal aspektualitas*) in verbal phrase, through interaction between the verb and other arguments, through adverbs of duration, and directive prepositions.

Tadjuddin (2005) divides aspectuality into seven categories, namely, perfective, progressive, non-progressive, habitual, inchoative/inceptive, iterative/frequentative, and imperfective. But I combine the imperfective, progressive, and habitual into one aspect, that is, imperfective, in line with the idea proposed by Gianto (2014). Tadjuddin exemplifies the progressive, frequentative, and habitual meanings in sentences (22), (23) for progressiveness, (24) for frequency, and (25) for habit; (24) and (25) are my own examples based on Tadjuddin's view. Progressiveness and frequency are marked in Indonesian by the use of lexical items like *sedang* and *berulang-ulang kali*, while habit is marked by the lexical item of *biasa* (or *used to* in English).

(22) Jam saya sedang tepat jalannya (My watch is working perfectly)

(23) Profesor itu sedang mengetik sendiri surat-suratnya The professor is typing his own letters)

(24) Orang itu berulang-ulang kali bertanya padaku tentang alamatku (The man is often asking my address)

(25) Saya biasa berjalan ke sekolah (I used to walk to school)

Gianto (2014) distinguished time – *kala* in Indonesian – from aspect. *Kala* refers to deictic category. Theoretically, deixis falls into time, space, discourse, person, and social. *Kala* deals with the *when* aspect, that is, the time when an event or activity occurs/occurred. But aspect refers to the *how* aspect which covers the problem of how long and how frequent an event or activity occurs/occurred, and so the durative aspect. Sentence (26) expresses the fact that someone – *adik* – is/was in process of playing. Sentence (27) indicates the frequency of calling, which is manifested through reduplication of the stem, namely, *panggil* and the addition of the prefix *me-*; the stem is reduplicated into *memanggil-manggil*.

(26) Adik lagi bermain di halaman (My brother/sister is/was still playing in the yard)

(27) Ibu memanggil-manggil adik (Mother keeps calling my brother/sister)

Gianto (2014) divides aspect into three groups, that is, perfective, imperfective, and resultative. The perfective aspect shows how the goal of an event or activity is/was reached or completed like in sentence (28) while the imperfect aspect shows the beginning of an event or activity without mentioning its completion as in sentence (29). The resultative aspect is marked by the passive form of the verb, which in Indonesia falls into the prefix *ter-* and *di-* plus the lexical items, the verb being used and adjective or adverb as exemplified in sentences (30) and (31). In sentences (30) and (31) the adjective and the adverb meant are *hangus* and *habis* respectively.

(28) Iring-iringan kendaraan itu melaju ke bandara (the vehicles are/were marching to the airport)

(29) Iring-iringan kendaraan itu berhenti di terminal penerbangan domestic (the vehicles stopped at the domestic airport station)

(30) Para pemberontak itu ditumpas habis (The rebels have ben exterminated completely)

(31) Rumah itu terbakar hangus (The house was burnt out)

With reference to the topic of this paper, I confine myself to the treatment of the imperfect aspect in Indonesia.

Theoretically, the imperfect aspect in Indonesian can be categorized into three groups based on the morphological and syntactical features. The former includes the inclusion of the suffix *–i – dilempari* (33), and the reduplication – *menari-nari* (32) and *mengaduh-aduh* (34) while the latter requires the addition of lexical item, which is generally an adverb of time – *lagi* (35), and the adverb shows the frequency of occurrence – *seringkali* (36). The sample sentences that follow clarify the theory. The lexical item *lagi* has the synonym, that is, *tengah* and *sedang*.

(32) Pejoget itu menari-nari dengan indahnya di atas panggung (The dancer was dancing beautifully on the stage)

(33) Rumah penjahat itu dilempari batu oleh tetangga (The neighbours were throwing stones at the house of the bandit)

(34) Ia mengaduh-aduh kesakitan (He was crying for pain)

(35) Adik lagi bermain di halaman (My brother/sister is still playing in the yard)

(36) Mereka seringkali menggoda si gadis cantik itu (They are frequently teasing that beautiful girl)

Compared with English grammar, Indonesian expresses the imperfect aspect containing the idea of progressiveness and duration through addition of lexical items like *tengah, sedang, lagi*. Unlike English, no morphological change of verb is required. In Indonesian, the lexical items like *seringkali, acapkali* are required to emphasize the idea of progressiveness as exemplified in (36). However, in English the verb of *keep* plus V^{ing} , which is synonymous to *terus menerus* plus verb in Indonesian, is needed as exemplified in (37).

(37)   Dia terus menerus menanyakan hal itu (He keeps/kept asking about it).

CONCLUDING REMARKS

I am for the idea of imperfective aspect as referring to progressiveness which is in Downing and Philip (2002:363) as *a type of imperfectivity or incompletion.* In English this aspect is a matter of morphology, meaning that this aspect requires a change in suffix form and inclusion of the verb *be.* Simply, the formula for

imperfect aspect is *be* + *V^{ing}* (verbal periphrasis). This aspect serves to indicate habitual or repeated meaning in addition to incompletion or continuation. In addition, the imperfect aspect in English involves *used to +* *infinitive* or adverbs of time.

In Indonesian this aspect requires morphological change in verb form which is marked with the *suffix –* *i*, reduplication, and lexical items such as *berkali-kali, sering* and the like (Gianto, 2014). What is interesting here is that the imperfect aspect is manifested in different ways but the concept underlying this aspect is the same, namely, incompletion or in progress.

As for implication to teaching lexical semantics and advanced grammar, this brief treatment of English and Indonesian imperfect aspects is of great significance. Further research on the imperfect aspect in languages other than English and Indonesian is worth conducting in order to endorse the theory of imperfect aspect.

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