

SPECIAL USAGE OF CERTAIN VERBS OF PERCEPTION

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ABSTRACT

This article is devoted to the verb, semantic classifications and its specific features of the verb in Modern English. It also gives some information about special usage of certain verbs of perception.

Key words: verb, semantic, classification, perception, usage, sense.

АННОТАЦИЯ

Данная статья посвящена глаголу, семантическим классификациям и его специфическим особенностям глагола в современном английском языке. Это также дает некоторую информацию о специальном использовании определенных глаголов восприятия.

Ключевые слова: глагол, семантика, классификация, восприятие, употребление, смысл.

INTRODUCTION

Verbs are the action words in a sentence that describe what the subject is doing. Along with nouns, verbs are the main part of a sentence or phrase, telling a story about what is taking place. In fact, without a verb, full thoughts can't be properly conveyed, and even the simplest sentences, such as *Maria sings*, have one. Actually, a verb can be a sentence by itself, with the subject, in most case you, implied, such as, *Sing!* and *Drive!*

When learning the rules of grammar, schoolchildren are often taught that verbs are 'doing' words, meaning they signify the part of the sentence which explains the action taking place: *He ran away, she eats chocolate cake on Sundays, the horses gallop across the fields.* **Ran, eats** and **gallop** are the 'action' parts of those sentences, thus they are the verbs. However, it can be confusing because not all verbs are easily identifiable as action: *I know your name, Jack thought about it, we considered several applications.* These are non-action verbs, i.e. those that describe a state of being, emotion, possession, sense or opinion. Other non-action verbs include include **love, agree, feel, am, and have**¹.

¹ Humes, A. Research on the composing process: Methodology, results, and limitations. Washington, DC: National Institute of Education, 1982, p.-56

DISCUSSION AND RESULTS

Imagine that you want to describe an experience. You want to talk about how you **perceived** something – in other words, what you saw, heard, or felt.

In our report today, we will explore the **grammar** of perception.

Specifically, we will explore what grammar experts might call “verbs of perception.” These are words that describe actions related to our senses – seeing, hearing and listening, for example.

Betty Azar is an expert on English grammar. In her book *Understanding and Using English Grammar*, she notes that English speakers often use verbs of perception before two other verb forms: the simple form and the form ending with –*ing*.

Similar meaning

Azar adds that the two verb forms that follow verbs of perception can sometimes have a similar meaning.*

"Dave, although you took very thorough precautions in the pod against my hearing you, I could see your lips move."

In this example, the verb *see* is the verb of perception. The simple form of the verb *move* follows it.

Although HAL said “I could see your lips move,” it could have said, “I could see your lips moving.” The two statements are close in meaning.

Here is another example. Imagine a police detective is investigating a crime. The detective might ask people questions, like:

Detective: *Did you see anything strange last night?*

Witness: *I saw a man run down the street.*

Here the witness used the verb of perception *see* as well as the simple form of the verb *run*.

But their exchange could have been somewhat different, as we hear in this example:

Detective: *Did you see anything strange last night?*

Witness: *I saw a man running down the street.*

In this case, the –*ing* form of the verb comes after the verb of perception.

The first and second exchanges with the police detective are close in meaning.*

However, at other times, there is a clear difference in meaning when English speakers use the –*ing* form after a verb of perception, as we will find.

Difference in meaning

Sometimes English speakers use the –*ing* form after a verb of perception to point out that an activity is taking place when it was perceived.

Here is an example. The following statements are about the American actor and humorist Dave Chappelle.

1: *I saw Dave Chappelle perform a new act last week.*

2: *When I walked into the **comedy club**, I saw Dave Chappelle performing a new act.*

In both statements, *see* is the verb of perception. In the first statement, the verb *perform* appears in its simple form. In the second statement, the verb *perform* appears in its *-ing* form.

In the first sentence, *I saw Dave Chappelle perform a new act last week*, the speaker gives the idea that she listened to all of Chappelle’s new act – from beginning to end.

In the second one, *When I walked into the comedy club, I saw Dave Chappelle performing a new act*, the speaker gives the idea that she entered the room when Chappelle was already performing. In other words, the speaker did not see the beginning of Chappelle’s act.

Other verbs of perception - examples

In the examples we presented today, we only used the verb of perception *see*. Other common verbs of perception include *hear, feel, watch and notice*².

So one could say:

“Last night, I heard a strange sound come from the closet.”

Or:

“Last night, I heard a strange sound coming from the closet.”

If you wanted to point out that an action was already taking place, you could say, for example, *“When I woke up, I noticed my dog **snoring** loudly next to me.”*

Verbs of Perception

Set 1	Set 2	Set 3
(action)	(non-action)	(non-action)
listen to	hear	sound
look at	see	Look
Touch	feel*	Feel
Smell	smell	Smell
Taste	taste	Taste

² Humes, A. Research on the composing process: Methodology, results, and limitations. Washington, DC: National Institute of Education, 1982, p.-56

Set 1 verbs indicate that the perceiver is “focusing” on a specific object. They can be used in the progressive. He is listening to the radio. They are looking at the picture. She is smelling the flowers.

Set 2 verbs indicate general perception and are non-progressive.

He hears a noise. (Not: He is hearing .)

They see flames. (Not: They are seeing .)

She smells smoke.

Set 3 verbs indicate appearance. (It “seems”...) They are non-progressive.

That sounds like thunder. (describes the object, not the perceiver)

This looks terrible.

It smells fishy.

*When feel is used to describe emotions, the progressive is sometimes used.

I feel great today. I’m feeling great today.

I feel cold today. (physical feeling is usually non-progressive)

See can sometimes be used in expressions in the progressive³. She is seeing the doctor. He is seeing another woman.

Special Usage of Certain Verbs of Perception Some verbs of perception see, look at, hear, listen to, and feel, along with watch and sense can be used with objects followed by other verbs (base form or gerunds, but not infinitives).

Note the examples below: We heard you leave. (Okay. Emphasis on our hearing.) We heard you leaving. (Okay. Emphasis on your leaving.) We heard you to leave. (Incorrect!) **Other examples:** I saw her go. Look at that man run! Sylvester listened to the canary sing. We watched them play basketball. We watched them playing basketball. Trudy can feel the wind blowing against her skin. Mr. Todd sensed the lion approaching.

Verbs of sense perception

to see	to hear	to feel	to watch	to notice
to taste	to smell	to sense	to observe	

Note: to feel (to experience a particular feeling or emotion) # to sense (to become aware of something even though you cannot see or hear it)

In English grammar, a verb of perception is a verb that conveys the experience of one of the physical senses. A few examples would be see, watch, look, hear, listen, feel, and taste. A verb of perception is also called a perception verb or perceptual

³ Flower and Hayes, A Cognitive process of Theory of verb, National Council of Teachers of English, 1981.- p.59–74

verb. Distinctions can be drawn between subject-oriented and object-oriented verbs of perception. Subject-Oriented and Object-Oriented Verbs of Perception⁴

"It is necessary to draw a two-way distinction between subject-oriented and object-oriented verbs of perception (Viberg 1983, Harm 2000), for ... this distinction plays into the expression of evidential meaning.

"Subject-oriented perception verbs (called 'experience-based' by Viberg) are those verbs whose grammatical subject is the perceiver and they emphasize the perceiver's role in the act of perception. They are transitive verbs, and they can be further sub-divided into agentive and experiencer perception verbs. The subject-oriented agentive perception verbs signify an intended act of perception:

(2a) *Karen listened to the music.* ... (3a) *Karen smelled the iris with delight.*

"So in (2) and (3), Karen intends to listen to the music and she intentionally smells the iris. On the other hand, subject-oriented experiencer perception verbs indicate no such volition; instead, they merely describe a non-intended act of perception:

(4a) *Karen heard the music.* ... (5a) *Karen tasted the garlic in the soup.* "So here in (4) and (5), Karen does not intend to go out of her way to auditorily perceive the music or to gustatorily perceive the garlic in her soup; they are simply acts of perception that she naturally experiences without any volition on her part.

"The object of perception, rather than the perceiver himself, is the grammatical subject of object-oriented perception verbs (called source-based by Viberg), and the agent of perception is sometimes wholly absent from the clause. These verbs are intransitive. When using an object-oriented perception verb, speakers make an assessment concerning the state of the object of perception, and these verbs are often used evidentially:

(6a) *Karen looks healthy.* ..(7a) *The cake tastes good.*

"The speaker reports on what is perceived here, and neither Karen nor the cake are perceivers," (Richard Jason Whitt, "Evidentiality, Polysemy, and the Verbs of Perception in English and German." *Linguistic Realization of Evidentiality in European Languages*, ed. by Gabriele Diewald and Elena Smirnova. Walter de Gruyter, 2010)⁵.

Examples of Verbs of Perception

In the following excerpts, which come from renowned publications, verbs of perception have been italicized to make them easier to identify. Study them and

⁴ Humes, A. Research on the composing process: Methodology, results, and limitations. Washington, DC: National Institute of Education, 1982, p.-56

⁵ Flower and Hayes, A Cognitive process of Theory of verb, National Council of Teachers of English, 1981.- p.59-74

decide, using information from the above section, which are subject-oriented and which are object-oriented.

I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings

"I discovered that to achieve perfect personal silence all I had to do was to attach myself leechlike to sound. I began to *listen* to everything. I probably hoped that after I had *heard* all the sounds, really *heard* them, and packed them down, deep in my ears, the world would be quiet around me," (Maya Angelou, *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*. Random House, 1969).

In conclusion, we have found different peculiarities of verbs of perception. Each of the perception verb has its own meaning.

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