

# LEXICAL ASPECT

by Seda Sürel

## INTRODUCTION

### 1. Function

Lexical aspect shows how an action is internally structured, not when it happens. It answers questions such as:

- Does the action have a natural endpoint?
- Does it describe a state, a process, or an instant change?
- Can it continue indefinitely, or does it necessarily finish?

Tense may stay the same.

The type of action changes.

### 2. Forms

Lexical aspect is not expressed by a single suffix.

It is expressed through:

- the inherent meaning of the verb
- the type of object (especially definite vs. indefinite)
- quantity and boundaries
- time expressions

No new tense or mood is introduced.

### 3. Morphology

There is no dedicated morpheme for lexical aspect.

The same grammatical material is used:

- same tense markers
- same person endings
- same negation

Aspectual meaning emerges from structure and context.

### 4. Structural Guide

**A key distinction:**

- Unbounded (Atelic) actions  
→ no inherent endpoint
- Bounded (Telic) actions  
→ clear endpoint or result

This distinction maps directly onto Vendler's classification.

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## 5. Usage

Vendler's Four Lexical Aspect Classes

### A) States

Unbounded (Atelic), Durative, Non-agentive

Describe situations, conditions, or mental states.

They do not involve intentional action and do not naturally "finish."

### B) Activities

Unbounded (Atelic), Durative, Agentive

Describe ongoing actions controlled by the subject.

They can continue indefinitely.

### C) Accomplishments

Bounded (Telic), Durative

**Describe actions that:**

- take time
- necessarily reach a result

The endpoint is often created by the object.

### D) Achievements

Bounded (Telic), Punctual

Describe actions that:

- happen instantly
- mark a sudden change of state

## Aspect Shift through Objects (CRITICAL RULE)

In Turkish, definite objects (Accusative –(y)I) often turn an Activity into an Accomplishment.

Indefinite object → Unbounded (Atelic)

Definite object → Bounded (Telic)

This is one of the main aspectual mechanisms in Turkish.

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## Diagnostic Tests (Aspect Tests)

Aspect types can be identified using time expressions:

- Duration test: bir saat / bir yıl
- → compatible with Activities
- In-X-time test: bir saatte
- → compatible with Accomplishments
- Instant test: bir anda
- → compatible with Achievements

## Examples

### States

Ali İstanbul'da yaşıyor.

— State, no natural endpoint.

Bu evi seviyorum.

— Mental state.

Bir saat seviyorum ✗

— Duration test not natural.

### Activities

Ali kitap okudu.

— Activity, no inherent endpoint.

Çocuklar parkta oynadı.

— Open-ended action.

Ali bir saat koştu.

— Duration test ✓

Ali bir saatte koştu ✗

— No natural endpoint.

### Accomplishments

Ali kitabı okudu.

— Definite object creates an endpoint.

Yemeği bitirdi.

— Result reached.

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Ali kitabı bir saatte okudu.  
— In-X-time test ✓ (telic)

## Achievements

Ali kapıyı açtı.  
— Instant change of state.

Film başladı.  
— Immediate transition.

Film bir anda başladı.  
— Instant test ✓

## Aspect Shift (same verb)

Ali kitap okudu.  
— Activity (Atelic)

Ali kitabı okudu.  
— Accomplishment (Telic)

Ali bir saat kitap okudu.  
— Activity limited by time

Ali kitabı bir saatte okudu.  
— Completed action

## Notes

- Lexical aspect describes internal temporal structure, not tense.
- States are typically non-agentive and do not respond clearly to duration or endpoint tests.
- Activities, Accomplishments, and Achievements are agentive and more compatible with diagnostic tests.
- States are often expressed with present tense (-yor) and can describe temporary situations (Bu aralar İstanbul'da yaşıyorum), without becoming Activities.
- States and Activities are Unbounded (Atelic); Accomplishments and Achievements are Bounded (Telic).
- In Turkish, definite objects (-(y)I) are a key trigger for aspect shift.
- Time expressions are reliable diagnostic tools, but their applicability depends on verb type.