

Intention of Verbal Action*

Ján Horecký

1. A detailed survey of works and opinions in the sphere of the intention of verbal action has recently been presented by Kačala in his monograph (1989) and also in his earlier lecture at the Summer Seminar of Studia Academica Slovaca (1977). In his work dealing with conversion Ondrejovič (1989) indicated broader connections with Tesnière's theory of actants as well as with Fillmore's theory of roles. He points out the competition of two principles in our theory of intention, reflected in the thesis that the dominant position in the sentence is occupied by the predicate or the subject. If we start from the thesis that the verb denotes the non-independently existing features (Pauliny 1958), it is necessary to see the connections with the Aristotelian one-member attribute logics, but if it is presupposed that the verb requires an agent or patient, it is necessary to see here the response to the multi-member argument-predicate or relational logics.

In spite of the extensive findings resulting from our theory of intention we still deem it useful to reconsider its theoretical principles and point out the basic problems, i.e., to search for the answer to the question whether the category of intention is of semantic, lexical or syntactic, or else grammatical, type. That is why after a brief survey of opinions on these questions we shall submit here an attempt at interpreting the category of intention as a distinctive morphological category bound to the verb. We will point out the relationship between the category of intention and the attempts at classifying verbs.

2. At the beginning of our considerations on the intention of verbal action it is necessary to raise the question of what actually verbal action is in contrast to physical action. It is evident that physical action means motion on the time axis and that no other action exists. Undoubtedly, this problem was realized by Pauliny, the founder of the theory of the intention of verbal action. In his lectures on the *System of the Slovak Standard Language* (Pauliny 1946: 130) he explains action as the existence of thought content with regard to time (hence with regard to the physical action – J. H.), but not as physical action per se. He, moreover, specifies this thought by the thesis that the actional relationship is the relationship of the verbal form (hence not of the thought content!) to the other member of the syntagm. It should be noted that here we move from the thought content to the concrete syntagm in which the verbal form is applied. These views are evidently based on his monograph (1943) where he states that the intention is a lexical as well as a grammatical phenomenon. Therefore he denotes intention as a lexical-grammatical category.

In our view, it should preferably be conceived of as a semantic-grammatical category because if the intention is understood as the fact that the verb as a predicate requires or does not require an agent or a patient of its 'dejanie' ('actionality'; Pauliny's term for action, 1943: 16), these are not lexical but semantic phenomena (more exactly, phenomena from the semantics of the sentence). His *Slovenská gramatika* [Slovak Grammar] (1981: 151) is characterized by certain oscillation between word-categorial and syntactic categories when intention is characterized as "the orientation of the verbal action at the substantive with which it is closely syntactically bound; in relation to the verbal predicate it concerns the connection of the subject to the predicative verb and the object to the predicative verb".

A similar oscillation also occurs in Ružička (1968) who, on the one hand, defines the intention or the orientation of verbal action as the "flow of action in space from the starting

point (agent) to the target point (patient)” and the intention as a semantic value of the verb. On the other hand, he brings in a strong syntagmatic orientation when he introduces the notion of a superior, governing substance: in addition to the scheme $A - Ac - P$ (agent – ‘actionality’ – patient), he introduces the scheme $G_A - Ac - Aff_P$ in which the governing substance is expressed by the agent and the affected substance by the patient (is it not rather the other way round? – the agent is expressed by the governing substance and the patient by the affected substance? – J. H.). Syntactic motivation is also manifested by the fact that it presupposes several affected substances, which is possible only in a concrete statement.

However, in the *Morphology of the Slovak Language* (1966) intention is considered for a lexical-grammatical category in which the basic character of verbs as naming units of the non-independent existing dynamic feature is joined with the transitory character of the verbal action.

Oravec (1967) defines the intention as the orientation of the verbal action at the substantive, or at several substantives. Later (1981: 127) he adds that intention is “the semantic, deep structure of the verbal meaning.” His view that the semantic structure is externally manifested by valency contradicts the assumption (ibid.: 126) that the semantic and the formal aspects of the verb are “summarised, systematized and in entirety explained by the category of verbal intention.”

It is, however, noteworthy and correct that Oravec speaks not about the intention of the verbal action but about verbal intention. This way, in my opinion, he correctly transfers this category from the sphere of thought content as presented in Pauliny to the sphere of word-class categories. Less distinct, though, is the intention system postulated by Oravec. Its members are, in his view, naming units (which brings him back to the syntactic understanding of intention) and the relationships among them. Nevertheless, he does not further specify these relationships.

The most detailed analysis of the intention of verbal action was done by Kačala. He summarizes his findings in *Sloveso a sémantická štruktúra vety* [Verb and the Semantic Structure of the Sentence] (1989). The intention of the verbal action is defined as the semantic properties of the predicate on the basis of which it combines with naming units of another word-categorial validity (ibid.: 30). Very soon he abandons this grammatical-semantic approach, and stresses that the intention of verbal action “expresses the spatial dimension of the feature and its orientation.” He justifies this view by claiming that the action or the dynamic feature “takes place between the substances.” The space within which the dynamic feature takes place or in which it moves is labelled as the intention sphere of the verb. Let us add that this notion/term is based on a very strong hypostatization of the dynamic feature.

Like Oravec, Kačala works with the concept of the intention system of verbs. But while for Oravec the intention system is what reflects the dependence of processual features, for Kačala (1977) the intention system has a quite concrete form because it is formed by intention types. That is why it can also be represented graphically:

- (1)
- | | | | |
|---|---|---|--|
| ← | V | → | subject–object: <i>kosit'</i> (to mow) |
| ← | V | | subject: <i>ísť</i> (to go) |
| | V | → | object (subjectless): <i>smädit'</i> (to feel thirsty) |
| | V | | substanceless: <i>mrholit'</i> (to be drizzling) |

(1) is a modification of an earlier classification into three basic types: $A \rightarrow Ac \rightarrow Aff$, $A [Aff] \rightarrow Ac$, $[A \rightarrow] Ac \rightarrow Af$ and a special type, $[A] Ac [Aff]$ (Kačala 1971) oriented at the verb.¹

The effort aimed at categorizing the intention within the theory of verb classes is manifested by the notion/term of intention value which is, however, not ascribed to the dynamic feature but to the verb. While Ružička characterized the intention of verbal action as a semantic value of the verb, Kačala (1989: 9) explicitly defines the intention value of the verb as a “possibility and ability of the verb to name – at the beginning or the end of the dynamic feature – the substance(s) with which the verb is habitually connected on the basis of its intention of action.”

This word-class-based definition of intention contradicts Kačala’s notion/term of the intention structure of sentence, understood as a configuration of intention sentence members related to the syntactic structure of the sentence. Intentional sentence members are, in his view, the predicate and the basis of the sentence, the subject and the object (these are the positions carried out on the basis of the intention). We consider the notion of the intention structure of the sentence to be redundant as it covers only a certain component of the verbal structure.

Finally, let us mention the concept of valency. Pauliny (1946-1947) notes that – in addition to the intention of verbal action – the term ‘valency of the verb’ is also used. Valency was in detail analyzed by Ružička (1968). Oravec (1984) considers valency for the formal expression of the intention. In his view, valency expresses the relationship between the verb and the substantives by which the participants of action are named. A similar division is also applied by Daneš (1971) who distinguishes the intention of the predicate in the sphere of meaning and the valency of the predicator in the sphere of form.

3. The intention of verbal action can be delimited within the theory of linguistic consciousness as one of the grammatical categories marking the verb as carrying out the linguistic category of processuality.

Linguistic consciousness is understood as a system of verbal behaviour stored (internalized) in the consciousness. This system has three subsystems: the subsystem of langue, the conceptual subsystem and the interactional subsystem. In the conceptual subsystem the main role is played by conceptualizers (Horecký 1987), i.e., linguistic means for the linguistic expression of the phenomena of objective reality in the process of cognition. The basic categories are substance, process, quality and quantity.

The naming of objects of any of these categories is connected with specific grammatical categories. The category of process is mainly connected with two nomination categories, i.e., with the grammatical categories participating in the act of naming, and also with the use of a naming unit in communication.

One of them serves for the delimitation of physical activity that is carried out on the linear axis by determining its beginning and end. The activity is started by the agent and finished by effecting the patient or by reaching a certain point or space. This framework actually represents the verbal intention. Its main distinctive features are transitivity TR and orientation OR of the process; e.g. the verb *rúbat* ‘to cut (wood)’; ‘to fell (trees)’ can be characterized by the features $+TR$ and $+OR$. On the other hand, the verb *bačovať* ‘to work as shepherd’; ‘to act (mainly in business) irresponsibly or nearly criminally with the aim of gaining undeserved profit’ can be characterized as non-transitive and negatively oriented ($-TR$, $-OR$).

The framework-establishing nominational grammatical categories also include the category of mode which characterizes the manner in which the process takes place, its semantic specification, e.g.: the phrase *hrať na husliach* (literally: to play a violin) does not express the delimitation of the activity (its course) of *hrať* ‘to play’ from the agent to the patient (that would be the case of the phrases *hrať pieseň, skladbu* (to perform a song, a musical composition)), but it expresses the manner, the mode of this activity using a certain musical instrument. The phrase *podávať pripomienky* ‘to submit comments/objections’ does not refer to the patient of ‘objections’ because the phrase as a whole represents a process.

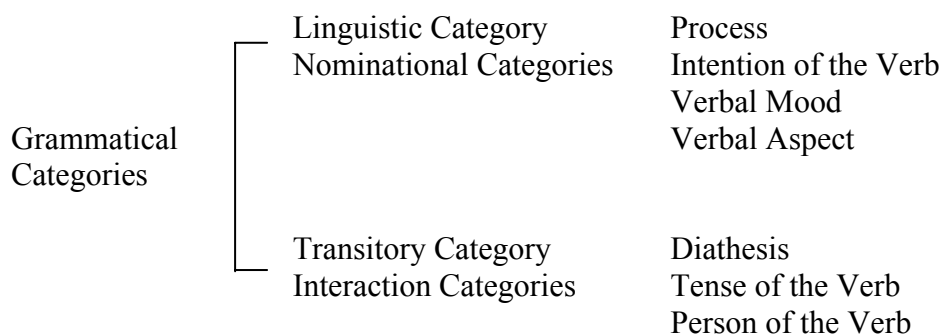
The modal, not intentional, character of such elements can be supported by analogy with polylexical naming units of the type *mláťací stroj* ‘thrashing machine’ in relation to its univertization. Within univertization, the distinctive feature forms the basis, which leads to the form *mláťačka* (literally: thrasher). Similarly, in addition to the phrase *jazdiť na bicykli* ‘to ride on the bicycle’ there is the verb *bicyklovať (sa)* ‘to bicycle’, and apart from the phrase *hra na fujare* (literally: the playing on the *fujara* – a long woodwind musical instrument traditionally used by Slovak shepherds) there also exists the verbal form *fujarovať*.

The other nominational grammatical category is the category of aspectuality characterized by the feature plurality *PL* which determines whether a process is carried out permanently, or relatively permanently, or, whether it is a point-action or a one-time action. In such case it is the grammatical category of aspect. However, the category of aspectuality can also express the beginning or the completion of the process– then it is the *Aktionsart* (manner of verbal action). This category has closer relationships to the intention as it delimits the beginning or the end of action.

The grammatical category of voice, or the active–passive relationship (as pointed out already by Pauliny and in more detail commented on by Kačala 1989), is related to the category of verbal intention. This category identifies whether the activity starts from the agent as subject or from another agent. The closeness of the category of verbal intention and diathesis can be seen, for example, from verbal endings in Latin where the morpheme *-r* is typical of passive and, above all, of special forms existing for the medium and the mediopassive in Old Greek. Let us mention Latin deponent verbs. The passive morpheme expresses that the action affects the originator, e.g. in the verb *morior* ‘I am dying’. It seems that this is the category that Štúr had in mind when distinguishing between *inam namerané* ‘oriented elsewhere’, *odinakial’ namerané* ‘oriented from elsewhere’, *k sebe namerané* ‘oriented towards oneself’, *na sebe ohraničené* ‘limited to oneself’. Let us also mention reciprocal verbs (cf. Kačala 1989: 96). From this it follows that rather than indications of the theory of intention Štúr’s work presents repercussions of the ancient opinions on the category of diathesis. (Cf. also the theory by Erhart 1981 stating that the category of diathesis can be characterized by the features of transgressivity, progressivity and regressivity.)

The category of verbal aspect, diathesis, understood in this way, constitutes an interface area between nominational and interactional categories, i.e., the categories which are carried out only within communication, i.e., within the production of a statement (time and person, Jakobson’s actualizers).

(2) Schematic Survey of Verbal Categories:



The above-indicated categorial character of verbal intention can be checked with the help of the general criteria of categorization proposed by Bondarko (1978). In his opinion, grammatical category has to be above all obligatory, and has to be manifested with each form. This criterion fully applies to verbal intention because each verb is either transitory or nontransitory, this applying to each of its definite form. In spite of the varied types of verbal intention this category is invariant (cf. below): invariance guarantees the presence of two basic features – transitiveness and orientation. Verbal intention is of a distinct systemic and system-forming character, and is indispensable for the delimitation and functioning of language as a system. Less distinct is the requirement that grammatical category has to be expressed by a closed system of formal means. It is evident that verbal intention is not expressed by special morphemes (but cf. the Latin type *morior*). There are, however, such elements as agent, patient and circumstance.

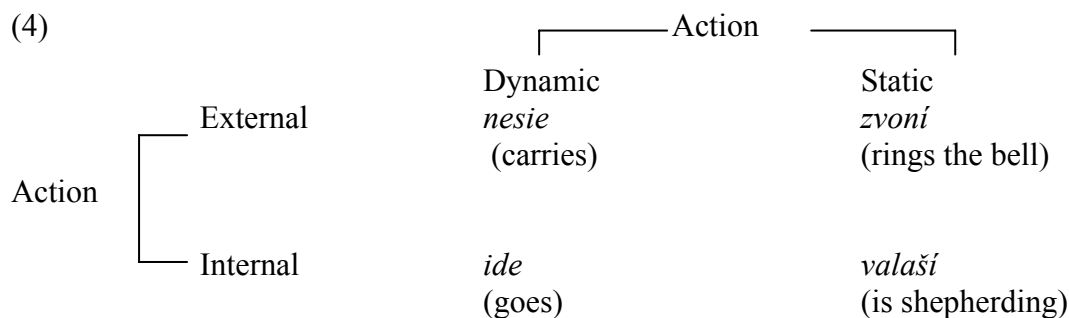
4. Nearly all the authors who dealt with the topic of verbal intention made lists of all the types of verbal intention characterized by the participation of certain elements (mainly the agent and the patient) and by the manner of expressing them (both explicit and implicit expressions). Less attention has been devoted to the absence of these features. That is why the intentional type was understood as a certain generalized case, a pattern, or a prototype. However, Oravec (1984) understood type as a set of verbs with approximately the same meanings and with the same set of nouns complementing it. But Oravec joins the semantic and the formal criteria. In contrast to Oravec, Kačala (1977) based his system on formal qualities, on the presence or absence of the subject and the object.

Pauliny (1943) based his system on the manner of expressing the components of the intentional structure: agent, ‘actionality’ (Sk. ‘dejanie’) and affectedness are explicitly expressed in the *A – Ac – Aff* type, while, for example, both actionality and affectedness are expressed by one expression in the type *A – AcAff*. It is, however, interesting that when formulating the types Pauliny starts above all from the agent and assigns parallel non-agential types to such agential types. In this way he gets ten intention types:

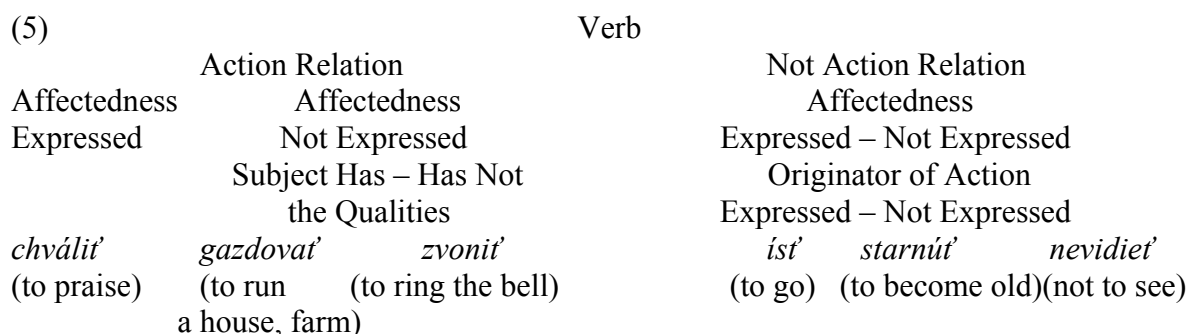
- | | | |
|-----|-------------------------------------|-----------------|
| (3) | 1. A – Ac – Aff | Ac – Aff |
| | 2. A – AcAff | AcAff |
| | 3. AAff – Ac | Ac |
| | 4. AAac – Aff | |
| | 5. AAacAff | |
| | 6. A _z – Ac _z | Ac _z |

He, moreover, adds that the $A_z - Ac_z$ type forms a transition between the second and the third types because affectedness is expressed together with the agent and the verb is further defined by the quality of affectedness, and that types 4 and 5 cannot have an agentless parallel because the agent is already included in the naming unit for Ac .

In his attempt to develop the typology of verbal intention Pauliny also deals with the classification of verbs. He divides them in the following way on the basis of the features of the action, in particular, dynamic vs static, or external vs internal:



Nevertheless, in his lectures on the *System of the Standard Slovak Language* Pauliny introduces a more complete system of verbs. As a criterion he uses the intention notions like the action relationship, the expression of affectedness, the expression of the originator of action and the qualities of the subject:



No other work attempts to propose similar hierarchization. The types are simply listed in a certain sequence, in principle from the most developed one to the narrowest one: Ružička presents six, Oravec eight and Pauliny ten.

Morfológia slovenského jazyka [Morphology of the Slovak Language] (1966) adds a parallel set of types expressing the relationships of the superior substantive (the governing substance) to the other components, evidently under the influence of Horák (1972) who was critical about the theory of verbal dynamic features. This approach seems to return to Pauliny's distinction between the agental and non-agental types. The basis is formed by the idea that the action is a feature of the thing, and hence it presupposes some thing to which it is attached as to a governing substance. This governing substance is the bearer of the action (Ibid.: 390).

Schematically the following intention types are listed:

- | | | |
|-----|---|---|
| (6) | 1. $A \rightarrow Ac \rightarrow P$ | $G_A - Ac - Aff_p$, or also $R_A - Ac - Aff_{p1} - Aff_{p2} (-Aff_{p3})$ |
| | 2. $A \rightarrow Ac_p$ | $G_A - Ac_p$, or $R_A - Ac_{p1} - Aff_{p2}$ |
| | 3. $A_p - Ac$ | $G_{A=P} - Ac$ |
| | 4. $N - Ac$ | $G_{A:P} - Ac$ |
| | 5. $Ac \rightarrow P$, or $Ac_A \rightarrow$ | $P Ac - Aff$, or $Ac_A - Aff$ |
| | 6. Ac_p | $Ac_{A:P}$ |

Along with the agent Oravec also recognizes the bearer of the feature (cf. also Ružička's type 4), and thus he extends the number of types to eight by splitting Ružička's type *dieťa rastie* $A_{Ac/P}$ 'the child grows' into three types: *brat šoféruje* 'brother is driving' – $A/N - Ac$, *otec starne* 'father is getting old' – $N - Ac$ and *fialka vonia* 'violet smells' – $N_V - Ac$.

However, Oravec adheres to his definition saying that type is a set of verbs. Consequently – with the exception of the first type which is the most extensive one – each of his types aims to give an extensive list of verbs (1967). Later, he abandons the objective of providing an exhausting list. However, in the first type he specifies four subtypes according to the kind of object (affective, resultative, perspective, content-based).

It follows from Oravec's description of intention types that his aim is not only to describe the intention system, and that even more so it is not to delimit its structure according to the occurrence of certain criteria, but his aim is to classify the verbs. Within this classification, the basic criteria include the verbal intention features and also the syntactic and word-class features.

If the description of the structure of the intention system makes use of the intention relationships, the types of verbal intention and the system of verbs created by them, we obtain the following picture:

(7)

TR	+	+	±	±	–	–	0
OR	+	–	+	–	+	–	0
	<i>rúbe</i> ¹	<i>starne</i> ²	<i>leti</i> ³	<i>zvoni</i> ⁴	<i>vonia</i> ⁵	<i>bačuje</i> ⁶	<i>prší</i> ⁷
	events		processes		states		

¹(s)he/it cuts wood; fells trees;

²" is getting old

³" flies

⁴" rings

⁵" smells

⁶" works as shepherd

⁷it is raining

This description combines the generally known names of events, processes and states as used by Daneš (1971). The identified classes seem to be more systematic than the classes suggested by Oravec.

5. In conclusion, let us specify what, in our opinion, does not belong to the area of the intention of the verb.

If we postulate that the function of the intention of the verb is to express the delimitation of the process by its beginning and end on the linear time axis, we cannot ascribe this category to expressions like *zamestnávať nákupmi* ‘to keep busy by shopping’ (cf. Kačala 1989). In such cases, the complement *nákupmi* does not express the completion by the affectedness of the patient, but a certain accompanying feature of the action. This also applies to expressions of the type *písať perom* ‘to write with a pen’, *písať na stroji* ‘to typewrite’ and *hrať na husliach* ‘to play the violin’. Interpretations can vary also as to the question whether the type *písať list otcovi* ‘to write a letter to the father’ is characterized by double intention or two intentions connected into a joined government in formulating the statement. However, it seems more appropriate to suppose that the verb *písať* ‘write’ has two intentions; the first one expresses the completion of the action by affecting the patient and the second one expresses the area reached.

We believe that the category of verbal intention in set phrases of the type *podávať pripomienky* ‘to submit objections’ and *postaviť otázku* ‘to raise a question’ belongs not to the verb but to the whole phrase in its complexity.

Let us note that there are also classifications that are not based on the features of verbal intention, but on the semantic qualities of the verb. The classifications based on the intention features do not respect the grammatical character of verbal intention and introduce syntactic criteria into the classification (e.g. the type of object in *Morfológia slovenského jazyka* [Morphology of the Slovak Language], and also that in Oravec’s approach). It follows from our interpretation of verbal intention that it can form the basis for some classification, but only through a more general criterion of actionality – non-actionality, or with regard to the triad of process – event – state.

Note:

* First published as “Intencia slovesného deja ako gramatickej kategórie.” In *Slovenská reč*, 55, 1990, pp. 343 – 352.

¹ From the terminological point of view it is necessary to object to the term *substanceless* because it deviates from the row *subject – subjectless*. Instead of referring to syntactic notions reference is made to the semantic notion. In the older scheme there should not be the member $[A \rightarrow]$, not even in the case if the bracket were to denote potentiality.

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