

University of Montana

## ScholarWorks at University of Montana

---

UM Graduate Student Research Conference (GradCon)

---

Apr 20th, 5:00 PM - 6:30 PM

### Uncovering the Rules of Language: What the Case of the Word 'Glimpse' Can Teach Us

Jessica Holtz

University of Montana, Missoula, [jessica.holtz@umconnect.umt.edu](mailto:jessica.holtz@umconnect.umt.edu)

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.umt.edu/gsrc>

**Let us know how access to this document benefits you.**

---

Holtz, Jessica, "Uncovering the Rules of Language: What the Case of the Word 'Glimpse' Can Teach Us" (2018). *UM Graduate Student Research Conference (GradCon)*. 4.

<https://scholarworks.umt.edu/gsrc/2018/posters/4>

This Poster Presentation is brought to you for free and open access by ScholarWorks at University of Montana. It has been accepted for inclusion in UM Graduate Student Research Conference (GradCon) by an authorized administrator of ScholarWorks at University of Montana. For more information, please contact [scholarworks@mso.umt.edu](mailto:scholarworks@mso.umt.edu).

# Uncovering the Rules of Language: What the Case of the Word 'Glimpse' Can Teach Us

Jessica Holtz  
Linguistics Program, Department of Anthropology

## Research Question: Are Semelfactives Dynamic?

Can semelfactive verbs occur with a dynamic adverb?

## Background

Verbs can be divided into aspectual classes based on how they behave. What class a verb belongs to can be determined by tests. Verbs grouped as semelfactives seem to sometimes pass and sometimes fail one of these tests.

### Test: Can the verb occur with a dynamic adverb?

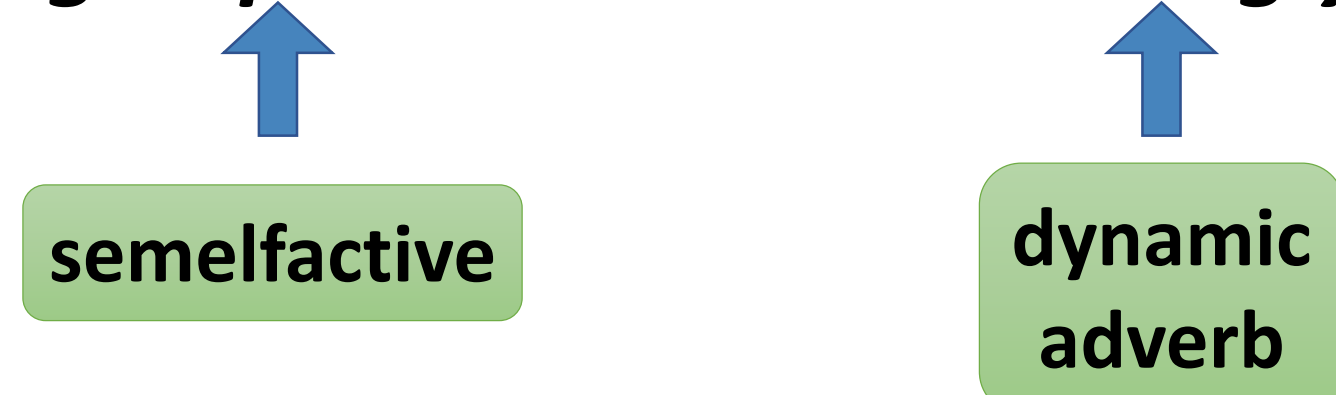
Dynamic adverbs are adverbs that indicate motion.

Van Valin's examples:

Passes the test: *She sneezed once violently.*



Fails the test: \**He glimpsed the intruder strongly.*



(Van Valin, 2006)

## Study Design

- Participants: four adult native speakers of English
  - Speaker 1: Male, from New York
  - Speaker 2: Male, from New York
  - Speaker 3: Female, from New York
  - Speaker 4: Female, from Colorado
- Participants were asked if different dynamic adverbs sounded natural in sentences with semelfactives.

## Experiment 1 – Isolating the Problematic Verb

Different predicates were tested for compatibility with dynamic adverbs.

### Speaker 1 (Male, from New York)

| Tested Sentences:   | vigorously   | actively     | violently    | forcefully   | energetically | strongly     | gently       |
|---|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|---------------|--------------|--------------|
| 1. He <b>glimpsed</b> at the side-view mirror _____.  | Unacceptable | Acceptable   | Unacceptable | Unacceptable | Unacceptable  | Unacceptable | Unacceptable |
| 2. He <b>glimpsed</b> at the date on the carton of milk _____.                                | Unacceptable | Unacceptable | Unacceptable | Unacceptable | Unacceptable  | Unacceptable | Unacceptable |
| 3. The woman <b>winked</b> _____.   | Strange      | Unacceptable | Unacceptable | Acceptable   | Strange       | Strange      | Acceptable   |
| 4. Mary <b>burped</b> _____.  | Acceptable   | Unacceptable | Acceptable   | Acceptable   | Acceptable    | Acceptable   | Acceptable   |
| 5. The light <b>flashed</b> once _____.   | Unacceptable | Unacceptable | Unacceptable | Acceptable   | Unacceptable  | Acceptable   | Acceptable   |
| 6. The phone <b>rang</b> _____ and John picked up on the first ring.                          | Strange      | Acceptable   | Acceptable   | Acceptable   | Acceptable    | Acceptable   | Strange      |
| 7. The boxer <b>hit</b> his opponent _____ and knocked him out in one blow.                   | Strange      | Strange      | Acceptable   | Acceptable   | Acceptable    | Acceptable   | Unacceptable |
| 8. The carpenter <b>hammered the nail</b> once _____ before realizing that the nail had bent. | Strange      | Unacceptable | Acceptable   | Acceptable   | Strange       | Acceptable   | Unacceptable |
| 9. For a split second the earth <b>shook</b> _____.   | Acceptable   | Strange      | Acceptable   | Acceptable   | Strange       | Acceptable   | Strange      |
| 10. The boy <b>cried out</b> _____ when the dog bit him.                                      | Strange      | Unacceptable | Acceptable   | Strange      | Strange       | Acceptable   | Unacceptable |
| 11. The student <b>called out</b> _____ to her friend.  | Unacceptable | Unacceptable | Unacceptable | Unacceptable | Acceptable    | Strange      | Unacceptable |

Key: Color corresponds to speaker's judgement of grammaticality

Green: Acceptable

Yellow: Strange

Red: Unacceptable

## Results

All semelfactives **except** for *glimpsed* could take at least one dynamic adverb in all of the tests.

## Experiment 2: Testing the Problematic Verb *glimpsed*

- The verb *glimpsed* was tested with various objects.
- Results from both experiments were compared.

|                  | Tested Sentences:  | Can take at least one dynamic adverb | Some Strange, but none fully acceptable | Cannot take at least one dynamic adverb | % total acceptability |
|------------------|--|--------------------------------------|---|---|-----------------------|
| Inanimate Object | 1. He <b>glimpsed</b> at the side-view mirror _____.           | Speaker 1, Speaker 2, Speaker 3      |   |   | 100%                  |
|                  | 2. He <b>glimpsed</b> _____ at the side-view mirror.           | Speaker 2, Speaker 3                 |   |   | 100%                  |
|                  | 3. He <b>glimpsed</b> at the date on the carton of milk _____. | Speaker 2, Speaker 3                 |   | Speaker 1, Speaker 4                    | 50%                   |
|                  | 4. He <b>glimpsed</b> _____ at the date on the carton of milk. | Speaker 2                            | Speaker 4                               | Speaker 3                               | 33%                   |
| Animate Object   | 5. He <b>caught a glimpse</b> of the intruder _____.           |                                      | Speaker 2                               | Speaker 3, Speaker 4                    | 0%                    |
|                  | 6. He <b>glimpsed</b> at the intruder _____.                   |                                      |   | Speaker 4                               | 0%                    |
|                  | 7. He <b>glimpsed</b> _____ at the intruder.                   |                                      | Speaker 4                               |   | 0%                    |
|                  | 8. He <b>glimpsed</b> at his girlfriend _____.                 |                                      | Speaker 2, Speaker 4                    |   | 0%                    |

## Results

For semelfactive + inanimate object:

Results were inconsistent between participants, but most of the sentences could take at least one dynamic adverb.

For semelfactive + animate object:

**None** of the sentences with the semelfactive *glimpsed* and a dynamic adverb were judged to be grammatical.

## Conclusion: Data Points Towards a Separate Rule at Work

- What appears to be an exception to the systematic classification of semelfactives could be the result of another rule.
- This rule would prevent animate objects from occurring with the word *glimpsed* when a dynamic adverb is present.
- Dialectal differences may also be involved. Non-participants from other areas have commented that *He glimpsed the intruder.* is grammatical for them, while all of the speakers in the study deemed it ungrammatical.

## Implications

- For the study of aspectual classes: This provides more evidence that Van Valin's classification and tests are more consistent and effective than previously thought.
- For our understanding of language: Evidence that what can appear to be an exception to a rule in a language may in fact be a separate rule.

## References

Van Valin, Robert D. 2006. *Some Universals of Verb Semantics*. In *Linguistic Universals*. Ricardo Mairal (ed.). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 155-178.