

MORPHOLOGICAL AND SYNTACTIC FEATURES OF VERBS EXPRESSING NATURAL PHENOMENA

Tukhtaeva Elmira

Master's Student of Karshi State University,

Tel: +998909252383

e-mail: isomiddinovnamira@gmail.com

Annotation: Verbs expressing natural phenomena form a distinct lexical category in English, encompassing words that describe meteorological, astronomical, and geological events. These verbs are essential for communicating about natural occurrences and their impact on human life. This article examines the morphological and syntactic properties of these verbs, including their forms, inflections, derivational processes, transitivity, and sentence structure. By analyzing these linguistic aspects, we highlight their unique role in English grammar and how they reflect our perception of nature.

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Through this study, we uncover the mechanisms that make these verbs distinctive, providing insights into how English encodes the natural world. The findings also serve as a basis for further comparative analysis, particularly in translation studies.

Verbs expressing natural phenomena constitute a unique lexical category in English, encompassing words that describe occurrences in the natural world, such as meteorological events, astronomical occurrences, and geological processes. These verbs play a crucial role in human language, enabling us to communicate about the environment and the forces of nature that shape our lives.

The study of verbs expressing natural phenomena offers valuable insights into the linguistic representation of the world around us. By examining their morphological and syntactic properties, we can gain a deeper understanding of how language reflects and shapes our perception of nature.

This chapter delves into the lexical-grammatical characteristics of verbs expressing natural phenomena in English. It explores their morphological features, including verb forms, inflections, and word formation processes. Additionally, it investigates their syntactic properties, such as transitivity, verb complementation, and sentence structure. By analyzing these linguistic aspects, we aim to shed light on the distinctive nature of this verb category and its role in English grammar.

This chapter delves into the lexical-grammatical characteristics of verbs expressing natural phenomena in English, focusing on their morphological and syntactic features. Natural phenomena have been a central part of human experience and linguistic expression throughout history. Verbs that describe these phenomena are particularly interesting as they represent events occurring independently of human agency. This study aims to investigate the morphological and syntactic features of such verbs in English, analyzing their unique properties and grammatical roles. By understanding these features, we can gain deeper insights into how language encodes

the natural world. Verbs that describe natural occurrences, such as rain, snow, thunder, and hail, hold a unique position in the English language due to their distinct structural and functional properties. Unlike most verbs, which often involve an agent or subject performing an action, these verbs typically describe events that occur independently of human involvement, emphasizing the autonomous nature of natural phenomena.

The chapter begins by exploring the morphological aspects of these verbs, including their inflectional patterns, derivational processes, and non-finite forms. It highlights the simplicity and regularity of many of these verbs, alongside exceptions that exhibit irregularities. The discussion also addresses how morphological forms like gerunds and participles contribute to the versatility of these verbs in various syntactic constructions.

Subsequently, the chapter examines the syntactic features of natural phenomenon verbs, with a focus on impersonal constructions, subjectless usage, and their alignment with intransitive verb behavior. The use of the dummy subject *it* in English is analyzed in depth, alongside the role of adverbials in modifying the meaning of these verbs. Moreover, the chapter considers how aspectual and temporal variations enable these verbs to convey nuanced descriptions of natural events.

Through a detailed analysis, this chapter aims to uncover the linguistic mechanisms that make these verbs unique, offering insights into how English encodes the natural world in its grammatical system. These findings also serve as a foundation for the comparative analysis in subsequent chapters, where the translation of such verbs into Uzbek and the accompanying challenges are explored.

Verbs that describe natural phenomena, such as rain, snow, hail, and thunder, exhibit distinct morphological characteristics. These features highlight the interplay between regularity and irregularity in English verb morphology. This section examines three key aspects: inflectional patterns, derivational processes, and non-finite forms, supported by scientific theories and empirical data.

Inflectional Patterns

Inflectional morphology involves the addition of suffixes or changes in the verb form to indicate grammatical categories like tense, aspect, mood, and person. Verbs expressing natural phenomena largely conform to the regular inflectional patterns in English, while a few exhibit irregularities.

Regular Verbs:

The majority of natural phenomena verbs, such as rain, snow, and hail, follow standard inflectional rules:

Present tense: rain → rains (third-person singular)

Past tense: rain → rained

Present participle: rain → raining

Past participle: rain → rained

The productivity of these regular patterns is extensively studied in linguistic research. Pinker (1999) discusses how regular verbs are processed through rule-based mechanisms in the human brain, emphasizing the cognitive efficiency of predictable inflectional paradigms.

Irregular Verbs:

A smaller subset of natural phenomena verbs, such as freeze and blow, demonstrates irregular inflection:

freeze → froze, frozen

blow → blew, blown

These irregularities are remnants of historical strong verb conjugations from Old English. According to Bybee and Slobin (1982), irregular verbs are often high-frequency items preserved through language evolution, which explains why verbs like freeze retain their irregular patterns. Such exceptions add depth to English morphology, blending modern regularity with historical complexity.

Derivational Processes

Derivational morphology refers to the creation of new words or grammatical forms through processes like affixation or conversion. Verbs describing natural phenomena frequently undergo zero-derivation (conversion), where a noun is repurposed as a verb without the addition of affixes:

"He padded the beaten trail." (Jack London's «The Call of the Wild»)

"Pad" (noun: a soft foot or cushion) → "pad" (verb: to walk softly).

"Buck leaped straight up into the air, and then straight down into the compact mass on the ground." (Jack London's «The Call of the Wild»)

"Leap" (noun: a jump) → "leap" (verb: to jump).

"The days grew colder and the nights sharper." (Jack London's «The Call of the Wild»)

"Sharpen" is expected, but "sharper" here functions adjectivally, hinting at a conceptual shift in the perception of coldness.

Bauer and Huddleston (2002) classify these conversions as efficient linguistic strategies, particularly in English, which often prefers lexical economy. Such derivations are common in natural phenomena verbs due to their descriptive function and their role in representing observable events.

In addition to zero-derivation, affixation can expand the lexical family of these verbs:

freeze → freezing (adjective), freezer (noun)

rain → rainfall (noun)

These derived forms, as noted by Plag (2003), reflect how morphology interacts with syntax and semantics to enhance a verb's utility across grammatical categories.

Non-finite Forms

Non-finite forms of verbs—infinitives, participles, and gerunds—enable them to function flexibly in complex syntactic constructions. Verbs expressing natural phenomena are no exception.

Infinitive: to rain, to snow, to thunder

Present participle: raining, snowing, thundering

Past participle: rained, snowed, thundered

These forms facilitate the construction of progressive, perfect, and passive tenses. For example:

Progressive aspect: It is snowing heavily.

Perfect aspect: It has rained all day.

Empirical studies, such as those conducted by Quirk et al. (1985), reveal the high frequency of non-finite forms in weather-related discourse, particularly in descriptive and narrative contexts.

Gerund Forms:

The overlap between present participles and gerunds (raining, snowing) adds further flexibility, allowing verbs to function nominally:

“There was imperative need of getting food. He saw to the feeding of the dogs and the getting of wood to build a fire.” (Jack London’s «The Call of the Wild»)

"Getting" (from "get") functions as a gerund, acting as a noun to indicate the act of obtaining something.

"Feeding" (from "feed") also acts as a gerund, referring to the process of giving food.

These gerund forms allow actions to be treated as abstract concepts or necessary tasks rather than immediate verbs.

Smith’s (1997) aspectual framework highlights the importance of non-finite forms in capturing temporal nuances, particularly in event-driven descriptions like natural phenomena.

Simplicity and Regularity

One of the defining characteristics of natural phenomena verbs is their morphological simplicity. Most of these verbs are monosyllabic (rain, snow, hail) and follow regular inflectional patterns, reflecting English’s preference for transparency in high-frequency verbs. As demonstrated in the British National Corpus (BNC), their regularity facilitates ease of use in both spoken and written communication, particularly in weather-related contexts.

Exceptions and Irregularities

Despite their overall regularity, irregular verbs like freeze (froze, frozen) and blow (blew, blown) stand out. These irregular patterns have been preserved due to their frequency and historical significance, as described by Lieberman et al. (2007), who analyzed the evolution of irregular verbs through computational models. Their findings suggest that high-frequency verbs are less likely to regularize over time, maintaining irregular forms as linguistic artifacts.

Scientific Implications

Cognitive Processing:

Regular and irregular verbs activate distinct cognitive processes, as shown in neuroimaging studies (e.g., Ullman et al., 1997). Regular forms rely on rule-based computations, while irregular forms are stored as lexical entries. This dual-mechanism model explains the coexistence of simplicity and exceptions in natural phenomena verbs.

Diachronic Linguistics:

Historical studies (Bybee, 2007) trace the morphological evolution of these verbs, revealing how natural phenomena verbs reflect broader patterns of language change, including the gradual loss of strong verb conjugations in English.

“He sprang from the midst of the sprawling men, and with a bound reached the dog.” (Jack London’s «The Call of the Wild»)

"Sprang" (past tense of "spring") is a strong verb, maintaining an older, irregular conjugation pattern.

The verb "sprawl" (used in "sprawling men") historically underwent regularization, forming its participle with -ing, aligning with the trend where older strong verbs became weak over time.

This example reflects broader patterns of morphological change in English, as strong verb forms have gradually diminished in favor of regularized patterns.

Typological Comparisons:

Cross-linguistic studies (Comrie, 1989) highlight differences in how languages morphologically encode natural phenomena. While English relies on zero-derivation and regular inflection, languages like Uzbek incorporate explicit auxiliary verbs, offering insight into universal versus language-specific strategies.

The morphological aspects of verbs expressing natural phenomena in English illustrate a balance between regularity and linguistic complexity. Their predictable inflectional patterns and derivational processes align with principles of cognitive efficiency, while irregularities offer a glimpse into the historical evolution of English. Supported by empirical evidence and linguistic theory, these features reveal the adaptability of English morphology in encoding universal natural experiences.

Natural phenomena verbs, such as shine, storm, drizzle, freeze, and fog, possess distinctive syntactic properties that make them unique in English grammar. These properties include transitivity, verb complementation, and sentence structure, reflecting the impersonal and event-driven nature of the phenomena they describe. This exploration is grounded in linguistic theories and supported by empirical data, highlighting the scientific basis of these features.

Transitivity

Most natural phenomena verbs are intransitive, meaning they do not require a direct object. This property aligns with their semantic role as descriptors of events that occur without human agency. For instance:

“The sun had risen brightly and the day was full of promise.” (Jack London’s «The Call of the Wild»)

"Risen" (from "rise") is an intransitive verb—it does not take a direct object, as the action occurs independently.

This aligns with the nature of natural phenomena verbs, which describe events (e.g., "snow falls," "wind blows") that happen without a direct agent acting upon them.

“The river froze solid during the long winter.” (Jack London’s «The Call of the Wild»)

"Froze" (from "freeze") functions intransitively, as the freezing occurs without an external force acting upon it.

According to Huddleston and Pullum (2002) in *The Cambridge Grammar of the English Language*, intransitive constructions are characteristic of verbs denoting weather and natural phenomena. The absence of an agent or object reflects the inherent autonomy of these events. Moreover, corpus studies, such as those conducted using the British National Corpus (BNC), show that natural phenomena verbs overwhelmingly occur without direct objects in both spoken and written English.

Optional Transitivity in Metaphorical Use:

In metaphorical contexts, some of these verbs adopt transitivity, taking objects for poetic or descriptive purposes:

A cold fear froze the very depths of his being.” (Jack London’s «The Call of the Wild»)

"Freeze" is typically intransitive (“The river froze”), but here it takes the object “the very depths of his being”, intensifying the emotional effect.

“Silence fell upon the camp.” (Jack London’s «The Call of the Wild»)

"Fall" is often intransitive (“The snow falls”), but here, it takes "silence" as a direct object, creating a poetic image of quiet settling over the camp.

This flexibility is documented in Langacker's (1991) work on cognitive grammar, which highlights how metaphorical extensions allow verbs to adopt new syntactic roles while preserving their core meanings.

Verb Complementation

Natural phenomena verbs often pair with adverbials to specify the manner, time, or place of the event, rather than requiring true complements. For example:

The drizzle continued through the night.

The frost settled on the fields.

Scientific Support:

Complementation patterns are analyzed extensively in Quirk et al. (1985), which identifies natural phenomena verbs as part of a broader category of verbs with simple syntactic requirements. These verbs tend to pair with adverbials rather than clausal complements, emphasizing the descriptive rather than relational nature of their usage.

Prepositional Complements:

Occasionally, these verbs combine with prepositions to provide additional locative or causal information:

"The snow fell on the sleeping land." (Jack London's «The Call of the Wild»)

"Fell" (intransitive) is complemented by "on the sleeping land", specifying where the action occurs.

"Darkness settled over the frozen landscape." (Jack London's «The Call of the Wild»)

"Settled" is enhanced by "over the frozen landscape", reinforcing the atmospheric shift.

Leech et al. (1994) in their work on English grammar note that such prepositional phrases are common adjuncts that enhance the informational content without altering the verb's syntactic simplicity.

Sentence Structure

A hallmark of natural phenomena verbs in English is their use in impersonal constructions featuring the expletive subject *it*:

"It was raining when they broke camp." (Jack London's «The Call of the Wild»)

The verb "raining" (from "rain") is intransitive and naturally occurs in impersonal constructions with "*it*."

"It grew colder as the night deepened." (Jack London's «The Call of the Wild»)

"Grew colder" describes a change in temperature, with "*it*" as the grammatical subject rather than an explicit agent.

Scientific Basis:

The use of expletive *it* is a syntactic strategy that satisfies English's requirement for overt subjects in finite clauses. Huddleston and Pullum (2002) describe these constructions as "weather *it*" clauses, designed to encode impersonal, agentless events efficiently. Linguistic studies, such as those by Krifka et al. (1995), emphasize that these constructions are semantically vacuous but syntactically necessary, reflecting English's subject-prominent grammar.

Sentence Variations:

In informal or poetic contexts, the expletive *it* may be omitted, resulting in subjectless constructions:

"Raining all night, the trail turned to slush." (Jack London's «The Call of the Wild»)

Instead of "It was raining all night", London drops "*it*", making the sentence more fluid and direct.

Such omissions, while rare, are documented in stylistic analyses like Biber et al. (1999), which explore variation in grammar across different registers.

Interaction with Aspect and Modality

Natural phenomena verbs demonstrate unique behaviors with respect to aspect and modality:

Progressive Aspect:

It is fogging up outside.

The wind is blowing fiercely. (Jack London's «The Call of the Wild»)

The progressive aspect highlights the ongoing, dynamic nature of these phenomena. Comrie (1976) in *Aspect* notes that such usage underscores the durative and evolving nature of events described by these verbs.

Modality:

It might drizzle later.

The sun could shine tomorrow.

Palmer (2001) in *Mood and Modality* explains that modal verbs frequently accompany natural phenomena verbs to convey uncertainty or prediction, reflecting the inherent unpredictability of natural events.

Cross-Linguistic Comparisons

The syntactic features of natural phenomena verbs in English contrast with those in other languages, providing additional insight:

In Uzbek, explicit subject-verb agreement is maintained even for natural phenomena verbs (e.g., Qor yog'moqda — "Snow is falling"), as noted by Ismatullaev (2007) in studies of Turkic languages.

In Spanish, subject omission is typical for weather-related verbs (e.g., Llueve — "It rains"), demonstrating syntactic economy.

These cross-linguistic variations emphasize English's reliance on expletive constructions as a unique strategy for expressing impersonal events.

The syntactic properties of natural phenomena verbs in English are supported by both linguistic theory and empirical research. Their intransitivity, reliance on simple adverbial complements, and use of impersonal constructions illustrate their distinct role in the language. Studies by Huddleston and Pullum, Bybee, and others provide scientific evidence for these features, while cross-linguistic comparisons underscore their specificity to English. Through these verbs, English efficiently encodes universal natural experiences, balancing syntactic simplicity with expressive depth.

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