VP-INTERNAL COMPOSITION OF EVENTS

E. Matthew Husband1, Linnaea Stockall2, and Alan Beretta1

1Department of Linguistics and Cognitive Science Program, Michigan State University, 2Psychology Department, Concordia University

CURRENT STUDY
- Our question: When is telicity calculated?
- Two experiments: Inversion and time course of telicity calculation.
- Experiment 1: Word by word measurement of subjects' reaction times as they read sentences, followed by a grammaticality judgment.
- Experiment 2: Lexical decision to different event classes of verbs.

INTRODUCTION & BACKGROUND
- Telicity as a component of event interpretation (aktionsart) has been studied both in linguistic theory and psycholinguistics.

LINGUISTIC PERSPECTIVES
- Telicity is determined by semantic properties of verbs and properties of internal arguments (Borer 2005; Dowty 1979; Verkuyl 1972).

Experiment 1: Self-Paced Reading
- Verbs were classified into lexically bounded or unspecified by telicity tests (VP or in X time; it took X time to VP; almost VP, stopped VP;ing; Dowty 1979).

Materials
(1) Bounded, Definite (Telics) The expert physicist lost the files on the formation of black holes.
(2) Bounded, Bare (Telics) The expert physicist lost files on the formation of black holes.
(3) Unspecified, Definite (Telics) The expert physicist read the files on the formation of black holes.
(4) Unspecified, Bare (Atelic) The expert physicist read files on the formation of black holes.

METHODS
- 55 subjects, 2x2 lexically bounded vs. unspecified verb by bare vs. definite determiner (50 items, 209 stimuli total), 122 fillers.
- Subjects made an acceptability judgment after completing each sentence.

RESULTS
- No main effect of Verb Type online (p > .05). Verb region showed no significant differences.
- Main Effect of Determiner Type in Noun region.
  - Bare nouns read slower than definite nouns (F(1, 61) = 21.45, p < .001; F(1, 49) = 16.374, p < .001).
  - Effect persists to Noun-1 region (F(1, 61) = 13.427, p < .001; F(1, 49) = 21.219, p < .001).

EXPERIMENT 2: LEXICAL DECISION
- Verbs from Experiment 1 items.

METHODS
- 66 subjects, 100 stimuli (50 bounded, 50 unspecified), 100 length matched pronounceable non-words (ARC Non-Word Corpus).
- Subjects made a word/non-word judgment as quickly as possible to a string of letters.

RESULTS
- No effect of Verb Type (t(1,64) = .850, p > .396; t(1,49) = .646, p > .521).

CONCLUSIONS
- Telicity is calculated as soon as VP information is made available.
- Evidence that event interpretation is an immediate commitment.
- VP-internal information, including verb type and argument properties, are quickly recovered.
- Only late offline effects of Verb Type.
- Not slow access. Recovery of verb type information is fast enough to enter into the event calculus.
- Complexity? Unspecified verbs, requiring more information to determine telicity, may lead to more difficulty and thus more rejections overall.

DIRECTIONALITY OF EFFECT
- An unexpected finding: Atelic interpretations more complex than telic interpretations. Two possible accounts to consider.
  1. Frequency account:
     - Telic interpretations are more frequent.
     - Telic is the default interpretation children first assume.
  2. Model-theoretic semantic account:
     - Atelic interpretation requires an unbounded set of events.
     - Unbounded sets may be more complex than singleton sets to process.

REFERENCES & ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS


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