Forty years of linguistic research has lead to a rich body of literature concerning event classification and representation in verbal predicates. Early work establishing basic event classes has provided a foundation for recent work attempting to derive these classes from more primitive semantic components. Focusing on eventive predicates, researchers have noted a relationship between the boundedness of an event and the distribution of temporal modifiers. This notion of boundedness, referred to as telicity, appears to be the product of the verb and the plurality of its internal argument in English. Singular internal arguments generate bounded (telic) phrases while bare plural internal arguments generate unbounded (atelic) verbal predicates.

(1) a. Howard sent a check to his daughter last year. (telic/nondurative)  
    b. #Howard sent a check to his daughter for years. (telic/durative)

(2) a. Howard sent checks to his daughter for years. (atelic/nondurative)  
    b. Howard sent checks to his daughter last year. (atelic/durative)

The anomaly of (1b) with a durative modifier is not like other semantic anomalous readings. What appear to be apparent mismatches between the event class of the verbal predicate and a temporal modifier instead lead to an iterative interpretation of the event. The process responsible for the iterative interpretation of the verbal predicate to match a durative (atelic) modifier has been called aspectual coercion.

Coercion processes have been of general interest to psycholinguistics as instances of semantic processing disassociated from syntactic processing. Budding research on aspectual coercion has focused on issues of incremental interpretation of aspect as revealed by the mismatch of a telic verbal predicate with a durative modifier which requires an atelic verbal predicate. Online processing costs of aspectual coercion have been taken as evidence that telicity is computed before the occurrence of the durative modifier, though this research has mixed results in need of clarification.

Our research continues work on aspectual coercion by focusing on durative and nondurative temporal modifiers, demonstrating online processing costs associated with aspectual coercion. In addition, we find effects of initial aspectual computation which have yet to be reported in the literature. We discuss these results in the context of previous experimental findings and in light of linguistic theory. These experiments demonstrate the need for linguistic theory in language processing research.