

Clean, empty, dry, and flat: Do children interpret adjectives in control resultatives as strong telicity markers?

The present study is the first to probe children's sensitivity to the telicity contribution of adjectives with (partially) closed scales. We assessed German-speaking children's interpretation of adjectival control resultatives [1] (see (1b), page 2), compared to the corresponding simple transitives (see (1a), page 2). These predicates involve incremental theme verbs such as *wipe* and exhibit variation in telicity, referred to as semantic and pragmatic telicity. (1a) allows a telic and an atelic reading, i.e. it can denote completed or incomplete events [2,3]. The telic reading in (1a) is argued to arise pragmatically via an inference triggered by the quantized DP and is not always computed, rendering a continuation with (1d) felicitous. In contrast, (1b/c) only allow a telic reading, which arises semantically from the meaning conditions of the closed scale adjective and the verb particle, respectively. The culmination point is entailed and cannot be cancelled; continuing with (1d) is infelicitous [2,4]. Accordingly, both resultative particles and closed scale adjectives are argued to be strong telicity markers. Experimental adult data (resultative particles [5,6]; adjectival resultatives [7]) support this analysis. The majority of acquisition studies, focusing on verb particles and transitives, found that by age 5, children restrict predicates with resultative verb particles like *off* (1c) to completed events, while simple transitives with quantized DPs (1a) are accepted for incomplete events about half of the time [5,8,9]. A recent study investigated adjectival resultatives [10] but did not assess telicity; hence, it is open whether children are sensitive to the telicity contribution of adjectives in control resultatives.

To address this issue, we investigated how children interpret adjectival resultative constructions compared to their simple transitive counterparts. 22 typically-developing monolingual German-speaking children (mean age: 5;6 years) were tested with the TVJ-task by [7], crossing structure (RESULTATIVE/TRANSITIVE) and event type (COMPLETED/INCOMPLETE), with 4 items per condition. Given the semantic similarities between resultative particles and adjectival resultatives, we predicted that children would assign a semantically telic interpretation to sentences like (1b) and a pragmatically telic interpretation to sentences like (1a). The adjectives *empty*, *clean*, *dry*, and *flat* were combined with the verbs *drink*, *wipe*, *blow-dry*, and *iron*. Children saw animations (see Fig.1 for stills): in the COMPLETED condition, the man removed the stains completely, in the INCOMPLETE condition some stains remained after the wiping had stopped. An adjective pretest assessed whether children agreed with the depiction of the properties described by the adjectives. Children performed at ceiling in the completed events (see Fig. 2). For incomplete events, acceptance, pointing to an atelic reading, was significantly lower for resultatives than for transitives (24.1% vs. 48.9%, Wilcoxon: $p=.0016$). The rate of telicity inferences for the transitive structures (51.1%) is in line with previous findings for different verb types [5]. However, the rate of telic readings for adjectival resultatives (75.9%) is slightly lower than that found for resultative particles [see 5]. An individual analysis revealed substantial variation across items: resultatives with *empty* and *clean* received a semantically telic interpretation by 95.5% and 81.8% of the children, while resultatives with *dry* and *flat* were interpreted as semantically telic by 63.6% and 61.9% of the children.

Our study provides novel evidence that a) preschoolers are sensitive to the telicity contribution of adjectives with (partially) closed scales, and b) that some of the adjectives are recognized as strong telicity markers by age 5. We propose that mastering the telicity entailment is more challenging with adjectival resultatives than with resultative particles, because adjectival control resultatives are less productive and because they require secondary predication [1].

- (1) a. Er hat den Tisch gewischt. ‘He wiped the table.’
 b. Er hat den Tisch **sauber** gewischt. ‘He wiped the table clean.’
 c. Er hat den Tisch **ab**gewischt. ‘He wiped the table off.’
 d. ..., aber es sind noch Flecken darauf. ‘..., but there are still stains on it.’



Figure 1. Example incomplete event.

Hat er den Tisch sauber gewischt?
 Has he the table clean wiped
 ‘Did he wipe the table clean?’

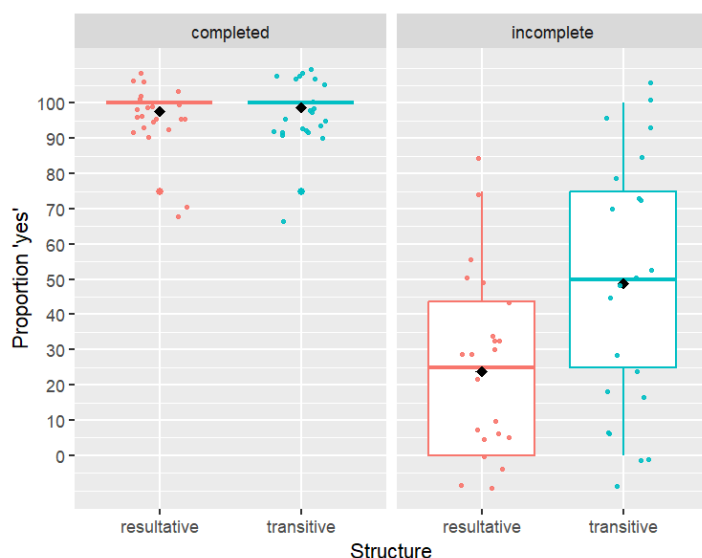


Figure 2. Box plots for yes-responses (in %) by structure and event type. ♦ = mean.

References

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