Coercion types in French : an experimental study
Submission for workshop 3 -- Experimental perspectives on event coercion

The purpose of this talk is to ascertain by experimental means whether (a) 'complement coercion' verbs (Pustejovsky, 1995) triggering a lexical type of coercion (cf. (1)), and (b) French tenses believed to trigger a grammatical type of coercion (de Swart's (1998) 'aspectual coercion') (cf. (2)), should be analysed similarly :

(1)   Yann commença sa crêpe.
        Yann begin-PS.3sg his pancake. 'Yann began his pancake.'
(2)   Yann fut malade.
        Yann be-PS.3sg sick. 'Yann (started) being sick'.

There is, in effect, a well-known difficulty in appraising what and what should not be modeled in terms of coercion, both within the theoretical and experimental literature (see e.g. Asher, 2011, Bary, 2009, Baggio et al. 2009). Recently, it has been argued (Katsika et al. 2012) that *contra* common wisdom (cf. Asher 2011:222), psych-verbs such as *enjoy* (unlike aspectual verbs) did not trigger coercion effects, as they did not exhibit the kind of experimental pattern associated with a greater processing cost (Frisson & McElree 2008…) – said cost being inherent to coercion *qua* a semantic adjustment mechanism (for instance in the spirit of Asher, 2011).

Bearing those results in mind, we have undertaken an experimental study of two French tenses, namely the *passé simple* (PS) and the *imparfait* (IMPF), which have also been generally associated with (grammatical) *aspectual coercion* effects (de Swart, 1998). Interestingly, while there is a strong consensus among aspectologists that the PS (cf. i.a., Smith 1991, Bary 2009…) triggers coercion effects when combined with *atelic* Aktionsart types (which violate its typing requirement), it has been sometimes questioned whether or not the IMPF exhibited related coercion effects when combined with *telic* Aktionsart types (the IMPF being commonly viewed as requiring atelic event types; see e.g. Bonami, 2002, Delfitto, 2004, Caudal 2005, Baggio et al. 2007, Bary 2009…).

Our experimental goal will be twofold, as we intend to determine (i) whether utterances in the PS and/or the IMPF incur or not the same kind of processing cost identified for *bona fide* complement coercion verbs in previous studies, and (ii) how they differ (or not) from one another in this respect. Specifically, we are currently running experiments whose purpose is to establish with which Aktionsart types (starting with the four traditional vendlerian classes) the PS and the IMPF can be shown (or not) to cause greater computing cost – see table 1, listing the Aktionsart types for which these tenses are expected to trigger coercion effects, according to predominant theoretical views.

Table 1

	Coercion effects with the PS	Coercion effects with the IMPF
States	yes	no
Activities	yes	no
Accomplishments	no	yes
Achievements	no	yes

We are currently running experiments using web-based acceptability judgments (Ibex-Farm), with 8 items per condition (64 items in total). In order to ensure that we have mustered enough (statistical) power to detect even small differences, we will use the thermometer judgment task (Featherston, 2008) and a substantial amount of participants (>100). Eye-

tracking while reading experiments using an SR-research Eyelink II system are also planned for the beginning of 2014.

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