Habituals and the progressive

Habituals in English, like statives, appear in the simple present tense, as in (1).

(1) a. John smokes.

b. Mary knows French

Habituals are generally assumed to be stative and homogeneous down to instants: if John smokes at interval i, he has this habit at all instants in i, even if he doesn't actually smoke in i. However, while other statives are infelicitous in the progressive (2c,d), habituals do occur in the progressive: (2a,b).

- (2) a. ✓ John is now/still/already smoking.
- b. ✓ John is smoking again.
- c. #Mary is now/still/already knowing French. d.#Mary is knowing French again.

So the problem is: how can habituals be stative and occur in the progressive (as they do even in languages like Dutch that strictly disallow progressives of statives)?

We propose a solution using the distinction between *segmental* and *incremental* homogeneity (Landman 2008, Landman and Rothstein 2012). Statives are segmentally homogenous: if P is a stative predicate and P holds at interval i, P holds at every subinterval of i, including all the instants in i. It is this that licenses the simple present tense in English (Dowty 1979). Activities are incremental homogenous: if P is an activity predicate that holds at inerval i, then P holds at the P-onset interval - an initial subinterval of i big enough to host P (which means, with Dowty 1979, bigger than an instant) and P holds at all incremental extensions of the onset interval that are part of i.

Incremental homogeneity allows for pauses in activities. If at interval i no crying goes on, we may still regard the activity of crying as going on at j if we regard j as an interval *continuing* an earlier interval i where actual crying *did* go on: incrementally, the crying at i continues to be a crying process at i+j, in particular if j is followed by an interval k where actual crying is once again going on: in that case j is a pause in the crying that goes on at i+j+k. Incremental homogeneity says that if John cried for two hours, sufficient crying must happen over the two-hour period to support the claim that the initial event continued throughout that period. But there may have been several pauses of varying size.

While states are segmentally homogenous and activities incrementally homogeneous, habit predicates are both. They are segmentally homogeneous, since if John has the habit of smoking at i, he has that habit at every instant in i. On the other hand, a habit, as a generalisation over episodic events, must be supported by sufficient *instances* of these episodic events. We will show that these instances form the incremental structure of a process of instantiation of the habit, and it is the latter process that licenses the progressive (i.e. it is the instantiation process that is claimed to be in progress in (2a,b)). We will argue that temporal adverbials impose temporal stages on habits, and we will show that this facilitates progressive habituals.

References:

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