

Title: Agentivity, Animacy and Telicity: Event Coercion in Intransitive Clauses

Application for Workshop 3: *Experimental perspectives on event coercion*

In this talk, we will focus on factors of aspect enrichment and coercion that are based on the interaction between agentivity (tested via animacy) and telicity. Such factors have been neglected in experimental and theoretical research on aspect enrichment and coercion. The empirical domain of our investigation are intransitive clauses.

As in many other languages, German intransitive verbs are split into unaccusatives such as *entkommen* 'escape' and unergatives such as *reden* 'talk'. In previous research, unaccusatives are assumed to be telic verbs that denote a change of location or state and to select a patient role; unergative verbs are analysed as atelic verbs with an agent role. Thus, agentivity and telicity are assumed to be inversely correlated in split intransitivity (e.g. Van Valin 1990, Keller & Sorace 2003). With respect to auxiliary selection, unaccusatives select the auxiliary BE, while unergatives select HAVE.

However, some intransitive verbs in German do not feature such a clear-cut distinction and call the hypothesized inverse correlation between agentivity and telicity into question. Verbs such as German *schwimmen* 'swim, float' and *schweben* 'float, hover' seem to be compatible with both an agentive interpretation (animate referent) and a non-agentive interpretation (inanimate referent) as well as with both telic and atelic contexts. These verbs also exhibit a more flexible auxiliary selection (see example in (1)).

- (1) *Peter behauptet, dass...*
Peter asserts that...
... *der Sportler* / *das Brett zur Schleuse* / *im See* *geschwommen ist/hat.*
... the sportsman / the plank to the sluice / in the lake swum BE/HAVE 3SG
'the sportman / the plank swam to the sluice / in the lake.'

From a theoretical perspective, such verbs are inherently locomotional since they denote an unspecified change in the position of the whole participant, even in atelic contexts. What is missing in atelic contexts is a locational or temporal boundary that is provided in telic contexts, for example, by a temporal or locative modifier. So, these verbs are indeterminate with respect to the telicity dimension 'specific change of state or location' but not with respect to the telicity dimension 'locomotion'. In addition, these verbs are also indeterminate with respect to agentivity. Therefore, the question arises how and to what extent event interpretation is guided by the intrasentential contextual information regarding agentivity (e.g. *der Sportler* 'the sportsman' vs. *das Brett* 'the plank') and telicity (e.g. *zur Schleuse* 'to the sluice' vs. *im See* 'in the lake').

In our talk, we will present ERP data from a recent experiment using sentences as in (1) to manipulate the factors ANIMACY of the referent, TELICITY and AUXILIARY in a systematic way. The data show that ERPs relative to the participle and relative to the subsequent auxiliary are strongly influenced by both factors ANIMACY and TELICITY in a way that is not in line with the predictions of previous accounts (inverse correlation of agentivity and telicity, e.g. Van Valin 1990, Keller & Sorace 2003).

References

- Keller, F. / Sorace, A. 2003. Gradient Auxiliary Selection and Impersonal Passivization in German: An Experimental Investigation. *Journal of Linguistics* 39, 57-108.
Van Valin, R. D. 1990. Semantic parameters of split intransitivity. *Language* 66, 221-260.