How Choice Of Syntactic Construction Affects Event Construal

If You Want A Quick Kiss, Make It Count:

1. How Choice Of Syntactic Construction Affects Event Construal

FROM SYNTAX TO EVENT CONSTRUAL

- Event construal is both based on lexical items and syntax (e.g., causation, roles of event participants, object properties, [1-3]).

- Light Verb Constructions (LVCs): two major fault lines in syntax and semantics interact

- Verbal aspect and mass vs. count [4-6]:
  - Punctive events:
    - Bounded in time (to kiss)
    - Often understood as repeated [7]
  - Durative events:
    - Unbounded in time (to advise, to talk)

Also: Count syntax aids in event individuation for punctive events [8]

HOW LONG DOES IT TAKE?

Key prediction: PC & DM shorter in ditransitive light verb

Version 1:
How long did that take?

100 English native speakers; answers transformed into log-seconds; LMER

Version 2:
After their first date, Douglas kissed/gave a kiss to Mary.
How long did that take?

[shortest] up to 15 seconds
[short] between 15 seconds and 46 seconds
[long] between 46 seconds and 1 hour
[longest] more than 1 hour

80 English native speakers; mixed-effects cumulative logit model

HOW MANY EVENTS?

Key prediction: count syntax (PC & DC) leads to fewer events

PC: After their first date, Douglas kissed/gave a kiss to Mary. How many events did you just imagine?

80 English native speakers; event counts transformed into log; LMER

HOW SIMILAR ARE THE EVENTS?

Key prediction: DC pairs less similar

Kissing --- giving a kiss (PC)

How similar are these events?

HOW LONG DOES IT TAKE?

Key prediction: main effects of event class and construction

Construction effect on PC & DM, but none on DC

How Choice Of Syntactic Construction Affects Event Construal

PREDICTIONS

- Punctive verbs:
  - Kiss

- Durative verbs:
  - Advise/talk

Stimuli:

- Count syntax
  - To give a kiss

- Mass syntax
  - To give advice

- To give a talk

Predictions:

- Shorter construal of events: to give a kiss < to kiss
- Shorter construal of events: to give a talk < to talk
- Different construal of events: to give advice < to advise
- Fewer events: to give a kiss < to kiss
- Same number of events: to give advice = to advise
- Fewer events: to give a talk < to talk

CONCLUSIONS

The interaction of aspectual class and mass/count syntax systematically affects...
- Construal of event duration
- Construal of event repetitions
- Construal of event similarity

We would like to thank David Barber, Victor Ferreira, Ray Jackendoff, Uri von der Malsburg, Emily Morgen, Jesse Snedeker, and Madeleine Wiese for helpful discussion, and an anonymous reviewer for her insightful comments. This work was supported by NIDCD Grant R01DC009187, DAAD (DAAD19-09-1-0953), IIS-0953870, an Alfred P. Sloan Fellowship to Roger Levy, as well as by a German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD) postdoctoral scholarship to Eva Wittenberg.

REFERENCES