

I'm done my homework: Complement coercion and aspectual adjectives in Canadian English

**Background:** Self-paced reading and eye-tracking studies have generally found that combining aspectual verbs (like *begin* or *finish*) with entity nouns (like *the book* or *the coffee*) is associated with increased reading times on and around the noun (McElree et al. 2001, Traxler et al. 2002, Pickering et al. 2005, Traxler et al. 2005, Frisson & McElree 2008, Katsika et al. 2012). This processing cost is widely interpreted as arising because *begin*, *finish*, and other aspectual verbs semantically select for an event (like *dancing* or *the dance*) and can take an entity complement only because it can be *coerced* into an event through a computationally costly process of type-shifting (see Pustejovsky 1991, 1995; Jackendoff 1997). This means that *finish + the book* is interpreted as *finish + reading the book* (or *writing the book*, etc.), at the cost of increased reading times when the noun is encountered.

The focus of this paper is the *be done NP* construction, which is found in Canadian English and a few varieties of American English (Yerastov 2008, 2012; Fruehwald & Myler 2015). In these dialects, it is possible to say *I'm done the book* (or *I'm finished the book*) to mean *I've finished the book*. According to the analysis of Fruehwald & Myler, this Canadian construction involves an aspectual adjective (*done* or *finished*) directly taking an NP complement, without silent intervening verbal or prepositional structure (i.e. this construction is not just *I'm done with the book* but with a silent or unpronounced preposition—among other differences, if you are *done the book* then you must have finished it, while if you are *done with the book* then it is possible that you lost interest before finishing). They also argue that, like aspectual verbs, the aspectual adjectives in this construction select for an event complement and require complement coercion / type-shifting for interpretation of entity nouns. If true, this should be detectable in longer reading times for entity nouns compared to event nouns.

**Experiment:** 36 speakers of Canadian English took part in an eye-tracking study that contrasted entity nouns (like *the resume*, *the coffee*, *the article*) with event nouns (like *the interview*, *the party*, *the conversation*) in the Canadian English *be done NP* construction and in the dialect-neutral *be done with NP* construction. There were 32 different sentences. Participants saw half of the sentences with an entity noun and half with an event noun. They also saw half of the sentences in the Canadian English construction, shown below, and half in the dialect-neutral construction (which includes *with* as an intervening preposition). The two groups of nouns were balanced to have the same average length and corpus frequency.

1. Because the actor is finished the script for the action movie, he can relax. (event version: the audition for the independent film)

Reading times for the critical region (determiner and noun) were analyzed with linear mixed effects models. A significant interaction between construction and noun type was found in go-past time ( $t_{54.88}=2.188$ ,  $p=0.0329$ ). Post-hoc t-tests found a longer go-past time for entity nouns (559ms) compared to event nouns (488ms) in the Canadian English *be done NP* construction ( $p=0.0326$ ), but no difference in go-past time (or other measures) between entity nouns (400ms) and event nouns (414ms) in the dialect-neutral *be done with NP* construction ( $p=0.4436$ ).

**Conclusion:** These results show a processing cost for entity nouns (compared to event nouns) directly following aspectual adjectives in the Canadian English *be done NP* construction, which supports Fruehwald & Myler's analysis that these aspectual adjectives (like the more widely studied aspectual verbs) require complement coercion and type-shifting for interpretation of entity noun direct objects. However, there was no such difference between noun types in the *be done with NP* construction, which has an intervening preposition. This suggests that no coercion / type-shifting is necessary in this construction, or alternatively that the construction has a built-in mechanism for interpreting or anticipating the need for

type-shifting (see Frisson & Frazier 2005 on the attenuation of mass→count coercion effects with elements that anticipate a count interpretation).

## References

- Frisson, Steven, & Brian McElree. 2008. "Complement Coercion Is Not Modulated by Competition: Evidence From Eye Movements". *Journal of Experimental Psychology: Learning, Memory, and Cognition*, 34(1). 1–11.
- Frisson, Steven, and Lyn Frazier. 2005. "Carving up word meanings: Portioning and grinding". *Journal of Memory and Language*, 53, 277–291.
- Fruehwald, Josef, & Neil Myler. 2015. "I'm done my homework—Case assignment in a stative passive". *Linguistic Variation*, 15(2). 141–168.
- Jackendoff, Ray. 1997. *The Architecture of the Language Faculty*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Katsika, Argyro, David Braze, Ashwini Deo, & Maria Mercedes Piñango. 2012. "Complement Coercion: Distinguishing between type-shifting and pragmatic inferencing". *The Mental Lexicon*, 7(1). 58–76.
- McElree, Brian, Matthew J. Traxler, Martin J. Pickering, Rachel E. Seely, & Ray Jackendoff. 2001. "Reading time evidence for enriched composition". *Cognition*, 78.
- Pickering, Martin J., Brian McElree, & Matthew J. Traxler. 2005. "The difficulty of coercion: A response to de Almeida". *Brain and Language*, 93. Pages 1–9.
- Pustejovsky, J. 1991. "The Generative Lexicon". *Computational Linguistics*, 17(4). 409–441.
- Pustejovsky, James. 1995. *The Generative Lexicon*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Traxler, Matthew J., Martin J. Pickering, & Brian McElree. 2002. "Coercion in sentence processing: evidence from eye-movements and self-paced reading". *Journal of Memory and Language*, 47. 530–547.
- Traxler, Matthew J., Brian McElree, Rihana S. Williams, & Martin J. Pickering. 2005. "Context Effects in Coercion: Evidence from Eye-Movements". *Journal of Memory and Language*, 53(1). 1–25.
- Yerastov, Yuri. 2008. "I am done dinner: a case of lexicalization". *Proceedings of the 2008 annual conference of the Canadian Linguistic Association*.
- Yerastov, Yuri. 2012. "Transitive *be* perfect: An experimental study of Canadian English". *Canadian Journal of Linguistics*, 57(3). 427–457.