

Eventivity Effects in Early Grammar: The case of non-finite verbs

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Various people have observed a relationship between finiteness and eventivity during the Root Infinitive (RI) stage in early grammar (e.g. de Haan 1987; Jordens 1990; Ferdinand 1996; Wijnen 1997; Hoekstra & Hyams 1998; Becker 2000 among others). The simplest generalization seems to be that *non-finite verbs are restricted to event-denoting predicates*. In other words, there are few, if any, stative non-finite forms though finite statives are plentiful. I refer to this as the Eventivity Constraint (EC) (See also Hoekstra and Hyams 1989). The EC is true for root infinitives in languages like Dutch, German, French and Russian. It also holds for ‘bare perfectives’ in Greek (arguably an RI-analogue) (Stephany 1981;1985; Hyams 1995), bare participles (participles without an auxiliary) in Italian, French and German (in fact, they are mainly telic, as observed by Antinucci and Miller (1976) and Bittner (2003). Interestingly, bare verbs in English are not restricted to eventive predicates (Hoekstra and Hyams 1998).

In this talk I propose an analysis of the EC based on the ‘aspectual anchoring hypothesis’ (AAH) in Hyams (2007). The AAH provides an account of the variation in temporal (past, present) and modal (volition, necessity, future) interpretations associated with different non-finite root verbs in several typologically diverse languages, including Dutch, Greek, Russian, English and Italian. This talk addresses the eventivity effects that show up in these same languages.

The basic idea behind the AAH is that in the absence of a tense specification non-finite clauses in child grammar are temporally anchored via the aspectual system (see also Becker 2000). The interpretations are derived through an interaction of universal principles of aspectual interpretation (for example, Giorgi and Pianesi’s 1998 Punctuality Constraint) and the specific aspectual properties of the target languages. I will show that without any additional stipulations the AAH also accounts for the EC and the lack of such an effect in English bare verbs.

To do this, I will also review the basic properties of the AAH, and also discuss some alternative accounts of the EC (for example, Hoekstra and Hyams’ 1998 Modal reference hypothesis, Wijnen’s 1987 denotational hypothesis, Blom’s 2002 heterogeneous set hypothesis). The modal reference and the denotational analyses offer some insight into the effects of eventivity, but at the same time neither is able to account for the full range of empirical data. The anchoring account of the EC incorporates insights from both these proposal, but avoids the pitfalls.