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Aspectual coercion from a cross-linguistic perspective

In my talk I will present two cross-linguistic psycholinguistic studies looking at the intricate interplay of lexical and grammatical aspect and the resulting processing consequences. The first study investigated accomplishments such as "build a house" under adverbial modification with for-adverbials resulting in a non-culminating interpretation. I will present contrastive reading time data from German and English showing remarkably similar interpretations with yet very different processing profiles in terms of processing costs. The experimental data suggest that we need to derive the 'coerced' interpretations in different ways and that the richer aspectual system in English with a grammaticalized progressive form may be responsible for the observed difference. The second line of research compares the processing of aspectual semantic mismatches in the case of for-modification of achievements such as "win the fight" in an aspect language, Russian, with a non aspect language, German. Cross-linguistic eyetracking research shows that the aspect system shapes the time course of semantic interpretation. Again, grammatical aspect strongly modulates effects that are commonly treated as lexical aspectual mismatches.