

Sensitivity to telicity with manner-of-motion verbs and complex Goal prepositions in child Romanian

Ioana Stoicescu
University of Bucharest, Bucharest, Romania

Abstract

The study investigates whether Romanian-speaking TD children assign telic interpretations to manner of motion verbs with complex Goal prepositions (*a se târî până la băncuță* “crawl up to the bench”). Previous work on the acquisition of telicity showed that sensitivity to telicity emerges early if telicity is entailed and is overtly marked (Van Hout 1998, 2008, Ogiela *et. al.* 2014, Anderson 2017, Stoicescu and Dressler 2022).

The main Path/Manner lexicalization strategy in Romanian, a verb-framed language (Talmy 2000), is to encode Path on inherently directed motion verbs, and Manner on adjuncts. Romanian can also associate a Manner verb with a complex PP. Complex prepositions such as *până la* “up to” have directional readings, with *până* conveying Goal and telicity (Drăgan 2012). Such predicates entail culmination. However, such predicates are not frequently produced in adult Romanian, leading to less exposure for children.

The task was a binary judgment task, in which children saw videos of animal characters moving in four manners (crawling, walking, etc.) up to a landmark or stopping at a distance before the landmark. The participants assessed sentences in which manner of motion verbs in the past tense co-occurred with complex Goal PPs (*Iepurele a sărit până la copac* “The rabbit jumped to the tree”). The participants were 28 TD monolingual Romanian-speaking 3-year-olds (age range 2;10-3;11, mean age 3;4), 24 4-year-olds (age range 4;3-5;2, mean age 4;6), and six adult controls.

The results indicated that Romanian children are sensitive to telicity in structures in which Manner of Motion verbs combine with Goal complex PPs, as their results went significantly above the chance level in all conditions. There were age effects only in the crucial test condition in which the landmark was not reached. The 3-year-olds were not adult-like in this condition, while the 4-year-olds were already adult-like. The children were adult-like in all other conditions.

The fact that in complex Goal PP constructions telicity is signalled overtly and entailed led to good performance by young Romanian-speaking TD children. However, lack of exposure may have contributed to the non-adult-like behaviour at the age of three.