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

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The study investigates whether Romanian-speaking TD children assign telic readings to a category of telic predicates not previously explored, namely predicates made up of manner of motion verbs and complex Goal PPs (*a se târî până la băncuță* "crawl up to the bench").

Previous work on the acquisition of telicity in a variety of child languages showed that culmination inferences develop at different rates as a function of the predicate type – early with change of state verbs, particle verbs and semantically telic incremental theme predicates, later with pragmatically telic incremental theme predicates. Sensitivity to telicity emerges early if telicity is an obligatory semantic entailment rather than an implicature and/or is overtly marked (Van Hout 1998, 2008, Ogiela *et. al.* 2014, Anderson 2017, Stoicescu and Dressler 2022, a.o.).

There are crosslinguistic differences between the lexicalization patterns for Path and Manner (Talmy 2000). Romanian had two main mechanisms for associating Path and Manner in its verbal system. Being a Romance verb-framed language, the main strategy is to encode Path on an inherently directed motion verb, and Manner on an adjunct (PP/AdvP/gerund) (1). However, Romanian has a second strategy for combining Manner and Path, namely associating a Manner verb with a complex directional PP (2). While, in Romanian, simple prepositions are locative, complex prepositions such as *până la* "up to" can have directional readings, with *până* conveying Goal information and telicity (3a) (Drăgan 2012). Such predicates entail (non-cancellable) culmination without ambiguity (3b). However, complex Goal PP manner predicates are not frequently produced in adult Romanian, as the main mechanism remains the one based on inherently directed motion verbs. Thus, children are likely to have less exposure to Goal PP predicates relying on manner verbs.

Our research question is whether three- and four-year-old Romanian TD monolinguals assign telic readings to manner of motion predicates with complex Goal prepositions. For such predicates, telicity is entailed and overtly marked through the complex preposition, but children have little exposure to the relevant structure in the input.

The task was a binary judgment task, in which children saw videos of animal characters moving in four manners (crawling, walking, jumping, flying) up to a landmark (landmark reached condition) or stopping at a distance before reaching the landmark (landmark not reached condition) (Anderson 2017). The participants assessed sentences in which manner of motion verbs in the past tense co-occurred with complex Goal PPs (2) (*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 both test and control conditions. There were age effects only in the crucial test condition (landmark not reached). The 3-year-old group 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 despite the paucity of exposure to the relevant structure. However, lack of exposure may have contributed to the non-adult-like behaviour at the age of three.

Examples

(1) A ieșit   din clasă   țopăind
    has got-out of   classroom hopping
    lit: "He went out of the classroom hopping."

(2) **Test item:** Crocodilul   s-a târât   până la copac.
                   crocodile-the has crawled up to tree
                      "The crocodile crawled to the tree."

(3) a. Câinele a   sărit   până la căsuță   în zece secunde.
       dog-the has jumped up   to house-little in ten   seconds
       "The dog jumped to the little house in ten seconds."

    b. *Câinele a   sărit   până la căsuță   dar n-a   ajuns   la căsuță.
        dog-the has jumped up   to house-little but not-has reached at house-little
       "The dog jumped to the little house but didn't reach it."

Results

Table 1 Percentages of on-target responses

Condition	Landmark not reached	Landmark reached	Control-accept	Control-reject	
3-year-olds	65*	98**	87**	87**	
4-year-olds	87**	97**	90**	91**	*
adults	100*	96*	92*	100*	

* , $p < 0.05$ (compared to the chance level), **, $p < 0.001$ (compared to the chance level)

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