Counting Events and Data

Dirk Wiebel
SFB 441 – University of Tübingen, Germany
dirk.wiebel@uni-tuebingen.de

1 Theoretical Assumptions

Temporal adverbs of quantification (QADV) have a great impact on the event structures of languages; they seem to limit possible constructions of tense, Aktionsarten, and external information on the event structures. For a subset of QADV in German I will discuss the restrictions that occur within some given temporal contexts. Kratzer’s (1978) interval model will be taken as a basis: Quantification requires either countable entities or some sort of container – a general timespan, in which a quantity can be described. Therefore, the given entities can be quantified within a given interval, or sub-intervals can be quantified separately in order to be well-interpretable.

Besides characteristics of the verb or external markers such as frames/spans, the tense system is another constructional unit that sets up intervals. For German, Latzel (1967) and Hauser-Suida/Hoppe-Beugel (1972) point out that some frequency adverbs restrict the usage of Präteritum. For French présent, de Swart (1992) shows problematic constructions with iterative adverbs (IADV), which have equivalents at least in German. In summary, three combinations cause problems in the construction of intervals:

– NEVER type adverbials and Präteritum: Kathinka spielte nie Cembalo.
– ALWAYS type adverbials and Präteritum: Kathinka spielte immer Cembalo.
– Iterative adverbials and Präsens: Kathinka spielt dreimal Cembalo.

However, the problematic constructions are closely related to the specific Aktionsart and externally given intervals. A basic set of Aktionsarten, derived from the verb categories based on Vendler (1967) and extended by Klein’s (1994) 0-state-predicates and Semelfaktiva is sufficient to separate telicity and durativity. An initial set of examples, based on tense and Aktionsart, lead to the following hypotheses:

A2: Non-durative predicates do not restrict quantification with IADV and Präsens.
A3: Durative predicates do not restrict quantification with IADV and Präsens if a larger frame (topic time, TT) is given explicitly or implicitly.
B1: 0-state-predicates do not restrict the FADV types nie, immer and Präteritum.
B2: Non-durative predicates do not restrict the FADV types nie, immer and Präteritum if a frame (TT) or sub-intervals are given explicitly or implicitly.
B3: Durative predicates do not restrict the FADV types nie, immer and Präteritum if some subintervals are given. Homogeneous states can be quantified within that TT.

2 Empirical Enquiries

The theoretical issues in this context are very much dependent on the chosen data structures for linguistic evidence, methods and the quantity of the data. Latzel’s introspective data have shown non-interpretable combinations. However, his large list of exceptions demonstrates the need for additional data. Hauser-Suida and Hoppe-Beugel corroborate Latzel’s observations, having found no single example of nie or immer and Präteritum. Nevertheless, numerous such examples can be found in a larger and more heterogeneous corpus than the 28 novel dialogues Hauser-Suida and Hoppe-Beugel used. In my analysis of 1.300 randomly accessed examples from the COSMAS System, Präteritum turns out to be the default case for FADV combinations. In additions, Aktionsarten and external spans/frames show important impact on interpretability.

A larger set of more heterogeneous corpus data has lead to different conclusions than Latzel’s introspective data and Hauser-Suida/Hoppe-Beugel’s homogeneous corpus data. Nevertheless, corpus data appears not to be sufficient for the evaluation of interpretability. Large amounts of idioms and the lack of ‘exotic’ expressions show that possibly difficult constructions seem to be avoided in written data sources. Therefore, a test based on acceptability judgements is planned for early 2004.

References


