Implicit Events for Event/Entity-Ambiguous Nouns

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The interpretation of event-subcategorizing verbs like *enjoy* or *begin* in combination with entity-denoting objects (EN) requires the recovery of covert events (CE) unrealized on the surface (e.g. *begin the newspaper → begin reading the newspaper*). The interpretation of such pairs seems to involve at least two steps: (1) the triggering of a CE, which is traditionally argued to be driven by the ontological type of the object (EN vs. event-denoting (EV) objects, Pustejovsky [1995], Jackendoff [1997], Pylkkänen and McElree [2006]); (2) the recovery of a specific CE, traditionally assumed to be retrieved from the *qualia structure* of the noun’s lexical entry [Pustejovsky, 1995].

Our intuition is that (1) a type clash between verb and object cannot be the only factor responsible for evoking CEs (e.g. *John is a wrestling fan. He really enjoyed the fight (EV) last night → enjoyed watching the fight*) and (2) an explanation of CEs in terms of qualia would undergenerate the range of possible CEs [Lascarides and Copestake, 1998, Egg, 2005]. Our hypothesis is that interpretation is *plausibility-driven*: CEs are retrieved when the plausibility of the standard verb/noun combination is “too small to make sense”.

We present a web-based elicitation study that provides access to the range of CEs understood by speakers (if any). We explore the behavior of EN/EV ambiguous nouns, which are problematic for an ontological trigger, because both readings are available: e.g. *begin the translation → begin the translation process (EV) OR begin reading/revising/typing the translation (EN)*. Preliminary results are coherent with our intuitions: CEs for EN objects go beyond *qualia structures* (e.g. *start the portrait → drawing, painting, modeling, critiquing*), EV objects can also elicit CE readings (e.g. *finish the holiday → celebrating, planning, preparing*) and both readings of EN/EV ambiguous objects give rise to CEs (e.g. *enjoy the translation → completing, hearing, reading*).

References


