I'm done my homework: Complement coercion with aspectual adjectives

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Background: Self-paced reading and eye-tracking studies have generally found that combining aspectual verbs with entity nouns (like *finish + the book*) is associated with increased reading time and likelihood of regressions on/around the noun (McElree et al. 2001, Traxler et al. 2002, Pickering et al. 2005, Traxler et al. 2005, Frisson & McElree 2008, Katsika et al. 2012). This processing cost has been interpreted as being a result of aspectual verbs semantically selecting for an event complement (like *dancing* or *the dance*) and taking an entity complement only because it can be coerced into an event through a (computationally costly) process of type-shifting (see Pustejovsky 1991, 1995; Jackendoff 1997). This means that *finish + the book* is interpreted as *finish + reading the book* (or *writing the book*, etc.), at a processing cost.

The focus of this paper is the *be done NP* construction, as in *I'm done the book* or *I'm finished the book* (meaning *I've finished the book*), that occurs in Canadian English (Yerastov 2008, 2012; Fruehwald & Myler 2015). Fruehwald & Myler argue that this construction has an aspectual adjective directly taking an NP complement, without silent intervening verbal or prepositional structure (this construction is not just *I'm done <u>with</u> the book* but with a silent/unpronounced preposition; among other differences, they differ in meaning because *be done NP* requires that the object be completely finished but *be done <u>with</u> NP* allows cases where the subject loses interest). They also argue that, like aspectual verbs, the aspectual adjectives in this construction select for an event complement and require complement coercion / type-shifting for interpretation of entity nouns. If true, this should be detectable in longer reading times for entity nouns compared to event nouns.

Experiment: 36 speakers of Canadian English took part in an eye-tracking study that contrasted entity nouns (like *the resume*, *the coffee*, *the article*) with event nouns (like *the interview*, *the party*, *the conversation*) in the Canadian English *be done NP* construction and in the dialect-neutral *be done with NP* construction. There were 32 different sentences. Participants saw half of the sentences with an entity noun and half with an event noun. They also saw half of the sentences in the Canadian English construction, shown below, and half in the dialect-neutral construction (which includes *with* as an intervening preposition). The two groups of nouns were balanced to have the same average length and corpus frequency.

1. Because the actor is finished <u>the script</u> for the action movie, he can relax. (event version: <u>the audition</u> for the independent film)

Reading times for the critical region (determiner and noun) were analyzed with linear mixed effects models. A significant interaction between noun type and construction was found in go-past time ($t_{54.88}$=2.188, p=0.0329). Post-hoc t-tests found a longer go-past time for entity nouns (559ms) compared to event nouns (488ms) in the Canadian English *be done NP* construction (p=0.03262), but no difference in go-past time (or other measures) between entity nouns (400ms) and event nouns (414ms) in the dialect-neutral *be done with NP* construction (p=0.4436).

Conclusion: A processing cost was found for entity nouns (compared to event nouns) directly following aspectual adjectives in the Canadian English *be done NP* construction, which supports Fruehwald & Myler's analysis that these aspectual adjectives (like the more widely studied aspectual verbs) require complement coercion and type-shifting for interpretation of entity noun direct objects. However, no such difference between noun types was found in the *be done with NP* construction, which has an intervening preposition. This suggests that no coercion / type-shifting is necessary in this construction, or alternatively that the construction has a built-in mechanism for interpreting or anticipating the need for type-shifting (see Frisson & Frazier 2005 on the attenuation of mass→count coercion effects with elements that anticipate a count interpretation).

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