

A contrastive study into the lexico-grammatical reactances of two intransitive verbal categories

Background

- Within the theory of Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), Halliday (1994) proposes six process types that each represents a different experience; **material**, mental, relational, verbal, **behavioural**, and existential.
- Material processes represent doings and happenings such as *running* and *eating*.
- Behavioural processes represent physiological and psychological behaviours such as *laughing* and *crying*, though are challenging as they have “no clearly defined characteristics” (Halliday 1994: 139).
- Halliday (1994: 106) claims that experiences are encoded in the grammar of the clause, however there are no clear lexico-grammatical distinctions or ‘reactances’ between behavioural processes and material processes that are intransitive: neither take a *-that* complement, they both favour imperfective progressive aspect (*-ing* form in unmarked tense), and behavioural are typically intransitive. Behaviourals typically have animate participants, yet certain material processes do too.

the two creatures	had been jumping about	like mad things	all this time
Actor	Process: material	Manner: comparison	Extent: temporal
we	can dance	without lobsters	
Behaver	Process: behavioural	Accompaniment: comitative	

Halliday and Matthiessen 2014: 333

- Lack of clear reactances causes problems in analysis (O’Donnell et al. 2009), which is problematic for the theory itself. Though, these features exist theoretically and testing them using corpus data could reveal whether the criteria hold in real language use.

Research Question

- 1) Are there differences in the lexico-grammatical reactances of behavioural and intransitive material processes?

Method

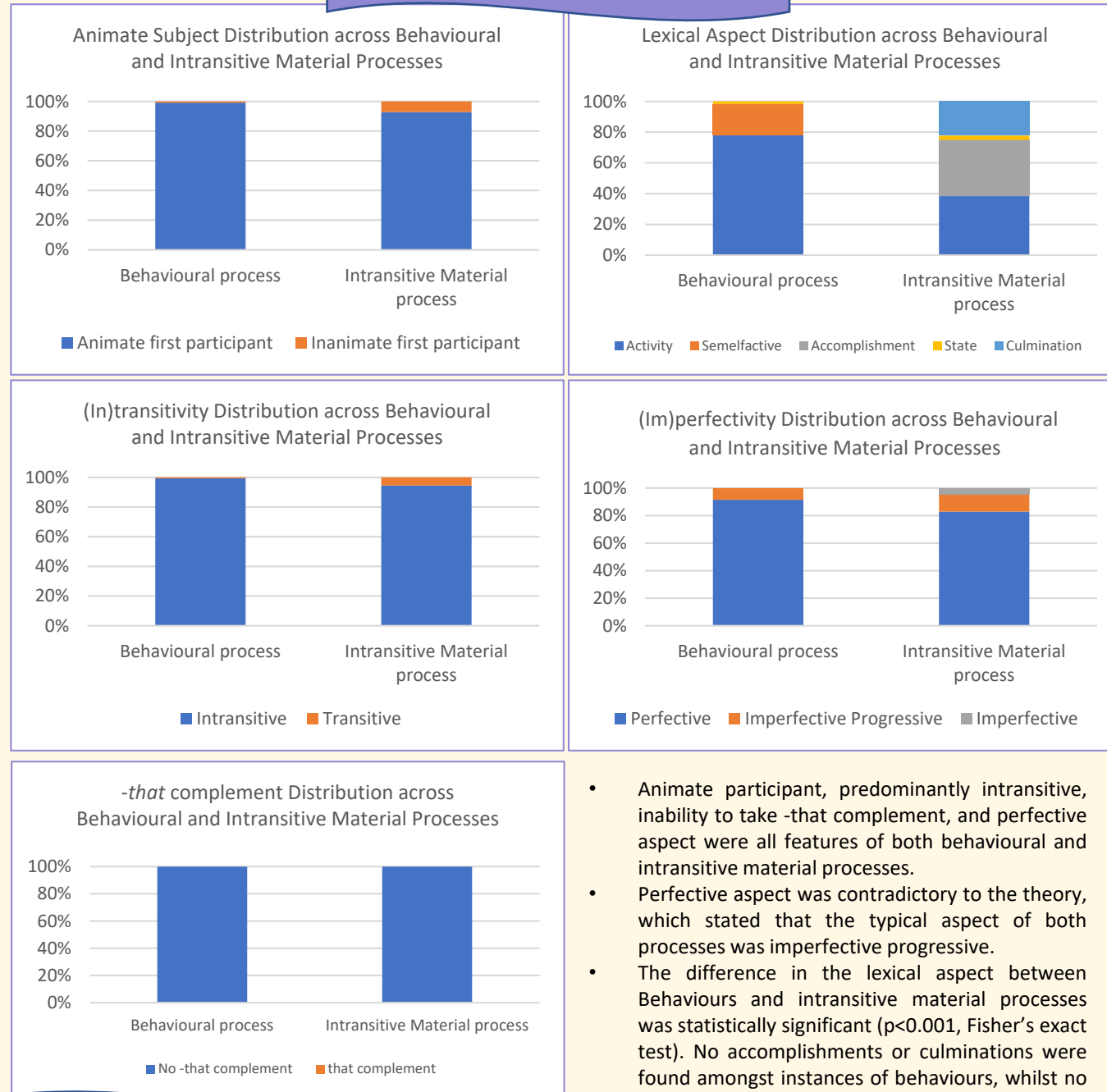
- Data based on five verbs that typically occur in behavioural processes: *sneeze*, *meditate*, *frown*, *converse*, *stare*, and five typically in intransitive materials: *resign*, *jog*, *walk*, *compete* and *climb*
- 2500 concordance lines (250 lines per verb) were extracted from the Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA; Davies 2008-) and analysed using Hanks’ (2004) Corpus Pattern Analysis (CPA), and aspectual analysis (Van Rompaey 2013).
- Five lexico-grammatical reactances were investigated:
 - 1) Animacy of first participant
 - 2) Ability of clause to take a *-that* complement
 - 3) (In)transitivity
 - 4) Grammatical aspect in terms of:
 - perfective aspect (bounded e.g. Tyrone plays football)
 - imperfective aspect (unbounded e.g. Tyrone is tall)
 - imperfective progressive aspect (unbounded in middle phase e.g. Tyrone is running) *claimed in the literature as a feature
 - 5) Lexical aspect – not addressed in the literature, but investigated for a more detailed account of aspect. Lexical aspect was explored in terms of five situation types:

Situation type	Feature	Example
State	Stative, atelic, non-agentive	I feel sick
Activity	Dynamic, durative, atelic, agentive	I went jogging
Accomplishment	Dynamic, durative, telic, agentive	I baked a pie
Culmination	Dynamic, punctual: transitional, agentive	I quit my job
Semelfactive	Dynamic, punctual: non-transitional, agentive	I am coughing

Adapted from Van Rompaey 2013: 209

Lucy Chrispin

Results



- Animate participant, predominantly intransitive, inability to take *-that* complement, and perfective aspect were all features of both behavioural and intransitive material processes.
- Perfective aspect was contradictory to the theory, which stated that the typical aspect of both processes was imperfective progressive.
- The difference in the lexical aspect between Behaviours and intransitive material processes was statistically significant ($p < 0.001$, Fisher’s exact test). No accomplishments or culminations were found amongst instances of behaviours, whilst no semelfactives occurred in intransitive actions.

Conclusion

- Corpus data should be used to test theoretical claims, as shown with the grammatical aspect reactance which diverged from the literature.
- The difference in lexico-grammatical reactances between behavioural and intransitive material processes was in the lexical aspect.

Questions

- 1) This poster is based on a finished draft of a chapter - are there any general questions or critique that stand out?
- 2) Are there any other statistical analyses to use on the results (besides a Fisher’s exact test on lexical aspect)?

References

- Davies, M. 2008. The Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA): 560 million words, 1990-present. Available at: <https://corpus.byu.edu/coca/>.
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