

Assessing agentivity and eventivity in object-experiencer verbs: the role of processing

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This paper presents an experimental investigation of agentivity and eventivity in ‘psych’ verbs, a verb class long noted for their semantic and syntactic co-variation (Pesetsky 1995; Arad 1998; Landau 2010, *inter alia*). While subject-experiencer (‘SubEx’) verbs like *love* express states, object-experiencer (‘ObEx’) verbs like *frighten* involve a causative element (Pesetsky 1995; Arad 1998). However, their precise aspectual value is less clear. Some argue that they fall into two sub-groups: those verbs which allow an eventive reading (e.g., *frighten*), and those which are strictly stative (e.g., *fascinate*), the latter also exhibiting unusual ‘psych’ syntactic behavior (Arad 1998; Alexiadou & Iordăchioaia 2014). Others have proposed that ‘psych’ behavior is related to non-agentivity rather than stativity *per se* (Grimshaw 1990; Landau 2010). Recent corpus and judgment data (Grafmiller 2013) seems to argue against either of these approaches, as categorically distinct sub-groups do not emerge. However, in light of the influence of aspectual coercion on sentence processing, such categorical effects seem unlikely. I present a further acceptability study which takes this influence into account. The results support the existence of an eventive-stative divide in ObEx verbs; however, they also suggest that ObEx states are more susceptible to coercion than SubEx states. This is in line with the proposal that stative ObEx verbs involve two causally related sub-eventualities, with the subject filling the role of Causer (cf. Kratzer 2000; Pesetsky 1995; Arad 1998).

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