

### (A)telicity and (un)boundedness: Ten complications of the ‘*in/for X time*’ test

[This used to be part of a longer text on (un)boundedness in motion events, a shortened version of which has appeared meanwhile in *Journal of Pragmatics*, 2005. The problems with the ‘*in/for X time*’ test, described here, were not included in that article.]

The ‘*in/for X time*’ adverbial test is a standard one for (a)telicity but less so for (un)boundedness. As we said in the previous section, (a)telicity has to do with whether or not an event is conceived of as having an inherent or intended endpoint (point of completion), while (un)boundedness has to do with whether or not such an endpoint, or an arbitrary endpoint, is (or: was, has been, will be) reached when the event actualizes (i.e. actually takes place). The following pair of examples shows that the test can be used for both the telic/atelic distinction and the bounded/unbounded distinction, and that the result of the test is apparently the same for either distinction:

- (1) a. Barney drank ten glasses of beer. (*We can add ‘in an hour’, but not normally ‘for an hour’ – see, however, section 2.4. on repetitive readings*)
- b. Barney drank beer. (*We can add ‘for an hour’, but not normally ‘in an hour’ – see, however, section 2.6. on the reading ‘It took Barney an hour to start drinking beer’*)

In (1)a, the event of drinking ten glasses of beer is conceived of as telic (because a telic predicate is used) and represented as bounded (in actualization). It is telic because the predicate *drink ten glasses of beer* specifies an inherent endpoint for this event: after drinking ten glasses of beer, the event is complete and cannot continue—if Barney drinks another ten glasses of beer, then this constitutes a different event. At the same time, the event of drinking ten glasses of beer is represented as bounded in (2a): because of the combination of a telic predicate, perfective (nonprogressive) aspect and the past tense, the (first) event of drinking ten glasses of beer is represented as having reached its endpoint. In (2b), the event of drinking beer is represented as both atelic and unbounded. It is atelic because the predicate does not involve reference to a natural (inherent) point of completion: after drinking beer, some more of the same event of “drinking beer” can take place. Sentence (9b) is unbounded because the event of drinking beer is not represented as having come to an end. This is not to say, however, that (2b) is not normally *interpreted* as bounded, due to the use of the past tense which establishes a temporal domain reaching up to the boundary constituted by the time of utterance (see previous section). It is important, though, to stress that this boundedness is only an interpretation. As observed by Declerck (1991b: 96–97), the combination of an atelic predicate and the past tense engenders the *implicature* that the event has come to an end, but this interpretation can be blocked or cancelled by the context, as in the following conversation (the second interlocutor has just returned from the pub, leaving his friend Barney there in the midst of an act of excessive drinking):

- (2) So what did the others drink? – *Barney drank beer*. And he was determined to drink all the beer available in the pub. He must be halfway the amount by now.

As shown in (1)a-b, telic and bounded events felicitously combine with a ‘(with)*in X time*’ adverbial but not with a ‘*for X time*’ adverbial (at least not on a semelfactive reading – see section 2.4. below), whereas atelic and unbounded events felicitously

combine with a ‘*for X time*’ adverbial but not with an ‘*in X time*’ adverbial (except if ‘*in X time*’ indicates the lapse of time between some time of reference and the beginning of an event – see section 2.6. below). Adverbials of the ‘*in X time*’ type are, for example, *in an hour*, *in less than a day*, *within the allotted time*. Adverbials of the ‘*in X time*’ type are also known as ‘inclusive durational adverbials’ or ‘containers’. Examples of adverbials of the ‘*for X time*’ type are *for an hour*, *all morning*, *for years*, *throughout the night*. Such adverbials can be called ‘non-inclusive durational adverbials’.

The test hinging on these two sorts of adverbials is often used without heed to its various complications. The purpose of this section is to heighten our understanding of just what it is that an ‘*in X time*’ or ‘*for X time*’ adverbial does (to what) and just what it can tell us (about what). At the end of this section, we will put forward some conditions that have to be met for this test to give reliable results.

### 2.1. Unbounded events but bounded sentences

Even though the possible addition of an adverbial like ‘*for an hour*’ normally proves that an event is unbounded (e.g. *They ran and ran {for/\*in} an hour*), the sentence resulting from such an addition automatically becomes bounded (cf. Declerck 1991a: 265-266; Depraetere 1996: 17; Hirtle 1987: 90-91). That is, *They ran and ran* is unbounded, but *They ran and ran for an hour* is no longer so. The rationale behind this claim is that an adverbial like *for an hour* measures an event from its beginning to its end and therefore imposes temporal boundaries on it (see also Michaelis 1993: 200). We need not be concerned with this complication, however, as long as we keep in mind that what the adverbial test applies to are the events described by the sentences without the temporal adverbials (but see also section 2.9).

### 2.2. Unbounded but telic events: the case of progressives

As has already been mentioned in section 1, the progressive form always has the effect of making an event unbounded, whether its non-progressive variant is already unbounded or not.<sup>1</sup> For example, the non-progressive sentences *Barney drank beer* and *Barney drank ten glasses of beer* refer to an unbounded and a bounded event, respectively—they also refer to an atelic and telic event, respectively; but their related progressive sentences (*Barney was drinking beer* and *Barney was drinking ten glasses of beer*) both describe unbounded events, albeit with different telicity values.

This view diverges from the standard assumption that progressives make an event atelic (e.g. Jackendoff 1996: 306, n. 2). By maintaining a distinction between (un)boundedness and (a)telicity, we do not have to give up a valuable distinction between progressive sentences. So, although *Barney was drinking beer* and *Barney was drinking ten glasses of beer* both refer to unbounded events (resulting from the progressiveness), we can still say that the first sentence is atelic whilst the second is telic. In other words, just because an event is unbounded does not mean that it is atelic. Progressives simply do not focus on the final phase of an event’s course, so even if the event is conceived of as *having* an inherent endpoint (and is therefore telic), that

<sup>1</sup> The only exception is the so-called “explanatory-resultative” use of the perfect progressive (see Declerck 1991b: 164-5), as exemplified in (i):

- (i) You’ve been drinking again. I can smell it.

Here, the situation of drinking is interpreted as having come to an end at the time of speaking.

terminal point is not reached within the “viewing frame” which the progressive verb form imposes on the course of this event (which is therefore unbounded). Whether such an inherent end point has been or will be reached after all is something that the progressive itself does not tell us. Compare:

- (3) a. Barney was drinking ten glasses of beer [when I left the pub, and I heard afterwards that he drank another ten after that.] (*telic, unbounded; that the endpoint was reached is clear from the following context*)  
 b. Barney was drinking ten glasses of beer [when I left the pub, but I heard afterwards that he suddenly decided to quit drinking after his ninth glass.] (*telic, unbounded; that the endpoint was not reached is clear from the following context*)

The ‘*infor X time*’ adverbial test is not useful to test boundedness with progressives, because an ‘*in X time*’ adverbial seems to be possible even though the event is unbounded:

- (4) Barney was drinking ten glasses of beer in an hour. (*This sentence is fine, e.g. if Barney had laid a wager that he could drink ten glasses of beer in an hour.*)

However, the event that is referred to in the progressive sentence is not ‘drink ten glasses of beer’, but ‘drink ten glasses of beer in an hour’. In other words, if an ‘*in X time*’ adverbial is added to a telic event in the progressive, the adverbial is naturally interpreted as being part of the subject referent’s intention. Such an intentional reading of the adverbial can easily be explained. When the event is referred to in a simple sentence (e.g. *Barney drank ten glasses of beer*), the information that it happened within a given time (e.g. *in an hour*) interval can be stated post factum, because the event is completely over at the time of utterance. There is consequently no certainty about whether or not the subject referent actually *intended* to carry out the action within that time interval. By contrast, when a telic event is not portrayed as reaching its endpoint and there is nonetheless an explicit reference to a closed time interval, as in (4), then the only natural reading is that the subject referent at least set out *trying* to reach the endpoint within that time interval. In other words, the event that is conceptualized in (4) is ‘drink ten glasses of beer in an hour’ rather than just ‘drink ten glasses of beer’.

In 2.9 we will continue this discussion by considering predicates that already contain a durational adverbial (prior to the addition of ‘*infor X time*’).

### 2.3. Unbounded but telic events: the case of unreached natural endpoints

The ‘*infor X time*’ adverbial test is a reliable diagnostic for the (a)telicity of a predicate-argument structure. For example:

- (5) a. to build a house (*telic: we can add ‘in three days’*)  
 b. to fly to New York (*telic: we can add ‘in three hours’*)

However, in a suitable context, it may be quite acceptable, if still not very natural, to use a ‘*for X time*’ adverbial in combination with a telic predicate. This is because the ‘*for/in X time*’ test is a test for (un)boundedness when applied to complete sentences. The first example is based on Moens (1987: 68):

- (6) a. Mary built a house for three days and then gave up.  
 b. The plane flew to New York for a few hours but then changed its course.

Jackendoff (1996: 306, n. 2) and Depraetere (1996: 18), amongst others, observe that a ‘for X time’ adverbial can often have the effect of forcing (“coercing”) the otherwise telic reading of an event into an atelic (i.e. activity) reading. These authors adduce this observation to point out the limited applicability of the temporal adverbial test for (a)telicity. Sentences like (7a-b) should alert us to the misleading results the ‘in/for X time’ test may give for (a)telicity, that is, the test is confusing in the sense that it may not be immediately clear that it is now a test for unboundedness rather than atelicity. So we agree with Jackendoff and with Depraetere that we should be cautious whenever we use this test for the telic/atelic distinction. However, our personal opinion is that the predicates remain telic in (7a-b), but that ‘for X time’ enforces an unbounded interpretation of *Mary built a house* and *The plane flew to New York*. The adverbial does *not* change the fact that the ‘predicate + {direct object / indication of goal}’ expression conceptualizes the *kind* of event as tending towards a natural point of completion. It is on the level of *actualization* that this point of completion is not reached. Put simply, these expressions remain telic, but are used in a context denying that the inherent point of completion is reached.

It is important to see that this does not necessarily mean that the sentence in which the telic predicate is used in combination with ‘for X time’ is unbounded. As noted in the introductory section, a ‘for X time’ adverbial itself imposes an end-boundary (endpoint) when X is a specific indication such as a numeral. Thus, the first clause of (7a) is bounded because *for three days* makes it clear that the event came to an end after three days. Only, the boundary that was reached lay somewhere before the ‘natural point of completion’: it was an arbitrary terminal point and not the natural (inherent) terminal point (at which the telic event is completed). We can therefore speak of an ‘incomplete (but) bounded’ event or, better still, of a ‘bounded representation of the incomplete actualization of a telic event’. If the adverbial were *for days*, no terminal point would be indicated and the event referred to in the first clause would be unbounded (i.e., not represented as bounded).

The main point to be remembered from this section is that (a)telicity is a question of how the predicate conceptualizes a kind of event and can therefore best be determined on the basis of a non-finite clause considered in isolation, as in [*I would like*] *to run five miles* (telic) and [*I would like*] *to have a run* (atelic).<sup>2</sup> (Un)boundedness, by contrast, is a question of actualization and is therefore determined by how an event is represented in a tensed clause. Thus *I ran five miles today* is bounded, whereas *I was running five miles [when I sprained my ankle and had to quit]* is unbounded.

#### 2.4. Unbounded events related to a telic event: the case of iterations

<sup>2</sup> As said in the introductory section, all the arguments of the predicate ought to be considered, including its subject argument. However, it is hard to construct a non-finite clause with a subject. The ‘*like NP to*’-construction might provide just such a construction:

- (i) a. [Stage director: “I would like] some children to run past {for 10 seconds / \*in 10 seconds}.” (atelic)  
 b. [Stage director: “I would like] all the children to run past {\*for 10 seconds / in 10 seconds}.” (telic)

Apart from cases like (6), there are two other cases in which a telic event can be used in combination with a ‘for X time’ adverbial. They differ from the former in that, whereas the ‘for X time’ adverbials in (6) indicate that the events’ natural point of completion is not reached, in the two cases to be discussed here and in the next section, the ‘for X time’ adverbial forces an unbounded reading on an event *related* to the actual event. The first case is illustrated by the following sentences. (Example (8a) is taken from Moens (1987: 68-69); (8b) is from Jackendoff 1996: 308, n. 6); (8c) from Vanden Wyngaerd (2001: 77)); (8d) from Declerck (1979: 779).)

- (7) a. Harry delivered that sermon for 4 years.  
 b. Bill sang the tune for hours.  
 c. Fred ran across the street all afternoon.  
 d. All day long John (repeatedly) ran from the station to the hotel.

The interpretation of (8a) is that Harry delivered the same sermon an indefinite number of times over a period of four years. Similarly, in the other examples, the same telic event is repeated many times over for a certain time span. Just like the events in (6), the events of delivering a sermon, singing a tune, etc. are still telic. However, this time they are also bounded. Indeed, for Harry to deliver a sermon twice, three times, etc., it is necessary that he finishes the sermon the first time. (More generally: one sermon needs to be finished before Harry can embark on another one.) What the time adverbial measures is not the event (which is necessarily bounded) of delivering a single sermon, but the derived event (which is unbounded) of repeatedly delivering the same sermon. The unboundedness of this derived event—let’s call it a ‘repetitive hyperevent’ consisting of ‘subevents’—is caused by the fact that the number of subevents is not specified. Jackendoff (1996: 308, n. 6) provides a test to tell the two unboundedness readings with telic events apart: the possibility to add *bit by bit* (in (6)) versus *over and over* (in (7)).

In fact, the possibility of adding a ‘for X time’ to a telic event in order to invite an iterative reading is one that is generally available, except when the pragmatic properties of the event in question block such an interpretation (e.g. *drink up the last bottle of wine*).

### 2.5. Unbounded events related to a telic event: the case of result states

So far we have discussed two cases in which a telic event can combine with a ‘for X time’ adverbial. In the first case (section 2.3), the adverbial forces an ongoingness (i.e., incompleteness) interpretation; in the second case (section 2.4), the adverbial forces a repetitive interpretation. The third case in which a ‘for X time’ adverbial can be added to a telic event is exemplified by the following sentences (after Piñón 1999):

- (8) Manuela went upstairs for a couple of hours.

The most felicitous reading of such a sentence is that Manuela stayed upstairs for a couple of hours *after* she went upstairs. An iterative reading (as in the previous subsection) is possible here too, but is pragmatically less plausible. As when there is an iterative reading, what the time adverbial measures here is not the event itself but a

related event, but this time the related event is the state resulting from an event involving a change of state.<sup>3</sup>

The actual event of going upstairs is telic and bounded, but the state resulting from it can in principle last indefinitely. Like any state, the resultant state thus has a certain duration, which can be measured by the addition of a ‘for X time’ adverbial.

#### 2.6. Bounded events related to any kind of event: the case of inchoatives

In 2.5, we discussed resultant state readings in which a ‘for X time’ adverbial applies to the state following the completion of a telic (and bounded) event. If a short-lived event like *jump into the water* is combined with an ‘in X time adverbial’, we get the reverse interpretation: the adverbial applies to the event (i.e. phase) *preceding* the actual jumping into the water (cf. Depraetere 1996: 19 and the references cited there):

(9) Manuela jumped into the water in five minutes.

An actual jump cannot take up five minutes, which is why an inchoative reading is arrived at, e.g., it took Manuela five minutes to put on her swimsuit and run to the diving blocks from where she plunged into the water. Such a reading also arises if an ‘in X time’ adverbial is combined with an atelic event (the following sentence is taken from Moens 1987: 72):

(10) My program ran in less than four minutes this morning.

Even when the event is telic and has considerable duration, an inchoative reading is still possible, if not always likely, with an ‘in X time’ adverbial:

(11) Homer ate fifteen sandwiches in an hour.

This sentence is ambiguous between a reading on which it took Homer an hour to eat up fifteen sandwiches and a reading on which Homer waited an hour after some point in time before beginning to eat fifteen sandwiches. Obviously, the second reading requires more context to be felicitous.

A few further observations can be made here. First, for some reason, the inchoative reading is more accessible if the ‘in X time adverbial’ has front position: *In an hour, Homer ate fifteen sandwiches*. Second, an inchoative reading can also arise if a progressive is used: *In an hour, Homer was eating fifteen sandwiches*, but then the time adverbial measures not just the running-up phase but also part of the actual event (since the progressive takes a middle view on an event). Third, if a perfect tense is used with a short-lived event, a combination of an inchoative reading and an event-related meaning arises: in the sentence *In an hour, Manuela had jumped into the water*, the span of time expressed by ‘in X time’ is longer than the duration of the running-up phase, because it also includes the actual jumping into the water. This sentence can even refer to a situation in which Manuela was already in the water after half an hour. Fourth, if a perfect tense is used with a telic event, the ‘in X time’ adverbial also measures more than the running-up phase and includes the time the actual event takes up: the sentence *In an hour, Homer had eaten fifteen sandwiches* can only be understood as: ‘It took

<sup>3</sup> Piñóns term “event-related” reading to refer to the iterative interpretation is a bit unfortunate, since what is measured by the time interval is not the actual event of going upstairs but the related event of repeatedly doing so.

Homer (possibly less than) an hour to finish (not just start!) eating fifteen sandwiches.’ Fifth, when the time adverbial measures more than just the running-up phase, *within* is more natural than *in*: *Within an hour, {Homer was eating fifteen sandwiches / Homer had eaten fifteen sandwiches / Manuela had jumped into the water}*. We will not attempt to give an explanation for these interesting facts.

### 2.7. ‘Zero-telic’ events

As observed in Declerck (1979: 768), certain sentences “are compatible with adverbials of the type ‘how long?’ as well as with adverbials of the type ‘within what time?’”. Such events were called ‘ $\emptyset$ -bounded’ in that article, where a distinction between (un)boundedness and (a)telicity was not yet made. It is in fact the predicates themselves that have a neutral value for telicity, so we will follow Depraetere (1996: 50-52), who speaks of ‘zero-telic’ events. The predicates in the following examples, from Declerck (*ibid.*), are ambiguous as to (a)telicity, and it is the context that has to make clear which reading is the intended one – see also Jackendoff (1996: 325).

- (12) a. The endless procession walked by the church. (We can add ‘{*in/for*} an hour’.)
- b. The insect crawled through the tube. (We can add ‘{*in/for*} an hour’.)

The distinction between telic, atelic and zero-telic events is not clear-cut. The most appropriate view is no doubt that in which telicity is seen as a gradable notion, with zero-telicity occupying a middle position on a continuous scale of telicity. The following examples, ranging from purely telic to purely atelic are all taken from Jackendoff (1996: *passim*):

- (13) a. Bill ate fifteen sandwiches {*in/\*for*} an hour.
- b. The water got hot {*in/\*for*} two minutes.
- c. Bill pushed the cart four miles {*in/?for*} two days.
- d. Bill read the paper {*in/?for*} two minutes.
- e. Bill sprayed the wall with paint {*in/for*} an hour.
- f. The water cooled down {*in/for*} two minutes.
- g. Bill pushed the cart {*for/?in*} two days.
- h. The cart rolled toward the house {*for/?\*in*} two minutes.
- i. The water got hotter {*for/\*in*} two hours.
- j. Bill ate sandwiches {*for/\*in*} an hour.

Some of Jackendoff’s judgements may be debatable, but this only bears witness to the gradability of telicity, which brings about that some cases are better examples of pure (a)telicity than others, and that some cases might be seen as good examples of (a)telic events by some people but not by others. This will be discussed in more detail in the following subsection.

To return to the effect of the addition of a ‘*for X time*’ adverbial, it has by now become obvious that we ought to make a distinction between its addition to a purely telic event like building a house (see point 2.3) and its addition to a zero-telic event like crawling through a tube. In the former case, we cannot add a ‘*for X time*’ adverbial to change its telicity value. Such an adverbial can only be added to an unbounded representation of that telic event: to *John had been building a house* (which is unbounded because of the progressive) we can add *for two months* (as in *John had been*

*building a house for two months when he died*). In this case the conceptualization of the event of building a house still involves a clear point of completion (and is therefore telic) but the ‘for X time’ adverbial indicates that the event has (or will be) stopped before its natural endpoint has (or will be) reached. If, by contrast, a ‘for X time’ adverbial is added to a zero-telic predicate (e.g. *crawl through a tube*) it brings out the potentially atelic reading of the event: the event of crawling through a tube is not felt to have a necessary point of completion but is interpreted as atelic, i.e. as a mere ‘activity’ (in Vendler’s sense). The ‘for X time’ adverbial then indicates for how much time the subject referent was engaged in this activity. And here again, if this indication of time is specific, the resulting sentence is bounded (e.g. *The insect crawled through the tube for two hours*), otherwise it is unbounded (e.g. *The insect crawled through the tube for hours*).

### 2.8. Events that are neither fully (a)telic nor zero-telic?

In the previous section we showed that some predicates are clearly telic or atelic, while others are ambiguous between the two readings. Adding a ‘for X time’ adverbial to a purely telic predicate (e.g. *build a house*), as we have seen, is only possible in a context which makes it clear that the inherent/intended endpoint is not reached. Adding a ‘for X time’ adverbial to a zero-telic predicate (e.g. *crawl through a tube*) simply switches the atelic reading on and the telic reading off, as it were, and no specific context is needed. This subsection deals with a particularly difficult problem, namely that some predicates seem to fall in between clearly telic (or atelic) ones and ambiguous ones. A case in point is *read a book* (or *read the paper*). For one of the present authors, this predicate is purely telic, and for seemingly good reasons: every book has a final page, so *to read a book* tends to a natural point of completion and must therefore necessarily be telic in nature. This means that a ‘for X time’ can only be added felicitously in contexts that explicitly deny the reaching of this natural point of completion, as in the following authentic examples:

- (14) a. Now, all these years later, my vision is still perfect. But if I ever forget to wear my reading glasses and use a computer or *read a book for a couple of hours*, my eyes get fatigued and I become nearsighted for a few hours or so.  
([slashdot.org/askslashdot/02/03/30/2330222.shtml?tid=152](http://slashdot.org/askslashdot/02/03/30/2330222.shtml?tid=152), accessed 19 May 2002)
- b. I like to *read a book for an hour*, but then I like to get up and do something.  
([www.guardian.co.uk/airlines/story/0,1371,591007,00.html](http://www.guardian.co.uk/airlines/story/0,1371,591007,00.html), accessed 19 May 2002)

For the other of us, *read a book* is not telic but of ambiguous telicity, because example (15b) also sounds fine to him even if the *but*-clause is omitted, in which case a ‘for X time’ adverbial is added to a non-finite clause, i.e. to the very predicate-argument structure. Here are a couple of authentic examples of this ‘atelic reading of a zero-telic event’. In both examples *read a book* is used in an untensed clause:

- (15) a. Consider giving your child a choice at bedtime: “Would you like for me to turn out the light, or would you like to read a book for 10 minutes?”.

([www.nevada.k12.ia.us/central/what\\_can\\_parents\\_do.htm](http://www.nevada.k12.ia.us/central/what_can_parents_do.htm), accessed 19 May 2002)

- b. Keep your brain exercised - if you can make time, try to read a book for 1/2 hour each day.  
([www.romanceclass.com/miscr/LoveInfo/7621-c-56920](http://www.romanceclass.com/miscr/LoveInfo/7621-c-56920), accessed 19 May 2002)

However, it is of course also possible to add an ‘*in X time*’ adverbial to *read a book* as used in an untensed clause:

- (16) a. To save time, try the “read a book in an hour” strategy.  
([www.turnerlearning.com/tcmbythebook/99/mm\\_act.html](http://www.turnerlearning.com/tcmbythebook/99/mm_act.html), accessed 22 April 2002)
- b. He used to be able to read a book in 20 minutes and tell you the plot and then he could recite huge passages from a novel the size of *Middlemarch*.  
(<http://www.oscarwilde.com/society.html>, accessed 19 May 2002)

The predicate *read a book*, in other words, could be said to be ambiguous between ‘do some book-reading’, as in (16a-b), and ‘read an entire book’, as in (16). Both senses (or readings) are potentially available, but only one is suitable in a given context. In the first sense, *read a book* is an event that is akin to, say, *watch television* (atelic); in the second sense, it is akin to *solve a cross-word puzzle* (telic).

Which of the two views is the correct one is hard to say. Possibly, as already hinted at, *read a book* is neither fully telic nor really zero-telic, but something in the middle between these two. It is also quite likely that there is some regional variety here. For some speakers (probably of British English), *read a book* is purely telic, while for others (probably of some American English variants), *read a book* is zero-telic. We leave this issue undecided here, but it would be interesting to pursue it in future research.

### 2.9. Predicates already containing a durational adverbial

By way of introduction, let us consider sentence (9) again, repeated here as (18):

- (17) Manuela went upstairs for a couple of hours. (= (9))

Piñón (1999: 420) claims that when we interpret the adverbial as measuring the length of the resultant state, we still have to face ambiguity between two readings. The duration specified by the adverbial may not only be the actual duration of the result state, it can also be an intended duration. On the second reading, it is possible to utter sentences like the following:

- (18) Manuela went upstairs for a couple of hours but she came back down after five minutes, bored te death.

Importantly, the actual duration is not indicated by the ‘*for X time*’ adverbial but is provided by the added context.

Note that such an ‘intended duration’ interpretation puts a sentence like (18) on a par with sentences like *John stayed under a cold shower for five minutes*, discussed by Depraetere (1995: 2), where the specified duration is “part of the challenge”. In other words, the ‘intended duration’ interpretation does not only arise if a ‘*for X time*’

adverbial is related to a result state: when related to the actual event, which must be atelic, a ‘*for X time*’ adverbial can also specify the intended duration of the event. Such an interpretation necessarily arises when a progressive, a future tense, or a particular modal auxiliary is used :

(19) The soldiers {are marching / will march / (will) have to march} for three hours today.

An ‘*in X time*’ adverbial, too, can be a pre-set target of completing a telic event rather than something added *post factum*:

(20) Mary {is writing / will write / had to write} a dissertation in two years.

In both (19) and (20), the durational adverbial forms part of the description of the event. That is, the adverbial is an argument of the predicate itself:

- (21) a. march (soldiers, for three hours)  
b. write (Mary, a dissertation, in two years)

If an event (or rather, a predicate) already contains an ‘*in/for X time*’ adverbial, the addition of an (extra) ‘*in X time*’ adverbial yields a very awkward result:

- (22) a. \* The soldiers marched for three hours in five minutes.  
b. \* Mary wrote a dissertation in two years within less than a month.

These sentences are quite unacceptable even on an inchoative reading (i.e. ‘It lasted five minutes before the soldiers marched for three hours’ / ‘Mary needed less than a month to start writing a dissertation in less than two years’).

However, there are two cases in which the combination of a clause already containing an ‘*in/for X time*’ adverbial with a ‘*for X time*’ adverbial can yield a grammatical result. One possibility concerns repetitive-habitual sentences: here we can simultaneously specify the length of the individual subevents and specify the length of the ‘hyper-event’:

- (23) a. For more than a hundred years, the soldiers marched for three hours every day [but this practice has been abandoned now].  
b. For the past thirty years I have written all my books within less than a year [but now I find I need more time to finish one].

Another possibility of adding a ‘*for X time*’ adverbial to a predicate already containing a duration adverbial is by making the clause progressive (preferably using the present perfect progressive), but the results are far from natural:

- (24) a. <sup>??</sup>The soldiers have been marching for three hours for two and a half hours now.  
b. <sup>??</sup>Mary has been writing a dissertation in two years for almost a year now.

Note that a habitual reading does not necessarily arise if the added time interval is larger than the time interval already present in the event: <sup>??</sup>*The soldiers have been marching*

*for three hours for four hours now*. If acceptable, this sentence can be used to refer to an event in which the soldiers are being punished – or being oblivious of the time. And <sup>2</sup>*Mary has been writing a dissertation in two years for more than seven years now* can be used to mock Mary's failed attempt at writing a dissertation within the allotted time.<sup>4</sup>

Note, finally, that a second duration adverbial cannot be added either to a clause containing a 'for X time' adverbial measuring the (actual or intended) length of the resultant state, as in (17), discussed at the beginning of this section. Such a combination seems to be possible only if the added adverbial is an 'in X time' adverbial triggering an inchoative reading. Compare:

- (25) a. \*For five minutes, Manuela went upstairs for a couple of hours.  
 b. Within five minutes (of seeing her parents), Manuela went upstairs for a couple of hours.

#### 2.10. Bounded and telic events combined with a 'for X time' adverbial

A 'for X time' adverbial may be compatible with a telic event even when this event is bounded. We are not referring to cases, already discussed, in which a 'for X time' adverbial can be added to a telic event without causing ungrammaticality, viz. the cases in which the adverbial measures the length of a repetitive-habitual hyperevent (*Harry delivered the same sermon every Sunday for 4 years*), or in which the adverbial measures the (actual or intended) duration of the resultant state (*Manuela went upstairs for a couple of hours*). In all these cases, the adverbial does not measure the length of the actualization of the event itself, but it does in the type of example we are discussing in this subsection:

- (26) I walked to school for an hour this morning because I was hampered by a strong wind blowing in my face.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> The addition of a second adverbial is still generally awkward, but more acceptable (a) if the adverbial measuring the actual event-up-to-the-time-of-speech is fronted and the adverbial measuring the intended duration follows the verb phrase:

- (i) a. <sup>2</sup>For three and a half minutes now John has been staying under a cold shower for five minutes.  
 b. <sup>2</sup>For almost a year now, Mary has been writing a dissertation in two years.

and (b) when the idea of intention is expressed explicitly by the use of *be going to*, as in

- (ii) For more than seven years now, Mary has been going to write a dissertation in two years.

<sup>5</sup> This sentence is based on the following authentic examples:

- (i) a. The Logan kids walked to school for an hour each day.  
 (www.tznet.com/bookswi/pastreviews1.html, accessed 22 April 2002)  
 b. Her parents and oldest brother worked on the farm, while she and her brother walked to school for 45 minutes in temperatures as low as 70 degrees below zero.  
 (www.metroactive.com/papers/willow.glen.resident/06.06.01/cover-0123.html, accessed 22 April 2002.)

However, the larger event of *walking to school for {an hour} each day* in (ia) is unbounded due to the habitual interpretation triggered by *each day*. Similarly, (ib) most likely has a habitual interpretation. Therefore, these authentic examples are less suitable for the discussion than the simplified example in (26).

The (single) event of *walking to school* is bounded in this sentence, since the intended interpretation is obviously that the inherent end point of the event (viz. arriving at the school) is reached. Accordingly, we would expect such an event to be compatible only with a temporal adverbial like *in an hour*, but (26) proves otherwise.

The existence of sentences like (26) follows from the common sense truth that if something has happened *in X time*, this logically entails that it has also gone on *for X time*. (The reverse is not necessarily true, of course.)

It may be tempting to claim that the reason for using a ‘*for X time*’ adverbial in (26) is that this sentence treats *walk to school* as an activity rather than as an accomplishment (put differently, that *walk to school* is a zero-telic event, like *crawl through a tube*—see section 2.7). This would be wrong, because the idea that the inherent end point of the event is reached is an essential part of the interpretation of (26), and for an endpoint to be reached, there must *be* one. Hence this event is telic. However, a modified version of this claim is probably correct: temporal ‘*for X time*’ adverbials focus on the extendedness of an event (and hence on the activity phase of an accomplishment) while temporal ‘*in X time*’ adverbials focus on its boundaries (and hence on the culmination point of an accomplishment).

Related to this difference is also the fact that in adverbials of the ‘*for X time*’ but not of the ‘*in X time*’ type, the variable ‘X time’ can be replaced by such values as ‘*days on end*’, ‘*ages*’, or ‘*eternity*’. Also, it is not a coincidence that a combination like *for more than a week* is more frequent than *for less than a week*, and that a combination like *in less than a week* is more frequent than *in more than a week*. ‘*For X time*’ implicates that the period indicated is longer than might be expected. ‘*In X time*’ implicates that the period indicated is shorter than might be expected. Clearly, sentences like (26) focus on the idea that the event of walking to school is extended in time, rather than limited in time, i.e. that the event took more rather than less time than expected.

What an example like (26) teaches us is that the idea of non-exhaustiveness we normally get on hearing a ‘*for X time*’ adverbial is only an implicature. In other words, while we typically assume that an event can go on beyond the upper boundary of a *for*-interval, it may well be possible for a (telic) event to be completed at the end of the interval.

\* \* \* \* \*

With the awareness of all the complications discussed above, we are now fully equipped to offer a number of recommendations for how to use the ‘*in/for X time*’ test properly.

(i) The test only tells us something of interest about the original sentence (= the sentence not yet containing an ‘*in/for X time*’ adverbial), not about the sentence resulting from adding a temporal adverbial. See 2.1.

(ii) The test of adding an ‘*in/for X time*’ adverbial should not be applied to progressive sentences, because a progressive clause normally represents the event referred to as unbounded. In this case we cannot learn anything new from the test, because, predictably, only a ‘*for X time*’ adverbial can be added. Adding an ‘*in X time*’ adverbial would create a different event. See 2.2.

(iii) The test is more reliable for testing (un)boundedness than for testing (a)telicity. The test can still be used for (a)telicity, but then the ‘*in/for X time*’ adverbial is best added to an infinitival description of the event (e.g. ‘to build a house’, rather than ‘she built a house’). See 2.3.

(iv) A possible iterative or repetitive-habitual reading should be left out of consideration when judging the acceptability of an added ‘*for X time*’ adverbial. See 2.4.

- (v) A possible result state reading should be left out of consideration when judging the acceptability of an added '*for X time*' adverbial. See 2.5.
- (vi) An inchoative reading should be left out of consideration when judging the acceptability of an added '*in X time*' adverbial. See 2.6.
- (vii) If an '*in X time*' and a '*for X time*' are both acceptable (without the need for a special context to facilitate the version with a '*for X time*' adverbial), then we are dealing with a zero-telic event. See 2.7.
- (viii) It should be realized that an event's (a)telicity can be a matter of degree and of debate. See especially 2.8.
- (ix) The test should not be applied to an event that already contains an '*in/for X time*' adverbial. See 2.9.
- (x) The possible addition of a '*for X time*' adverbial to an event does not necessarily mean that this event has not yet reached its natural endpoint. See 2.10.

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## References

[This list of references also contains references to studies mentioned in the earlier version, most of which has appeared in *Journal of Pragmatics*.]

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