In this paper, I develop a novel interval-based approach to some well-known semantic puzzles related to aspect shift, in particular, to the interaction of for-adverbials with accomplishment and achievement verbs that take indefinite, bare plural, and mass noun complements. My approach is based on the insight that implicit frequentative aspect plays a central role in this interaction, a fact that was largely ignored in previous analyses. Specifically, I interpret frequentative aspect as an abstract verb-level pluractional operator that brings about aspect shift and that is responsible for the distribution of subevent times and subevent participants over the event time of an atelic sentence. What Zucchi and White (2001) call “the aspectual effect of frequency adverbs” thus becomes the general rule for all frequentatively understood for-adverbial sentences. Linguistic support for silent verb-level frequentativity in English is drawn from overt frequentative aspect marking in West Greenlandic verbs.

1. SOME PUZZLES IN THE DISTRIBUTION OF FOR-ADVERBIALS

It is a well-known fact that in many cases if an accomplishment or an achievement verb combines with a singular indefinite complement while this verb is in the scope of a for-adverbial, the resulting sentence sounds odd. This is illustrated in the examples (1) and (2):¹

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¹ I had the opportunity to present parts and previous versions of this paper at the workshop ‘Semantics Meets Acquisition’ at the MPI, Nijmegen, at the first conference on the Semantics of Under-represented Languages of the Americas (SULA 1) in Northampton, and as colloquium talks at the University of Amsterdam, the University of Stuttgart, the University of Texas at Austin, Northwestern University, the University of Bielefeld, and the University of Leipzig. I am grateful for the comments and questions I received from the audiences that I met on these occasions. I am particularly grateful for the discussions I had with Arik Cohen, Hannes Doelling, Bart Geurts, Hans Kamp, Chris Kennedy, Anita Mittwoch, Barbara Partee, Arnim von Stechow, and Sandro Zucchi. I also thank two anonymous reviewers for their comments. In my pursuit of a clearer picture of the West Greenlandic data, I was fortunate to work with the following consultants: Anders Benjaminsen, Ceci Marie Christiansen, Dorthe Egede, Marius Elisassen, Fleming Enequist, Uusaqqaq Kristensen, Sequssuna Lund Olsen, Carina Møller, Mia Samuelsen, Kiståra Vahl Olsen, and Bollatta Vahl. For the pecan pies and everything else, I want to express my warmest gratitude to Pia Rosing Heilmann and Ove Nielsen.

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¹ Note that I do not simply regard (1) and (2) as ungrammatical or fully nonsensical sentences. This view is often taken given that Mary ate a sandwich and Mary discovered a
(1) ?Mary ate *a sandwich* for an hour.

(2) ?Mary discovered *a flea* on her dog for six weeks.

Sentence (1) is odd – which I indicate by means of one question mark – because it sounds as if Mary was eating the same sandwich again and again throughout an hour, which is a weird if not impossible thing to do. Similarly for (2): this sentence seems to describe the weird situation in which Mary discovers the same flea over and over again during a period of six weeks. Another well-known fact is that if an accomplishment or an achievement verb combines with a bare plural complement, the oddness disappears. This is illustrated in (3) and (4):

(3) Mary ate *sandwiches* for an hour.

(4) Mary discovered *fleas* on her dog for six weeks.

The above contrast between indefinites and bare plurals is usually described as a scope contrast: whereas the singular indefinites in (1) and (2) seem to take wide scope with respect to the respective *for*-adverbials, the bare plurals in (3) and (4) seem to take narrow scope. In the literature, this scope contrast basically has received two kinds of explanations, namely, one in Dowty (1979) and another one in Krifka (1989, 1992).

In Dowty (1979), *for*-adverbials are appropriate for any predicate that has the so-called subinterval property, which means that the sentence in which such a predicate occurs is true of most or all subintervals of an interval at which this sentence is true. State and activity predicates have this property automatically, which explains why (5) and (6) are fine, but accomplishment and achievement predicates do not, which explains why (1) and (2) are out:

(5) Mary was in Spain for a week

(6) Mary ran for an hour.

Dowty then gives a Carlsonian explanation for why the indefinites in (1) and (2) give rise to oddness whereas the bare plurals in (3) and (4) do

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*flea on her dog* are ‘out’ with *for*-adverbials but fine with *in*-adverbials, as shown in (i) and (ii) (see Vendler 1967):

(i) Mary ate a sandwich in an hour.

(ii) Mary discovered a flea on her dog in ten minutes.

2 A recent discussion of these explanations can be found in Zucchi and White (2001). Verkuyl (1972) is the first study of the influence of nominal complements on verbal aspect.