

The Syntax of Telicity in Vietnamese*

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1. Introduction

Vietnamese is an SVO language with isolating morphology, no morphological case marking, *wh*-in-situ, and a rich classifier system. As an SVO language, objects follow the verbs that subcategorize for them. While a verb and its object are normally adjacent, there is a group of particles that can intervene between them.

- (1) a. Lan tìm hai quyển sách¹
Lan search two CL book
'Lan looked for two books.'
- b. Lan tìm **ra** hai quyển sách
Lan search T-PART two CL book
'Lan found two books.'
- (2) a. Tân đọc hai quyển sách
Tân read two CL book
'Tân read two books'
- b. Tân đọc **xong/hết** hai quyển sách
Tân read T-PART/T-PART two CL book
'Tân has read two books.'

These particles are interesting for several reasons. Syntactically, they appear to form constituents with objects, as they can be coordinated.

- (3) Lan tìm [ra sách đó] nhưng [không ra từ điển]
Lan search [T-PART book that] but [NEG T-PART dictionary]
'Lan found the book but not the dictionary.'

There are also restrictions on the positions of these particles with respect to objects. Quantified NPs (i.e. NPs with a classifier phrase) and some bare NPs

can be either preceded or followed by these particles (4). With some other bare NPs, however, these particles must follow them (5).

- (4) a. Kim mở (ra) cửa (ra)
 Kim open (T-PART) door (T-PART)
 ‘Kim opened (the) door.’
- b. Lan bày (xong) hai trăm bức tranh (xong)
 Lan display T-PART two hundred CL picture T-PART
 ‘Lan finished displaying two hundred pictures.’
- (5) a. Lan bày (*xong) tranh xong
 Lan display T-PART picture T-PART
 ‘Lan finished displaying pictures.’
- b. Lan cắt (*ra) cỏ ra
 Lan cut T-PART grass T-PART
 ‘Lan cut grass.’

Semantically, the presence of these particles induce a telic interpretation of events, as seen in the contrast between the *a* examples and *b* examples in (1) and (2). In (1b), an atelic verb *tìm* ‘search’ denotes a telic event with an addition of the particle *ra*, creating an event whose appropriate English translation seems to be *find*. Thus, once the particle is present, a time interval adverbial ‘for X-time’ is ungrammatical (6). For this reason, I refer to these as *telic particles*.

- (6) Lan tìm ra hai quyển sách (*trong một giờ)
 Lan search T-PART two CL book (*for one hour).
 ‘Lan found two books (*for one hour).’

Telic particles’ syntactic distribution and semantic effect have been reported in Duffield (1998, 1999), where he suggested two analyses. In one of the analyses, *the small clause analysis*, a telic particle forms a constituent with an object under the main verb (7a) (Duffield 1998).² In the other, *the functional projection analysis*, telic particles head a functional projection above VP, with the main verb raising to a position yet higher than telic particles (7b) (Duffield 1999).

- (7) a. [_{VP} V [_{SC} NP T-PART]]
 b. [_{VP} V_I+Y [_{XP} T-PART [_{VP} V_I NP]]]

In this paper, I present novel evidence for the functional projection analysis and argue that the projection of telic particles is best analyzed as an instance of *aspect phrase* located between *vP* and *VP*, where aspectual information about events are syntactically encoded (Travis 1991).³

2. The small clause analysis

2.1 Arguments for the small clause analysis

Under the small clause analysis, an object and a telic particle together form a small clause under the matrix verb.

(8) [VP V [sc NP T-PART]]

A clear conceptual advantage of the small clause analysis over the functional projection analysis is that the surface word order directly reflects the base-generated positions of the elements in the former. The empirical motivation for the small clause analysis comes from a causative construction in Vietnamese. One of the causative constructions in Vietnamese involves either the causative verb *làm* 'make' or a verb of physical contact, i.e. *đánh* 'hit', followed by an object and a verb predicated of the object (Kwon 2004). Interestingly, the word order of the object and the second verb can be altered (Duffield 1998).

- (9) a. Tân làm trà ngọt
 Tân make tea sweet
- b. Tân làm ngọt trà
 Tân make sweet tea
 'Tân made tea sweet.'

Duffield (1998) analyzes the object and the second verb to form a constituent under the main verb, and the word order alternations derive from the embedded verb incorporating into the main verb

(10) Tân làm+ngọt_i [trà ngọt_i]

The causative construction and the 'telic particle-object' complexes share certain similarities. Both the causative construction and the 'telic particle-object' complexes allow for the word order alternations. Also, they both create a telic interpretation of events. If the small clause analysis of the causative construction is extended to the 'telic particle-object' complexes, the '*verb-telic particle-object*' word order can be derived from the incorporation of a telic particle into the main verb.

(11) [VP V+ T-PART_i [sc NP T-PART_i]]

2.2 Arguments against the small clause analysis

Despite the initial plausibility of the small clause analysis of the ‘telic particle-object’ complexes, there are reasons to believe that the causative construction and the ‘telic particle-object’ complexes are very different, and the small clause analysis should not be extended to ‘telic particle-object’ complexes. First, while the word order alternations with telic particles and objects are limited to certain NPs ((4) and (5)), the grammaticality of the word order alternations with the causative construction depends on the embedded verbs. Only when the embedded verb denotes a result-state, the alternation is possible (Duffield 1998).

- (12) a. Tân làm Lan khóc
 Tân make Lan cry
- b. *Tân làm khóc Lan
 Tân make cry Lan
 ‘Tân made Lan cry.’

Second, even when the embedded verb in the causative construction denotes a result-state of the object, there still is an important difference between the ‘telic particle-object’ complexes and the causative construction. Unlike the embedded verb in the causative construction which denotes the object’s state, telic particles create telic events from atelic events. Thus, telic particles are not predicated of objects and tell us nothing about their states. The telic particle *ra* in (13) below, therefore, provides no information about the state of the object, the *job*.

- (13) Lan tìm ra việc
 Lan search T-PART job
 ‘Lan found a job.’

Third, for unknown reasons, the negative marker *không* cannot precede the causative construction, although it can appear inside of it (14). The negative marker can precede a telic particle-object complex (15).

- (14) a. * Tân làm không [SC trà ngọt]/[SC ngọt trà]
 Tân make NEG [SC tea sweet]/[SC sweet tea]
- b. Tân làm [SC trà không ngọt]
 Tân make [SC tea NEG sweet]
 ‘Tân made tea not sweet (intended).’
- (15) Dũng ăn không [hết quả táo]
 Dũng eat NEG [T-PART CL apple]
 ‘Dũng ate the apple without finishing it.’

These data suggest that the causative construction and the ‘telic particle-object’ complexes are different from each other both semantically and syntactically. Thus, they should not be analyzed to have the same structure.

3 The functional projection analysis

In the functional projection analysis, telic particles head a projection above VP, and the word order is derived via movement of the main verb to a functional projection yet higher than the projection of telic particles (Duffield 1999).

(16) $[_{VP} \quad V_i + Y [_{XP} \quad T\text{-PART} [_{VP} \quad V_1 \quad NP]]]$

In this section, I first show that the semantic characteristics and syntactic distribution of telic particles are consistent with the structure proposed in the functional projection analysis. I then introduce an additional argument for the functional projection analysis from a construction that creates inchoatives from statives, which involves one of the telic particles, *ra*.

3.1. Interpretation

Under the structure proposed in the functional projection analysis, telic particles dominate VP (16). This structural assumption is consistent with the interpretation of telic particles, that they add telicity to otherwise atelic events.

3.2. Verb raising

In the functional projection analysis, the main verb rises to a position that is higher than telic particles, deriving ‘verb-telic particle-object’ word order. In Duffield (1998), this line of analysis was rejected based on an assumption that the verb raising cannot be motivated for Vietnamese (ibid: 104). On the contrary, there exists independent evidence for verb raising in Vietnamese. A manner adverb such as *nhanh chóng* ‘quickly’ can intervene between a verb and its object, suggesting that the main verbs in Vietnamese move out of VP.^{4,5}

(17)

Chúng nó bày	nhanh chóng	năm	mười	bức	tranh
They display	quickly	five	ten	CL	picture
‘They quickly displayed fifty pictures.’					

Assuming verb raising takes place in Vietnamese, the functional projection analysis predicts that a manner adverb may also occur between a telic particle and an object, since a ‘stranded object’ alone may represent the remnant VP under the analysis. This prediction is borne out by (18).

- (18) Tân tìm_i ra [VP' **nhanh chóng** [VP t_i [các chương trình]]]
 Tân search_i T-PART [VP' quickly [VP t_i [all program]]]
 'Tân found quickly all the programs.'

Moreover, with a raised main verb, the constituency fact in (3) can be analyzed as an instance of across-the-board extraction of the main verb, as in (19).

- (19) Lan tìm_i [t_i ra sách đó] nhưng [không t_i ra từ điển]
 Lan search[t_i T-PART book that] but [NEG t_i T-PART dictionary]
 'Lan found the book but not the dictionary.'

Finally, the negation fact in (15) can also be accounted for, with the assumption that the negative marker *không* adjoins to the projection of telic particles.⁶

- (20) [VP Dững [Y' ăn_i [**không** [XP hết [VP t_i quả táo]]]]]
 [VP Dững [Y' eat_i [NEG [XP T-PART [VP t_i CL apple]]]]]
 'Dững ate the apple without finishing it.'

3.3. Stative-inchoative alternation: an additional argument

There is an additional set of data which provides further support for the functional projection analysis. In Vietnamese, stative predicates are simply concatenated with an NP (21a). Interestingly, when stative predicates are combined with the telic particle *ra*, the resulting sentence denotes an inchoative event. In this inchoative construction, *ra* must follow the stative predicate (21b).

- (21) a. Kim đẹp/béo/giàu
 Kim pretty/fat/ rich
 'Kim is pretty/fat/ rich.'
- b. Kim (*ra) giàu ra
 Kim (*T-PART) rich T-PART
 'Kim became rich'

Given a clear similarity between the inchoative construction and the instances of telic particles with transitive predicates — namely, telic particles create telic events from atelic events/situations in both — a unified account is desirable. Under the small clause analysis, (21b) would require a structure like (22), in which *giàu* 'rich' is the matrix predicate and *Kim* and *ra* form a small clause complement of *giàu*, with *Kim* raising to be the matrix subject.

- (22) Kim_i giàu [sc ~~Kim_i~~ ra]

(22) is quite problematic, however, as the predicate denoting the result-state, *giàu* ‘rich’, dominates the predicate providing the inchoative meaning, *ra*. It is not clear how the appropriate interpretation can be derived from this structure, given the common assumption that an inchoative event derives from the inchoative component of the meaning operating on a state, not vice versa (i.e. Dowty 1979). Under the functional projection analysis of telic particles, on the other hand, *ra* would be the head of the functional projection above the projection of the stative predicate, with *Kim* as the embedded subject. The stative predicate would raise to the head position of a projection higher than that of *ra*, with the embedded subject *Kim* also raising to become the matrix subject.

(23) Kim_i đep_j [_{XP} ra [_{VP/AP} Kim_i đep_j]]

Thus, applying the functional projection analysis to the inchoative construction enables us to postulate a more plausible structure for the construction, in which the inchoative predicate dominates the result-state predicate. More importantly, the functional projection analysis enables us to account for the instances of telic particles with transitive verbs and the inchoative construction in a unified way.

Thus, unlike the small clause analysis, which is only consistent with some of the data, the functional projection analysis has been shown to be consistent with and supported by the original data as well as the additional data from the verb raising and inchoative construction. In the rest of the paper, therefore, I pursue the functional projection analysis of telic particles.

4. Aspect phrase in Vietnamese

Thus far, our analysis of telic particles suggests that there are two functional projections above VP in a Vietnamese sentence: one that is headed by telic particles, and the other that is the landing site for the raising main verbs. In this section, I first argue that the landing site for the rising main verbs is *v*, based on the distribution of elements around the surface position of the main verb. Second, given this analysis, as well as the unique semantic effect of telic particles, I argue that the functional projection of telic particles is *aspect phrase*, where aspectual information of events are syntactically encoded (Travis 1991).

4.1. V-to-*v* movement in Vietnamese

If Vietnamese main verbs move to a position that is higher than the projection of telic particles, an obvious question is where main verbs move to. Elements occurring in the vicinity of the main verb help us determine the main verb’s position. First, there are several elements that must precede the main verb in a

Vietnamese sentence: (i) view-point aspect markers, such as *đã* ‘perfective’; (ii) modals, such as *phải* ‘must’; and (iii) the subject-oriented element, *tự* ‘self’.

- (24) Lan đã (phải) **tự** tìm (*đã) (*phải) (*tự) ra việc
 Lan PERF (must) self search (*PERF) (*must) (*self) T-PART job
 ‘Lan found the job by herself.’

For the purpose of this study, I assume that view-point aspect markers and the modals head their own projections. Under this assumption, the linear order in (24) shows that Vietnamese main verbs land in the position that is lower than the projections of view-point aspect and modals. Within the standard assumptions about phrase structure in the *Minimalist Program*, such an intermediate projection would be *vP* or *VoiceP* (Kratzer 1994, 1996, Chomsky 1995).

In fact, the distribution of the third element, *tự* ‘self’, suggests that *v* is indeed the landing site of Vietnamese main verbs. As can be seen in (25) below, *tự* is grammatical only when a sentence denotes an event. It is ungrammatical with locative verb *ở* ‘be’ or stative predicates such as *giàu* ‘rich’ (25a), unless the stative predicates become eventive in the inchoative construction (25b).

- (25) a. Dững (***tự**) ở San Diego/giàu
 Dững (*self) be_{LOC} San Diego/rich
 ‘Dững is/lives in San Diego/is rich (*by himself).’
- b. Kim **tự** đẹp/béo ra
 Kim self pretty/fat T-PART
 ‘Kim became pretty/fat by herself’

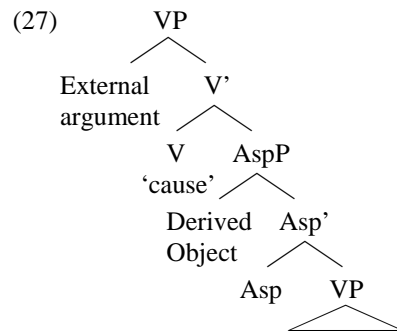
I take this distribution of *tự* to suggest that *tự* expresses an instigator or causer of an event. Assuming that states by themselves do not involve instigation or causation, they are incompatible with *tự*. On the other hand, caused event such as (24) and inchoative events such as (25b) can be instigated or caused, whether the responsible force is external or internal (Levin and Rappaport Hovav 1995). Thus, *tự* is grammatical with them. If this analysis of *tự* is on the right track, one may argue that *tự* can only be adjoined to the projection introducing instigation/causation, namely, *vP* (Ramchand 2001, Folli and Harley 2005). If *tự* is adjoined to *vP*, the most likely landing site for Vietnamese main verbs is *v*.⁷

- (26) Kim_i [_{vP} **tự** [_{vP} t_i [_v đẹp/béo_j [_{XP} ra [_{VP} t_i t_j]]]]]
 Kim_i [_{vP} self [_{vP} t_i [_v pretty/fat_j [_{XP} T-PART [_{VP} t_i t_j]]]]]

4.2. Telic particles head aspect phrase

According to the proposed analysis, *telic particles* head a projection above *VP* and the main verbs occupy the head position of a yet higher projection, *vP*. In

other words, the projection of *telic particles* comes between *vP* and *VP*. What would such a projection be? The idea that there is a functional projection between *vP* and *VP* is not new. Based on evidence from Tagalog, Travis (1991) argued that derived objects occupy the specifier position of a functional projection between *VP* and the projection introducing causation (the higher *V* in her analysis), whose head position is occupied with the completive aspect morpheme. This functional projection is called *aspect phrase*.



Given the syntactic position of the projection of telic particles (between *vP* and *VP*), combined with the semantic effect that they produce, I conclude that telic particles head aspect phrase.

5. Remaining issues

The proposed analysis of telic particles leaves one interesting fact about them unexplained: the selective nature of the word order alternation between telic particles and objects. In this last section, I suggest an analysis of the word order variation with telic particles and object NPs, which divides instances of ‘telic particle-object’ complexes in two types. One is a case of complex verb formation between a verb and a bare NP object, which imposes strict adjacency between them. The other is a case of object NP licensing inside and outside of *VP*, which allows for an object NP to appear in two positions.

5.1. Complex verb formation

As seen earlier, telic particles must follow some bare NPs and cannot intervene between these NPs and the verb. This strict adjacency requirement between some bare NPs and the subcategorizing verbs appears to be independent of telic particles, however, as adverbs also cannot intervene.

- (28) *Chúng nó bày **nhanh chóng** tranh
 They display quickly picture
 ‘They displayed quickly picture.’ (cf. (5a))

Given the general nature of the adjacency restriction, I propose that some bare nouns form complex predicates with the subcategorizing verbs. The resulting complex predicate raises to *v*, deriving the ‘verb-object-telic particle’ order.

- (29) [_{VP} Subj[_v V+N_i [_{AspP} T-PART [_{VP} ~~V~~+N_i]]]]

Evidence supporting the complex predicate analysis comes from an apparent “(outbound) anaphoric island” effect (Postal 1969) seen with some frequent ‘verb + noun’ combinations, as in (30).

- (30) Tân lái xe_i và quyết định mua pro_{??i/j}
 Tân drive car_i and decide buy pro_{??i/j}
 ‘Tân drove a car_i and decided to buy pro_{??i/j}.’

In (30), the *pro* object in the second conjunct cannot have the object in the first conjunct, *xe* ‘car’, as its antecedent, suggesting that *xe* ‘car’ cannot have the referential interpretation. Such an effect is absent with less frequent combinations, such as *thử* ‘try’ and *xe* ‘car’ in (31).

- (31) Tân thử xe_i và quyết định mua pro_{i/j}
 Tân try car_i and decide buy pro_{i/j}
 ‘Tân tried a car and decided to buy pro_{i/j}.’

5.2. Object NP licensing inside and outside of VP

In contrast with the case of strict adjacency, some other bare NPs and quantified NPs in general can precede or follow telic particles (4).⁸ This optionality is reminiscent of the derived object positions in other languages, in which object NPs are argued to be licensed either inside or outside of VP (Mahajan 1990, Runner 1993, Diesing 1995, de Hoop 1996, Ramchand 1997). If object NPs can be licensed either inside or outside of VP in Vietnamese, the object-telic particle order obtains when an object moves out of VP (32a), while the *telic particle-object* order obtains when an object stays inside VP (32b).

- (32) a. Tân [_{VP} tạo_i [_{XP} [nhiều vấn đề]_j [_{AspP} **ra** [_{VP} t_i t_j]]]]
 Tân [_{VP} create_i [_{XP} [many problem]_j [_{AspP} T-PART [_{VP} t_i t_j]]]]
 b. Tân [_{VP} tạo_i [_{AspP} [ra [_{VP} t_i [nhiều vấn đề]]]]]
 Tân [_{VP} create_i [_{AspP} [T-PART [_{VP} t_i [many problem]]]]]
 ‘Tân created many problems.’

In the languages with derived object positions, different positions of objects correlate with different interpretations of them, such as specificity, definiteness, and referentiality (the references above). With Vietnamese, there appear to be differences between two positions (Duffield 1998), yet they are not always reported. Even when they are, the nature of the differences is not clear. Thus, I leave an account for the optionality of object positions for future research.

6. Conclusion

In this paper, I have argued that Vietnamese telic particles, which intervene between verbs and their objects and create a telic interpretation of events, head an *aspect phrase* between vP and VP. I have also proposed a preliminary analysis of the word order alternations between telic particles and objects. If the proposed analysis is on the right track, Vietnamese adds a piece of evidence for syntactic encoding of verbal aspect (Rosen 2003 and references therein). Further data and careful analyses are required, however, in order to gain insight into a potential interaction between aspect phrase and the variability of object positions.

Notes

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¹ Abbreviations: T-PART = telic particle, CL = classifier, NEG = negation, PERF = perfective

² In Duffield (1998), what I refer to as small clause is a projection of aspect, or *aspect phrase*, although it is below the lexical verb (as opposed aspect phrase in Travis 1991, which is above VP). I refer to it as small clause in this paper, in order to avoid confusion.

³ A functional projection of aspect was independently proposed also by Borer (1994). See also Rosen (2003) for an overview of the literature on syntactic analysis of aspect or event structure.

⁴ A possible alternative analysis is that the object is post-posed in (17). However, since extraction from the post adverbial object is grammatical (i.e. *wh*-question), the post-posing analysis is unlikely.

⁵ Agbayani and Zoerner (2006) explicitly argue that Vietnamese lacks V-to-v movement, due to lack of VP ellipsis and left-peripheral ellipsis.

⁶ I have no account for why the negative marker cannot precede the causative construction.

⁷ Another important question is *how* the main verbs move to v, which I leave for future research.

⁸ There is a strong preference for quantified NPs to be sentence final in Vietnamese (Simpson 2001). Whether this has a grammatical or production/processing explanation (i.e. heaviness) is not clear.

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