

The Syntax and Semantics of Inner Aspect

Class 5: More recent developments

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Introduction

- In the past two decades or so, lots of novel data and analyses have appeared in the literature regarding event culmination.
- Scholars have, for example,
 - (i) discovered non-culminating predicates,
 - (ii) provided novel typologies of linguistic elements associated with event culmination, and
 - (iii) challenged previous generalizations concerning the role direct objects play in measuring out events or the relation between result state and telicity.
- Today I will give a quick overview of some recent results regarding (i) - (iii). (Some of this material is based on Kardos 2024).

Non-culminating predicates

- Some verbal predicates from languages like Karachay-Balkar, various Salish languages, Korean, Mandarin, and Hindi have been characterized by both culminating and non-culminating construals.

(1) kerim ešik-ni ac-xan-di, Karachay-Balkar

Kerim door-ACC open-PFV-3Sg

alaj boša-ma-Ɂan-di.

but finish-NEG-PFV-3SG

Literally: 'Kerim opened the door, but didn't finish.'

(Tatevosov 2008: 396)

Non-culminating predicates

(2) ku-ka changmwun-ul kkay-ss-ta Korean

he-NOM window-ACC break-PST-DECL

haciman changmwun-i

but window-NOM

kkay-ci-ci anh-ass-ta

break-PASS-COMP NEG-PST-DECL

Literally: 'He broke the window. But it was not broken.'

(Beavers and Lee 2020: 1235)

Non-culminating predicates

- What is interesting regarding these examples is that they are associated with defeasible culmination.
- The example in (2), for example, shows that the inference that the window became broken can be cancelled.
- Non-culmination readings may correspond to zero-change or partial-change construals given specific grammatical conditions. For example, it has been claimed by Beavers and Lee (2020) regarding (2) that the absence or presence of intentionality regarding the referent of the subject determines which reading becomes available.

Non-culminating predicates

- These examples contrast with accomplishments like *clean the kitchen* in (3), which entails culmination.

(3) Paul cleaned the kitchen in half an hour, although it is not completely clean yet. (Martin and Demirdache 2020: 1203)

What is negated is the maximally clean state of the kitchen.

(4) Paul cleaned the kitchen, #but he hasn't finished cleaning it.

(Martin and Demirdache 2020: 1203)

That *clean the kitchen* is incompatible with the continuation *but he hasn't finished cleaning it* is considered evidence that event culmination cannot be cancelled.

Non-culminating predicates

- Research on non-culminating predicates has shown that the class of predicates associated with event culmination is more diverse than previously thought.
 - For more on this, see, for example, Martin and Demirdache (2020), who propose a novel typology of accomplishment readings based on a careful examination of accomplishments in different languages.
- The question of how to represent defeasible culmination readings has primarily interested semanticists. For more on recent analyses, see Bar-el (2005), Bar-el *et al.* (2005), Altschuler (2014), Demirdache and Martin (2015), Martin and Schäfer (2017), Martin (2019), Martin *et al.* (2021) and Nederveen (2024, 2025), among others.

Towards a novel typology of completives

- The exact aspectual function of linguistic elements associated with event culmination has also been the subject of much prior literature, including more recent works.
- A more specific question here is whether event culmination, often represented as event maximalization in recent literature (Filip and Rothstein 2006 and Filip 2008), is overtly or covertly encoded in verbal expressions.
- For example, in the literature on Slavic aspect, we see arguments both for and against the view that prefixes directly encode event culmination. Borer (2005) represents the former view, whereas Filip (2008) supports the latter.

Towards a novel typology of completives

- Here is an example that Filip (2008) uses to argue against the view that prefixes like *do* in (5) in Czech are overt markers of telicity/event maximalization.

(5) Mozart *do.pis.ova.l* Czech

Mozart TERM.write.IPF.PST.3SG

poslední takty Don Giovanniho

last notes D.G.SG.GEN

na Bertramce týden / *za týden.

on B. for a week / *in a week

'Mozart spent a week finishing the last notes of D.G. in the villa Bertramka.'

(Filip 2008: 246)

Towards a novel typology of completives

- Filip (2008: 247) argues that in (5) in the presence of the prefix *do* and secondary imperfective morphology a culmination interpretation with respect to the theme is only implicated. This is not compatible with the hypothesis that prefixes like *do* are overt instantiations of her maximalization operator MAX_E .
- Recall that on Borer's (2005) view, by contrast, Slavic prefixes are phonological instantiations of a head feature that assigns range to an open value, thereby giving rise to quantity structures. → Slavic perfective prefixes are direct range assigners.
- This is compatible with the view that secondary imperfectives illustrate a type of outer aspect. Perfective verb forms are contrasted here with basic imperfective forms, contra Filip (2008).
- For more on this debate, see also Filip (2026).

Towards a novel typology of completives

- Borer (2023) extends the typology of telicity markers/completives and argues that the structure of the verbal domain is more complex than that proposed in Borer (2005) (cf. class 3).
- In the former, there are two operations necessary for the creation of event culmination/telicity: The ASP-DIV function is responsible for the creation of quantifiable divisions, whereas MAX is an operation on divided structures, which picks out the requisite number of divisions.
- Both functions are associated with a dedicated functional projection and telicity-marking elements differ as to whether they value (=assign range to) only the MAX head or the ASP-DIV head or both.

Towards a novel typology of completives

- In Borer (2005), there is an important distinction between range assigners (=valuers) and predicate modifiers. Range assigners create telicity, modifiers require Asp_Q in that they modify it.

valuers	modifiers
quantity DPs in English and lots of other languages	<i>in</i> -adverbials <i>*John ate cakes in 10 minutes.</i> <i>John ate an apple in 10 minutes.</i>
perfective prefixes in Slavic languages	shifted <i>up</i> <i>*Kim wrote letters up. (single event)</i> <i>Kim wrote the letters up.</i>
goal PPs <i>John ran. (atelic)</i> <i>John ran to the bank. (telic)</i>	prefixes like <i>out</i> - <i>*Robin outran contestants.</i> <i>Robin outran ten contestants.</i>
some intransitive English particles <i>Robin took off. (telic)</i>	

Towards a novel typology of completives

- Given that telicity-marking devices either create ambiguity (see *the book* in *read the book*) or strict telicity (see *twice* in *sing twice*) and that some modifiers require gradeability/quantifiable divisions (see *gradually* in *Kim ran seven miles gradually for 2 hours*), Borer (2023, p. 13), proposes a three-way distinction between valuers and also identifies modifiers of ASP-DIV and MAX:

MAX (only)	ASP-DIV (only)	both MAX and ASP-DIV	modifiers
shifted <i>up</i>	quantity DPs	Slavic prefixes	ASP-DIV: <i>gradually</i> <i>Kim ran seven miles gradually.</i>
prefixes like <i>out-</i>	goals	Hungarian <i>meg</i>	MAX: <i>completely</i>

Towards a novel typology of completives

- English resultatives are modifiers, they do not value ASP-DIV or MAX. Consider (6).

- (6) a. Kim wiped the table clean (gradually) for/in 20 minutes.
b. I painted cars red for/*in a day.

Towards a novel typology of completives

- This is different in Hungarian, where resultatives ensure strict telicity, similarly to verbal particles like *meg*.

(7) a. Kati 10 perc alatt/*10 perc-ig lapos-ra kalapált egy fémlémezt.

Kati 10 min under/*10 min-for flat-SUBL hammered a metal sheet.ACC

'Kati hammered a metal sheet flat in 10 minutes.'

b. *Kati lapos-ra kalapált fémet.

Kati flat-SUBL hammered metal.ACC

Hungarian resultatives seem to be range assigners on Borer's (2005) view (or valuers of both ASP-DIV and MAX in Borer 2023), similarly to verbal particles.

Towards a novel typology of completives

- Finally, consider Russian, where resultatives are possible with imperfective verbs, contra what we often find in Slavic languages, but then only an atelic, imperfective interpretation is allowed. This points towards a modification analysis of resultatives in Russian.

- (8) a. Ona myla stol gubkoj nachisto (*za dve minuty).
she washed.IMPF table sponge.INST on.clean (*in two minutes)
'She was washing the table clean with a sponge (*in two minutes).'
- b. Ona vy-myla stol gubkoj nachisto za dve minuty.
she PF-washed table sponge.INST on.clean in two minutes
'She washed the table clean with a sponge in two minutes.'

Russian (confirmed by Irina Burukina, p.c.)

Challenging measuring out

- That verbal particles, goal PPs, resultatives and direct object NPs have different aspectual effects is also noted by MacDonald (2024) and MacDonald and Glodstaf (2025).
- The latter argue that "the contribution of verb particles, and goal prepositional phrases make a more robust contribution to the (a)telicity of the verb phrase, in contrast to nouns" (*ibid.* 7).
- These authors also argue that "there is no aspectual feature/projection syntactically present within a noun related to the effect the noun has on the (a)telicity of the verb phrase" (*ibid.* 9), contra much previous literature (see, for example, Borer 2005).

Challenging measuring out

- Here are some data in support of the previous claim:

(9) a. They lengthened the rope. (quantity object and atelic reading)

b. The tailor lengthened my pants. (quantity object and telic reading)

(10) Pat drank it for 10 minutes/in 10 minutes.

(quantized object without conceptual content and aspectual variability)

(11) Dana ate breakfast/lunch/dinner for/in 10 minutes.

(bare object and aspectual variability)

(12) Dana ate in 10 minutes. (no object and telicity is possible)

(MacDonald and Glodstaf 2025: 12)

Challenging measuring out

- MacDonald and Glodstaf (2025) assume that
 - (i) grammatical/syntactic information is rigid while conceptual information is flexible (see also Borer 2005) and
 - (ii) once grammatical information is specified in the syntax, it should not be removed (as captured, for example, by Koontz-Garboden's (2009) structure preserving notion of monotonicity).
- The central question these authors ask is the following: If the assumptions above are correct, why is it that direct objects associated with a [+Q] feature do not necessarily give rise to strict telicity and [-Q] nouns do not necessarily yield atelicity, either.

Challenging measuring out

- That [+Q] direct objects do not have a telicising effect is also illustrated by data from a variety of other languages such as Korean, Mandarin and Japanese. Here I show further examples from Hungarian (see also class 4).

(13) a. Kati mosott egy inget. (strictly atelic)

Kati washed a shirt.ACC

b. Laci takarított egy szobát. (strictly atelic)

Laci cleaned a room.ACC

c. Béla súrolt egy kádat. (strictly atelic)

Béla scrubbed a tub.ACC

Results are an epiphenomenon of event culmination

- That telic predicates do not necessarily express situations associated with a prominent result state has been noted by several scholars. See Borer (2005), MacDonald (2008) and Rappaport Hovav and Levin (2010).
- The *egyed*-construction from Hungarian, which we briefly discussed in class 4, also illustrates that. (14b) is from Csirmaz (2006).

(14) a. Juli délelőtt pihent egyed.

Juli morning rested one.ACC

'Juli rested in the morning.'

b. Juli délelőtt is és délután is pihent egyed.

Juli morning too and afternoon too rested one.ACC

*'Juli rested in the morning and in the afternoon too.' (no single-event reading)

Results are an epiphenomenon of event culmination

- Hungarian also has a sizeable class of verbal expressions where the situation of a manner verb combined with a telicizing particle is not necessarily associated with the coming about of a result state (Kardos 2026, Kardos and Pethő 2026).

(15) a. Ili ki-mosott egy ruhát, de a ruha nem változott semmit.

Ili PRT-washed a dress.ACC, but the dress not changed nothing.ACC

'Ili washed a dress (telic), but the dress did not change.'

b. #Ili foltmentes-en ki-mosott egy ruhát,

Ili spotless-ly PRT-washed a dress.ACC,

de a ruha nem változott semmit.

but the dress not changed nothing.ACC

Literally: 'Ili washed a dress spotless, but the dress did not change.'

Results are an epiphenomenon of event culmination

(16) a. Pali ki-vasalta az inget, de az ing gyűrött maradt.

Pali PRT-ironed the shirt.ACC, but the shirt creasy remained

'Pali ironed the shirt (telic), but the shirt had creases in it.'

b. #Pali gyönyörű-en ki-vasalta az inget, de az ing gyűrött

Pali beautiful-ly PRT-ironed the shirt.ACC, but the shirt creasy
maradt.

remained

Literally: 'Pali ironed the shirt and the shirt became beautiful, but the shirt
had creases in it.'

Results are an epiphenomenon of event culmination

- That the coming about of a result state is not entailed by *kimos* 'PRT-wash' is also evidenced by the adequate nature of (17).

(17) János ki-mosott egy tiszta ruhát.

János PRT-washed a clean dress.ACC

'János washed a clean dress (telic).'

- By contrast, with a result verb in the sentence, we get an unnatural sentence.

(18) #János meg-tisztította a tiszta cipőjét.

János PRT-cleaned the clean his.shoe.ACC

Intended meaning: 'János cleaned his clean shoes.'

Results are an epiphenomenon of event culmination

- One final question: What kind of situations are expressed by *kimos* 'PRT-wash' and *kitakarít* 'PRT-clean'?

(19) Anna fél-ig ki-takarított egy garázst.

Anna half-to PRT-cleaned a garage.ACC

'Anna completed half of the process of cleaning a garage.,

- Such sentences express the completion of a process, which may consist of several subparts. See also (19).

(20) Az orvos fél-ig *(meg)-gyógyította a beteget.

the doctor half-to *(PRT)-cured the patient.ACC

'The doctor completed half of the process of treating the patient.'

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