

Telicity in Hungarian verbal predicates is a syntactic matter, whereas results are a semantic property

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1. Background

- ❖ **Telicity** is often described as a **property of verbal predicates** that arises **compositionally**: it is assumed to be calculated from the semantics of the verb and those of other elements (most importantly, the internal argument) in the verb phrase (Verkuyl 1993, Krifka 1998).
- ❖ For example, on Krifka’s view,
 - verbs like *eat* and **internal arguments** like *an apple*, characterised by **quantised reference**, give rise to a **telic** predicate,
 - whereas **internal arguments** like *apples*, characterised by **cumulative reference**, in *eat apples*,
 - and **verbs** like *push*, whose theme **does not measure out the event** even if the theme is quantised, as in *push the cart*, yield **atelicity**.
- ❖ **Telicity** on this view is thus a purely **semantic property**.
- ❖ Another notion, besides quantisation and measuring out, that is often invoked in the analysis of telicity is that of a **result state** that arises at the **termination** of the eventuality denoted by the verbal predicate.
 - In analyses such as Dowty (1979), Rappaport Hovav and Levin (1998), Folli and Harley (2005), Ramchand (2008), the presence of a result state in the predicate directly triggers a telic interpretation.
- ❖ By contrast, in analyses such as those of Borer (2005) and Jung and Choi (2023), **telicity** is argued to be **independent** of whether the predicate describes an event that terminates with a **result state**.
- ❖ For these authors, telicity is a **syntactic matter** that is directly associated with a **functional head**.
 - Borer (2005): the Asp_Q head
 - Jung and Choi (2023): the v_{CAUSE} head
- ❖ They differ with respect to the syntactic representation of the **result**:
 - Borer (2005): results have **no** syntactic significance
 - Jung and Choi (2023): they are expressed within a **ResP projection**, and are distinct from inner aspect

2. Facts from Hungarian

Focusing on the grammar of manner verbs in Hungarian, we provide novel arguments for two claims (see also Borer 2005, MacDonald 2008, Travis 2010):

- (i) **telic** interpretations are **syntactically** instantiated;
- (ii) **result states** are a **semantic** property of predicates.

2.1. In Hungarian, **telicity is not calculated compositionally** by combining a verb and a quantised theme. Instead, telicity is **linked to a verbal particle**.

- (1) a. János súrolt egy kádat.
János scrubbed a tub.ACC
‘János scrubbed a tub.’ (atelic)
b. János **ki**-súrolt egy kádat.
János PRT-scrubbed a tub.ACC
‘János scrubbed a tub.’ (telic)

2.2. This telicity is **rigidly determined** by a grammatical element. The culmination of the event is **not defeasible**:

- (2) #János **ki**-súrolt egy kádat, de még nem fejezte be.
János PRT-scrubbed a tub.ACC, but yet not finished PRT
‘János telic-scrubbed a tub, but hasn’t finished scrubbing it.’

Coercion of (a)telicity by temporal adverbials is not possible in the same way as in English:

- (3) Pat drank it {in / for} 10 minutes.
MacDonald and Glodstaf (2025: 12 (19a))
(4) a. Takarította *pro*_{OBJ} 10 {perc alatt / percig}.
‘He cleaned it {*in / for} 10 minutes.’
b. **Ki**-takarította *pro*_{OBJ} 10 {perc alatt / percig}.
‘He telic-cleaned it {in / *for} 10 minutes.’

2.3. By contrast, while a change of state is often implicated as a consequence of a telic predicate expressed with such a **manner** verb, this **change of state is generally defeasible**:

- (5) a. János **ki**-takarította a szobát, de nem lett tiszta.
‘János telic-cleaned the room, but it didn’t become clean.’
b. János **ki**-takarította a szobát, bár eleve tiszta volt.
‘János telic-cleaned the room, although it was already clean.’

Note that the verb (*ki*-)takarít above (~ German *putzen*) is not deadjectival in Hungarian. This pattern contrasts with **result verbs**, which are typically derived from an adjectival root in this language:

- (6) a. #János **meg**-szárította a rongyot, de nem lett száraz.
‘János telic-dried the cloth, but it didn’t become dry.’
b. #János **meg**-szárította a rongyot, bár eleve száraz volt.
‘János telic-dried the cloth, although it was already dry.’

2.4. Results can also be expressed by resultative adverbial elements in Hungarian. With respect to telicity, we can distinguish two types of such adverbial modification:

- The type in (7a) **renders the event description telic without a verbal particle** (É. Kiss 2021), whereas it is also compatible with an additional verbal particle as shown in (7b).
- The type in (8) modifies a particle-verb predicate **that is already telic** by contributing a result state.

- (7) a. *-ra/-re* (SUBL = sublative case) + V: telic
János **folntementes-re** **súrolt** egy kádat 5 {perc alatt / *percig}.
János spotless.SUBL scrubbed a tub.ACC 5 min in / *for
b. *-ra/-re* + **particle** + V: telic
János **folntementes-re ki-súrolt** egy kádat 5 {perc alatt / *percig}.
János spotless.SUBL PRT-scrubbed a tub.ACC 5 min in / *for

- (8) *-an/-en* (ESS = modal-essive case) + **particle** + V: telic
János folntementes-**en ki-súrolt** egy kádat 5 {perc alatt / *percig}.
János spotless.ESS PRT-scrubbed a tub.ACC 5 min in / *for
All (7a-b), (8): ‘János scrubbed a tub spotless in / *for 5 min.’

3. Central claims

- ❖ Along the lines of Borer (2005), we distinguish between syntactic constituents that assign range to Asp_Q and those that modify this projection.
- ❖ **Verbal particles** like *ki*- and *meg*- are **range assigners** (= valuers). Syntactically, they **license Asp_Q** by appearing as its specifier, while also expressing some idiosyncratic lexical meaning in combination with the verb stem.
- ❖ **Resultatives** ending in *-ra/-re* are also **range assigners** when combined with a particle-less verb.
- ❖ It is one of the most basic facts of Hungarian **syntax** that both **verbal particles** and *-ra/-re* resultatives are **tied to a specific**, directly preverbal, stressed **position**. We conjecture that within Borer’s theory, $\text{Spec}, \text{Asp}_Q\text{P}$ is the location of this Hungarian syntactic position.
- ❖ The same resultatives can also **modify** an Asp_QP that is assigned range by a **verbal particle**.
- ❖ Resultative adverbials ending in *-an/-en* can **only** serve as **modifying adjuncts** to an Asp_QP whose head is assigned range either by a **verbal particle** or by a *-ra/-re* resultative, cf. Kardos (2026). However, the *-an/-en* resultative **cannot assign range** to Asp_Q itself.
- ❖ **Semantically**, both types of resultative, ending in *-ra/-re* and *-an/-en*, are **equivalent**. They only differ with respect to whether they are able to ‘mark’ telicity.
- ❖ Telicity in Hungarian predicates is **not calculated semantically** by combining a **verb** with an expression that specifies a **result state**, either via a verbal particle or via a resultative adverbial, as previously generally assumed in the literature, starting with É. Kiss (2006).
- ❖ Instead, the semantics of **telicity is contributed** by the semantic value of the **phonetically empty functional Asp_Q head**. According to Borer, Asp_Q asserts that the predicate is true of the event as a whole, but not of all subparts of the event (‘quantity’).

Telicity, on this view, is understood as **event culmination** (reaching **some** semantically and pragmatically determined **endpoint**) and is independent of the coming about of a result state or event completion.

4. Result as a semantic-pragmatic issue

- ❖ The expression of a result does not appear to have any syntactic significance in Hungarian. With respect to compatibility with e.g. temporal adverbials, expression of telicity, word order, etc.:
 - there is no strict grammatical distinction between result and manner verbs, and
 - it makes no difference whether a verbal particle or a *-ra/-re* adverbial can be straightforwardly understood as describing a result state (e.g. *meg*-ver ‘telic-beat’, *vissza*-ver ‘beat back’).
- ❖ *-ra/-re* resultative adverbials
 - are **syntactically** categorised as either modifying or licensing a **telic** predicate,
 - and **semantically** express **secondary predication**.
 - These adverbials are typically **interpreted** as predicating a **result state** of the predicate’s theme, which appears to be a consequence of the combination of these two properties.
- ❖ *-an/-en* adverbials, by contrast,
 - can **either** modify a telic predicate (Asp_QP) and thus receive a **resultative** interpretation,
 - **or** appear with other non-telic projections (e.g. $v\text{P}$), where they get a different, e.g. **depictive or manner**, secondary predicate interpretation,
 - **depending on the lexical meaning** of the adverbial and of the verbal predicate.
 - A **resultative interpretation is excluded** and only manner (etc.) is possible if the predicate is **atelic**.

(9) a. Károly szép-**en** terítette az asztalt.
Károly nice.ESS set the table.
‘Károly atelic-set the table in a beautiful manner.’

 - Compare with the **telic** minimal counterpart, which is ambiguous:

(9) b. Károly szép-**en meg**-terítette az asztalt.
Károly nice.ESS PRT-set the table.
‘Károly telic-set the table {in a beautiful manner / resulting in a beautifully set table}.’

 - A manner or result interpretation can be excluded if it is incompatible with the lexical meaning of the adverbial.

(10) a. Mari csúny-**án le**-horzsolta a térdét.
‘Mari telic-scraped her knee badly.’ (result only)
(10) b. Feri folntementes-**en el**-törölte a poharakat.
‘Feri telic-wiped the glasses spotless.’ (result only)
(11) Feri lass-**an** / óvatos-**an** / vidám-**an ki**-nyitotta az ajtót.
‘Feri telic-opened the door slowly / carefully / cheerfully.’ (manner / depictive only)

 - ❖ Both modification and range assignment by a resultative adverbial (whether *-an/-en* or *-ra/-re*) are compatible with both **result verbs**, which **entail a result state** semantically, and **manner verbs**, which **do not entail** a result state, but where one is **merely pragmatically accessible**.

(12) a. Kati fényes-**re** tisztította a kocsit.
‘Kati cleaned the car shiny.’ (range assignment, result verb)
b. Kati fényes-**re** törölte a kocsit.
‘Kati wiped the car shiny.’ (range assignment, manner verb)

(13) a. Kati **meg**-tisztította a kocsit fényes-**re** / szép-**en**.
‘Kati telic-cleaned the car shiny / beautifully.’
b. Kati **meg**-törölte a kocsit fényes-**re** / szép-**en**.
‘Kati telic-wiped the car shiny / beautifully.’

- ❖ It is possible to express more than one result state by different grammatical means.
 - resultative *-re* + *-en*:

(14) Gábor gyönyörű-**en** élé-**re** vasalta az inget.
~ ‘Gábor ironed creases into the shirt beautifully.’
results: shirt has creases + is beautiful
 - **particle** + *-en*:

(15) János ünnepélyes-**en meg**-terítette az asztalt.
‘János telic-set the table festively.’
results: table is set + is festive

5. Challenges for the analysis

- ❖ Our syntactic theory predicts **two** *-ra/-re* adverbials (one range-assigning, the other modifying) to be possible, which is not the case:
(14’) *Gábor gyönyörű-**re** élé-**re** vasalta az inget.
‘Gábor ironed creases into the shirt beautifully.’
- ❖ *-an/-en* resultatives can modify predicates **without** a particle or *-ra/-re*, suggesting an Asp_QP structure:
(16) Károly szép-**en** vasal / rajzol.
‘Károly irons / draws beautifully.’
- ❖ However, such predicates can only receive a non-episodic, ability/dispositional interpretation, which suggests that the telic/atelic distinction is neutralised for non-episodic predicates.

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