

The Projection of Telicity in Vietnamese

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Vietnamese has SVO as the canonical word order and generally disallows intervening elements between a verb and its object (1). However, there is a group of particles which can appear in this very position (2). These particles add a telic interpretation to the otherwise atelic or aspectually underspecified VP (*telic particles*). Although the word order in (2) is productive, it is not without consequence: bare NPs are strongly dispreferred in the “stranded” position (3) while quantified NPs do not show such a restriction (2) (Simpson 2001). The telic particles have been discussed in Duffield (1998, 1999), where he suggests in passing a *base-generation* analysis (ibid. 1998) and a *verb raising* analysis (ibid. 1999). In this paper, I present new evidence to argue that: (i) Vietnamese has a projection of *aspect* headed by the telic particles, and (ii) as in the *verb raising* analysis, Vietnamese verbs move out of VP and land in a position that is higher than the projection of aspect, most likely *v*. Our analysis of the telic particles in Vietnamese, therefore, offers support for the syntactic representation of event structure, proposed by Travis (1991), Borer (1994), among others. In fact, Vietnamese’ contribution is rather unique, due to its isolating morphology. One can witness, for instance, an achievement event of ‘finding’ is syntactically encoded with two separate heads: a verb *tim* ‘search’ and the telic particle *ra*, as seen in (2b).

There are at least two plausible ways in which the word order in (2) can be analyzed: (a) that the telic particles are *base-generated* below V as heads of a small clause-like projection (4a), and (b) that the telic particles are heads of a projection above VP, or *aspect phrase*, where telicity is encoded, and the word order is derived by a verb raising to a position that is higher than the aspect phrase, i.e. *v* (4b). *Prima facie* the *base-generation* analysis is plausible, as (i) a telic particle and an object NP appear to form a constituent (5) and (ii) Vietnamese has a resultative construction (6). Nonetheless, there are several arguments against analyzing the telic particles as heads of resultative phrases (RPs): (i) The predicate in the RPs has the same meaning whether it occurs as the main verb or inside the RP, whereas many telic particles have different meanings when they appear as the main verbs. (ii) While the predicate in the RPs is predicated of the object NP, the telic particles are predicated of the event denoted by VP. (iii) The order of the predicate and a bare NP in the RP can be altered without affecting the interpretation of the bare NP (6), while bare NPs strongly resist following a telic particle (3). (iv) For whatever reasons, the RP cannot have negation preceding the entire RP (6), while the telic particle-NP complex can (7). All of these differences suggest that telic particles should not be analyzed as heads of RPs.

The *verb raising* analysis, on the other hand, is consistent with the telic particles’ adding the telic interpretation to VP, since they dominate VP. It is also compatible with the observation that these elements are interpreted as telic markers only when they appear post-verbally. Just like the English *have* and *do*, these elements serve different functions whether they appear as lexical verbs or functional heads. The distribution of the negation can also be accounted for under the *verb raising* analysis (a verb moves to a position higher than the projection of the telic particles), and the constituency fact in (5) can be analyzed as an instance of the across-the-board extraction. Finally, only under the *verb raising* analysis, can a ‘stranded’ NP alone represent the remnant VP, which correctly predicts that an adverb may occur between a telic particle and a ‘stranded’ NP (8).

Two questions remain: i) Where the landing site of a verb is and ii) Why bare NPs cannot be stranded. For the former, the most plausible answer appears to be *v*. The raised verb always follows viewpoint aspect markers, i.e. *đã* ‘perfective’, and never precedes a subject-oriented element *trừ* ‘self’ (9). If we assume that *trừ* is adjoined to *vP*, the raised verb occupies *v*. The latter may be analyzed as an instance of ‘scope evasion’ phenomena in Vietnamese discussed in Duffield (to appear), in which an element moves in order to ‘evade’ the scope of a relevant head. The telic particles enforce the bound interpretation of VP, requiring an object under its scope to

be quantized; thus, a bare NP is infelicitous in situ. In order to be felicitous, it must ‘escape’ from the domain of a telic particle by moving to [Spec, AspP], preceding a telic particle as seen in (3).

- (1) ??Anh ây uóng **nhanh chóng** trà.
He drink quickly tea
‘He drinks quickly tea.’
- (2) a. Dững ăn **hết** quả táo
Dững eat TP Cl apple
‘Dững ate up the apple.’ (TP = telic particle)
- b. Lan tìm **ra** hai quyển sách
Lan search TP two Cl book
‘Lan found two books.’
- (3) Lan mở ([_{NP} cửa]) ra (??[_{NP} cửa])
Lan open ([_{NP} door]) TP (??[_{NP} door])
‘Lan opened up (the/a) door(s).’
- (4) a. Subject [_{VP} V [_{SC} TP NP]] (base-generation analysis)
b. Subject [_{VP} V_i [_{AspP} TP [_{VP} t_i NP]]] (verb raising analysis)
- (5) Lan uóng [[**hết** hai cốc trà] nhưng [không hết hai cốc cà phê]]
Lan drink [[TP two Cl tea] but [Neg TP two Cl coffee]]
‘Lan drank up two cups of tea but not (up) two cups of coffee.’
- (6) Tân làm (***không**) [_{ResultP} (trà) ngọt (trà)]
Tân make (Neg) [_{ResultP} (tea) sweet (tea)]
‘Tân made tea (not) sweet.’
- (7) Dững ăn (**không**) [**hết** quả táo]
Dững eat (Neg) [TP CL apple]
‘Dững ate the apple not finishing.’
- (8) Tân tìm_i ra [_{VP} **nhanh chóng** [_{VP} t_i [các chương trình]]]
Tân search_i TP [_{VP} quickly [_{VP} t_i [all program]]]
‘Tan found quickly all the programs.’
- (9) Lan [_{VAspP} đã [(tự) [_{VP} tìm_i (*tự) [_{AspP} ra [_{VP} t_i hai quyển sách]]]]]]]
Lan [_{VAspP} Perf [(self) [_{VP} search_i (self) [_{AspP} TP [_{VP} t_i two Cl book]]]]]]]
‘Lan found two books (by herself).’

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