Events and the Headed Aspectual Structure: 
The Syntax–Lexicon Interface*

Sang-Geun Lee
(Korea University)

Lee, Sang-Geun. 2011. Events and the Headed Aspectual Structure: The Syntax-Lexicon Interface. Linguistic Research 28(3), 569-584. Extending the headed aspectual structure proposed by Li (1993) to the lexical decomposition of an eventive verb, I propose a model of mapping from lexicon to syntax where the event starts its life as two distinctively defined subevents, Asp(ectual)-head and Asp(ectual)-complement, which are directly reflected in two layers of verbal constituency structure, i.e., small vP and Verbal nucleus Phrase (VnP). It turns out that this model successfully explains away the notorious syntax-semantics mismatch in Chinese without creating the same troubles as Huang's (1993, 1994) analysis would. (Korea University)

Key words  decomposition, events, headed aspectual structure, mapping

1. Introduction

Though it is uncontroversial that the Davidsonian semantics of underlying events, which are counted as extra arguments for action verbs, is accepted as a central part of semantic theory, the question has still remained unclear as to how the semantics of underlying events is related to the syntax of verb phrase. To be more specific, where is the event argument located within the standard theory of syntactic structure (Kratzer 1989, Diesing 1992, Huang 1993, 1994, Cowper 1999, Lee 2008 among others)?

For Kratzer (1989), the notion of underlying events in the Davidsonian semantics is identified with that of spatio-temporal locations in the syntax, though Kratzer (1989) herself is not so sure about this identification. In contrast, for Huang (1993, 1994), who obviously denies the Kratzerian spatio-temporal location arguments as

*I am deeply thankful for the reviewers’ insightful comments and suggestions. They have guided me through several hidden traps that my analysis of events would otherwise fall into. Of course I am the person responsible for all errors that might occur in this paper.
events, the Davidsonian event argument is identified with event argument *per se* which serves as complement to such abstract aspectual predicates as DO, CAUSE, and BECOME (cf. Hale & Keyser 1993). It amounts to saying that only the VP-internal, not VP-external, complement is understood as the realization of events.

In section 2, I introduce an interesting set of Chinese data that shows the syntax-semantics mismatch, which Huang (1993, 1994) attempts to solve by assuming that the nominalized functional projection, IP[+N], which is understood to denote an event, intervenes between the higher aspectual predicate DO and the lower verb. I will argue that Huang's (1993, 1994) treatment of events as IP[+N] in the syntax is on the wrong track from the very first moment. In section 3, I propose a model of mapping from lexicon to syntax, according to which the event starts its life as two distinctively defined subevents, Asp(ectual)-head and Asp(ectual)-complement, through lexical decomposition and directly reflects on the verbal constituency (cf. Grimshaw 1990, Li 1990, 1993, Pustejovsky 1991, 1995, Levin & Rappaport 1995, 2005, Ramchand 1996, 2008 among others). This model will eventually allow us to dispose of the problems that Huang (1993, 1994) previously ran into. I will then devote section 4 to what follows from the direct mapping of an event onto the verbal constituency.

2. Events as VP-internal Event Arguments *per se*?

2.1 Events and the Syntax–Semantic Mismatch in Chinese

Based on the idea of lexical decomposition (Jackendoff 1990, Hale & Keyser 1993, Williams 1994), Huang (1993, 1994) attempts to interpret the notion of events to be located within the standard theory of syntactic structure, and concludes that events are realized in the syntax as event arguments *per se* that function as complements to the aspectual predicate, i.e. DO, CAUSE, OCCUR, or BE, that occupies the higher position of the Larsonian VP-shell structure.

The lack of an account of the internal mechanism, by which semantic structures and syntactic structures are connected, leads some linguists such as Jackendoff (1990), Hale & Keyser (1993), and Williams (1994) to pursue the idea that the meaning of a lexical item is highly structured and hence constrained already in the