

## Aspectual verbs as functional heads: evidence from Japanese aspectual verbs

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**Abstract** A novel analysis of aspectual verbs is proposed according to which aspectual verbs are heads of functional projections rather than main verbs taking clausal complements. As a case study, four Japanese aspectual verbs are analyzed: those that express inception (*hajime*- ‘begin’), continuation (*tsuzuke*- ‘continue’), and termination (*oe*- ‘finish’, and *owar*- ‘end’). Employing data from previous studies, Japanese aspectual verbs are shown to exhibit the following two characteristic behaviors: (i) they occasionally exhibit mono-clausal properties, and (ii) they impose different selectional restrictions on their verbal complements. These behaviors are characteristic of aspectual verbs cross-linguistically. This paper argues that these behaviors of Japanese aspectual verbs are accounted for if they are analyzed as heads of *aspect phrases*, the functional heads that encode aspectual information about events. In particular, it is proposed that (a) aspect heads occur in two positions in a clause, where they select for syntactic realizations of different event types, and (b) individual aspectual verbs are distributed differently between these two head positions based on the event types they select. The proposed analysis is shown to account for previously unaccounted for correlations between passivizability of the aspectual verbs and the event types of the verbal complements, as well as interactions between the Japanese aspectual verbs, subject honorification, and the focus particle *-dake* ‘only’. Finally, cross-linguistic data from previous studies on aspectual verbs in German, Italian and other Romance languages, and Basque are discussed and shown to provide further support for the proposed analysis.

**Keywords** Aspectual verbs · Aspect phrases · Restructuring · Long passive · Verbal aspect · Japanese

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