

# Syntax of Aktionsart

## Internal-External Interaction and Cross-linguistic Variation<sup>1</sup>

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# Outline

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  - Observation
- 3 Theory
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  - Proposal
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    - Hungarian
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    - Chinese
- 4 Summary & Further Implication

# A Type of Complex Verb

[▶ notes on data](#)

# A Type of Complex Verb

▶ notes on data

- English: set **up**, kill **away**, cry **out**, give **in**...
- German: **ablehnen** “**off**-lean→reject”, **verbinden** “**PFV**-combine”, **ausgehen** “**out**-go”, **totarbeiten** “**dead**-work→work to death”...
- Russian: **vytyanut'** “**out**-pull”, **razjest'** “**around**-eat→corrode”...
- Hungarian: **felolvas** “**up**-read→read aloud”, **becsuk** “**in**-close→shut, lock”, **kiderül** “**out**-clear→turn out”, **megcsinál** “**PFV**-do”...
- Chinese: **xiangchu** “think-**exit**”, **yongkai** “use-**open**→begin to use”, **ganshang** “chase-**ascend**”, **leisi** “tire-**die**→tire to death”...
- Japanese: **omoidasu** “think-**exit**→recall”, **shiageru** “do-**raise**→finish”...
- ...

# What do they have in common?


- Main verb + secondary element
- Two parts clearly distinguishable (regardless of lexical status)
- Syntactic separability & semantic idiomaticity mutually independent
- Event-situation modification

# What do our observations imply?

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- Aktionsart-related structure 
- Split-V 

# Vendler-Aktionsart vs. Kiefer-Aktionsart

[▶ back](#)

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[▶ back](#)

## Vendler-Aktionsarten:

- basic situation types
- closed group (4-5)
- temporal dimension
- =situation/inner/lexical aspect
- Vendler (1957), Comrie (1976), Smith (1991), Travis (2010), Ramchand (2008), etc.

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## Kiefer-Aktionsarten:

- additional event modification
- open group (saturative, exhaustive, intensive, etc.)
- multiple dimensions
- preverbs in Kiefer's Sprachbund
- Kiefer & Honti (2003), Kiefer (2010)

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## Kiefer-Aktionsarten:

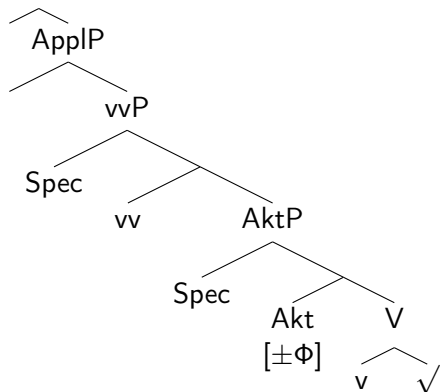
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- Our data: the secondary elements are mainly Kiefer-Aktionsart items
- Core distinction: primary typing vs. secondary modification

# Proposal

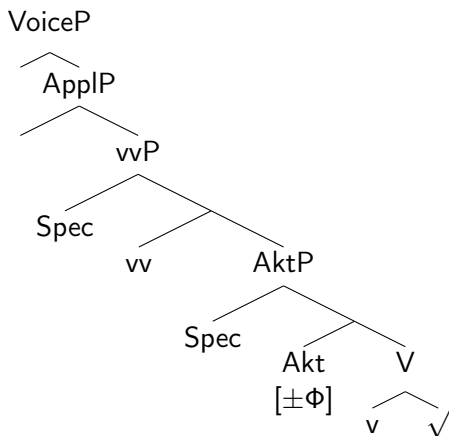
▶ outline

VoiceP



# Proposal

▶ outline

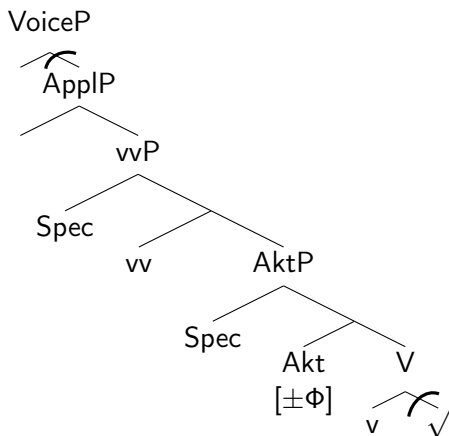


There is an AktP in the Split-VP harboring the various Akt-items (from now on I will use Akt-item to refer to Kiefer-Aktionsart element). Akt-head can be either overt or null.



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▶ outline




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## Akt featural make-up (first attempt)

- Overt:  $\{ [+ \Phi], [\pm \Sigma], [uF_1], [F_2] \}$
- Null:  $\{ [- \Phi], [- \Sigma], [uF_1], [F_2] \}$
- Null = Category( $F_1$ ) + Operator( $F_2$ )
- Overt = Null + Exponence( $\Phi$ )




# Some notes on data

- Core data 
- Marginal data: CHI **guashang-qu** “**hang-up-thither**”, **najin-lai** “**take-in-hither**”; GER **vor-anmelden** “**pre-on-register**”, **ur-aufführen** “**original-up-lead**→premiere”; ENG **upset**, **undertake**, etc.
- Non-data: ENG **accelerate**, **impinge**, **forget**, etc.

# Cross-linguistic Variation

[▶ outline](#)[▶ summary](#)

In the following, we will see how this proposal can be applied to explain the cross-linguistic phenomena. We will focus on three languages for now:

- Hungarian 
- German 
- Chinese 

# Hungarian: Overview


[▶ back to main](#)[▶ to tree](#)[▶ to sum](#)

Hungarian Akt-items are:

# Hungarian: Overview

[▶ back to main](#)[▶ to tree](#)[▶ to sum](#)



Hungarian Akt-items are:

- mainly verbal particles (preverbal in dictionary) 

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[▶ back to main](#)[▶ to tree](#)[▶ to sum](#)

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- always separable (with word order change) 

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[▶ back to main](#)[▶ to tree](#)[▶ to sum](#)

Hungarian Akt-items are:

- mainly verbal particles (preverbal in dictionary) ▶
- always separable (with word order change) ▶
- optionally idiomatic ▶

# Hungarian Akt-items

## Verbal particles

abba-, agyon-, alá-, által-, át-, be-, bele-, benn-, egybe-, el-, ellen-, elő-, előre-, fel-, félbe-, félre-, felül-, fenn-, hátra-, haza-, helyre-, hozzá-, ide-, keresztül-, ki-, körül-, külön-, le-, meg-, mellé-, neki-, oda-, össze-, rá-, rajta-, széjjel-, szembe-, szerte-, szét-, tele-, tovább-, tönkre-, túl-, újjá-, újra-, utána-, végbe-, végig-, vissza-, etc.

## Example

**abba**hagy “into that-let, leave→abandon, discontinue”, **agyon**ver “on brain-beat→beat to death”, **alá**húz “to under-draw, pull→underline”, etc.



# Hungarian

[▶ continue](#)[▶ back](#)

## Separability of Akt-items

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- Preverbal in neutral sentences ▶

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- Preverbal in neutral sentences ▶
- Postverbal in non-neutral sentences ▶
- Phrasal status ▶

# Hungarian: Neutral Context

e.g. János fel-olvasta a verseit.  
John up-read.PST his poems  
“John read out his poems.”

(É. Kiss 2002: 56)

# Hungarian: Non-Neutral Context

- a) János **tegnap** olvasta fel a verseit.  
 John yesterday read.PST up his poems  
 “John read out his poems yesterday (not today).” (É. Kiss 2002: 56)
- b) János **nem** olvasta fel a verseit.  
 John not read.PST up his poems  
 “John didn’t read out his poems.”
- c) **Kinek a verseit** olvasta fel János?  
 whose poems read.PST up John  
 “Whose poems did John read out?”

# Hungarian: Phrasal status of Akt-items

## a) Topicalization:

János **fel** szeretné olvasni a verseit.  
 John up love.COND read.INF his poems  
 “John would love to read out his poems.”

## b) Long distance movement:

**Fel** akarom, hogy olvasd a verseidet.  
 up I want that read.SBJV your poems  
 “I want that you read out your poems.”

## c) Ellipsis:

-Fel-olvasta János a verseit? -**Fel**.  
 -up-read.PST John his poems -up  
 “-Did John read out his poems? -He did.”

(É. Kiss 2002: 57–59)

## Hungarian: Semantics of Akt-items

Take **be-**, **ki-**, **fel-** for example, the semantics of Hungarian Akt-items can be purely compositional, somehow abstract, or totally idiomatic.

**Importantly, there is no completely bleached Akt-item in Hungarian (NB: *meg-*, cf. Pátrovics 2002).**

### Compositional:

- Literal: **bemegy** “in-go”, **kijön** “out-come”, **felrepül** “up-fly”, etc.
- Abstract: **bejár** “in-go→travel all around”, **kifárad** “out-get tired→get extremely tired”, **felolvas** “up-read→read out”, etc.

### Idiomatic:

- **berüg** “in-kick→get drunk”, **kiborul** “out-fall, burst→get psyched out”, **felad** “up-give→give up, abandon”, etc.



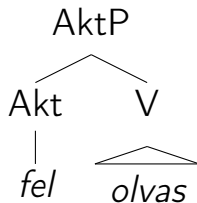
# Hungarian

[▶ back](#)

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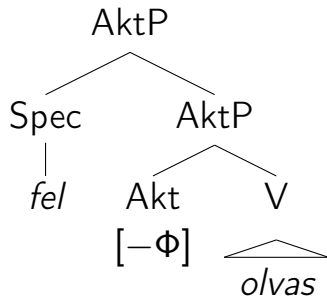
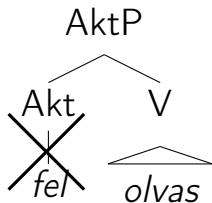
Hungarian ▶ back

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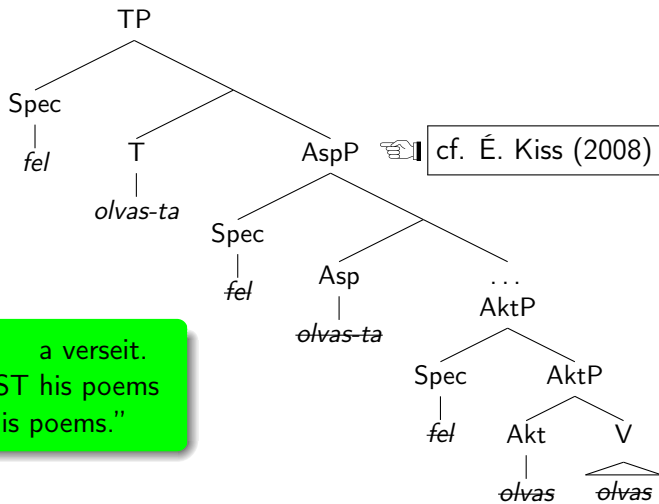


Hungarian ▶ back

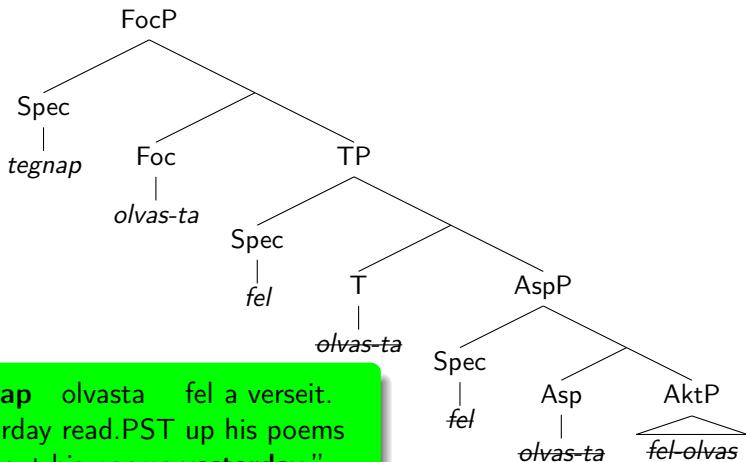
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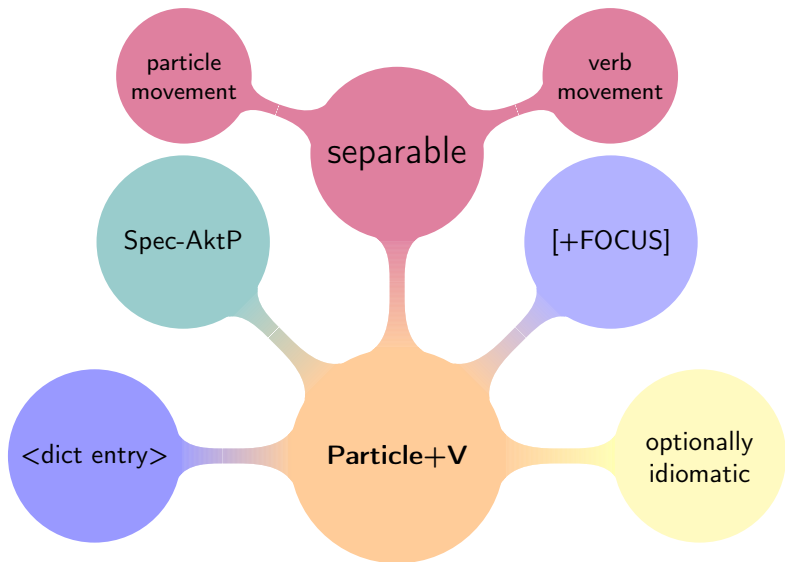


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Hungarian: Non-Neutral Context ▶ back

János **tegnap** olvasta fel a verseit.  
 John yesterday read.PST up his poems  
 "John read out his poems yesterday."

# Hungarian Akt-items: Summary

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# German: Overview

[▶ back to main](#)[▶ to tree](#)[▶ to sum](#)

German Akt-items are:

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- verbal particles (separable, preverbal in dictionary) or prefixes (inseparable) ▶
- subject to word order change when separable ▶
- optionally idiomatic ▶

# German Akt-items [▶ back](#)

## Particles (separable)

ab-, an-, auf-, aus-, auseinander-, bei-, da-, ein-, fern-, fest-, fort-, frei-, gegenüber-, gleich-, heim-, her-, hin-, hoch-, los-, mit-, nach-, nieder-, statt-, vor-, vorbei-, weg-, weiter-, zu-, zurecht-, zurück-, zusammen-, etc.

## Prefixes (inseparable)

be-, ent-, emp-, er-, ge-, miss-, ver-, zer-, etc.

## Particle-or-prefixes

durch-, hinter-, unter-, um-, über-, voll-, wieder-, etc.

## Example

**ab**holen “off-take→pick up”, **auf**stehen “up-stand→stand/get up”, **ent**gehen “SEPA-go→escape”, **erschlagen** “EXH-beat→slay, kill”, etc.

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- Particles:
  - stranded at end of clause under V2
  - preverbal in non-V2 context (still at end of clause) ▶
  - Phrasal status ▶
- Prefixes: inseparable, always preverbal ▶

# German: Separable Akt-item in V2/non-V2 contexts

- a) Peter steigt in den Bus ein.  
Peter climbs in the bus in  
“Peter gets on the bus.”
  
- b) ... weil Peter in den Bus ein-steigt.  
...because Peter in the bus in-climbs  
“...because Peter gets on the bus.”

(Zeller 2001: 55)

# German: Phrasal status of separable Akt-items

## a) Topicalization:

**Zu** hat er die Tür gemacht.

closed has he the door made

“He locked the door.”

(Zeller 2001: 89)

## b) Scrambling:

Ich weiß, daß die Sonne **auf** im Osten und **unter** im Westen geht.

I know that the sun up in the east and down in the west goes

“I know that the sun goes up in the East and down in the West.”

(Lüdeling 2001: 50)

## c) Gapping:

...weil Peter ein-steigt und Hans **aus**.

...because Peter in-climbs and Hans out

“...because Peter gets in and Hans out.”

(Zeller 2001: 85)

(cf. Svenonius 2008)

## German: Inseparable Akt-items

- a) Peter verschießt die Munition.  
Peter RES-shoots the ammunition  
“Peter runs out of ammunition.”
- b) ...weil Peter die Munition verschießt.  
...because Peter the ammunition RES-shoots  
“...because Peter runs out of ammunition.”

(Zeller 2001: 56–57)

## German: Semantics of Akt-items

Like Hungarian, German Akt-items can also be either compositional or idiomatic. **But unlike Hungarian, German has completely bleached Akt-items (the prefixes).**

### Compositional:

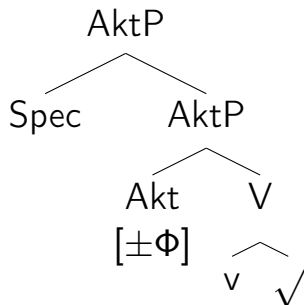
- Literal: **ein**steigen “in-climb”, **weg**fahren “away-drive”, etc.
- Abstract: **ein**reden “in-talk→talk into, persuade”, **aus**kennen “out-know→be knowledgeable about”, **ver**ändern “RES-change”, etc.

### Idiomatic:

**auf**geben “up-give→give up”, **ver**stehen “RES-stand→understand”, etc.

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- Scenario 1: simple particle [▶](#)

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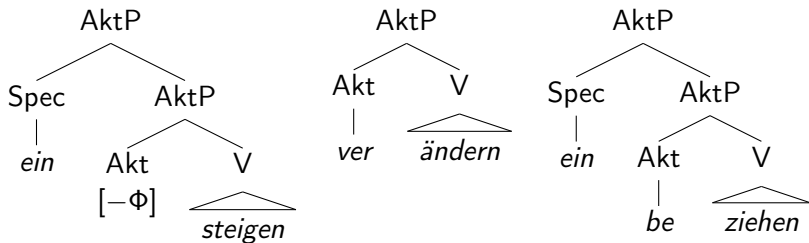
- Scenario 1: simple particle [▶](#)
- Scenario 2: past participle [▶](#)

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- Scenario 1: simple particle [▶](#)
- Scenario 2: past participle [▶](#)
- Scenario 3: complex particle [▶](#)

German: Scenario 1 

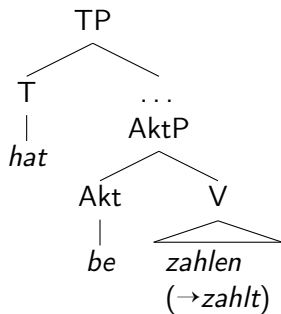
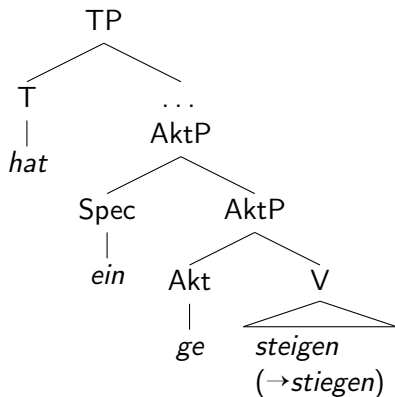
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Under V2, V (=v+ $\sqrt{\quad}$ ) goes through Head Movement (through Akt and T to C) in a roll-up fashion, **thus taking the prefix (Akt<sup>0</sup>) with it but leaving the particle (Spec-AktP) behind.**

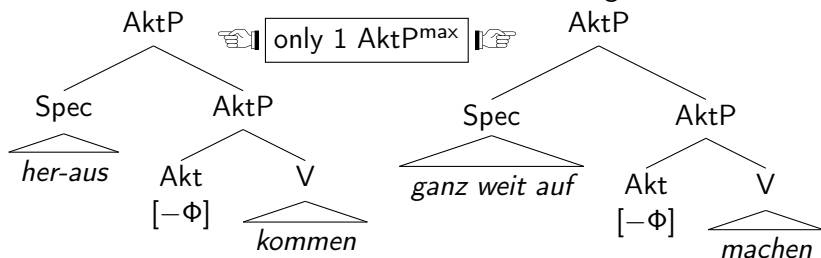
German: Scenario 2 

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German: Scenario 3 

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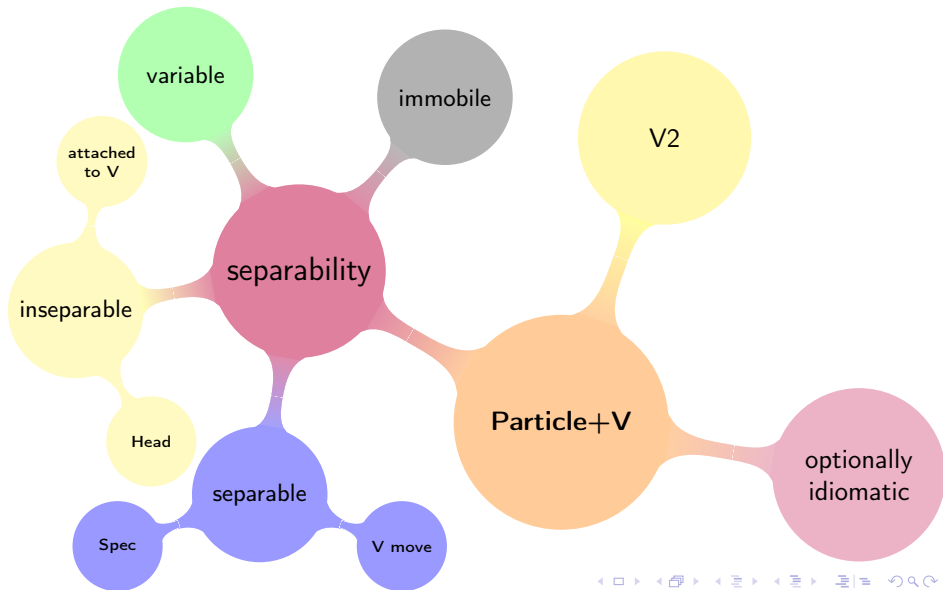


- Such complex Akt-items can also topicalized.

e.g. **Ganz weit auf** hat Peter die Tür gemacht.

“Quite wide has Peter opened the door.” (Zeller 2001: 100)

# German Akt-items: Summary

[▶ back](#)

# Chinese: Overview

[▶ back to main](#)[▶ to tree](#)[▶ to sum](#)

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[▶ back to main](#)[▶ to tree](#)[▶ to sum](#)

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Chinese Akt-items are:

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# Chinese: Overview

[▶ back to main](#)[▶ to tree](#)[▶ to sum](#)

Chinese Akt-items are:

- (semi-)grammaticalized V-complements [▶](#) [▶ Akt](#)
- inseparable [▶](#)
- mostly compositional [▶](#)

## Chinese: V-AKT complex verbs

- Chinese complex verbs with Akt-items are of the form **V-AKT**.
- In canonical cases, both V and Akt are monosyllabic. But disyllabic V/Akt items also exist (mainly in spoken/casual registers).
- It is hard to determine the category of Akt (a general characteristic of Chinese), so we should not take it for granted that such complex verbs are V-V compounds. Compare:

V-AKT

chi-diao “eat- $\sqrt{\text{DROP}}$ →eat up”

xiang-chu “think- $\sqrt{\text{EXIT}}$ →think out”

da-jin “hit- $\sqrt{\text{EXHAUST}}$ →hit all”

V-V

chi-he “eat-drink”

xiang-nian “think-consider→miss”

da-sui “hit-break”

\* $\sqrt{\quad}$  plus CAP indicates bleached original/literal meaning.

# Chinese: V-AKT vs. V-V

▶ continue

▶ back

## V-AKT

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## V-V

chi-he “eat-drink”

xiang-nian “think-consider→miss”

da-sui “hit-break”

### Akt-items are:

- semantically bleached/shifted
- verb modifiers (i.e. modifying the same event instead of introducing a new one)
- aspectual (Vendlerian & Kieferian)

# Chinese: A brief history

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## The Akt-slot

- appeared and matured in Middle to Early Modern Chinese (5-12c.)
- along with the disyllabification trend
- facilitated by the frequent adjacency of a main verb **V** and a complementary/secondary verb **C** (resultative or directional).



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- More and more adjacent strings got reanalyzed: V-C → V-AKT
- Complex (serial verb construction) → simplex (a single verb left)

Meanwhile, the C-elements underwent gradual grammaticalization:

- Resultative C: V → AKT → Asp → ?, e.g. LE “end”  temporal
- Directional C: V → AKT → ?, e.g. SHANG “up”  spatial



## Chinese: Same string, different structure

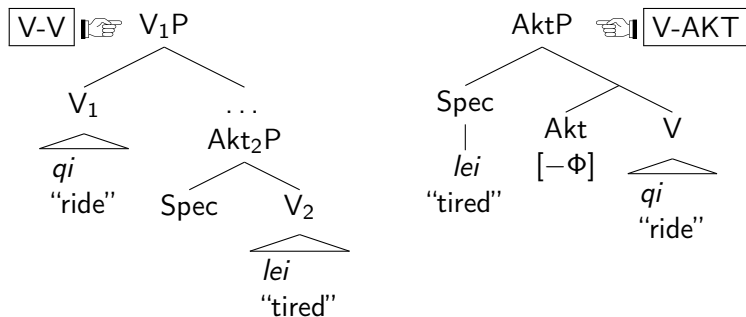
Given that:

- the grammaticalization of C-items is a long and still ongoing process
- disyllabic units are still preferred in Chinese prosody
- Chinese tends to preserve diachronic structures/meanings

⇒ One V-C string may have different underlying structures. This is manifested in both Mandarin-internal and cross-dialectal data.

# Chinese: The ambiguity of *qi-lei* “ride-tired”

Mandarin-internal example: *qi-lei* “ride-√TIERED”



Hence the ambiguity of the following sentence:

- Baoyu *qi lei le ma*.  
 Baoyu ride tired PFV horse  
 “Baoyu rode the horse and (as a result) Baoyu/the horse got tired.”

# Chinese: *Da-sui* “hit-break” in Mandarin vs. Dongying

Cross-dialectal example: *da-sui* “hit- $\sqrt{\text{BREAK}}$ ” in Standard Mandarin vs. Dongying (a Mandarin dialect)

- a) Xiaoming da sui (le) hua-ping (le). (Mandarin)  
 Xiaoming hit break (PFV) vase (PFV)
- b) Siaoming da sui \*(liu) hu-pingr \*(liæ). (Dongying)  
 Xiaoming hit break \*(PFV) vase \*(PFV-SFP)  
 “Xiaoming broke the vase.”


# In Mandarin, at least one LE is needed, whereas in Dongying, both LEs are compulsory. This indicates that there is only **one** structure in Dongying, but at least **two** in Mandarin (details omitted).

# Chinese: Distinguish V-AKT vs. V-V

So, given the structural variation, how to decide which C-items are Akt-items, and which are embedded Vs? And more specifically, which Akt-items are Specs/Heads?


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- semantic bleachedness (Spec-Head)


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- semantic (in)dependence 
- semantic bleachedness (Spec-Head)
- phonological reduction (unfortunately only work for dialects, as Mandarin phonology is standardized)
- both available (V/Spec-Akt, due to diachronic preservation)



# Chinese Akt-items (cf. Chao 1968)

## Phasal (originally resultatives)

-dao, -de, -**guo**, -hao, -jian, -**le**, -liao, -zhao, -**zhe**, -zhu, etc.

## Degree

-duo, (-fan,) -hen, -ji, (-lei,) -si, -tou, (-yan,) etc.

## Directional

-chu, -diao, -guo, -hui, -jin, -kai, -**lai**, -pao, -qi, -**qu**, -shang, -xia, -zou, etc.

## Example

peng**dao** “meet- $\sqrt{\text{ARRIVE}}$ →bump into”, shuiz**hao** “sleep- $\sqrt{\text{TOUCH}}$ →fall asleep”, leisi “tire-die→tired to death”, chish**ang** “eat- $\sqrt{\text{ASCEND}}$ →finally have the chance to eat”, etc.

## Chinese: Akt-items are mostly inseparable ▶ back


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- a) Wo zuo-tian **peng-dao** Xiaoming le.  
I yesterday bump into Xiaoming PFV  
“I bumped into Xiaoming yesterday.”
- b) Xiao-bao-bao **shui-zhao** le.  
little baby fall asleep PFV  
“The little baby fell asleep.”
- c) Tian-tian xue-xi, **lei-si** wo le.  
everyday study tire to death I PFV  
“Studying everyday has tired me to death.”
- d) Na-ge shan-cun qu-nian **chi-shang** shui le.  
that-CL mountain-village last-year eat-ASCEND water PFV  
“That mountain village has (finally) had (tap) water to drink last year.”

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This is different from Hungarian and German, where V moves over Akt to higher positions (T or C) to get Tense/Aspect. In Chinese, what we see is that the Asp-LE linearizes with the entire VoiceP-domain.

## Chinese: Complex verbs are mostly compositional ▶ back

Chinese Akt-items are seldom idiosyncratic, i.e. there is nothing like HUN *be-rúg* “in-kick→get drunk” or GER *auf-geben* “up-give→abandon”. The meaning of the complex verb is always directly based on that of the main verb. Highly bleached Akt-items exist (e.g. *-le*, *-zhe*), but their original meanings are not forgotten (unlike GER *ver-* etc.).

### Compositional:

- Literal: **zoujin** “walk-in”, **chanchu** “produce-out”, etc.
- Abstract: **zoukai** “walk- $\sqrt{\text{OPEN}}$ →walk away”, **zhuishang** “chase-up→catch up”, **tingjian** “listen- $\sqrt{\text{SEE}}$ →hear”, etc.

# Chinese

[▶ back](#)

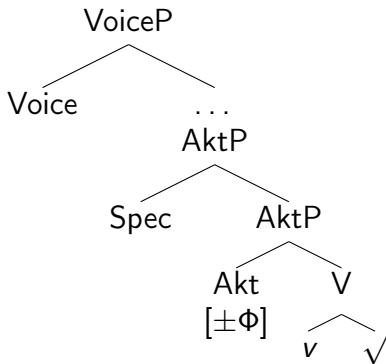
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▶ back

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Well, the “schema” we have proposed still holds. ↷

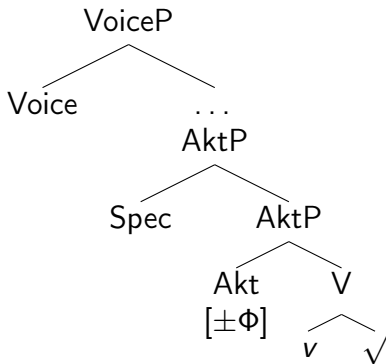


## Chinese

▶ back

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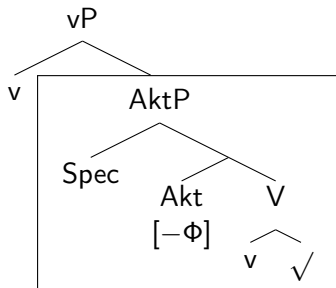
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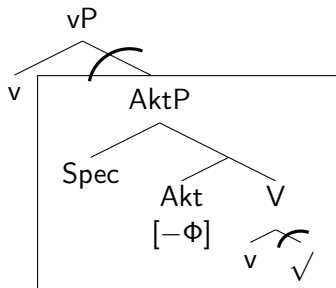
Chinese ▶ back

## Scenario 1: Akt-item as Spec



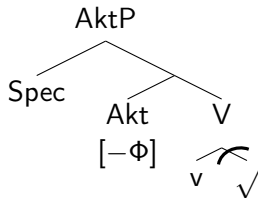
#reategorization

Scenario 1: Akt-item as Spec

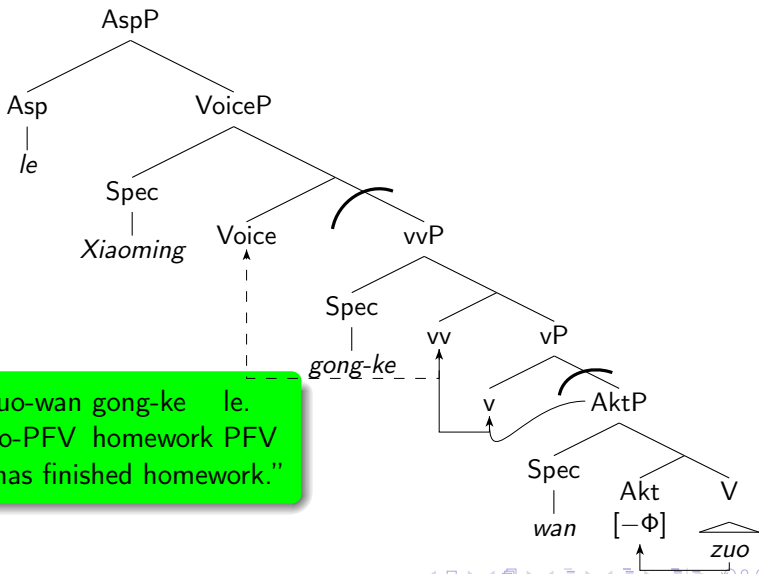


#reategorization

Scenario 2: Akt-item as head



#no recategorization

Chinese: Scenario 1 ▶ back

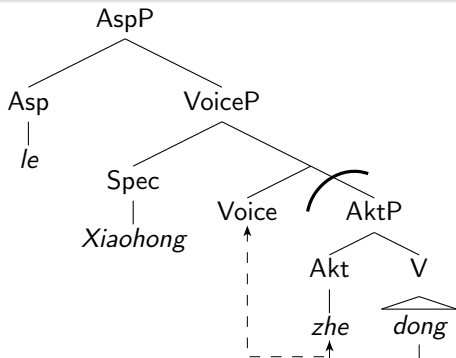
Xiaoming zuo-wan gong-ke le.  
 Xiaoming do-PFV homework PFV  
 "Xiaoming has finished homework."

Chinese: Scenario 2 ▶ back

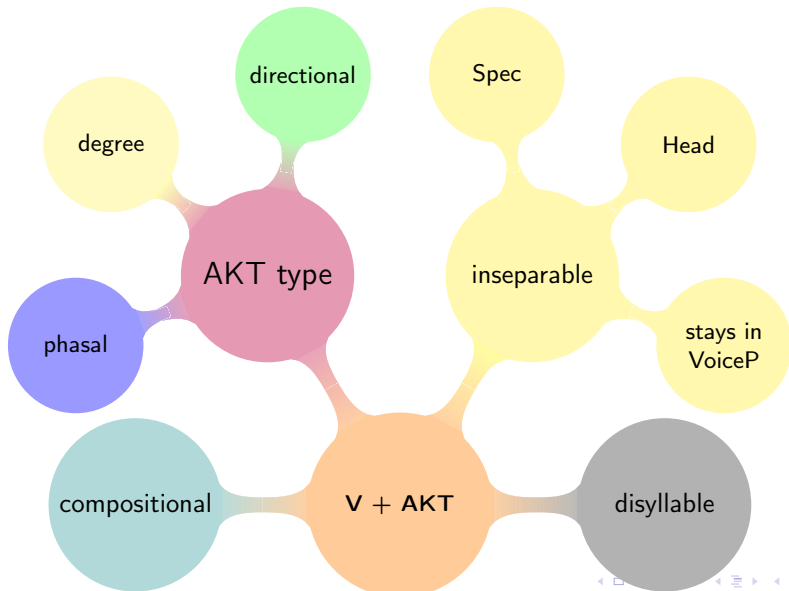
Tian tai leng, Xiaohong dong-zhe le.

weather too cold Xiaohong freeze-RES PFV

“The weather was too cold; Xiaohong got frozen (and sick).”



# Chinese Akt-items: Summary

[▶ back](#)

# Summary: Akt-systems of Hungarian, German, and Chinese

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In this study, we have...

- proposed an AktP for the secondary verbal elements in our data;
- differentiated two uses of “Aktionsart” and split “the big V” into three;
- analyzed the different positioning of Akt-item and its predictions;
- applied the proposal to three typologically unrelated languages, &
- seen how the internal and external syntax of AktP interact.

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- applied the proposal to three typologically unrelated languages, &
- seen how the internal and external syntax of AktP interact.

Conclusions:

- The AktP proposal has some cross-linguistic tenability.
- Spec/Head → determines syntactic and semantic nature
- Akt-item movement + verb movement → word order change
- Language-specific peculiarity → affects internal-external interaction



# Further implication

[▶ back to outline](#)

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### Grammaticalization of Akt-item in three stages

- l-morpheme → semi-f-morpheme (Spec) → f-morpheme (Head)
- justifiable both synchronically and diachronically
- featural change:  $\{[\Phi\downarrow], [\Sigma\downarrow], [FF\uparrow]\}$

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### The Akt category and its universal basis

- f-morpheme = conceptual category + syntactic category.
- e.g. anchoring (Wiltschko 2014) → Tense → Tense phenomena
- Akt-*le* = Akt (f, List 1) + /lʁ/ (List 2) (+  $[\Sigma]$ , List 3)
- Akt feature bundle (2nd attempt):  $\{[uV], [FLAG]\}$
- Root licensing; complete vs. defective Root
- ?? → Akt → Akt phenomena
- verb framing vs. satellite framing - more cross-linguistic variation

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