The Visibility Parameter reconsidered

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Some adverbials permit an unusual low reading, shown in (1) for *again* and *almost*. Consider the repetitive *again*. Crucially the earlier event, which is presupposed, is distinct from the asserted event in the low reading.

(1) a Bill *almost* closed the door
       (Possible meaning (low): Bill did something earlier, which resulted in the door being almost closed)
    b Bill closed the door *again*
       (Possible meaning (low): The door closed earlier, and Bill closed the door (later))

The low reading is unavailable for most adverbials, as shown for *twice/ once more* (the latter repetitive, like *again*):

(2) a Bill closed the door *twice*
       (Impossible meaning: Bill did something (earlier) that resulted in the door closing twice)
    b Bill closed the door *once more*
       (Impossible meaning: The door closed earlier, and Bill closed the door)

Visibility Parameter. The behavior of the adverbials in (1) has been described as following from the so-called Visibility Parameter (Rapp&Stechow 1999). In English *again* and *almost* have a marked setting (permitting low readings), while other adverbials have a default one. We note that Rapp&Stechow do not provide an explicit formulation of the parameter, and their discussion indicates that the parameter is sensitive to the lexical/ functional distinction. Beck 2005 (also Beck et al 2009, Beck and Gergel 2015, Gergel and Beck 2015) significantly modify the parameter of Rapp&Stechow, treating (phonetic) overtness as the main distinction between the adverbials in (1) and (2) (see (3)). Note that the revision results in an unclear and heterogeneous description: setting (a) appears to select larger syntactic units (TPs/CPs) (as described in Beck and Gergel 2015), while (b) refers to phonetic overtness.

(3) An adverb can modify

     a only independent syntactic phrases,
     b (ii) any phrase with a phonetically overt head (German *fast*); or
     c any phrase (includes lexical accomplishments; English *again, almost*, German *wieder*).
        The default setting is (a).
        (Beck 2005 and later work)

Productivity of adverb uses. In (3), *again* and German *wieder* have setting (c); thus both should modify any phrase. However, Scholler 2014 shows that the productivity of low readings differs sharply. German freely allows modification by *wieder*, but English is more restricted. The low reading of (1-b) was judged as worse than the non-low reading in (4) for English, but judgments did not differ significantly for German (the low reading in (1-b) requires setting (c) of the VisPar in (3), while the reading in (4) is available for any setting). Scholler does not discuss verb and predicate types in detail, but reports the conflated results for the readings permitted by settings (a) and (c).

(4) Bill closed the door again
     (Possible reading (high): Bill closed the door earlier, and Bill closed the door (later))

Another look at visibility. Scholler 2014 suggests that the formulation in (3) is not satisfactory. We hypothesize that *again*, an aspectual adverbial, is sensitive to aspectual distinctions, similarly to temporal *still* (*still* requires a homogeneous predicate of times). If the aspectual class of the predicate plays a role in the acceptability of the low reading of *again*, then it shows that a formulation which ignores such properties, such as (3), is not appropriate.
Aspect and low reading of *again*. We collected judgments on the availability of low readings, where low readings also include those where the subjects of the asserted and presupposed events are distinct. Given a context that forced a low reading, participants judged a sentence with *again* on a 4-point Likert scale. Building on the aspectual system of Ramchand 2008, we have compared 5 pairs of aspectual classes, where the members of each pair are closely related (e.g. open and closed scale degree achievements constitute one pair). Since Beck 2005 and later work assume that *again* has the setting (c) in (3), the prediction is that there will be no significant difference between the pairs. For a number of pairs, the prediction is false; there is indeed a significant difference between (a) goals (*walk onto the stage*) and locatives that function as goals (*jump in the lake*); (b) achievements (*arrive*) and semelfactives (*cough once*); and (c) open (*widen the road*) and closed scale degree achievements (*dry the shirt*). We found no significant difference between resultatives that had (*paint the door green*) or lacked theta-marked objects (*run the shoest threadbare*). The members of the pairs where we found a significant difference permit adjoining *again* in a low position in Ramchand 2008 and for some pairs (e.g. (a)), both members are telic. Furthermore, when comparing

goals, resultatives and lexical accomplishments (*close*), we found that low *again* readings with goals are significantly worse. Thus the parameter must refer to fine-grained aspectual distinctions that go not just beyond (3), but beyond a basic telic/ atelic distinction. Our findings are also relevant for productivity. We found that the acceptability of low readings is quite high for some aspect classes overall (e.g. for achievements). This contradicts Beck et al. 2009, who claim that low readings are not entirely productive, but restricted to some lexical items in English.