Fábregas, Antonio
A note on how and why 'state + aorist = achievement'

A note on how and why
'state + aorist = achievement'[1]

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Abstract

In syntactic and semantic studies, there is a debate about the proper definition of 'achievement'. While some authors consider them pure punctual boundaries without any extension, others treat them as short accomplishments, and propose that they have a process component that happens to be instantaneous. The goal of this article is to discuss an empirical pattern whereby some stative verbs become achievements in the aorist; it is argued that this pattern of data supports the view of achievements as pure boundaries.

Keywords: achievements; Aktionsart; grammatical aspect; states.

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1. On some loose ends of the Vendlerian classification

The Vendler-Dowty classification of predicates into Aktionsart classes is arguably the most influential proposal in contemporary studies of the semantics of verbs; it has been adopted in a wide variety of frameworks, and it has proven useful in the analysis of phenomena apparently as eclectic as argument structure, periphrases and adjunction, among many others. Despite its influence, there are still some loose ends that are being discussed in the current literature. This talk aims to contributing to one of these debates, specifically the nature of achievements inside the Aktionsart system. What is the appropriate consideration of achievements in opposition to accomplishments? We will see that there are two incompatible and distinct views: (i) achievements are 'short' accomplishments, structures with an initiation phase, a culmination phase and a defined internal progression that, however, is punctual (cf. Dowty, 1979; Ramchand, 2008); (ii) achievements completely lack a progression component and are better defined as non-extensive boundaries (Piñón, 1997; Martin, 2011).

This paper has two distinct components: on the one hand, we will describe a particular empirical pattern that supports a neoconstructionist view of Aktionsart and a view of achievements as pure boundaries, not as short accomplishments. On the other hand, we will provide an analysis of that pattern which tries to restrict the phenomenon making a minimum of independent assumptions, crucially raising the question of whether it is necessary to mark verbs that undergo this transformation in the lexicon or there are semantic and syntactic principles that can predict it. Hopefully, the description stands independently of the analysis (so the consequences

for the status of achievements will stand even if the particular analysis we propose is not accepted by everyone), but we will try to convince the reader of both.

2. The problem

Some stative verbs display an achievement behaviour when they appear combined with a perfective / aorist grammatical aspect. (1), with *saber* 'know' in an imperfective form, displays the following properties: it rejects *in*-aspectual modifiers and it rejects place modifiers.

(1) Juan sabe (*en el hospital) (*en cinco minutos) que la tierra es redonda.

Juan knows (in the hospital) (in five minutes) that the earth is round

Intended: 'In the hospital, after five minutes, Juan knows that the earth is round'

But once the same verb appears in aorist[1] (2), the behaviour changes.

(2) Juan supo (en la universidad) (en cinco minutos) que la tierra es redonda.

Juan knew.AOR in the university in 5 minutes that the earth is round

'In the university, Juan got to know after five minutes that the earth is round'

As it is the case with other non-stative verbs (specifically, non Kimian-states; Maienborn, 2005), the predicate accepts now a place modifier of the event (not a frame adverbial). It does accept also an *in*-adverbial with the interpretation noted by Piñón (1997) for achievements: the *in*-adverbial measure the time that went by between an arbitrary point in the past, and the point where the event started happening. Thus, on the surface (and we will go back to this issue) the state has become an achievement when combined with the aorist grammatical aspect.

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2   In order to avoid potential confusion between *perfective* and *perfect*, we will use aorist as a term in the remainder of this paper.

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2.1. Other cases

Some other stative verbs display the behaviour of achievements when combined with aorist, but by all means not all of them. The following examples show a number of verbs that do.

(3) a. Juan conoce la respuesta (*en la universidad) (*en dos horas).

Juan knows the answer (*in the university) (*in two hours)

*'Juan knows the answer in the university in two hours'

b. Juan conoció la respuesta (en la universidad) (en dos horas)

Juan knew.aor the answer (in the university) (in two hours)

'Juan got to know the answer in the university after two hours'

(4) a. Juan puede ser presidente (#en España) (#en un año)

Juan can be president (in Spain) (in a year)

b. Juan pudo ser presidente (en España) (en un año)

Juan could.aor be president (in Spain) (in a year)

'Juan managed to become president in Spain after a year (of trying)'

(5) a. Juan quiere una novia (*en la boda) (*en cinco minutos)

Juan wants a girlfriend (*in the wedding) (*in five minutes)

b. Juan quiso una novia (en la boda) (en cinco minutos)

Juan wanted.aor a girlfriend (in the wedding) (in five minutes)

'Juan started feeling like he wanted a girlfriend after five minutes, in the wedding'

(6) a. Juan odia a su profesora (*en la primera clase) (*en unos minutos)

Juan hates ACC his teacher (*in the first class) (*in some minutes)

b. Juan odió a su profesora (en la primera clase) (en unos minutos)

Juan hated.aor ACC his teacher (in the first class) (in some minutes)

'Juan started to hate his teacher in the first class, after a few minutes'

(7) a. Juan ama a Lucía (en el bosque) (en un ratito)

Juan loves ACC Lucía (in the forest) (in a while)

b. Juan amó a Lucía (en el bosque) (en un ratito)

Juan loved ACC Lucía (in the forest) (in a while)

'Juan started to love Lucía in the forest after a short while'

All these verbs seem to adopt the same kind of interpretation when they become achievements: a focus on the initial point that defines a change, followed by the state that the verb originally means. If *saber* means 'know', *supo* talks about a temporal point where there is a change and the person learns something; that is, the initial boundary of a situation where the person starts to know. This is noticeable in the kind of glosses that are necessary in English to express the meaning of the verb in the aorist.

(8) started V-ing / came to V / become V-ed

(9) a. came to know

b. became aware

c. managed ('started being able')

d. started feeling like

e. started hating

f. came to love...

Thus, it does not seem that we are in front of a quirk of a particular verb; the phenomenon seems wider and has a systematic impact: from a state (10) we move to the denotation of a starting boundary which conducts the subject to the state (11).

(10) [BE IN STATE]

(11) [BECOME [BE IN STATE]]

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Let us now consider the properties of this empirical pattern in a more detailed way.

3. Step 1: to show that these verbs have become achievements in the aorist

The first issue that we need to address so that our claim is convincing is to provide evidence that these states in the aorist have become achievements, and not any other dynamic class (such as activities or accomplishments). The tests that we are going to see here are taken from Piñón (1997), Heyde (2008), Martin (2011) and Rothstein (2004: 36-58).

3.1. Time-span adverbials

Achievements, like accomplishments, are telic events, and as such they can be combined with *in*-adverbials.

(12) a. He wrote the book in ten days.

   b. He arrived in ten days.

There is a difference, though. With accomplishments, the *in*-modifier quantifies the extension of the progression part of the event, from its beginning to its culmination. In (12a) the default reading —that is, when no arbitrary point in time is contextually specified— is that the whole writing took place in the course of ten days. However, in (12b), we do not say that the arrival lasted for ten days. The adverbial quantifies the distance between the starting point of the event and an arbitrary point in time that precedes it. What we measure is the preparatory state that precedes the arrival (say, the whole trip that ended when he arrived at some place). Consequently, the PP is equivalent to an *after*-modifier only in the second case.

(13) a. He wrote the book in ten days =//= He wrote the book after ten days.

   b. He arrived in ten days == He arrived after ten days.

This second reading is the one that emerges with our states in the aorist.

(14)   Juan supo la respuesta en dos días.
   Juan knew.aor the answer in two days
   'Juan got to know the answer after two days'

3.2. No partial completion

Another difference between accomplishments and achievements is that, given that achievements lack a relevant period of time through which the process happens (remember that even theories that treat them as short accomplishments propose that the progression part is quasi-instantaneous), they take place or not, but they cannot be only partially completed. Accomplishments can be partially completed, meaning that the process starts and part of it is satisfied, but there is an interruption.

(15) a. Juan escribió el libro a medias.
   Juan wrote.aor the book at half
   'Juan wrote the book in part'

   b. *Juan llegó a casa a medias.
   Juan arrived.aor at home at half
   Intended: 'Juan arrived home in part'[3]

In our stative verbs in the aorist, we find the same situation as with achievements:

(16)   ??Juan supo que la tierra era redonda a medias.
   Juan knew.aor that the earth was round at half
   Intended: 'Juan got in part to know that the earth is round'

When the non-completion modifier is possible, it refers to the state achieved —that is was not the highest degree possible of that state— not to the change.

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3   For completeness' sake, note that there is a potential reading of (15b), perhaps licensed by pragmatic contextual knowledge. In that reading, the partial completion does not apply to the event –which has to be necessarily completed– but to the state obtained as a result: (15b) can be interpreted as a claim that the arrival happened, but one cannot say that Juan is now at home *completely*, because, for instance, his heart is still somewhere else.

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(17)　Juan conoció a su jefe a medias.

　　　Juan knew.aor ACC his boss at half

　　　'Juan got to know his boss only in part'

3.3. Place adverbials

Note that this test shows that the state is not a state anymore when combined with the aorist aspect, but it does not show whether it became an achievement or an accomplishment. States —at least, leaving aside the problematic class of Davidsonian-states (Maienborn, 2003)— reject place modifiers locating the eventuality.

(18)　*Juan sabe inglés en su casa.

　　　Juan knows English at his house

　　　*'Juan knows English at home'

Place adverbials are possible, however, in the aorist.

(19)　Juan supo la noticia en su casa.

　　　Juan knew.aor the news at his house

　　　'Juan got to know the news at home'

3.4. Manner adverbials

If we concentrate now on manner adverbs, and leave aside those that express the behaviour of the agent, we find also —expectedly— that states will reject adverbials meaning *quickly* or *slowly*, because in them there is no dynamic part that can have a speed.

(20) a.*John knows English quickly.

　　b. John learns English quickly.

Accomplishments and achievements allow them, but they contrast, again, in what the speed refers to. With accomplishments, the speed modifier refers to the process —'the process V was quick or slow'—, while with achievements, it refers to the timespan of the preparatory stage: whether that preparatory stage was short or long.

(21) a. He wrote the book quickly. == His writing was quick.

　　b. The book arrived to the shops quickly. == The time that passed between an arbitrary point in the past (presumably, his writing the book) and the arrival of the book was short.

Our stative verbs in the aorist produce the same interpretation as with achievements.

(22)　Supo la noticia rápidamente.

　　　He.knew.aor the news quickly

　　　'He got to know the news soon', not 'The way in which he came to know the news was quick'

4. Step 2: to restrict the class of stative verbs that can become achievements

Not all stative verbs adopt an achievement behaviour with perfective external aspect, which brings up the question of whether one has to list idiosyncratically the verbs that do. Verbs that allow it typically involve mental states (*odiar* 'hate', *querer/desear* 'want'...).

(23)　Juan conoció en cinco minutos al presidente.

　　　Juan knew.aor after five minutes to-the president

　　　'Juan became acquainted with the president after five minutes'

This is not the case with other states, including those that express possession, inclusion, existence or resemblance[4].

(24) a.*El barril contuvo cincuenta litros en cinco minutos.

　　　The cask contained.aor fifty liters in five minutes

4　The situation with locative states is more complex, but we believe that it also follows the general proposal. The first thing to note (and we are grateful to an anonymous reviewer for this observation) is that sentences like (i), with an animate subject, are not impossible.

　　(i)　Juan estuvo en lo más alto en un año.

　　　　Juan was in the more high in one year

　　　　'After one year, Juan had arrived to the highest level'

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Intended: 'After five minutes, the cask came to contain 50 liters'

b. *Faltaron mil euros en cinco minutos.

There.lacked.aor thousand euros in five minutes

Intended: 'After five minutes, they were 1000 euros short'

c. *Juan poseyó cuatro millones en el banco

Juan possessed.aor four millions in the bank

Intended: 'Juan got to have four millions in the bank'

d. *Sobraron tres empleados en un año de crisis

There.were.superfluous.aor three employees in a year of crisis

Intended: 'After one year of crisis, three employees become superfluous'

e. *Juan se pareció a su madre en unos meses

Juan SE seemed.aor to his mother in some months

Intended: 'Juan started resembling his mother after a few months'

What is the right generalisation? It seems that the restriction on the class of states that become achievements in the aorist has to do, indeed, with the presence of an experiencer of a mental state: if the predicate defines a state that is experienced by an animate entity, the achievement interpretation will be available. Evidence in favour of this is that with the same verb we have both cases where the state becomes an achievement, and cases where this does not happen. The crucial difference between these minimal pairs is whether the predicate assigns an experiencer interpretation to the subject or not:

(25) a. Juan fue consciente de esto en su casa en un par de días.

Juan was.aor conscious of this in his house in a couple of days

'Juan became aware of this at home after a couple of days'

b. *Juan fue cruel en una hora.

Juan was.aor cruel in one hour

Intended: 'Juan started being cruel after one hour'

(26) a. Juan tuvo {hambre / sed} otra vez en una hora.

Juan had.aor {hunger / thirst} other time in one hour

'Juan got {hungry / thirsty} again after one hour'

b. ??Juan tuvo dinero otra vez en una hora

Juan had.aor money other time in one hour

Intended: 'Juan received money again after one hour'

(27) a. Juan estuvo en dificultades económicas otra vez en unos días.

Juan was.aor in difficulties economic other time in some days

'Juan started having economic difficulties again in a few days'

b. Juan estuvo enfermo otra vez en unos días.

Juan was.aor sick other time in some days

'Juan started being sick again after a few days'

c. *La pared estuvo rota otra vez en unos días.

the wall was.aor broken other time in some days

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Intended: 'The wall got broken again after a few days'

Thus, there must be some relation between having experiencers and mental states and allowing this Aktionsart reinterpretation in the aorist.

5. Step 3: how it is done

The following characterisation of the aorist form has become standard in a Kleinian view of aspect (Klein, 1992): the aorist is a situation where the focus time includes the boundary of the event time. Here we represent with - - - the event time, with + + + + the time not covered by the event, and with [ ] the interval focalised by grammatical aspect.

(28)   + + + + + + - - - - - - - - - - - - - - [- +] + + + + + + + + + + +

However, the representation in (28) is able only to account for the terminative reading of the aorist (where the point that is focalised coincides with the endpoint of the event). Other authors, like Smith (1991) (building on observations by Talmy, 1985) have noted that there is also an ingressive interpretation of the aorist, where the point focalised is the starting point of the event time.

(29)   Juan ordenó sus libros alfabéticamente a las diez.

Juan arranged his books alphabetically at the ten

'Juan arranged alphabetically his books at ten'

(30) a. Starting point of the event: 10 p. m.

b. Duration: Unknown

c. Ending point: Unknown

The ingressive is also the interpretation that is relevant in our states in the aorist: as the gloss makes clear (come to V, start V-ing...) our sentences in the aorist claim something about the starting point of a situation, but say nothing about when (or whether) the endpoint appears.

Even though we borrow the ingressive interpretation from her theory, we take distance from

Smith's (1991) proposal that the aorist grammatical aspect covers the whole event time (as in 31), subsuming in practice both starting and ending points, and instead propose that aorist focalises one of the boundaries of the event (left or right) (32). This is an application of the Kleinian view of aspect, only that with the modification that the boundary focalised does not need to be the final one.

(31)   + + + + + + + + [+ - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - +] + + + + + +

(32)   Interpretations of the aorist

a. Ingressive: + + + + + + + + + [+ -] - - - - - - - - - - - - -

b. Terminative: - - - - - - - - - - - - - [- +] + + + + + + + + +

Thus, from this perspective, the question of why some states get an achievement interpretation in the aorist reduces to the following problem: why does perfective, with these states, have an ingressive interpretation that focalises a starting point of the situation?

Here is our proposal: the state, as such, lacks any event boundary and does not express any event. For lack of a better representation, conceive a pure state as a series of - - - points without delimiting + + + +'s:

(33)   ...- - - - - - - - - - - - -...

An aorist grammatical aspect combines with the lexical verb, and brings with it the need to identify a final or initial boundary. With most states, this boundary would be final: the state ceases to exist. Nothing happens with respect to its internal Aktiosart type, because the boundary does not need to be identified with a culmination point: it is just the final point where the predicate holds, followed by a point where it does not hold.

(34)   ...- - - - - - - - - - - - - [- +] + +

(35)   Mi abuelo fue médico.

My grandfather was doctor

'My grandfather was a doctor'

The only meaning addition here is a final point, but this does not affect the aspectual class

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of the predicate, because there is no qualitative difference between that final point and the other ones that preceded it: there is no culmination. Consequently (35), one possible interpretation that is triggered is a lifetime effect: the state does not hold anymore because my grandfather is dead now.

However, in our case, with states that become achievements, the point that is picked by the aorist is a starting one.

(36)   + + + + + [+ -] - - - -

       '+ + + + + [come to] k n o w'

Interestingly, this changes the aspectual class of the verb, by making it turn into an achievement: it expresses a boundary of change, a transition between a situation not being true and a situation being true.

5.1. On the asymmetry between initial and final points

This explanation, in practice, makes an important presupposition that, in our mind, is implicit in many existing works on aspectual structure: initial and final points of a situation are not identical, and there are important asymmetries between them. So why do we have an asymmetry between initial and final boundaries?

Even though we do not consider our answer to be complete, we could perhaps speculate a bit. One can think that there is an inherent asymmetry between the first and the final temporal point of a situation. The first point of a situation is always qualitatively different from the one that precedes it, while the last point of a situation is not necessarily qualitatively different from the point that precedes it. In telic events, there is a culmination and the last point of the situation will be qualitatively different from the one that precedes it, but if the event is atelic that point is not qualitatively different from the one that precedes it —it is identical to the rest of the series—. On the assumption that chan-

ges are evaluated by comparison to the point in time that precedes them, and not by comparison to the point in time that follows them (because that point in time has not happened yet) the inescapable conclusion should be that initial points always imply a change, while final points do not always imply a change. But this is necessarily implying that the relevant qualitative difference in order to define the aspectual type of the verb is the difference of a point T with respect to the point T' that precedes it in time, ignoring the one that follows it in time. If the time that follows it is also relevant, then the initial and the final boundaries should be equal.

We can conclude then that with states the default interpretation of aorist is in the final point, precisely because it does not imply an aspectual change in the semantics of the verb.

5.2. Why not accomplishments or activities?

Finally, another question is relevant at this point: why doesn't an aorist turn an activity or an accomplishment into an achievement when it takes the ingressive reading? Why should the capacity of an aorist grammatical aspect to change the Aktionsart of a predicate be restricted to just states?

We suggest the following explanation: the role of the external aspect is to add information over what is defined at the level of the lexical verb, but it cannot remove information with respect to what the verb means lexically. In the case of a stative verb, aorist can define a boundary (adding the information 'come to' at an interpretative level) and the denotation of the verb (a state) can be interpreted as the result state following that boundary. This gives, in fact, a type that is independently identified for some achievements related to psychological stats (Marín & McNally, 2011): a left boundary followed by a state.

(37)   [- - - -   (get worried, preocuparse)

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However, in the case of an activity or an accomplishment, turning it into the structure of (37) would imply ignoring the dynamic component that follows the left boundary in those verbs: the activity or the accomplishment cannot be a result state following a change, simply because the lexical verb does not denote (just) a state.

6. Step 4: why?

The question that remains at this point is why the situation should be like this.

i.   Why does aorist only select the initial point with some states? Why cannot extend this state > achievement transformation to, for instance, existence states?

ii. What makes that initial point special only for some states?

Remember the generalisation that we presented in §4: only states that assign an experiencer role to its subject can take part in the construction where aorist turns the state into an achievement. The question is what relates the presence of an experiencer with the saliency of the initial point of the situation.

We believe that the answer lies in considering experiencers initiators of psychological states. Following Ramchand (2008: 106-107), one can assign the following structure to a stative predicate, essentially reducing it to a causative/agentive head that does not select a process complement.

(38)
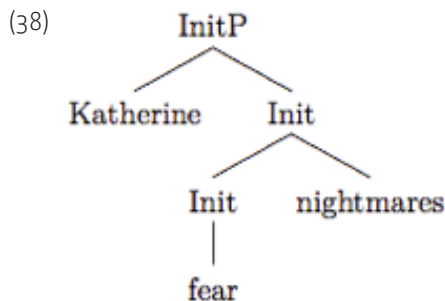
The experiencer is an initiator (a 'causer' of sorts, an entity that in some way triggers the si-

tuation) because for the psychological state to hold it is crucial that it has some particular internal properties: "I am assuming it is the Init(iation) head what is at issue here because it shares some salient properties with the Init(iation) head in dynamic predications. First of all, the DP argument in its specifier is the entity whose properties are the cause or grounds for the stative eventuality to obtain, for example, it is because of Katherine's personality that the state of her fearing nightmares arises" (Ramchand, 2008: 107).

Note that this cannot be the case for all states: if John has one kilo of rice, it is very difficult to conceive of the set of internal properties of John that triggers this state. However, the definition clearly applies to psych states: unless John has some special predispositions and a set of human characteristics, he cannot fear spiders.

Thus here is our proposal: the presence of the experiencer in a state makes the initial point of the state salient —because it is the point at which the internal properties of the experiencer license the situation—. Assuming a counterfactual theory of causality (Lewis, 1973), that triggering component entails that previously to the intervention of the experiencer, the state did not hold. The presence of the experiencer, with its defining mental characteristics, defines a starting point. This saliency is what makes the initial point available for aorist to define a left boundary.

7. Conclusions. What does this tell us about what an achievement is?

The phenomenon studied here has implications for two debates that intersect in the study of achievements.

The first one is whether so-called 'lexical' aspect is really lexical, that is, defined for atoms that are the minimal units that the computational system can combine. The phenomenon that we have identified here —independently

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of whether our analysis is right or not— constitutes a problem for lexicalist theories of Aktionsart, where aspect is defined at a lexical level (X^0). In order to explain the data we have here one has to accept that the Aktionsart of a predicate can be defined at a higher level of structure (XP, and worse than that for lexicalism, a functional XP): grammatical aspect must be able to define Aktionsart. Given our data, we must admit that something like (39) can be an achievement.

(39)
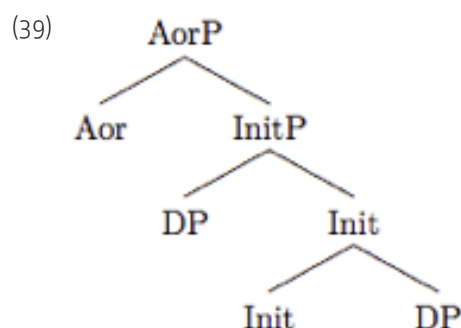
As far as I see it, any lexicalist account of our cases will have to claim at some point that some verbs are idiosyncratically marked in the lexicon as potential candidates to an achievement transformation under certain aspectual heads. The problem is that this listing 'solution' does not block in a principled way activities or accomplishments from also becoming achievements by virtue of their combination with aorist.

Admittedly, it is very difficult to completely rule out a lexicalist analysis. We have identified a set of generalisations, related to the aspectual type of the lexical verb and its argument structure, that suggest that an idiosyncratic analysis, where individual verbs are just listed as participating in this aspectual alternation, would lack some explanatory power. However, as usual, one cannot completely rule out that these generalisations are present at the lexical level and restrict how a particular lexical operation, letting it only act over psychological states. Our point is, in any case, that this listing solution would not be necessary for these cases, because the generalisations can be derived at a phrasal level.

Secondly, our analysis has consequences for the debate of what an achievement is.

Dowty (1979) and Ramchand (2008), from very different frameworks, have argued that achievements are just accomplishments whose process part is extremely short —e.g., because the initial and the result states have to be adjacent—, while other authors like Piñón (1997) and Martin (2011) have argued that achievements entirely lack the process part and are, literally, boundaries without any internal temporal extension. The data we have presented here clearly support the boundary analysis, because a state becomes an achievement under aorist. Aorist defines a boundary, in accordance with the standard account of this grammatical aspect, but no account —to the best of my knowledge— has proposed that aorist provides the VP with an event or imposes conditions on how temporally close the initial and final points of an event have to be.

There are, of course, many issues that would have to be addressed also in order to give a complete characterisation of the nature of aorist aspect and the operations that it triggers in combination with other Aktionsarten. However, we hope to at least have provided a convincing account of a fragment of its grammar that deepens our understanding of achievements and the relation between the lexical and functional aspectual layers.

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