Adverbial mimetics and lexical aspect

Previous research, Toritani (2007), has shown that Japanese verb phrases (VPs) are sensitive to the inherent aspectual properties of adverbial mimetic phrases (AMPs) and that AMP modification can affect VP lexical aspect. Thus, the unmodified VP (1) is understood as atelic whereas the AMP modified VP (2) is understood as telic. However, Toritani's analysis does not indicate why AMP modification should result in lexical aspectual shifts. I propose instead that analysis of AMP modification should be contextualized within an account of lexical aspect.

    1. Mizu ga   nagareta.
        Water NOM   flow.PST
        'Water flowed.'

    2. Mizu   ga   zaaQ to   nagareta.
        Water   NOM   gush ADV   flow.PST
        '(One burst of) water gushed.'

My proposed lexical classification system for Japanese is adapted from Olsen (1997) and defines three privative aspectual features: [+dynamic], [+durative], [+telic]. Crucially, only those aspectual properties lexicalized by the verb are considered when initially determining lexical aspectual classification - VP internal elements such as direct object noun phrases (NPs) are disregarded. Thus activities and accomplishments form one class.

    3.

Verb Class	Features	Added by External Elements
Stative	[+durative]	[+dynamic]
Achievement	[+dynamic] [+telic]	
Activity/Accomplishment	[+dynamic] [+durative]	[+telic]

However, external elements such as direct object NPs can potentially add aspectual features: adding *hon o nisatsu* 'two books' to *yomu* 'read' adds [+telic] in (4). In (5), however, availability of multiple interpretations for *hon* 'a book/the book(s)/books,' indicates that [+telic], while available, is not necessarily added. Furthermore, availability of multiple interpretations for *hon* (5) means that the VP is itself open to multiple interpretations, here an activity interpretation 'read books' and an accomplishment interpretation 'read a book/the book(s).'

    4. Tomu wa   hon o   nisatsu   yonda.
        Tom   TOP book ACC two volumes read.PST
        'Tom read two books.'

    5. Tomu wa   hon o   yonda.
        Tom   TOP book ACC   read.PST
        'Tom read a book/the book(s)/books.'

AMPs like other verb external elements can potentially add aspectual features, e.g. in (2) addition of the AMP *zaaQ to* 'gush' means that [+telic] is added to the VP, interfering with the availability of an atelic interpretation. In (6), addition the AMP *marumaru* 'completely' also adds [+telic] to the VP and therefore interferes with the availability of the activity interpretation - the VP is therefore interpreted as an accomplishment.

    6. Hazukashi   nagara, hon   o   marumaru   yonda   ato   demo   wakaranakatta
        Shy   while   book ACC   completely   read.PST after   even   understand.NEG.PST
        'It's embarrassing that even after reading the book(s)/*books completely, I didn't understand.
        http://blog.livedoor.jp/ugoky/archives/52012122.html

My analysis will cover modification by an AMP for each of the verb classes in (3) and demonstrate how such modification can restrict or facilitate the availability of particular VP interpretations. Thus, not only does my analysis make the correct predictions for how AMP modification can impact the aspectual features of a VP, but it also sheds light onto why VPs are aspectually sensitive to AMP modification in the first place.

Olsen, Mari Broman. 1997. *A semantic and pragmatic model of lexical and grammatical aspect*.; Toratani, K. (2005). A cognitive approach to mimetic aspect in Japanese.