

Article

“Again” and “Again”: A Grammatical Analysis of *lại* and *nữa* in Vietnamese

Yi-Ling Irene Liao * and Tzong-Hong Jonah Lin

Graduate Institute of Linguistics, National Tsing Hua University, Hsinchu 300044, Taiwan;
jonahlin@mx.nthu.edu.tw

* Correspondence: irene0202@gapp.nthu.edu.tw

Abstract: This work examines the grammatical properties of *lại* and *nữa* in Vietnamese, both of which can express the repetition of an event. It has been observed that different syntactic positions of *lại* result in different readings, as noted in previous studies. When *lại* precedes a verb, it may assume either the repetitive reading or restitutive reading. When *lại* follows a verb, it can only assume the restitutive reading. *Nữa* can be used for the repetitive reading and the incremental reading as well, in the sense that an activity is incremented by adding subevents measured along some dimension, as discussed by Tovená & Donazzan (2008). We adopt Stechow’s (1996) structural analysis and the theory of focus semantics and propose that the preverbal *lại* is adjoined to vP, which can be focus-associated with an element within its c-command domain, i.e., vP or VP. This is the origin of the ambiguous readings of the preverbal *lại*. The postverbal *lại* is adjoined to VP, and this is the reason why it does not yield ambiguous readings. We also propose that *nữa* is adjoined to vP, along with the movement of vP to a higher functional projection. This results in the surface final position of *nữa*.

Keywords: repetition; repetitive; restitutive; again; Vietnamese



Academic Editors: Trang Phan,
Nigel Duffield and Tim Chou

Received: 30 October 2024

Revised: 3 January 2025

Accepted: 6 January 2025

Published: 23 January 2025

Citation: Liao, Y.-L. I., & Lin, T.-H. J. (2025). “Again” and “Again”: A Grammatical Analysis of *lại* and *nữa* in Vietnamese. *Languages*, 10(2), 18. <https://doi.org/10.3390/languages10020018>

Copyright: © 2025 by the authors. Licensee MDPI, Basel, Switzerland. This article is an open access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) license (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).

1. Introduction

This work investigates the adverbs of repetition in Vietnamese, *lại* and *nữa*, and proposes syntactic accounts for them. The adverb *lại* can be used alone or with the particle *nữa* to express the meaning of “again” (Nguyễn, 1997), as shown in (1).

- | | | | | | |
|-----|---|-------|------|-------|-------------------|
| (1) | Trời | lại | mưa | (nữa) | rồi. ¹ |
| | sky | again | rain | more | PERF |
| | ‘It is raining again.’ (Nguyễn, 1997, p. 147) | | | | |

The word *lại* in Vietnamese can be used as a verb meaning “to come”, an adverb, a modal particle conveying the speaker’s attitude, or a sub-element in a sentence connector (Thompson, 1987; Nguyễn, 1997; Trần, 2023, and others). See (2a)–(2d).

- (2) a. Em hãy **lại** đây với anh!
 you IMP come here with me
 ‘Come here to me, please!’ (Trần, 2023, p. 252)
- b. Tôi **lại** yêu anh ấy như ngày nào.
 I again love him as day which
 ‘I fell in love with him again like before.’ (Trần, 2023, p. 255)
- c. Vì sao khi con kéo đàn, bà
 why when I play violin grandma
lại khóc vậy mẹ?
 LAI cry such mother
 ‘Why does grandma cry when I play the violin, mom?’ (Trần, 2023, p. 261)
- d. **Ngược lại** / **Trái lại**, anh ta rất chăm chỉ.
 however however he very hard-working
 ‘However, he is very hard-working.’ (Trần, 2023, p. 263)

In this work, we focus on the repetitive use of *lại*. It has been pointed out that different syntactic positions of *lại* result in different readings (Thompson, 1987; Nguyễn, 1997; Phan, 2013, etc.); see (3a,b). When the adverb *lại* precedes a verb, it has a repetitive reading. When the adverb *lại* follows a verb, it can only yield a restitutive reading. According to Phan (2013), in (3a), the entire event of the subject writing a letter is repeated, while, in (3b), only the result state of the event (i.e., the letter having been written) re-occurs.^{2,3}

- (3) a. Ông **lại** viết thư.
 he again write letter
 ‘He wrote another letter.’ (Phan, 2013, p. 98)
- b. Ông viết **lại** thư.
 he write again letter
 ‘He revised the letter.’ (Phan, 2013, p. 98)

Stechow (1996) postulates a structural analysis for the ambiguous readings of the adverb *wieder*, “again”, in German and argues that the ambiguity of *wieder* arises from different modifying scopes. Beck and Johnson (2004) further apply this analysis to the ambiguity of the adverb *again* in English (see also Beck & Snyder, 2001; Beck, 2006). Inspired by these analyses, we propose that the preverbal *lại* in Vietnamese adjoins to vP. The modifying scope of the preverbal *lại* can be the entire event or a result state of the event. This gives rise to the two readings, namely the repetitive and restitutive readings. In addition, we argue that the postverbal *lại* adjoins to VP, and it can only modify the result state of the predicate vP. Therefore, it only yields the restitutive reading. We also show that syntactic tests support the proposed analyses of the preverbal *lại* and the postverbal *lại*.

The word *nữa*, which occurs after the predicate, expresses the meaning “more, in addition, also”, as shown in (4). It can also denote the repetition of an event, as in (5).

- (4) Ông dùng cơm **nữa** thôi?
 you have rice more SFP
 ‘Are you going to eat more rice?’ (Thompson, 1987, p. 271)
- (5) Hôm nay trời mưa **nữa** rồi.
 today sky rain more PERF
 ‘It is raining again today.’

We propose that *nữa* adjoins to vP, and, furthermore, it triggers the merger of a FocusP on the phrase structure, to which vP moves. This results in the predicate-final position of *nữa*.

This paper is structured as follows. Section 2 presents a review (Stechow, 1996). Section 3 examines the preverbal *lai* and the postverbal *lai*. Section 4 discusses *nĩa* and its syntactic position. Section 5 outlines our proposal. Section 6 contains the summary.

2. The Structural Analysis of the Repetitive/Restitutive Ambiguity

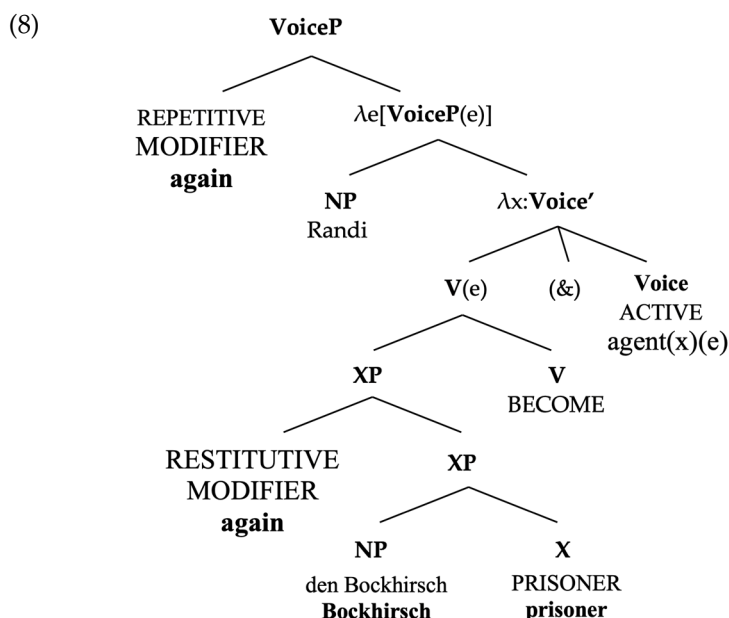
Stechow (1995) points out that *wieder*, “again”, in German, exhibits semantic ambiguity, as shown in (6). The adverb *wieder*, “again”, may assume the repetitive reading (the reading in (6a)) or the restitutive reading (the reading in (6b)).⁴ In (6a), the whole event “Randi had caught Bockhirsch” is repeated. In (6b), the result state of the event, “Bockhirsch is in the state of being a prisoner,” is repeated.⁵

- (6) Randi den Bockhirsch wieder fing. (Stechow, 1996, pp. 94–95)
 Randi Bockhirsch again caught
 a. ‘Randi had caught Bockhirsch before, and she caught him again.’
 b. ‘Bockhirsch had been a prisoner before, and Randi caused him to be a prisoner again.’

This repetitive/restitutive ambiguity is also observed in English. See (7). When the whole agentive event “Sally opened the door” is repeated, a repetitive reading is obtained. When the state of the door’s being open is repeated, the restitutive reading results instead. In other words, if the repetition includes the agent of the action, the repetitive reading is yielded.

- (7) Sally opened the door again. (Beck & Johnson, 2004, p. 106)
 a. ‘Sally opened the door, and that had happened before.’ (repetitive)
 b. ‘Sally opened the door, and the door had been open before.’ (restitutive)

Adopting the theory of Voice projection by Kratzer (1994), Stechow (1995, 1996) postulates a structural analysis for the ambiguity of *wieder*, “again”, as shown in (8) (from Stechow, 1996, p. 97).



There are two possible positions for *wieder* in the D-structure of the sentence in (6). When *wieder* is generated in a higher position, it scopes over the VoiceP, resulting in a repetitive reading. When it is in a lower position, it only scopes over the main predicate (XP here), resulting in a restitutive reading.

Words corresponding to *wieder* in other languages are also claimed to exhibit such semantic ambiguity. Some authors (Beck & Johnson, 2004; Beck, 2005) apply Stechow’s (1996) theory to *again* in English for its ambiguous readings in the double-object construction.

3. The Syntactic Position of the Adverb *lại*

In this section, we discuss the syntactic structures of the preverbal *lại* and the postverbal *lại* and how their syntactic positions are correlated with their potential readings.

3.1. The Preverbal *lại*

To begin with, we examine the syntactic position of the preverbal *lại*. The strategy that we use consists of comparing the syntactic occurrence of *lại* with different types of elements of different syntactic positions in the same sentence, thereby determining the structural position of the element *lại*.

First, the evaluative adverb *quả nhiên*, “indeed”, and the epistemic adverb *có lẽ*, “possibly”, must precede the preverbal *lại*.⁶ Evaluative and epistemic adverbs are usually assumed to be CP-level adverbials (see Cinque, 1999; Giorgi, 2010).

- | | | | | | | |
|------|----|---|------------|------------|-------|--------|
| (9) | a. | Ông | quả nhiên | lại | viết | thư. |
| | | he | indeed | again | write | letter |
| | | ‘He indeed wrote another letter again.’ | | | | |
| | b. | *Ông | lại | quả nhiên | viết | thư. |
| | | he | again | indeed | write | letter |
| (10) | a. | Ông | có lẽ | lại | viết | thư. |
| | | he | possibly | again | write | letter |
| | | ‘He possibly wrote another letter.’ | | | | |
| | b. | *Ông | lại | có lẽ | viết | thư. |
| | | he | again | possibly | write | letter |

Second, the preverbal *lại* must precede the subject-oriented adverb *vô tình*, “unintentionally”, and the vP-level adverb *bình tĩnh*, “calmly”, as shown in (11) and (12). Presumably, these adverbials are adjoined to vP.

- | | | | | | | | |
|------|----|---|-----------------|-----------------|---------|----------|-------|
| (11) | a. | Nam | lại | vô tình | làm vỡ | chiếc | bình. |
| | | Nam | again | unintentionally | break | CL | vase |
| | | ‘Nam unintentionally broke the vase again.’ | | | | | |
| | b. | *Nam | vô tình | lại | làm vỡ | chiếc | bình. |
| | | Nam | unintentionally | again | break | CL | vase |
| (12) | a. | Nam | lại | bình tĩnh | trả lời | câu hỏi. | |
| | | Nam | again | calmly | answer | question | |
| | | ‘Nam calmly answered the question again.’ | | | | | |
| | b. | *Nam | bình tĩnh | lại | trả lời | câu hỏi. | |
| | | Nam | calmly | again | answer | question | |

Third, the preverbal *lại* must precede the vP-level aspectual adverb *liên tục*, “continually” (Cinque, 1999), but it follows the generic-modal adverb *thông thường*, “normally”, which presumably is a TP-level adverb.

- (13) a. Gần đây Nam lại liên tục mắng Hoa.
 recently Nam again continually scold Hoa
 ‘Nam has been scolding Hoa continuously recently.’
- b. *Gần đây Nam lại liên tục mắng Hoa.
 recently Nam continually again scold Hoa
- (14) a. Nam thông thường lại đến phòng tập
 Nam normally again come room do
 thể dục vào buổi chiều.
 exercise in afternoon
 ‘He normally goes to the gym again in the afternoon.’
- b. *Nam lại thông thường đến phòng tập
 Nam again normally come room do
 thể dục vào buổi chiều.
 exercise in afternoon

Fourth, the preverbal *lại* must precede the passive maker *bị*, which, according to (Bruening & Tran, 2015), is the head of a predicate, equivalent to *v* in most current syntactic analyses.

- (15) a. Nam lại bị Hoa đánh.
 Nam again PASS Hoa hit
 ‘Nam was beaten by Hoa again.’
- b. *Nam bị lại Hoa đánh.
 Nam PASS again Hoa hit

Fifth, the preverbal *lại* can take a dynamic or a stative predicate, but it requires the perfect aspect marker *rồi* when it occurs with a stative predicate.⁷ This phenomenon is similar to the adverb *you*, “again”, in Mandarin. Lin and Liu (2009) observe that the adverb *you*, “again”, in Mandarin requires the presence of the perfect aspect marker *le* when the main verb is stative. It appears that the same requirement is effective for the Vietnamese adverb *lại* as well. Compare the examples in (16) and (17).

- (16) a. Nam lại hôn Hoa. [dynamic]
 Nam again kiss Hoa
 ‘Nam kissed Hoa again.’
- b. Nam lại đánh Hoa. [dynamic]
 Nam again hit Hoa
 ‘Nam hit Hoa again.’
- (17) a. Nam lại thích Hoa *(rồi). [stative]
 Nam again like Hoa PERF
 ‘Nam likes Hoa again.’
- b. Nam lại béo *(rồi). [stative]
 Nam again fat PERF
 ‘Nam gets fat again.’

To summarize, the hierarchical distribution of the adverbials discussed so far is shown in (18). Based on this observation, we propose that *lại* adjoins to *vP* as its outer-most layer.

- (18) $\left\{ \begin{array}{l} \textit{quả nhiên} \textit{ 'indeed' (CP)} \\ \textit{có lẽ} \textit{ 'probably' (TP)} \\ \textit{thông thường} \textit{ 'normally' (TP)} \end{array} \right\} > \textit{lại} > \left\{ \begin{array}{l} \textit{vô tình} \textit{ 'unintentionally' (vP)} \\ \textit{bị} \textit{ (v)} \\ \textit{liên tục} \textit{ 'continually' (vP)} \end{array} \right\}$

3.2. The Postverbal *lại*

In this subsection, we turn to the grammatical properties of the postverbal *lại*. Remember that the postverbal *lại* only yields a restitutive reading. First, the postverbal *lại* is only compatible with dynamic predicates, as shown in (19). Ungrammaticality results when it co-occurs with a stative predicate, regardless of whether the perfect marker *rồi* occurs or not, as shown in (20).

- (19) a. Nam sơn **lại** nhà. [dynamic]
 Nam paint again house
 ‘Nam repainted the house.’
 b. Nam làm **lại** một cái bánh. [dynamic]
 Nam do again one CL cake
 ‘Nam made another cake.’
- (20) a. *Nam thích **lại** Hoa (rồi). [stative]
 Nam like again Hoa PERF
 Intended reading: ‘Nam likes Hoa again.’
 b. *Nam quên **lại** chuyện này (rồi). [stative]
 Nam forget again story this PERF
 Intended reading: ‘Nam forgot this story again.’

Second, the postverbal *lại* cannot occur after the object, as in (21b). It must precede the object, as in (21a).

- (21) a. Ông viết **lại** thư.
 he write again letter
 ‘He revised the letter.’
 b. *Ông viết thư **lại**.
 he write letter again

Third, the postverbal *lại* must precede the postverbal manner adverb *từ từ*, ‘‘slowly’’. The reverse order is ungrammatical.

- (22) a. Làm **lại** từ từ!
 do again slowly
 ‘Do it slowly again!’
 b. *Làm từ từ **lại**!
 do slowly again

Fourth, the postverbal *lại* must precede the completive particle *xông*, ‘‘finish’’. Phan (2013) argues that *xông* takes the ‘‘base predicate’’ (roughly equivalent to VP) as the complement.

- (23) a. Nam vừa sơn **lại** xong nhà.
 Nam just paint again finish house
 ‘Nam has just finished the repainting of the house.’
 b. *Nam vừa sơn xông **lại** nhà.
 Nam just paint finish again house

Fifth, the postverbal *lại* must precede the dynamic modal *được*, ‘‘be able to’’, as shown in (24). Ungrammaticality results if *lại* follows the postverbal modal *được*.

- (24) a. Nam viết **lại** được lá thư.
 Nam write again be able to CL letter
 ‘Nam was able to revise the letter.’
 b. *Nam viết được **lại** lá thư
 Nam write be able to again CL letter

Sixth, the postverbal *lại* can co-occur with the preverbal *lại*, as shown in (25).

- (25) Ông lại viết lại thư.
 he again write again letter
 ‘He revised the letter again.’

To summarize, the hierarchical distribution of the postverbal *lại* is shown in (26). The postverbal *lại* must precede postverbal manner adverbs, the completive marker, the dynamic modal, and the object in a linear order.

- (26)
- | | | | | | |
|-----------|---|-----------------------|---|---|--|
| Lexical V | > | Postverbal <i>lại</i> | > | } | <p><i>từ từ</i> 'slowly'</p> <p><i>xông</i> 'finish'</p> <p><i>được</i> 'be able to'</p> <p>Object</p> |
|-----------|---|-----------------------|---|---|--|

4. The Adverb *nữa* and Its Syntactic Position

In this section, we discuss the grammatical properties of the adverb *nữa*, “more, in addition, also” in Vietnamese. Before delving into the discussion of *nữa*, let us introduce the concept of “incremental reading” first. [Tovena and Donazzan \(2008, p. 91\)](#) point out that the repetitive adverb *ancora* in Italian can give rise to an incremental reading, which means that an activity is incremented by adding subevents measured along a specific dimension. See (27).

- (27) a. Maria sta **ancora** leggendo.
 ‘Maria is *still* reading.’
 b. Maria sta leggendo **ancora** un libro.
 ‘Maria is reading one *more* book.’

The word *ancora* in (27a) denotes a meaning comparable to “still,” and the one in (27b) denotes a meaning similar to “more.” The incremental interpretation can be thought of either as a repetition of events or as a continuation of an activity by adding more object units. The adverb *nữa* in Vietnamese is quite similar to *ancora*, as it yields an incremental reading, shown in (28) and (29).

- (28) Hôm nay trời mưa **nữa** rồi.
 today sky rain more PERF
 ‘It is raining again today.’
- (29) Nam có thể ăn một bát cơm **nữa**.
 Nam can eat one bowl rice more
 ‘Nam can eat one more bowl of rice.’

Now, we turn to the syntactic position of *nữa*. First, similar to the preverbal *lại*, the adverb *nữa* can occur with a stative or dynamic predicate; see (30) and (31). When it occurs with a stative predicate, the perfect aspect particle *rồi* is required, as shown in (31).

- | | | | | | | | |
|------|----|-------------------------|-------|-----|-------------|---------|-----------|
| (30) | a. | Nam | hôn | Hoa | nữa. | | [dynamic] |
| | | Nam | kiss | Hoa | more | | |
| | | 'Nam kissed Hoa again.' | | | | | |
| | b. | Nam | đánh | Hoa | nữa. | | [dynamic] |
| | | Nam | hit | Hoa | more | | |
| | | 'Nam hit Hoa again.' | | | | | |
| (31) | a. | Nam | thích | Hoa | nữa | *(rồi). | [stative] |
| | | Nam | like | Hoa | more | PERF | |
| | | 'Nam likes Hoa again.' | | | | | |
| | b. | Nam | lại | béo | nữa | *(rồi). | [stative] |
| | | Nam | again | fat | more | PERF | |
| | | 'He gets fat again.' | | | | | |

Second, *nữa* must follow postverbal manner adverbs, such as, for instance, *từ từ*, “slowly”, in (32). The reverse order is ungrammatical.

- | | | | | | |
|------|----|-----------------------|------------|--------|-------------|
| (32) | a. | Nam | ăn | từ từ | nữa. |
| | | Nam | eat | slowly | more |
| | | 'Nam ate slowly too.' | | | |
| | b. | *Nam | nữa | ăn | từ từ. |
| | | Nam | eat | more | slowly |

Third, *nữa* must follow the completive marker *xông*, “finish”, as shown in (33).

- | | | | | | | | |
|------|----|--------------------------------|-------|-----|---------|------------|-------------|
| (33) | a. | Nam | (còn) | ăn | bánh mì | xông | nữa. |
| | | Nam | even | eat | bread | finish | more |
| | | 'Nam even finished the bread.' | | | | | |
| | b. | *Nam | (còn) | ăn | bánh mì | nữa | xông. |
| | | Nam | even | eat | bread | more | finish |

Fourth, *nữa* must precede the perfect aspect marker *rồi*. See (34). When the perfect aspect marker precedes *nữa*, the sentence is ungrammatical.

- | | | | | | | |
|------|----|------------------------------|------|------|------------|-------------|
| (34) | a. | Hôm nay | trời | mưa | nữa | rồi. |
| | | today | sky | rain | more | PERF |
| | | 'It is raining again today.' | | | | |
| | b. | *Hôm nay | trời | mưa | rồi | nữa. |
| | | today | sky | rain | PERF | more |

Fifth, *nữa* cannot scope over the epistemic modal adverb *chắc chắn*, “surely”. For the sentence in (35), only reading 1 is possible, where *nữa* is within the scope of *chắc chắn*, “surely”. In reading 2, *nữa* is intended to scope over the epistemic modal adverb *chắc chắn*. This reading is not available.

- | | | | | | |
|------|-----|-----------------------------------|-----|------|-------------|
| (35) | Nam | chắc chắn | ăn | cơm | nữa. |
| | Nam | surely | eat | rice | more |
| | | 1. 'Nam surely ate rice again.' | | | |
| | | 2. *'Again, Nam surely ate rice.' | | | |

Sixth, *nữa* cannot scope over the negator *không*, “not”, as shown in (36). In this sentence, the negator scopes over the particle *nữa* in readings 1 and 2, and both readings are acceptable. In reading 3, the negator is intended to fall within the scope of *nữa*. However, this reading is unacceptable.

- (36) Nam sẽ không đi Mỹ nữa.
 Nam will NEG go America more
 1. ‘Nam doesn’t have any intention to go to the US now.’ (“will” > NEG > *nũa*)
 2. ‘Nam will not go to the US anymore.’ (NEG > “will” > *nũa*)
 3. *‘Nam again doesn’t have any intention to go to the US.’
 (**nũa* > NEG / “will”)

Seventh, *nũa* can scope over the quantificational subject of a sentence, as shown in (37). When the quantificational subject *không ai*, “nobody”, in (37) scopes over the particle *nũa*, reading 1 is obtained. When the particle *nũa* scopes over the quantificational subject, reading 2 is obtained. Both readings are acceptable.

- (37) Không ai đến nữa.
 NEG who come more
 1. ‘Nobody came again.’ (NP > *nũa*)
 2. ‘Again, nobody came.’ (*nũa* > NP)

Eighth, *nũa* can co-occur with the preverbal *lại* and the postverbal *lại*. When these three adverbial elements appear in the same sentence, as in (38), the sentence is fully grammatical.

- (38) Nam lại sơn lại nhà nữa.
 Nam again paint again house more
 ‘Nam repainted the house again. (He also repainted other stuff)’

In summary, the following two sets of properties are observed with *nũa*. See (39) and (40). In linear order, the particle *nũa* must follow the postverbal manner adverb *từ từ*, “slowly”, and the completive marker *xông*, “finish”, and precede the perfect aspect marker *rồi*. Regarding the scope property of *nũa*, it must fall within the scope of the epistemic modal adverb *chắc chắn*, “surely”, and the negator *không*, “not”. In addition, *nũa* may scope over the quantificational subject of a sentence.

- (39) Linear order
 Verb > $\left\{ \begin{array}{l} \textit{từ từ} \textit{ ‘slowly’} \\ \textit{xông} \textit{ ‘finish’} \end{array} \right\}$ > *nũa* > *rồi*

- (40) Scope
 a. *chắc chắn*, “surely” > *nũa*
 b. *không*, “not” > *nũa*
 c. Quantificational subject > *nũa*
 nũa > Quantificational subject

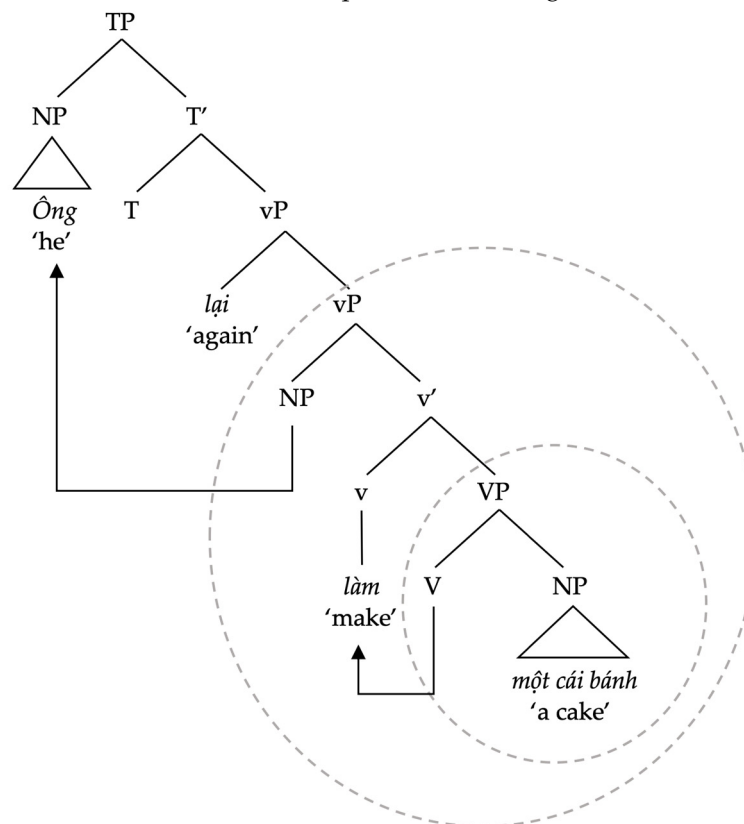
5. The Proposal

Inspired by the structural analysis of Stechow (1996), we propose an analysis for the preverbal *lại*, the postverbal *lại*, and *nũa* that is partially structural and partially focus-semantic (see Beck, 2006; Ippolito, 2007; and Csirmaz & Slade, 2020, for more focus-based accounts of repetitive adverbs). We agree with Stechow’s proposal that the different readings of a repetitive adverb result from its syntactic position, rather than lexical ambiguity (see Dowty, 1979; and Fabricius-Hansen, 1983, among others). However, the approach we adopt is more flexible, since syntactic adjacency does not completely determine the reading of the adverb in question (for details, see below). We argue that the repetitive adverb can target an element within its c-commanding domain and not only the constituent to which it is directly adjoined.

First, based on our observation of the preverbal *lại* (summarized in (18)), we propose that the preverbal *lại* adjoins to vP. Semantically, as a focus particle, it can be associated with the entire event, namely vP, or only with the result state of the event, namely VP. This results in two possible readings, i.e., the repetitive reading and the restitutive reading. See the example in (41) and its syntactic structure in (42). Note that, in Stechow’s theory, *wieder* (and also the English adverb *again*; see Beck & Johnson, 2004) can only modify the syntactic domain to which it is directly adjoined. However, in the case of Vietnamese (and Mandarin, too; see Lin & Liu, 2009), non-adjacent focalization is possible. In other words, when *lại* is adjoined to vP, focalization of the complement of vP, namely VP, is possible in Vietnamese (and Mandarin). This state of affairs is actually a normal case rather than an exception. An example is the focus adverb *only* in English. In the English sentence “*John only bought books*”, *only* may focalize the verb *bought* or the object NP *books*. For example, we can have the following two contrasts in mind: “*John only bought books and did not buy other things*”, in which case *books* is focus-marked; or alternatively, “*John only bought books and did not borrow them*”, in which case the verb *bought* is focus-marked. Having the English adverb *only* as a paradigm example, we claim that the preverbal *lại* in Vietnamese is such a focus particle. It can focalize a constituent that is within its c-command domain, immediately adjacent to it or otherwise. We assume that the focalization function of the preverbal *lại* is carried out by the probe–goal relation of current syntactic theory, which does not require adjacency.

- (41) Ông **lại** làm một cái bánh.
 he again make one CL cake
 ‘He made a cake again.’ (repetitive or restitutive)

(42) Preverbal *lại* (circled areas = possible focus targets)



The proposed analysis explains the position of *lại* when it co-occurs with other elements, as shown in (16) and repeated in (43).

$$(43) \left\{ \begin{array}{l} \text{quả nhiên 'indeed' (CP)} \\ \text{có lẽ 'probably' (TP)} \\ \text{thông thường 'normally' (TP)} \end{array} \right\} > \text{ lại} > \left\{ \begin{array}{l} \text{vô tình 'unintentionally' (vP)} \\ \text{bị (v)} \\ \text{liên tục 'continually' (vP)} \end{array} \right\}$$

The analysis in (42) can account for the structural properties of the preverbal *lại* shown in (43). If the preverbal *lại* adjoins to vP, it will necessarily be lower than CP-level adverbs and TP-level adverbs, such as *quả nhiên*, “indeed”, *có lẽ*, “probably”, and *thông thường*, “normally”. In addition, since it is on vP and thus precedes the head *v*, it naturally precedes the passive maker *bị*, which is assumed to be the head of a predicate (equivalent to *v*) (see Bruening & Tran, 2015). And, since we assume that the preverbal *lại* adjoins to the outer-most layer of vP, it is higher than and, hence, precedes the vP-level adverbs *vô tình*, “unintentionally” (vP), and *liên tục*, “continually” (vP).

We also noted that the preverbal *lại* may occur with dynamic and stative predicates, but the perfect aspect marker *rồi* is required when it occurs with a stative predicate, as in (16) and (17), repeated below.

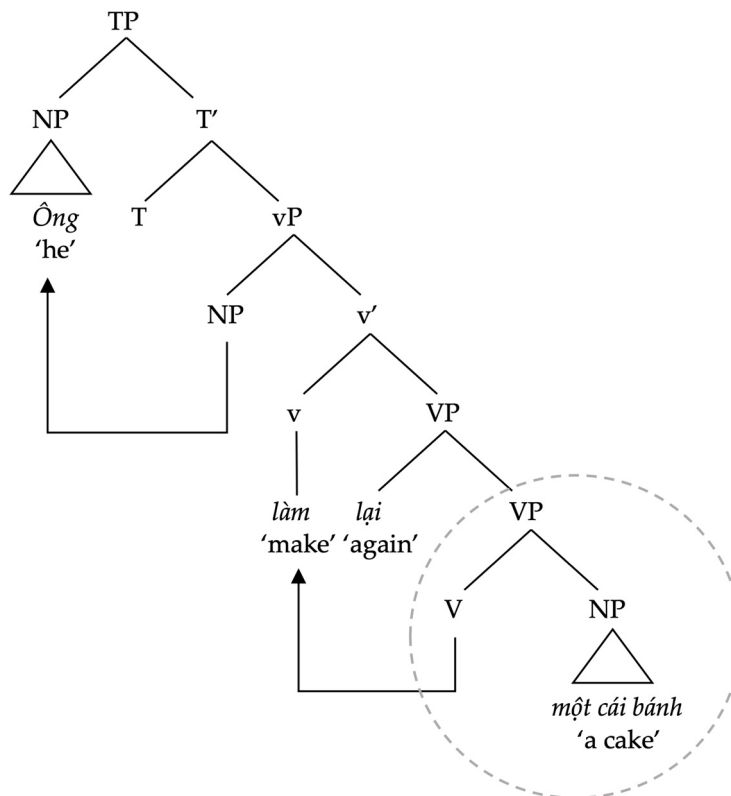
(44)	a.	Nam	lại	hôn	Hoa.		[dynamic]
		Nam	again	kiss	Hoa		
		'Nam kissed Hoa again.'					
	b.	Nam	lại	đánh	Hoa.		[dynamic]
		Nam	again	hit	Hoa		
		'Nam hit Hoa again.'					
(45)	a.	Nam	lại	thích	Hoa	*(rồi).	[stative]
		Nam	again	like	Hoa	PERF	
		'Nam likes Hoa again.'					
	b.	Nam	lại	béo	*(rồi).		[stative]
		Nam	again	fat	PERF		
		'Nam gets fat again.'					

This phenomenon is similar to the adverb *you*, “again”, in Mandarin. When *you*, “again”, occurs with a stative predicate, it also needs the presence of the perfect aspect marker *le*. Lin and Liu (2009, p. 1188) argue that, when *you*, “again”, adjoins to a static predicate, it turns the predicate into a dynamic one, namely a change-of-state predicate. We propose that the preverbal *lại* exhibits the same function. When it occurs with a static predicate, it turns the predicate dynamic. The presence of the perfect aspect marker *rồi* is therefore required to indicate that the predicate is now a dynamic one.⁸

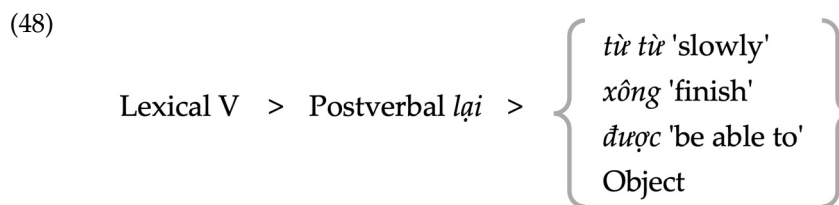
As to the postverbal *lại*, we propose that it adjoins to the lexical VP as its outer-most layer. See (46) and (47) as a demonstration. In sentence (46), the verb *làm*, “make”, raises to the head of vP, resulting in the postverbal position of *lại*. Since the postverbal *lại* only c-commands the VP, its focus domain is limited to the result state of the predicate. Consequently, only the restitutive reading is available for the postverbal *lại*. This analysis is also compatible with Phan’s (2013) proposal, which posits a projection lower than the vP which denotes the result state of the asserted event, ResultativeP. For simplicity, we use the term VP here.

(46)	Ông	làm	lại	một	cái	bánh.
	he	make	again	one	CL	cake
	'He made a cake again.' (only restitutive)					

(47) Postverbal *lại* (circled area: possible focus target)



This analysis accounts for the structural properties of the postverbal *lại* shown in (24), repeated as in (48).



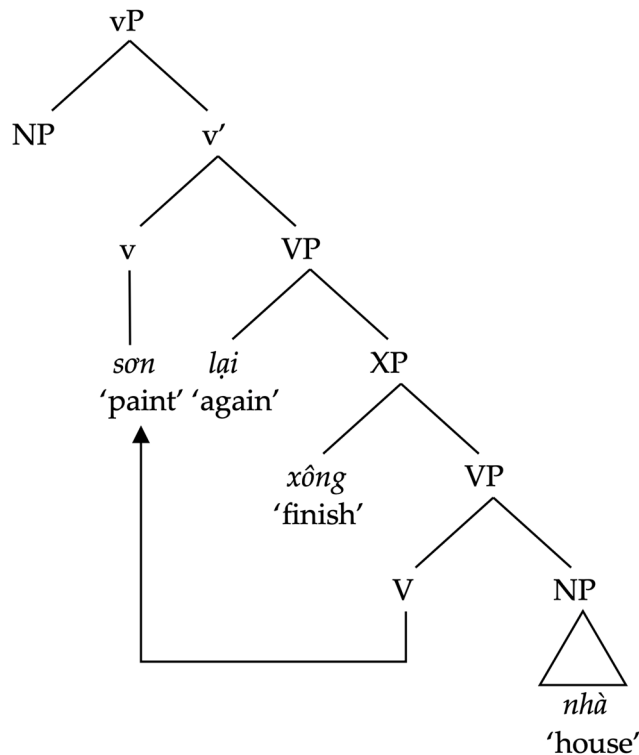
First, if the postverbal *lại* adjoins to VP, it should precede the object. This accounts for the fact that the postverbal *lại* must precede the object in a sentence. Second, if the postverbal *lại* adjoins to VP as its outer-most layer, other VP-level elements should be lower than it. This explains the fact that the postverbal *lại* precedes the postverbal VP-level manner adverb *từ từ*, “slowly.” It also explains the fact that *lại* precedes the completive particle *xông*, “finish”, and the dynamic modal *được*, “be able to.” Phan (2013) proposes that the particle *xông* and the modal *được* are heads of the projection CompletiveP and ResultativeP, respectively, both of which occur between a higher VP (roughly equivalent to vP) and a lower VP of a sentence. In our framework, the postverbal *lại* is the outer-most layer of the (generalized) VP; thus, it must be higher than these two elements and precede them. We take *xông* as an illustration.⁹

(49)

Nam	vừa	[sơn	lại	xông	nhà].
Nam	just	paint	again	finish	house

‘Nam just finished the house painting.’

(50) Co-occurrence of the postverbal *lại* with the other postverbal element



In Section 3.2, we observed that the postverbal *lại* can only be used with a dynamic predicate; it cannot be used with a stative predicate, not even with the perfect aspect marker *rồi*. See (19) and (20) above. This can be explained by the proposal that the postverbal *lại* adjoins to the projection denoting the result state of a verbal predicate, namely VP. Only a dynamic verbal predicate has a result state. Furthermore, we may assume that the result state that *lại* modifies must be the result of an agentive action. Since *rồi* only introduces a change-of-state meaning to a stative predicate and no agency is brought in, the addition of *rồi* cannot save the sentence from ungrammaticality. A piece of evidence for this proposal is that sentences (17a,b), where the presence of *rồi* makes a stative sentence with the preverbal *lại* grammatical, can only have the repetitive reading. They do not have the restitutive reading. The lack of an acceptable restitutive reading for (17a,b) clearly originates from the fact that stative predicates do not yield a result state, even when they become dynamic by the function of *rồi*.

Lastly, we turn to the particle *nữa*, which occurs in the predicate-final position. The particle *nữa*, in its lexical–semantic nature, is an additive particle that yields an incremental reading. The structural properties of *nữa* are shown in (39) and (40), now repeated in (51) and (52).

(51) Linear order

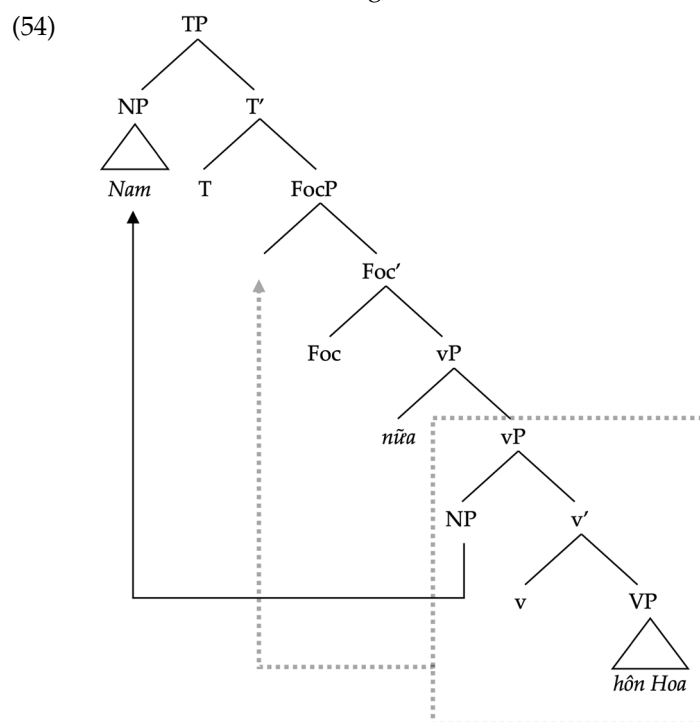
$$\text{Verb} > \left\{ \begin{array}{l} \text{từ từ 'slowly'} \\ \text{xong 'finish'} \end{array} \right\} > \text{nữa} > \text{rồi}$$

(52) Scope

- a. *chắc chắn*, “surely” > *nữa*
- b. *không*, “not” > *nữa*
- c. Quantificational subject > *nữa*
nữa > Quantificational subject

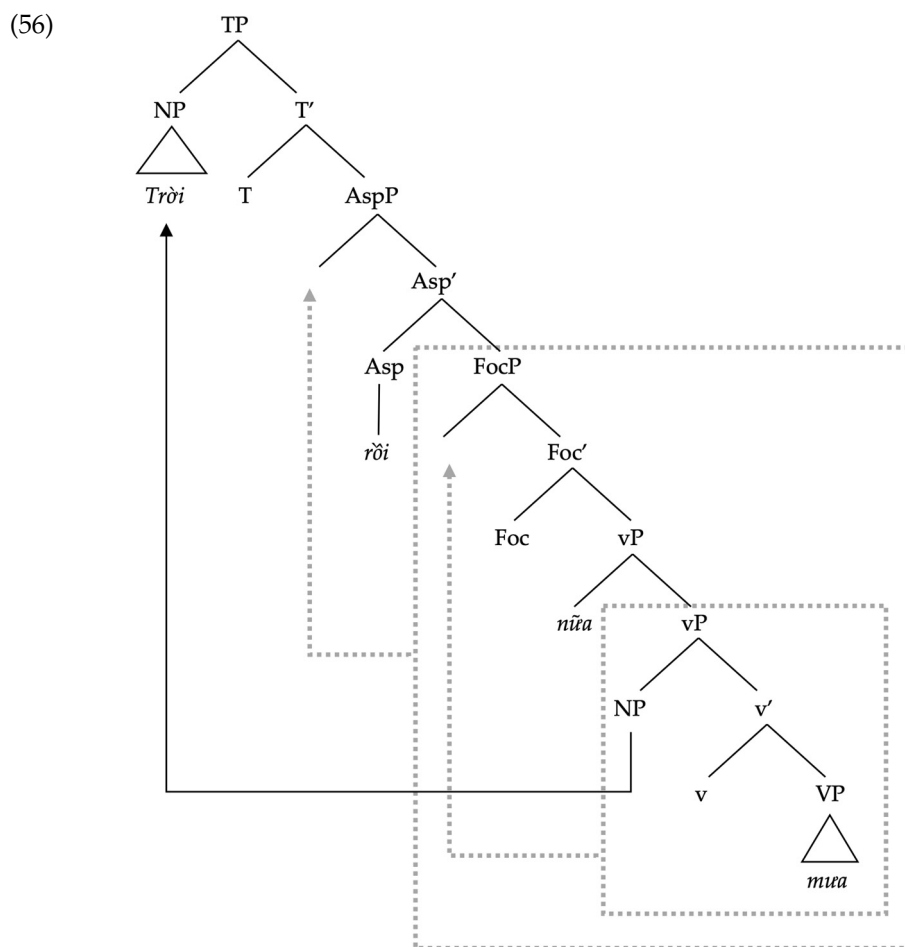
We propose that *nũa* adjoins to vP. We further propose that *nũa* triggers movement of the vP to a higher functional projection, Spec, FocP, resulting in its being stranded behind the predicate.¹⁰ Following the analysis of light predicate raising of Simpson (2001), we assume that the motivation for such movement is to defocus the constituent in question. Examples of such movement include the sentence-final particle *kong*, “to speak”, in Taiwanese (Simpson & Wu, 2002) and the sentence-final deontic modal in Cantonese and a number of Southeast Asian languages (Simpson, 2001). Let us use the sentence in (30a) as a demonstration, repeated as (53), with (54) as its structural analysis.

- (53) Nam hôn Hoa nũa.
 Nam kiss Hoa more
 ‘Nam kissed Hoa again.’



This analysis can account for the structural properties of *nũa* shown in (51) and (52). First, if *nũa* adjoins to vP, VP-level or VP-internal elements such as *từ từ*, “slowly”, and *xông*, “finish”, should precede it because the whole VP moves to Spec, FocP, and becomes higher than vP. Second, *nũa* precedes *rồi* because *rồi* is the head of the projection AspP, which we assume triggers the raising of its complement (FocP in this case) to its specifier. See (55) and (56) for illustration.

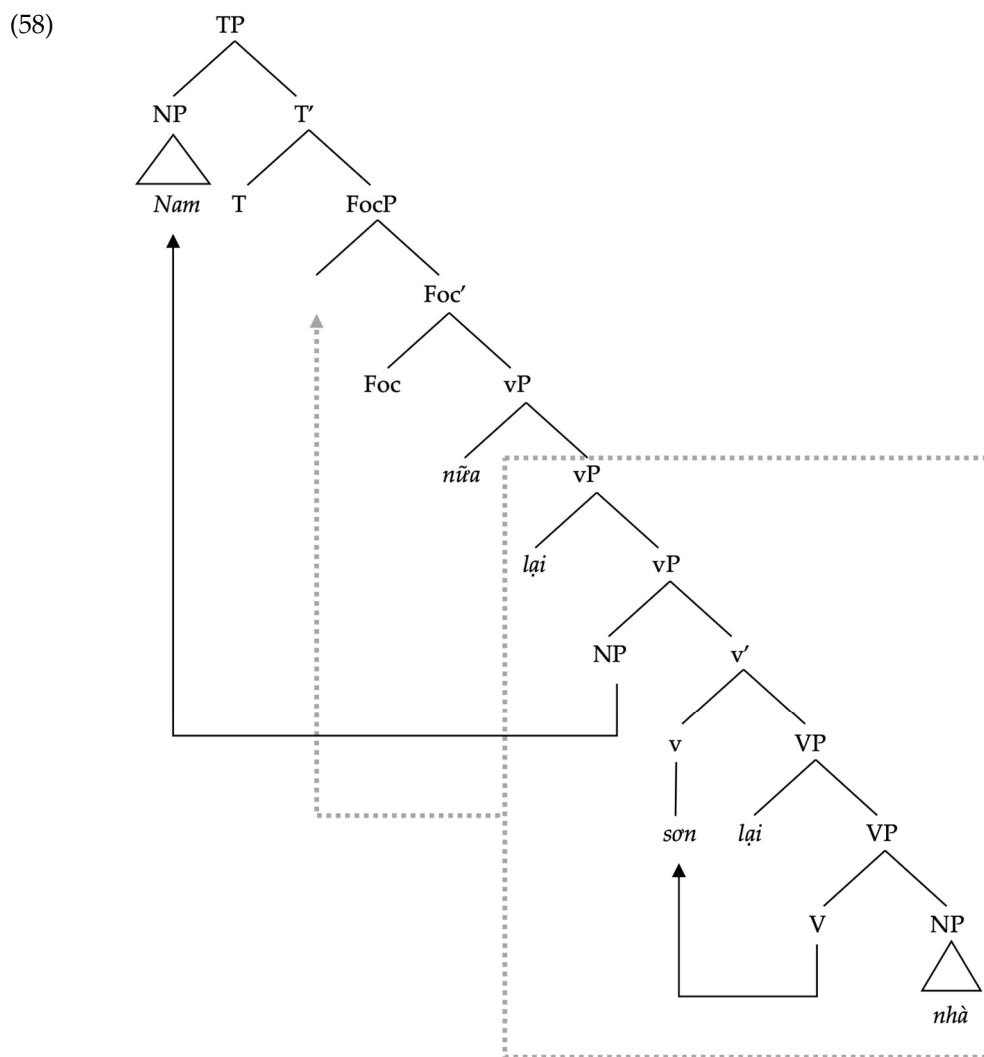
- (55) Trời mưa nũa rồi.
 sky rain more PERF
 ‘It is raining again.’



Third, if the particle *nĩa* adjoins to vP, it cannot scope over TP-level elements such as the epistemic modal adverb *chắc chắn*, “surely”, and the negator *không*, “not”. In addition, as *nĩa* adjoins to vP, it should fall within the scope of a subject quantifier. So, the scope relation “quantificational subject > *nĩa*” in (52c) is obtained. On the other hand, a quantificational subject may undergo quantifier lowering (May, 1985) and assumes its scope position in Spec, vP. In that position, it falls within the scope of *nĩa* since *nĩa* adjoins to vP. In this way, the scope relation “*nĩa* > quantificational subject” is obtained.

Fourth, our proposal can also account for the co-occurrence of *nĩa* with the preverbal *lại* and the postverbal *lại*, as shown in (57) and (58). Sentence (38) is repeated in (57).

- (57) Nam lại sơn lại nhà nĩa.
 Nam again paint again house more
 ‘Nam repainted the house again. (He also repainted other stuff)’



6. Conclusions

Inspired by previous works (Stechow, 1996; Beck & Johnson, 2004), we propose that the ambiguity of *lại* in Vietnamese results from its adjunction to vP and VP. Additionally, the adverb *nũa* in Vietnamese adjoins to vP and yields an incremental reading. It also triggers vP movement to Spec, FocP, resulting in its predicate-final position.

Author Contributions: Conceptualization, Y.-L.I.L. and T.-H.J.L.; Methodology, Y.-L.I.L. and T.-H.J.L.; Software, Y.-L.I.L. and T.-H.J.L.; Validation, Y.-L.I.L. and T.-H.J.L.; Formal analysis, T.-H.J.L.; Investigation, Y.-L.I.L.; Resources, Y.-L.I.L. and T.-H.J.L.; Data curation, Y.-L.I.L.; Writing—original draft preparation, Y.-L.I.L.; Writing—review & editing, Y.-L.I.L. and T.-H.J.L.; Supervision, T.-H.J.L.; Project administration, Y.-L.I.L. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

Funding: This research received no external funding.

Institutional Review Board Statement: Not applicable.

Informed Consent Statement: Informed consent was obtained from all subjects involved in the study.

Data Availability Statement: The data presented in this study are available upon request from the authors.

Acknowledgments: We would like to thank our informants, Trần Phan and Viet Cao, for their assistance with grammatical judgments on Vietnamese data. We also thank the audience at ISVL-

4 (National Yang Ming Chiao Tung University, Hsinchu). We are grateful to the two anonymous reviewers for their valuable advice and comments.

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Notes

¹ The abbreviations used in the glosses are as follows: PERF = perfect aspect marker; IMP = imperative particle; CL = classifier; PASS = passive marker; and NEG = negator.

² A reviewer questions that the definiteness of the objects in (3a,b) is not consistent: one is indefinite, and the other is definite. The examples are from (Phan, 2013). However, a bare noun in Vietnamese can be definite or indefinite (Phan & Chierchia, 2022). Thus, we can replace the objects in (3a,b) with a numeral to make them both indefinite. The semantics remain the same.

(i) a. Ông lại viết một lá thư.
he again write one CL letter
'He wrote a letter again.'

b. Ông viết lại một lá thư.
he write again one CL letter
'He wrote a letter again.'

³ For resultative verbs such as “catch” or “open”, the restitutive reading does not need to involve the same agent (or it does not need an agent at all). But, for verbs like “write”, it is difficult to imagine a restitutive reading such that different agents are involved in the “written-state” of a same letter. This is why the restitutive reading of (3b) yields a “revisiting” or “rewriting” meaning. We thank an anonymous reviewer for bringing this issue to our attention.

⁴ Stechow (1996) does not provide translations for these two readings. The English translations for the two readings of this German sentence are taken from Stechow's (1996, pp. 94–95) discussion of this sentence.

⁵ Please note that the example sentence in (6) follows a dependent-clause word order (S-O-V), rather than the standard independent-clause word order (S-V-O) in German.

⁶ Phan (2024) also argues that the adverb *có lẽ*, “possibly”, in Vietnamese adjoins to ModP_{Epi}, which is within the CP layer.

⁷ Following (Cao, 2003; Trinh, 2005), we assume that the sentence-final particle *rồi* is a perfect aspect marker.

⁸ When the perfect marker *rồi* is present, a stative sentence becomes dynamic, as shown in (i).

(i) a. Nam thích Hoa.
Nam like Hoa
'Nam likes Hoa.'

b. Nam thích Hoa rồi.
Nam like Hoa PERF
'Nam comes to like Hoa.'

⁹ We will not delve into questions about how CompletiveP and ResultativeP would be represented in our framework. One possibility, though, is to assume, with Phan (2013), that CompletiveP and ResultativeP occur in the phrase structure, and that the postverbal *lại* adjoins to them rather than to VP when they occur (assuming that VP is a complement of CompletiveP or ResultativeP). We leave the relevant questions aside.

¹⁰ The movement of the vP that *nũa* modifies, without *nũa* itself, could pose a problem in the Government-Binding (GB) theory, because, in the GB theory, only a maximal projection can move. However, we assume that, in the theory of Bare Phrase Structure (Chomsky, 1995), which does not formally distinguish maximal and non-maximal projections, this issue does not pose a serious problem.

References

- Beck, S. (2005). There and back again: A semantic analysis. *Journal of Semantics*, 22(1), 3–51. [CrossRef]
- Beck, S. (2006). Focus on Again. *Linguistics & Philosophy*, 29, 277–314. [CrossRef]
- Beck, S., & Johnson, K. (2004). Double Objects Again. *Linguistic Inquiry*, 35(1), 97–124. [CrossRef]
- Beck, S., & Snyder, W. (2001). The resultative parameter and restitutive ‘again’. In C. Féry, & W. Stemefeld (Eds.), *Auditor vox sapientiae: A festschrift for arnim von stechow* (pp. 48–69). Akademie Verlag.
- Bruening, B., & Tran, T. (2015). The nature of the passive, with an analysis of Vietnamese. *Lingua*, 165, 133–172. [CrossRef]
- Cao, X. H. (2003). *Tiếng việt. mấy vấn đề ngữ âm, ngữ pháp, ngữ nghĩa*. Nhà xuất bản Giáo dục.
- Cinque, G. (1999). *Adverbs and functional heads: A cross-linguistic perspective*. Oxford University Press.
- Chomsky, N. (1995). Bare phrase structure. In G. Webelhuth (Ed.), *Government and binding theory and the minimalist program (generative syntax 1)* (pp. 383–439). Blackwell.

- Csirmaz, A., & Slade, B. (2020). Anatomy of Hungarian aspectual particles. In V. Hegedűs, & I. Vogel (Eds.), *Approaches to Hungarian: Volume 16: Papers from the 2017 Budapest conference* (pp. 26–45). John Benjamins.
- Dowty, D. (1979). *Word meaning and montage grammar*. Reidel.
- Fabricius-Hansen, C. (1983). Wieder ein wieder? Zur Semantik von wieder. In R. Bauerle, C. Schwarze, & A. von Stechow (Eds.), *Meaning, use and interpretation of language* (pp. 97–120). Walter de Gruyter.
- Giorgi, A. (2010). *About the speaker: Towards a syntax of indexicality*. Oxford University Press.
- Ippolito, M. (2007). On the meaning of some focus-sensitive particles. *Natural Language Semantics*, 15, 1–34. [CrossRef]
- Kratzer, A. (1994). *The event argument and the semantics of voice* [Master's thesis, University of Massachusetts].
- Lin, T.-H. J., & Liu, C.-M. (2009). 'Again' and 'again': A grammatical analysis of *you* and *zai* in Mandarin Chinese. *Linguistics*, 47(5), 1183–1210. [CrossRef]
- May, R. (1985). *Logical form*. MIT Press.
- Nguyễn, Đ.-H. (1997). *Vietnamese*. John Benjamins Publishing Company.
- Phan, T. (2013). *Syntax of Vietnamese aspect* [Ph.D. thesis, University of Sheffield].
- Phan, T. (2024). Vietnamese modal system of dynamic possibility: A diachronic perspective. *Taiwan Journal of Linguistics*, 22(1), 167–198.
- Phan, T., & Chierchia, G. (2022). Identifying (in)definiteness in Vietnamese noun phrase. *Journal of the Southeast Asian Linguistics Society*, 15(2), 27–49.
- Simpson, A. (2001). Focus, presupposition and light predicate raising in East and Southeast Asia. *Journal of East Asian Linguistics*, 10, 89–128. [CrossRef]
- Simpson, A., & Wu, Z. (2002). IP-raising, Tone Sandhi and the Creation of S-final Particles: Evidence for Cyclic Spell-Out. *Journal of East Asian Linguistics*, 11, 67–99. [CrossRef]
- Stechow, A. v. (1995). Lexical decomposition in syntax. In U. Egli, P. E. Pause, C. Schwarze, A. von Stechow, & G. Wienold (Eds.), *The lexicon in the organization of language* (pp. 81–118). John Benjamins.
- Stechow, A. v. (1996). The Different Readings of *Wieder* 'Again': A Structural Account. *Journal of Semantics*, 13(2), 87–138. [CrossRef]
- Thompson, L. C. (1987). *A Vietnamese reference grammar*. University of Hawaii Press.
- Tovena, L., & Donazzan, M. (2008). On ways of repeating. *Recherches Linguistiques de Vincennes*, 37, 85–112. [CrossRef]
- Trần, K. P. (2023). LAI 'come/again' in Vietnamese from syntactic, semantic and pragmatic perspectives. In M. J. Alves, L. Q. Đông, T. C. Lan, T. T. H. Hạnh, & D. X. Quang (Eds.), *Researching and applying linguistics and Vietnamese language studies* (pp. 251–269). Geolinguistic Society of Japan.
- Trinh, T. (2005). *Aspect of clause structure in Vietnamese*. Humboldt University.

Disclaimer/Publisher's Note: The statements, opinions and data contained in all publications are solely those of the individual author(s) and contributor(s) and not of MDPI and/or the editor(s). MDPI and/or the editor(s) disclaim responsibility for any injury to people or property resulting from any ideas, methods, instructions or products referred to in the content.