Incrementality in Lexical Aspect

One of the most intriguing facts about the lexical aspectual properties of verbal predicates such as telicity and durativity is that they are partly contingent on the expression of certain dependents of the main verb (Verkuyl 1972, 1993, Tenny 1992, 1994, Krifka 1989, 1992, 1998, Dowty 1991, inter alia). These include incremental themes of creation and consumption predicates, paths of motion predicates, and scales of property change predicates, collectively referred to here as "incremental arguments". A common understanding of the role incremental arguments play in lexical aspect is that their referents "measure out" the progress of the event denoted by the verbal predicate due to some homomorphic mapping between the quantity or extend of the incremental argument and the quantity or extent of the event. The more specific a predicate is about the quantity or extent of the incremental argument the more specific it is about the quantity and extent of the event, from which properties such as telicity and durativity arise.   The homomorphic model of Krifka (1989, 1992, 1998) is arguably the most detailed such model to date, wherein quantity and extent are analyzed in terms of mereological decompositions of individuals and events (building on Link 1983), and homomorphic mappings preserve this structure between incremental arguments and events.

However, work over the last decade and a half has called this approach into question. Zucchi and White (2001) note that there are broad, systematic cases of incremental argument expressions that generate telic predicates yet do not seem to place sufficiently strong constraints on the quantity of their referents, a point which leads Rothstein (2004) to ultimately reject homomorphic models. Kratzer (2004) argues that the class of atelic predicates is more diverse than would be expected on a simple incremental argument approach. Finally, Beavers (2012) demonstrates that many if not all telic predicates have more than one dependent that shows properties of being an incremental argument, a fact incompatible with the standard understanding of incrementality as being associated with one and only one dependent.

In this talk, I address these criticisms and show that a suitably modified homomorphic analysis can overcome many of these objections. I first outline a model of incremental arguments developed in Beavers (2012) that rejects the one incremental argument per predicate assumption, and instead assumes that all potentially telic predicates have not one but two incremental arguments: a theme that undergoes the change described by the predicate and a path or scale that measures the incremental progress of the change undergone by the theme. These two incremental arguments are together mapped homomorphically to the event via a single, ternary thematic relation I call a Figure/Path

Relation (FPR). The FPR determines that both the quantity of the theme and the extent of the path/scale conspire in mutually constraining ways to derive the lexical aspectual properties of the predicate, in particular that of telicity. This analysis in turn provides a way of capturing Kratzer's observations about multiple types of atelic predicates. I then show that an extension of the analysis Zucchi and White apply to their data can be incorporated into the model in a way that overcomes objections to their analysis made by Rothstein (2004). Finally, I show that the FPR also makes correct predictions about the durativity of verbal predicates that crucially require a homomorphic analysis. Thus homomorphic analyses are still viable for analyzing incremental argument effects, and are perhaps even necessary to capture certain facts, albeit only by admitting a broader class of homomorphic relationships than previously assumed.