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A Discussion of Delimitative in Mandarin Chinese

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A DISCUSSION OF DELIMITATIVE IN MANDARIN
CHINESE

by

QI ZHANG

A master's thesis submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Linguistics in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts, The City University of New York

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Qi Zhang

This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in Linguistics
in satisfaction of the thesis requirement for the degree of Master of Arts.

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ABSTRACT

A Discussion of Delimitative in Mandarin Chinese

by

Qi Zhang

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This thesis investigates how delimitative marking in Mandarin Chinese is better considered as an instance of verb-phrase modification instead of aspect marking. The study investigates data with verb reduplication cases caused by delimitative marking from both syntactic and semantic points of view. Through observations and analyses, it is found that delimitative marking does not have the same distribution as other aspect markers, but rather shows resemblance to temporal modifiers syntactically. Semantically, instead of providing a viewpoint as other aspect markers do, delimitative indicates the temporal length (shortness) of the event. In addition, it is found that delimitative marking has strict licensing condition: it only applies to eventive verbs. These findings suggest that delimitative marking is better categorized as a special kind of temporal modifier.

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1 Introduction

The verb-doubling or verb reduplication phenomena in Chinese reflects many aspects of Chinese grammar. In this thesis, I will focus on one particular instance of verb reduplication, which is believed to be caused by delimitative (DLM) marking, from both syntactic and semantic points of view.

Among the various verb reduplication cases, DLM marking will only cause reduplication of the verb, and express a meaning of the event or action denoted by the verb being short:

- (1) ta **kan** le **kan** zhe ben shu
he read PFV read this CL book
He has read this book for a short time.

In (1), the verb ‘*kan*’ (read) is reduplicated, and the event of book reading is understood to have a short duration. According to Li and Thompson (1989), DLM is a type of aspect marker, and the temporal interpretation in (1) is achieved by aspect marking.

The presentation in this thesis will be guided by the following questions: (A) What is the syntactic category, if there is one, of delimitative verb doubling? (B) Relatedly, what restrictions are there on the distribution of DLM verb-doubling? My ultimate conclusion is that the distribution and properties of DLM-doubling resemble those of temporally modified verb phrases, and therefore that DLM-marking, syntactically, is an instance of verb-phrase modification, rather than a marker of aspect, as Li and Thompson (1989) have proposed.

2 Verb-doubling Phenomena in Mandarin Chinese

In Mandarin Chinese, verb (re)duplication or verb-doubling is a fairly common phenomenon. (2-4) show verb or verb phrase reduplication of other types.

- (2) ta **kan** mei **kan** na ben shu?
he read NEG read that CL book

Did he read that book or not?

- (3) **chi**, ta shi **chi** guo le.
eat, he COP eat EXP PFV.

As for eating, he has already ate.

- (4) ni **xi-huan hao-kan-de tu-hua** bu **xi-huan hao-kan-de tu-hua**?
you like gook-looking picture NEG like good-looking picture
Do you like a good-looking picture or not?

In (2), the verb ‘*kan*’ (read) appears once before the negation element ‘*mei*’, and once again after it. Similarly, in (3) the verb ‘*chi*’ (eat) precedes and also follows the subject pronoun and the copula ‘*shi*’. Finally, (4) shows an instance of duplication where the verb and its object (good-looking picture) appear on either side of the negation element ‘*bu*’. Although verb reduplications occur through (1) to (4), only (1) is caused by DLM marking. To set the ground of this paper, in this section, I will look at some of these verb-doubling constructions, and then compare them to DLM.

2.1 The ‘Verb-Negation-Verb’ Structure

One kind of verb-doubling that is commonly used is the Verb-Neg(ation)-Verb structure. This was shown in (2), and in more examples below:

- (5) ta **chi** mei **chi** fan?
he eat NEG eat rice

Did he ate rice or not?

- (6) ta **chi** fan mei **chi** fan?
he eat rice NEG eat rice

Did he ate rice or not?

- (7) ta **chi** fan mei **chi**?
he eat rice NEG eat?

Did he ate rice or not?

- (8) ta **xiang kan** bu **xiang kan** shu?
 he want read NEG want read book
 Does he want to read that book or not?
- (9) ta **kan guo** mei **kan guo** zhe ben shu?
 he read EXP NEG read EXP this CL book
 Has he read this book or not?
- (10) ta **kan guo zhe ben shu** mei **kan guo zhe ben shu**?
 he read EXP this CL book NEG read EXP this CL book
 Has he read this book or not?

The structure shown above is the A-not-A yes/no question structure in Chinese. Each of the questions in (5-10) is an ‘alternative’ question, in the sense that it has one of two possible answers, of opposite polarity. The question in (5), for example, can only be answered with *chi* (‘eat’) or *mei chi* (‘not eat’), and the question in (7), can only be answered with *chi fan* (‘eat rice’) or *mei chi* (‘not eat’). Depending on the expected answer, speakers would have the freedom to choose what part of the verb or verb-phrase gets to occur twice in the question. In other words, the generalized pattern of constructing questions of this kind is to place the negation between the two expected answers. This is summarized as below:

- **Patterns of Verb-Neg-Verb Structure**

- **Verb-NEG-VP.**
- **VP-NEG-VP.**
- **VP-NEG-Verb.**

2.2 The ‘*lian-Verb-dou-Verb*’ Structure

Another structure where verb-doubling is likely to happen is the ‘*lian...dou...*’ structure:

- (11) ta **lian kan** dou **kan** le
 he *lian* look dou look PFV

He has already taken a look.

- (12) ta lian **chi** fan dou **chi** le
he lian eat rice dou eat PFV
He have already had rice.

- (13) ta lian **xiang kan** dou **xiang kan** bu liao
he lian want look dou want look NEG COMP.
(He just wants to see something but) he cannot even want to see it.

The verb reduplication caused by this *'lian-dou'* structure is a method of emphasizing. If the speaker intends to emphasize only the action, then the verb would be doubled and placed between *'lian-dou'* as shown in (11); if the speaker intends to emphasize the complete event, then the verb phrase containing the object would be reduplicated as whole, as shown in (12).

(11-13) exemplify the three schemata shown below, which cover most instances of *'lian-dou'* duplication:

- **Patterns of the 'lian Verb dou Verb' Structure**
 - **lian-Verb-dou-Verb.**
 - **lian-VP-dou-Verb.**
 - **lian-VP-dou-VP.**

2.3 The Cleft Structure

Verb-doubling is also possible in cleft-constructions, as (14-17) show.

- (14) **chi**, ta shi **chi** le.
eat, he COP eat PFV
It was eating, that he has already done.

- (15) **kan** zhe ben shu, ta shi **kan** le.
read this CL book, he COP read PFV
It was reading the book, that he has already done.

- (16) * **kan zhe ben shu**, ta shi **kan zhe ben shu** le.
read this CL book, he COP read this CL book.

Intended meaning: It was reading, that he has already done (to) the book.

- (17) **gei Xiaoming yi ben shu**, Hong shi **gei Xiaoming** le.
give Xiaoming one CL book, Hong COP give Xiaoming PFV

It was giving Xiaoming a book, that Hong has already done.

In this set of data, we can clearly see that, when a copula (COP) is present, the verb or verb phrase can be reduplicated and placed in the beginning of the sentence. In most cases, like (14) and (15), only the verb remains in the main clause following COP, and the object cannot remain in the main clause, as shown in (16). However, (17) shows that when a ditransitive verb is reduplicated, the verb and the indirect object are doubled as a whole. Since the reason behind this particular phenomenon is not my main concern in this paper, I will not examine the grammar behind it. But this piece of data show that hat this kind of reduplication can apply to elements other than the verb itself. The pattern is generalized below:

- **Patterns of the Cleft Structure**

- **Verb-COP-Verb**

- **VP-COP-Verb**

- **VP-COP-VP**

Similar to the *'lian-dou'* structure, this cleft structure also provides emphatic reading of the verb or verb phrase by reduplication: depending on the speaker's intention, the verb or verb phrase can be doubled.

2.4 A Fourth Verb-doubling Phenomenon

The three types of verb doubling structures that I have presented so far share some obvious similarities. First, speakers have the freedom to reduplicate any verb or verb phrase excluding the subject.

As shown in examples above, there are cases where only the verb is reduplicated, as well as cases where both the verb and the object are reduplicated as a whole. Second, the action or event denoted by the first verb/verb phrase receives a sort of emphatic reading.

We may now return to the focus of this thesis: the delimitative doubling construction. Recall that in the introduction section, I have presented examples where only the verb is reduplicated. Here is another example:

- (18) ta xiang **kan kan** na ben shu
he want read read that CL book
He wants to read that book for a bit.

While there appear to be some superficial similarity between DLM and the verb duplication structures discussed earlier, there are in fact important differences. First, DLM formation is limited to doubling the verb alone, never other parts of the VP. This is shown in (19) and (20)

- (19) * ta xiang **kan na ben shu kan na ben shu**
he want read that CL book read that CL book
Intended meaning: He wants to read that book for a bit.

- (20) * ta xiang **kan na ben shu kan**
he want read that CL book read
Intended meaning: He wants to read that book for a bit.

Second, DLM doubling does not contribute any focus or emphasis of the kind seen in the three structures mentioned above. When consulting native Chinese speakers, they reported that they did not get any emphatic readings from such a verb-doubling sentence. On the contrary, such sentences made them feel that the action or the event is of less importance, compared to a plain sentence without this kind of verb reduplication.

3 Current Literature on the delimitative as an Aspect Marker

It is a standard in current literature on Chinese to assume that the language has four major aspect markers: Perfective (PFV), which means that the event has been completed; Experiential (EXP), which also means the event has been completed while the progress of the event is emphasized; Durative (DUR), which is similar to Progressive in English and many other languages and describes the progression the event; and Delimitative (DLM), which means the event is short. The first three aspects are studied and discussed thoroughly by many linguists, but little attention was given to the fourth aspect DLM, which, on the surface, is the fourth kind of verb reduplication that I have presented before.

Chao (1965) first drew attention to this type of verb reduplication and regarded it as a ‘tentative aspect’. In his study, he believed that verbs that are reduplicated with a neutral tone consist a meaning of ‘trying’. For example, *kan kan* (read read) would mean ‘try to have a look’. However, his analysis is strongly related to observation of tonal information in oral Chinese, therefore many other cases in written forms were not included, which resulted in a lack of empirical support.

Li and Thompson (1989) took another strategy and examined this phenomenon based on both written and oral data. The claim is that when the verb, and only the verb, is reduplicated, the sentence takes on the ‘delimitative’ meaning, that is, that the relevant event described by the verb was short. A morpheme *yi* (‘one’) is optionally added in between the two verb copies, but when this *yi* morpheme is present, the syllable following *yi* could be changed into any frequency adverbial and still provides a similar meaning (in addition to the frequency adverbial’s literal meaning):

- A. ni **kan kan** zhe ben shu.
you read read this CL book
you read this book for a bit.

- B. ni **kan yi kan** zhe ben shu.
you read one read this CL book
you read this book for a bit.

C. ni kan yi xia zhe ben shu.
you read one time this CL book
Reading 1: you read this book for a bit.

Reading 2: you read this book for (strictly) one time.

Li and Thompson (1989) also summarized the conditions that license delimitative marking. First, since DLM means short duration, it can only mark activity verbs. Verbs like *da* ‘to hit’, *kan* ‘to read’ and so on can be marked by DLM, while verbs that denote states cannot, like *xiao-xin* ‘to be careful’. Second, action verbs need to be volitional to license DLM. In other words, if the action cannot be completed by the subject’s will or intention, it cannot be marked by DLM. The example they used is *wang* ‘to forget’, and a sentence contains ‘*wang wan*’ is judged ungrammatical. Finally, a resultative verb compound cannot be marked by DLM as well, according to the (only) example they presented:

D * ni **da-kai da-kai** zhe ben shu.
you open open this CL book
Intended reading: you open this book for a bit.

As shown in (D), the verb compound *da-kai* ‘to open’ is reduplicated but judged ungrammatical since it is resultative.

Li and Thompson’s (1989) definition of Delimitative receives relatively wide acknowledgement among linguists who study the Chinese Aspect system. Ljic (1990) mentioned DLM in his study of the Experiential marker *guo*. He elaborated on Li and Thompson’s view and proposed that the action/event be viewed as a continuous succession of instantaneous states. DLM picks out a small amount of these fragmented states therefore providing the ‘little bit’ reading of the event.

Some linguists also mentioned DLM as an aspect marker in heritage Chinese studies. Shi (2011) extended the meaning of DLM in his study of heritage Chinese speakers’ aspect usage in the Netherlands. He proposed that, other than meaning the action being short, it also contains the meaning of attempt, as Chao (1965) has proposed. For example, at least for Dutch heritage Chinese speakers, to ‘read read’ the book also means ‘trying to read the book for a bit’.

Liu (2008) also classified DLM as an aspect marker, and found supporting evidence in pidgin Chinese spoken by Singaporeans to show that it actually occurs in code switching situations as well:

E ta mei shi jiu qu **shopping shopping**.

he Neg thing then go shopping shopping

If he has nothing to do, then he will go shopping for a bit.

As Liu (2008) stated, in a code-switching sentence like (E), pidgin Chinese speakers will mark the verb with a DLM even when the verb is an English one. Similar aspectual marking cases are also found with other Chinese aspect markers (e.g. PFV). Therefore, Liu (2008) suggested that such evidence proves the strong influence of Chinese aspectual marking, including DLM.

In the following sections, I will investigate the properties of DLM more carefully, and show evidence that it is not an aspect marker but a modifier.

4 Is Delimitative an Aspect Marker?

4.1 DLM in Imperative Sentences

The first case I would like to discuss here is imperative sentences. In English, imperative sentences are generally tenseless and aspectless, like ‘Eat your vegetables!’ or ‘Wash your hands.’. It is ungrammatical, on the other hand, to say ‘Reading the book.’ or ‘Have washed your hand.’ as imperative sentences. Like English, a Chinese imperative sentence normally will not contain much temporal or aspectual information, since uttering an imperative sentence usually means to give command at the utterance time:

- (21) (ni) kan zhe ben shu.
(you) read this CL book
(you) (should) read this book.

As one might expect from the behavior of English imperatives, adding aspect markers to (22) results in ungrammaticality:

- (22) * (ni) kan le/guo zhe ben shu.
(you) read PFV/EXP this CL book

Intended meaning: (you) have read this book/complete reading this book.

Li and Thompson (1989) stated that, since DLM-marked events take very short period of time, DLM should also be considered bounded, just like PFV and EXP. If so, then one could expect a DLM marked imperative sentence to be ungrammatical as well. However, data from Chinese show otherwise:

- (23) (ni) **kan kan** zhe ben shu.
(you) read DLM-read this CL book
(you) (should) read this book for a bit.

- (24) wo **kan kan** zhe ben shu.
I read DLM-read this CL book
Let me read this book for a bit.

Unlike (22), (23) and (24) are judged grammatical by native Chinese speakers. When the verb is reduplicated, or marked by DLM, in an imperative sentence, the reading of the sentence would be to conduct/do the action/verb for a little bit, either to a light degree or for a short period of time. The predicted boundedness does not occur in an imperative sentence like (23) or (24). These two examples show that, DLM can be used in a tenseless/aspectual-less sentence, and it might not contain the aspectual (boundedness) information.

4.2 DLM in Habitual-reading sentences

Like imperative sentences, habitual sentences are also considered tenseless/aspectless in general. When describing one's habit of doing something in Chinese, the verb will not be marked by any aspect markers:

- (25) ta kan shu.
 he read book
 He reads books. (Habitual reading)
- (26) ta mei-tian kan shu.
 he everyday read book
 He reads books everyday. (Habitual reading)
- (27) ta zhou-mo kan shu.
 he weekend read book
 He reads books on weekends. (Habitual reading)

(25)-(27) are habitual sentences. In (25), the subject ‘he’ has a habit of reading, but there is no other information about this habit. In (26), the universal temporal modifier ‘everyday’ provides frequency information of his reading habit: he reads and this reading event occurs everyday. In (27), although there is no universal temporal modifier, speakers of Chinese will easily get the frequency information from the noun ‘weekend’. Since there is no plural morphemes in Chinese, nouns without specific classifiers are considered mass nouns, and are interpreted as all individuals that of that kind. In other words, the bare noun ‘weekend’ here refers to ‘all weekends’ in general. Therefore, (27) is grammatical and means ‘he has a habit of reading books on all weekends’.

Habitual sentences in Chinese are generally incompatible with overt aspect marking, as shown below.

- (28) * ta mei-tian kan le shu.
 he everyday read PFV book.
 Intended meaning: He has read books everyday.
- (29) ?? ta zhou-mo kan le shu.
 he weekend read PFV book.
 He has read books on a/some weekend(s).

For (28), due to the universal quantifier ‘every’, the event is required to be recurring. But this recurrence is blocked by the presence of PFV, and this causes (28) to be ungrammatical. Interestingly, for (29), since PFV requires the reading event to have been completed by the utterance time,

‘weekend’ here is no longer habitual; instead, it becomes episodic, and the hearer of (29) is very likely to demand more information to specify on which weekend or weekends has the subject read books. These examples show that, when marked by aspect, habitual readings are unavailable.

However, DLM is compatible with habitual sentences:

(30) ta mei-tian **ti ti** qiu
he everyday kick DLM-kick ball
He plays football for a little bit everyday. (Habitual reading)

(31) ta mei ge zhou-mo **ti ti** qiu.
he every CL weekend kick DLM-kick ball
He plays football for a little bit every weekend. (Habitual reading)

In (31), the verb reduplication means that the habit being described is ‘to play football for a short time’. Unlike PFV-marked sentences, there is no completion of the event in (31), therefore the habitual reading is not blocked. In comparison to (29), when there is no universal quantifier to indicate the recurrence of the event, DLM is still allowed if the habitual reading is mentioned in the conversational background:

(32) A: ta zhou-mo tong-chang zuo shen-me?
he weekend usually do what
What does he like to do on weekends?

B: ta zhou-mo **ti ti** qiu.
he weekend kick DLM-kick ball
He plays football a little bit on weekends.

In a conversation like (32), when the habitual reading is already set the conversational background, then a sentence like (32.B) is strong enough to support the verb reduplication. This provides evidence that when a strong enough habitual reading is present, verb reduplication, or DLM, is also allowed.

So far, we can see that, unlike other aspect markers in Chinese, DLM can appear in a habitual sentence, if there is a universal modifier or conversational background to enforce the habitual

reading. This piece of evidence also sets DLM aside from other aspect markers in Chinese.

4.3 DLM and Modals

Another interesting property of DLM is that it can also co-occur with deontic modals. Usually, when we have a sentence with the modal ‘must’, or in Chinese, ‘*bi-xu*’, two readings will arise:

(33) ta bi-xu zai jia.
he must be-at home

Reading 1: He must be home (according to some regulations.)

Reading 2: He must be home (according to given evidence.)

Reading 1 here is the deontic reading, which means that according to some rules or regulations, ‘he’ is obligated to stay home. Reading 2 is the epistemic reading, which means that there is evidence, e.g. the light or sound from the house, pointing to the conclusion that he is staying at home right now.

Aspect markers like PFV or EXP can be used with the modal ‘*bi-xu*’, but only the epistemic reading will be available:

(34) ta bi-xu kan le/guo zhe ben shu.
he must read PFV/EXP this CL book

He must have read this book. (Epistemic reading)

According to native Chinese speakers’ responses, (34) means that there are signs or evidence to show that ‘he’ has finished reading this book, and no other meaning can be derived. This means that when an aspect marker is used with ‘*bi-xu*’, the deontic reading will be blocked.

If DLM were also an aspect marker, we would expect that the same would happen when it is used with ‘*bi-xu*’. However, data show otherwise:

(35) ta bi-xu **kan kan** zhe ben shu.
he must read DLM this CL book

He must read this book for a bit.

When the verb *kan* ‘read’ in (35) is reduplicated, the only available reading would be the deontic one. As reported by native Chinese speakers, the meaning of (35) can only be that the subject ‘he’ is obligated to read the book, but just for a short time. The epistemic reading is impossible with only DLM marking.

It is clear that, when used with modals, the other bounded aspects can only derive epistemic reading, while DLM only drives deontic reading. This piece of evidence also points to the grammatical difference between DLM and other aspect markers in Chinese.

4.4 DLM and Temporal Modifiers

Many linguists have claimed that Chinese is a tense-free language with rich aspectual markers. Temporal information of a sentence or an event is not provided by tense morphemes, but by adding in temporal modifiers, such as temporal adverbials or prepositions. A basic Chinese declarative sentence consists of the following elements: subject, verb, aspect marker, object and temporal modifier. Some examples of declarative sentences are listed below:

- (36) ta zuo-tian kan le zhe ben shu.
he yesterday read PFV this CL book
He has read this book yesterday.
- (37) shang ge xing-qi, ta zai kan zhe ben shu.
up CL week, he read DUR this CL book
He was reading this book last week.
- (38) ta kan guo yi-ci zhe ben shu.
he read EXP one-time this CL book.
He has read this book for one time/once.

If DLM is one of the major aspect markers in Chinese, then it should fulfill the grammatical/selectional role that other aspect markers play in sentence structure. There is thus no reason to expect sentences like (39-41) to be ungrammatical, but they are.

- (39) * ta zuo-tian **kan kan** zhe ben shu.
 he yesterday read DLM-read this CL book.
 Intended meaning: He read the book for a bit yesterday.
- (40) * shang ge xing-qi, ta **kan kan** zhe ben shu.
 up CL week, he read DLM-read this CL book
 Intended meaning: He read this book for a bit last week.
- (41) * ta **kan kan** yi-ci zhe ben shu.
 he read DLM-read one-time this CL book
 Intended meaning: He read this book for a bit for once.

These examples show that, unlike other aspect markers, DLM cannot simply occur with a temporal modifier in a declarative sentence.

4.5 Interim Conclusion I

In this section, I have presented data to show that DLM is quite different from other aspect markers. If DLM is an aspect category that marks boundedness, just like PFV or EXP, then it should have similar distribution. However, in most situations, DLM does not pattern with other aspect markers at all: Generally, aspect markers do not appear in imperative sentences, but DLM can. Aspect markers do not occur in habitual reading sentences, while DLM do if the habitual reading is strong enough. When used with the modal *bi-xu*, other bounded aspect markers can only derive the epistemic reading, while DLM can only derive the deontic meaning. Lastly, all other aspect markers can and always do exist in simple declarative sentence with temporal modifiers, but DLM cannot. These pieces of evidence support my original hypothesis: DLM might not be part of the Chinese aspect family at all. In the next section, I will discuss the licensing conditions of DLM.

5 Licensing conditions of DLM

In Li and Thompson (1989), DLM is described to have three licensing conditions: first, DLM only applies to action verbs; second, DLM only applies to volitional verbs; third, multi-character resultative verbs cannot license DLM. In this section I will re-examine these claims.

5.1 Stative Verbs

In the first subsection, I will present data with only stative verbs. They will be put into two categories: verbs with only one character and verbs with two characters. Within the second category, the double-character verbs are further divided into two sub-categories: within one verb, the two characters have balanced semantic weights, which means that both characters have the meaning of the verb, or the two characters have unbalanced semantic weights, which means that only one character contains the meaning of whole verb phrase.

- **Single-Character Stative Verbs**

Stative verbs such as ‘love’, ‘know’ usually describe the state that the subject is in. Since states are, by their semantics, unbounded, there are not required to co-occur with an aspectual marker of completion.

(42) ta ai zhe ge ren
he love this CL person
He loves this person.

(43) ta ai le/guo zhe ge ren (yi nian)
he love PFV/EXP this CL person (one year)
He has loved this person (for a year).

Both (42) and (43) are considered grammatical. The difference between these two sentences is that, in (42) the state of loving is not understood to have terminated, while in (43) the state of loving has already ended by the utterance time. As we can see from (43), a temporal modifier may

be used to describe the length of the state. Since DLM also describes the length (or shortness) of the event/action, it is logical to predict that, if we reduplicate the verb *ai* in (43) and remove the temporal modifier, the sentence would mean that the loving state is short and has ended by the utterance time. However, such a sentence is ungrammatical:

- (44) * ta **ai** le **ai** zhe ge ren
he love PFV DLM this CL person

Intended meaning: He has loved this person for a bit/for a short while.

The ungrammaticality like (44) is not an individual example. Data show that when marked by other markers, i.e., future marker (FUT) or light-verbs (which means the verb is about to happen), verb reduplication is still banned if the verb is a single syllable stative verb:

- (45) ta hui ai zhe ge ren
he FUT love this CL person

He will love this person.

- (46) * ta hui **ai ai** zhe ge ren
he FUT love DLM this CL person

Intended meaning: He will love this person for a bit/for a short while.

- (47) ta lai ai zhe ge ren
he light-verb love this CL person

He comes to love this person.

- (48) * ta lai **ai ai** zhe ge ren
he light-verb love DLM this CL person

Intended meaning: He comes to love this person for a bit/for a short while.

(45)-(48) show that, although the stative verb *ai* can be accompanied by different markers and adjust the viewpoint of the state accordingly, verb reduplication is always unwelcome. Since the ungrammaticality is not caused by the markers, the only possible trigger would be the verb type: DLM or verb reduplication is forbidden to apply to a single character stative verb.

- **Two-Character Stative Verbs**

There are multiple structures of Chinese two-character verbs. The two most common types, as I refer here, are the semantically balanced verbs and the semantically unbalanced verbs.

A semantically balanced compound verb contains two characters, each of which is a verb individually. The two characters share a highly similar meaning, if not exactly the same, and when combined together, they form this new verb which still inherits the original meaning from the two characters. Sometimes the compound verb will have a more specific or narrower meaning compared to its parts (the two characters), but the general idea always remains the same.

A semantically unbalanced compound verb, on the other hand, contains also two characters but each has a different meaning. Unlike semantically balanced ones, in a semantically unbalanced verb, the two characters need not be verbs individually. Combinations of a verb and a noun are a common pattern as well. No matter what component it has, such a compound verb will only inherit the meaning from one of the characters, and the other character often serves as a filler, a place-holder or provider of more detailed information of the verb.

One example of a semantically balanced stative verb is *xi-huan* ('to like'). As described above, the two characters, *xi* and *huan*, are both verbs individually and both means 'to like something/someone', and are commonly seen in idioms or classical Chinese literature:

(49) ta zong-shi xi xin yan jiu.
he always like new hate old
He always likes new things but hates old things.

(50) cheng huan, wu suo hen ye.
really like, NEG for hate SP
...(he) truly likes it, and there's nothing to complain about it at all.

Again, like a single-character stative verb, *xi-huan* can be marked by an aspect to specify the viewpoint of the state, or be in its bare form to describe an unchangeable state:

(51) ta xi-huan zhe ge ren
he like this CL person
He likes this person.

- (52) ta xi-huan le zhe ge ren (hen jiu)
he like PFV this CL person (very long)
He has liked this person (for a very long time).

The relevant question for us regarding these verbs is whether they can be marked by DLM, and in what way. The judgments that I elicited show that balanced two-character stative verbs may not be DLM-marked, either by duplicating one of its characters (53-54), or by duplicating both of them (55):

- (53) * ta **xi xi-huan** zhe ge ren. (reduplicate the first character)
he DLM like this CL person
Intended meaning: He likes this person a little bit.
- (54) * ta **xi-huan huan** zhe ge ren (reduplicate the second character)
he like DLM this CL person
Intended meaning: He likes this person a little bit.
- (55) * ta **xi-huan xi-huan** zhe ge ren (reduplicate the whole verb)
he like DLM this CL person
Intended meaning: He likes this person a little bit.

As shown above, all three cases are rejected by Chinese speakers' intuitive judgements. It is clear that, semantically balanced stative verbs follow the patterns of single character ones. Now I will turn to semantically unbalanced verbs.

There are very few stative verbs that are semantically unbalanced. The example used here is the verb *mao-si*, which means 'look like'. Within this verb, the first character, '*mao*', means 'face' or 'appearance', which contains no actual semantic meaning in the verb. The second character '*si*' literally means 'look like', and sometimes can be used as a single character verb that has the same meaning as the word *mao-si*, while the first character '*mao*' cannot be used as a verb:

- (56) zhe mei jing si yi fu ming hua.
this beautiful view look-like one CL famous painting
The beautiful view here looks like a famous painting.

- (57) *zhe mei jing mao yi fu ming hua.
this beautiful view look-like one CL famous painting
Intended meaning: The beautiful view here looks like a famous painting.

Examples of this verb compound *mao-si* are shown as below:

- (58) ta mao-si yi ge ming-ren
he look-like one CL celebrity
He looks like a celebrity.

- (59) ? ta hui mao-si yi ge ming-ren
he FUT look-like one CL celebrity
Intended meaning: He will look like a celebrity (if he will have a plastic surgery someday).

Since the verb *mao-si* describes a state of an object's physical appearance, which by default is highly unlikely to change throughout time, it seems that any view point marker will be difficult to apply to it, unless a strong enough background story is provided (as shown in parentheses in (59)). Despite the fact that this verb might not be the perfect example, it still patterns with other stative verbs that I have presented before.

In these cases too, DLM marking is unacceptable as (60) shows; reduplicating the 'weight carrying' syllable produces an ungrammatical construction:

- (60) * ta **mao-si si** yi ge ming-ren
he look-like DLM one CL celebrity
Intended meaning: He looks like a celebrity for a little while.

It is also difficult to repair (60) with a background story. For example, if the subject puts on heavy make-up and dresses like a celebrity at a party, and if he does it for a short period of time, speakers still find (60) quite awkward as a description in this context. The ungrammaticality is not caused by not being able to rationalize the reading, but by grammar itself.

So far, the data above show that, it is not grammatical to mark the delimitative on stative verbs via reduplication. However, there are exceptional cases and I will present data and discuss the phenomena in the following section.

• **Exceptional Cases of Doubled Stative Verbs**

As I have discussed, DLM marking is forbidden with stative verbs. However, there are exceptional cases, in which the stative verb is marked by DLM via verb reduplication, but the reading of the sentence changes:

- (61) ta hui xi-huan zhe ge ren ma?
 he FUT like this CL person QM
 Will he like this person? (as in keep the state of being in love or fall in love)
- (62) ta hui **xi-huan xi-huan** zhe ge ren ma?
 he FUT like DLM this CL person QM
 Will he just like this person for a bit/for real quick? (as in fall in love)

The verb *xi-huan* (like), as a stative verb expressing the state of a fond emotion, should be predicted ungrammatical in (62). However, in (62), when *xi-huan* (like) refers to the instant action of becoming fond of something or falling in love with someone, DLM can be used to mean that the ‘becoming’/‘falling’ event happened within a short period of time. More interestingly, in (61), where *xi-huan* is in its bare form, it has two meanings. When DLM is used in (62), it disambiguates the sentence by canceling out the stative reading.

This phenomenon of ‘shift’ or ‘coercion’ is also seen in idioms. Consider the following examples:

- (63) Xiaoming he Xiaohong tan-qing shuo-ai
 Xiaoming and Xiaohong talk-emotion say-love
 Xiaoming and Xiaohong are in a romantic relationship.
- (64) Xiaoming he Xiaohong **tan le tan-qing shuo le shuo-ai**
 Xiaoming and Xiaohong talk PFV DLM-emotion say PFV DLM-love
 Xiaoming and Xiaohong have been on a short date.

Generally speaking, the idiom ‘*tan-qing shuo-ai*’ means being in a romantic relationship, as shown in (63). When used alone, it rarely means that there are actual dating scenes going on unless other conversational background is given. However, when DLM is used (with PFV) as in

(64), the reading of this sentence only focuses on the dating event. The stative meaning of the verb phrase is cancelled and the eventive reading is forced out easily. In other words, as long as an eventive reading is possible, DLM should be able to apply.

5.2 Eventive Verbs

Based on the exceptional cases in stative verbs, it is easy to deduce that DLM should be able to apply to all eventive verbs. In Li and Thompson (1989), two restrictions relating to eventive verbs were mentioned: firstly, only volitional verbs can carry DLM, and secondly, resultative verb compounds cannot carry DLM. Here I will present non-volitional verbs and resultative verb compounds to show that, when the verb is an eventive verb, then verb reduplication can occur.

Non-volitional verbs depict actions or events that cannot be controlled by the agent's or subject's will. In Li and Thompson's (1989) argument, since DLM also has a 'try to do' meaning in most cases, therefore only volitional verbs can license DLM. However, when a non-volitional eventive verb needs to present the meaning of 'happening for a little bit', verb reduplication does occur.

The first non-volitional sample verb is *xia-yu* ('to rain'). Since this is a weather verb, the lack of an agent or subject ensures the action of raining cannot be controlled by will. This verb is a semantically unbalanced one, in which the first character carries the verbal meaning, therefore the reduplication happens to the first character only:

(65) **xia** le **xia-yu** hua jiu kai le.
rain PFV DLM flower then open PFV.

It has rained for a bit then the flowers has blossomed.

The verb *xia-yu* is not an isolated example. Another non-volitional verb, *hui-fu* ('to recover/heal') also reduplicates when expressing the 'little bit' meaning. The only difference is that, for *hui-fu*, which is a semantically balanced verb, reduplication applies to the whole verb:

- (66) jiao zai **hui-fu hui-fu** jiu bu teng le.
 leg more recover DLM then NEG hurt PFV
 The leg recovers a little more then it won't hurt any more.

(65) and (66) show that, with non-volitional verbs, as long as they are eventive, then DLM can be applied. The same happens to resultative verb compounds:

- (67) ta **tai** le **tai-gao** ta de tui.
 he raise PFV DLM ta POS leg
 He has raised his leg for a short time.

- (68) ta **ti-ba ti-ba** le zhe ge xin-ren.
 he raise PFV DLM this CL newbie
 He has raised this newbie's position/job title in a short period of time.

(67) and (68) are examples of how resultative verb compounds reduplicate when in need to express the 'little bit' meaning. In (67), the verb compound raise, which is a semantically unbalanced verb and the first character carries the core meaning, the first character reduplicates, while in (68), the verb compound reduplicates as a whole since it is a semantically balanced one.

From these data we can see that, as long as the verb is eventive, DLM can apply. The only difference lies in the reduplication manner: for a semantically balanced verb compound, reduplication happens to the core verb only; for single-character verbs or semantically unbalanced verb compounds, reduplication happens to the whole verb/verb compound.

5.3 Interim Conclusion II

In this section, I presented data to show that, DLM only applies to eventive verbs. Although there are exceptional cases with stative verbs, the only reason that DLM applies is because of the availability of eventive reinterpretations of the stative verbs. For eventive verbs, on the other hand, there is no restrictions if the reduplication manner is correct.

6 Hypotheses on the Grammatical Category of Delimitative

So far I have collected data and provided evidence to show that DLM is not an aspect marker, and it only applies to eventive verbs. The more important question to ask is, if DLM is not an aspect marker, then what it is?

One possibility is that DLM, or the reduplicated verb, serves as a special temporal modifier, and is very closely related to frequency modifiers. Several early studies concerning DLM, including Li and Thompson (1989), have mentioned that an optional morpheme *yi* can be inserted between the two verbs, which strongly resembles the use of frequency modifiers in both form and meaning:

- (69) ni **kan yi kan** zhe fu hua.
you look yi DLM this CL picture
you take a look at this picture for a bit.
- (70) ni kan yi-xia zhe fu hua.
you look one-time this CL picture
you take a/one look at this picture.

(69) is a DLM marked imperative sentence with a *yi*-morpheme inserted in between the two verbs. (70) is an imperative sentence without DLM marking, but instead has a frequency modifier *yi-xia* ('one-time'). Li and Thompson (1989) used a set of similar examples to argue that, the reduplicated verb could be changed into any Chinese frequency classifier, which can quantify events or actions, and the meaning of the whole verb phrase remains unchanged, as shown in (69) and (70). This observation reveals that DLM is somewhat related or similar to frequency modifiers. Specifically, it appears that DLM marking occurs in the same linear position as frequency modifiers.

In Chinese, the slot between the verb (including its aspectual marker) and its object is picky. Most prepositional phrases cannot be placed in between the verb and its object. For example, a temporal prepositional phrase like 'last week' can be placed either in the front of the verb or at the beginning of the whole sentence, but inserting it in between the verb and the object is robustly

ungrammatical:

(71) ta shang-xing-qi kan le zhe ben shu.
he last-week read PFV this CL book
He has read this book last week.

(72) shang-xin-qi ta kan le zhe ben shu.
last-week he read PFV this CL book
He has read this book last week.

(73) * ta kan le shang-xing-qi zhe ben shu
he read PFV last-week this CL book
Intended meaning: He has read this book last week.

However, FMs only occur between the verb and the object, as (70) shows above. The only other element that can show up in this position is the reduplicated verb caused by DLM, as shown in (69). One might argue that the reduplicated verb can be seen as a morpheme or element that attaches to the verb, like aspect markers or part of a verb compound, which does not take the same position as the FM. Data show otherwise:

(74) * ni **kan kan** yi-ci zhe ben shu.
you look DLM one-time this CL book
Intended meaning: You take a look at this book for a bit.

(74) shows that, when DLM and FM both apply to an imperative sentence, which does not need any aspectual marking, ungrammaticality occurs. Such ungrammaticality is also found in sentences with more than one FM:

(75) * ni kan yi-ci ji-yan zhe ben shu.
you look one-time some-eye this CL book
Intended meaning: You take a look at this book for several times.

Based on (74), we can see that the reduplicated verb and the FM compete for one same slot. (75) shows that this slot will only take one element at a time. The element that qualifies to fit in

this position is either a FM or the reduplicated verb caused by DLM. In other words, both DLM and FM occur in the same linear position in a sentence.

- **Observation 1:**

Reduplicated verb and frequency modifiers occur in the same linear position.

Another similarity between DLM and FMs is that they both cannot apply to stative verbs.

(76) * ta ai (le) ji-ci zhe ge ren.
he love (PFV) some-time this CL person

Intended meaning: He (has) loved this person for several times.

(77) * ta **ai** (le) **ai** zhe ge ren.
he love (PFV) DLM this CL person

Intended meaning: He (has) loved this person for a short time.

Ungrammaticality in (76) and (77) is caused by quantifying a state. Since states are not events, and usually do not have a specified starting and ending point, therefore one cannot count frequencies of occurrences of that state. The same happens with using DLM. DLM also requires a starting and ending point since it specifies the shortness of an action or event. This supports the claim that DLM and FMs have the same restrictions when choosing verbs to apply to.

- **Observation 2:**

Both DLM and FM do not apply to stative verbs.

It is worth noting here, like DLM, the exceptional stative verbs which I have discussed in the previous section also occurs with FMs:

(78) Xiaoming he Xiaohong tan le ji-ci qing, shuo le ji-ci ai.
Xiaoming and Xiaohong talk PFV some-time emotion, say PFV some-time love
Xiaoming and Xiaohong has been on a few dates.

As I have explained before, the idiom ‘*tan qing shuo ai*’ in (78) means ‘be in a relationship’ and is considered a stative verb. When DLM applies, the stative meaning will fade and an eventive

meaning of ‘to date someone’ is forced out. In (78), when a FM *ji-ci* (‘several times’) applies to this idiom, the only reading reserved is the eventive one. Such example also provides evidence that DLM and FM might be in the same grammatical category.

Our final comparison between DLM and FM has to do with their ability to block ‘for’-phrases. ‘For’-phrases usually start with the word *wei-le*, but there are variants that begin with the wh-item *wei-shen-me*. The core meaning of these phrases is ‘for certain reason/people’s sake’. Syntactically, these ‘for...’ phrases are adjuncts of the verb phrase, therefore they can appear either preceding or following the verb phrase:

(79) *wo wei-le ni kan zhe ben shu.*
I for you read this CL book
I read this book for your sake/because of you.

(80) *ni kan zhe ben shu wei-le shui?*
you read this CL book for who
For whose sake do you read this book?

As shown in these two examples, the ‘for...’ phrase can be placed on either end of the verb phrase. However, when FM or DLM applies to the verb phrase, the ‘for...’ phrase is banned:

(81) **wo wei-le ni kan kan / yi-ci zhe ben shu.*
I for you read DLM / FM this CL book
Intended meaning: I read this book a little bit/for one time because of you.

(82) **ni kan kan / yi-ci zhe ben shu wei-le shui?*
you read DLM / FM this CL book for who
For whose sake do you read this book for a bit/for one time?

If we reduplicate the verb *kan* or add a FM *yi-ci* to quantify the reading event in (79) and (80), the sentences become ungrammatical, as shown in (81) and (82). The reason behind this blocking effect might not be syntactic, since multiple prepositional phrases are allowed within one Chinese sentence. Moreover, it seems that ‘for...’ phrases cannot scope over a DLM or FM modified verb phrase:

(83) Ming kan Hong ti qiu zuo-shen-me?
 Ming watch Hong kick ball do-what
 Reading 1: Why does Ming watch Hong kicking the ball?

Reading 2: Ming is trying to find out why Hong kicks the ball.

(83) has two readings. In (83), ‘*zuo-shen-me*’ is considered a ‘for..’ phrase since it seeks the reason behind either event: Ming watching or Hong kicking the ball. If we interpret the ‘for..’ phrase at the matrix level, the reading will be a question asking ‘why does Ming watch Hong kicking the ball’. If we interpret the ‘for..’ phrase as modifying the embedded clause ‘Hong kick ball’, then the reading will be ‘Ming tries to find out for what reason Hong is kicking the ball’.

However if we apply FM/DLM to (83), the ambiguity disappears:

(84) Ming **kan kan** / yi-xia Hong ti qiu zuo-shen-me.
 Ming watch DLM / FM Hong kick ball do-what
 Ming tries a bit/for one time to find out why Hong kicks the ball.

If we reduplicate the matrix level verb *kan* or add a FM *yi-ci* to it, as shown in (84), the only available reading will be Reading 2 in (83). The ‘for..’ phrase cannot be interpreted at the matrix level. A parallel disambiguation results from applying FM/DLM to the embedded clause:

(85) Ming kan Hong **ti ti** / yi-xia qiu zuo-shen-me.
 Ming watch Hong kick DLM / FM ball do-what
 Why does Ming watch Hong kicking the ball for a bit/one time?

As shown in (85), when the sub-clause event is modified by a DLM or FM, the ‘for..’ phrase can only be interpreted as modifying the matrix verb.

• **Observation 3:**

Both FMs and DLM block the ‘for..’ phrase.

These data show that both DLM and FM can block the scoping effect of a ‘for..’ phrase, which can serve as another piece of evidence to show that, DLM and FM belong to the same grammatical category.

- **Interim Conclusion III**

In this section, I presented data and collected three pieces of evidence to show that DLM should belong to the same grammatical category as frequency modifiers. Based on observations and comparisons between DLM and FMs, it is clear to see that they both occur in the same linear position of a Chinese sentence, fail to apply to stative verbs and can block ‘for...’ phrases.

However, these pieces of evidence do not prove that DLM is a frequency modifier. Since DLM contains the meaning of an event being short, there is no indication of how many times the action or event repeats. Unlike frequency modifiers such as *yi-ci* (one time) or *ji-xia* (several times), the number of the action being repeated is not important for a DLM marked verb phrase. As long as the temporal length of the event taking place is short, compared to normal expectations, then applying DLM is grammatical. In this sense, DLM is like a combination of frequency modifier and a temporal length modifier: from a grammatical point of view, both syntactic and semantic, DLM behaves like a frequency modified. Semantically, DLM adds that the event it describes has short duration, similarly to other temporal length modifiers.

7 Conclusion

In this paper, I presented a brief discussion of the grammar behind a specific Chinese verb reduplication phenomenon known as Delimitative. Compared to other instances of verb reduplication in Chinese, DLM only reduplicates the verb, while other focus-related reduplications also allow reduplicating the whole verb phrase. Moreover, DLM is the only form of reduplication that does not have any focus meaning or emphasizing information on the verb. These differences distinguish DLM from other cases of duplication, and bring interesting questions about its properties. I have raised three research questions regarding to DLM’s grammatical properties, and presented data to answer them accordingly.

The first research question is whether DLM is an aspect marker. Former studies of DLM regarded it as a bounded aspect marker, which means that the action has a short duration time and has several restriction of application. In this paper, I presented data to show DLM is not an aspect marker, and there is only one restriction of application. According to data, DLM can exist in imperative and habitual reading sentences, while other aspect markers, such as PFV or DUR cannot. Moreover, when used with the modal *bi-xu*, DLM allows deontic readings, while other aspect markers can only allow the epistemic reading. These data point to the fact that DLM and other aspect markers should belong to different grammatical categories.

The second research question relates to the licensing conditions of DLM. In most current literature, DLM is said to have several restrictions. However, data showed that there is only one restriction in general: DLM only applies to eventive verbs. Although exceptional cases where DLM applies to some stative verbs exist, in those cases, the stative reading of the verb is cancelled and an eventive reinterpretation is forced out. That is to say, when the verb is eventive or has an eventive reading, DLM can be licensed.

The third question I explored in this paper is what grammatical category does DLM belong to. I proposed that DLM is best analyzed as a kind of temporal modifier. Semantically, DLM application means that there is a bounded restriction for the length of the event, which is similar to temporal modifiers such as ‘for a week’ or ‘for three minutes’. On the other hand, DLM shares a lot of similarities with frequency modifiers: they both occur in the same linear position in a sentence, fail to apply to stative verbs and can block ‘for...’ phrases. That is to say, DLM should be at least considered as a special kind of temporal modifier.

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