

# A Basic Network of the Chinese Verbs: Scale and Aspect

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Constructions in a language should be connected through a well-motivated network (Goldberg 1995, 2006). Furthermore, the grammar of every language (Croft 2001) may have a different system. As a language without grammatical tense, the Chinese verbal constructions are fundamentally connected through a multi-dimensional system of scale and aspects. First of all, over 15% (Tao and Thompson 1994, Guo 2004) of the Chinese verbs cannot co-occur with the perfective aspect marker. Thus, Chinese verbs can be divided into two major kinds, temporally changeable and unchangeable. The changeable verbs can be subdivided into two classes, telic and atelic. On the one hand, the atelic verbs are comprised of still another two kinds, scalar and non-scalar ones similar to those noted by Kennedy and Levin (2008) in other languages. Depending on a given context, an atelic verb such as *hao* “good” can be either a scalar verb co-occurring with a degree modifier *hen* “very” *wo hen hao*/\**wo hao* “I am well”, or a non-scalar verb in *ni hao*/\**ni hen hao* “hello”. Separable words 离合词 (Lu 1957) also belong to this atelic category. On the other hand, the telic verbs are further divided into multi-point closed scale and two-point closed scale (Peck, Lin, and Sun 2015). The former includes predicates such as *sha-le Li Si* “killed Li Si” that is scalar in nature, as it is possible to say in Chinese *sha-le Li Si jici Li Si dou mei si* “\*killed Li Si several times (but) he did not die.” As is revealed by the ungrammatical direct English translation, such a temporal structure is not available in the English *kill*. The two-point closed scale verbs refer to instantaneous events that are mostly made up by resultative verb compounds such as *da-si* “hit to death”. Finally, there is a perfective marker *-le* that is in complementary distribution with its negator *mei(you)* that signals negation of perfective meaning. Interestingly, no scalar atelic verb can co-occur with the perfective *-le*, *\*hen xihuan-le ta* “\*very liked her.” It will be demonstrated through the co-occurrence constraints with degree modifier *hen*, the perfective *le*, negators *bu* and *mei(you)* as well as other features indicative of a basic network linking the Chinese verbal constructions. Speech time as a basic point of reference in English motivated various forms signaling past tense, present tense or future tense. Instead, Chinese verbal constructions are linked up through a network of concepts relating to the notions of 变 “change” and 度 “scale”, thus 不可变 non-changeable, 可变 changeable, 无度无变 non-scalar atelic, 有度无变 scalar atelic, 多度有变 multi-point telic, 单度有变 two-point telic, and 已变 perfective.