Title:	The Distribution of Aspect Markers and Aspectual Verb Types in Chinese
Author keywords:	Chinese aspectual system Aspect marking Aspectual verb types Situation types Corpus-based study
Abstract:	Chinese has no tense, but it has a very rich aspectual system with several aspect markers. Unlike the compulsory tense/aspect marking in many languages, aspect marking in Chinese is optional and the occurrences of aspect markers depend on several factors, including: the aspectual type of the verb, the structure of the sentence, the information structure, etc. There has been a large amount of literature on the inter-relationship between aspect marking and verb types/different situation types (Vendler, 1967; Dowty, 1979; Smith, 1997; among others). There has also been some literature on the distribution of aspect markers among verbs of different aspectual types in Chinese (Ma, 1981 ; Chen, 1988 ; Guo, 1993 ; Yang, 1995; Dai, 1997; among others). However, the previous studies on Chinese aspect markers are mostly based on a small amount of data. The only corpus-based study (Xiao & McEnery, 2004) examined only the situation types of sentences which contain aspect markers, and sentences which do not contain aspect markers were excluded from examination, which, we believe, does not provide us with a complete view of the occurrence patterns of aspect markers among verbs of different types.

In the present study, we examined the distribution of four major Chinese aspect markers le, guo, zai and zhe in three corpora, each containing around 250,000 words, representing three different discourse types: fiction, news reports and conversations. We first developed a database of verb classification based on criteria such as [±durative], [±dynamic], [leading to result], [encoding result], etc. (Smith, 1997; Vendler, 1967; Yang, 1995, 2009, 2011). The database was then used to automatically tag the aspectual nature of all verbs in the three corpora. We then examined all the verbs type by type to find out the co-occurrence patterns of all the aspect markers and all the verbs in the corpora. The identified patterns show that each and every of the features [±dynamic], [±durative], [±telic], [leading to result] and [encoding result] we used to classify verbs is closely related to the presence/absence of the aspect markers.

The findings allow us to provide both quantitative and qualitative descriptions of aspect marking in Chinese. Our discussion of the findings will contribute to the development of a general theory of aspect as well as to our understanding of the specific characteristics of the Chinese aspectual system.

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