

# THE COMPOSITION OF THE PERFECTIVE IN MANDARIN CHINESE

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## ABSTRACT

This dissertation focuses on one of the many structures of Mandarin in which a series of verbs are concatenated. In the context of aspectual studies, there has been little scholarship on the perfective aspect values of the directional and resultative verb compounds (henceforth DVC and RVC respectively). The aspectual nature of the directional verb complements (*shang, xia, jin, chu, hui, guo, kai, qi, and lai, qu*) was totally overlooked until 1992, when the Chinese grammarian Fang treated them as the perfective aspect particles. However, the exact nature of the aspectual meaning of the directional verb complements is frequently unclear. A detailed study of the aspectual properties of the DVC and RVC constitutes the main part of this dissertation. The grammatical perfective aspect particle *le* is also examined. Confusions about its aspectual meanings are clarified in view of the compositional nature of aspectual meaning. The functions of its interactions with the DVC are studied as well.

Analysis of grammatical aspect particles is done in the two-component theory proposed by Smith (1991), which is represented with a composite temporal schema of aspect and situation type. The aspectual properties of the DVC and RVC are studied in terms of aspectual structure developed by Tenny (1994).

In this framework, resultative and directional verb compounding are viewed as operations over aspectual structure. They are aspectual operations whereby the MEASURE aspectual role of a resultative complement, and the PATH, TERMINUS or the MEASURE aspectual role of (a) directional complement(s) are added to the empty aspectual role grid of the simplex verb (mainly an Activity) they combine with. As a result, the verb compound acquires the MEASURE or the PATH, TERMINUS aspectual role and converts to a complex Accomplishment. As such, the DVC and RVC describe telic situations. In a past context, or in combination with the perfective *le*, they denote attainment of a goal, thus contributing to the perfective meaning of a sentence.

Resultative and directional verb compounding represent a highly productive process that relies on the property of delimitedness. They are clearly instances of grammaticalization of the telic notion in Chinese. They contribute to the perfective reading of a sentence.