



Chinese Dialect Map

TABLE 1.2
INITIALS

MANNER OF ARTICULATION PLACE OF ARTICULATION	UNASPIRATED STOPS		ASPIRATED STOPS		UNASPIRATED AFFRICATES		ASPIRATED AFFRICATES		NASALS		FRICATIVES		VOICED CONTINUANTS	
	IPA	Pinyin	IPA	Pinyin	IPA	Pinyin	IPA	Pinyin	IPA	Pinyin	IPA	Pinyin	IPA	Pinyin
Bilabials	p	b	p ^h	p						m	m			
Labio-dentals											f	f		
Dental-alveolars	t	d	t ^h	t	ts	z	t ^{sh}	c	n	n	s	s	l	l
Retroflexes					tʂ	zh	tʂ ^h	ch			ʂ	sh	ʐ	r
Palatals					tʃ	j	tʃ ^h	q			ç	x		
Velars	k	g	k ^h	k							x	h		

CHAPTER 6

Aspect

The verbal category presented in this chapter expresses what linguists call *aspect*, that is, different ways of viewing a situation. The category of aspect is very different from that of tense: a marker of *tense* relates the time of the occurrence of the situation to the time that situation is brought up in speech. In English, for example, we have past tense, as in

- (1) I proposed a toast.

where the suffix *-ed* signals that the act of proposing took place before the time of speaking. Mandarin has no markers of tense. The language does not use verb affixes to signal the relation between the time of the occurrence of the situation and the time that situation is brought up in speech.

Aspect, on the other hand, refers, not to the time relation between a situation and the moment of its being mentioned in speech, but, rather, to how the situation itself is being viewed with respect to its own internal makeup.¹ To take an example, first let's look at an English sentence:

- (2) Rosco was reading when I came in.

Here, two events are expressed in past tense. The first verbal complex, *was reading*, however, differs strikingly from the second verbal complex, *came in*, in terms of the way the two situations are viewed. The second verbal complex presents the totality of the situation referred to (the speaker's coming in) without reference to its internal temporal constituency; the entire situation is viewed as a single, unanalyzable whole. When a language has special verbal forms to indicate

this viewing of an event in its entirety, we say that that form expresses *perfective* aspect. In Mandarin, the marker for perfective aspect is *-le*, but perfective aspect can also be expressed by a "perfectivizing expression" (see section 6.1).

The first verbal complex in (2), *was reading*, on the other hand, does not present the situation of Rosco's reading in its entirety, but instead makes explicit reference to the internal makeup of "reading", presenting it as ongoing, referring neither to its beginning nor its end, but to its duration. Verbal markers signaling this ongoing-duration aspect constitute one type of the aspect, referred to as *imperfective*, which we might call *durative*. In Mandarin, the imperfective durative markers are *zài* and *-zhe* (see section 6.2).

In addition to *-le*, *zài*, and *-zhe*, there is a fourth verbal aspect marker in Mandarin, *-guo*, which is an *experiential* aspect, indicating that a situation has been experienced (see section 6.3).

Finally, there is a *delimitative aspect* category that is expressed, not by a particular morpheme, but by the reduplication of the verb (see section 6.4).

The verbal aspects in Mandarin, then, are:

1. Perfective: *-le* and perfectivizing expressions
2. Imperfective (durative): *zài*, *-zhe*
3. Experiential: *-guo*
4. Delimitative: reduplication of verb

Let's look at each of these verbal aspects in more detail.

6.1 The Perfective Aspect

Any description of the verbal aspect marker *-le* must begin with the caveat that it is important to keep the perfective aspect distinct from the sentence-final particle *le* (which is written without the hyphen in this book). The sentence-final particle *le* and sentences containing both *-le* and *le* are described in chapter 7.

6.1.1 Where to Use *-le*: A Bounded Event

We have said that the verbal aspect suffix *-le* expresses perfectivity, that is, it indicates that an event is being viewed in its entirety or as a whole. An event is viewed in its entirety if it is *bounded* temporally, spatially, or conceptually. There are essentially four ways in which an event can be bounded:

- A. By being a quantified event
- B. By being a definite or specific event

- C. By being inherently bounded because of the meaning of the verb
 D. By being the first event in a sequence

We will discuss each of these in turn.

A. A Quantified Event

An event can be viewed as bounded when temporal, spatial, or conceptual limits are placed on it. What this means grammatically is that a verb typically will occur with *-le* if the event signaled by the verb is limited by overt phrases naming the extent to which that event occurred, the amount of time it took, or the number of times it happened. For example:

- (3) tā shuì - le sān - ge zhōngtóu
 3sg sleep - PFV three - CL hour

S/He slept for three hours.

- (4) wó zài nàlǐ zhù - le
 I at there live - PFV

liǎng - ge yuè
 two - CL month

I lived there for two months.

- (5) yǐjīng rěn - le zhème duō
 already endure - PFV that many
- nián, wó huì zài rěn - xiàqu
 year I likely more endure - continue

I have already tolerated it for so many years, I can go on tolerating it.

- (6) diàn - dēng liàng - le hěn duō
 electric - light bright - PFV very much

The electric light got a lot brighter.

- (7) wó bā gǒu dā - le yī dùn
 I BA dog hit - PFV one time

I gave the dog a beating.

- (8) wó bā mén tī - le sān jiǎo
 I BA door kick - PFV three foot

I gave the door three kicks.

- (9) dírén wàng hòu chètùì - le
 enemy toward back retreat - PFV

èr - shí lǐ
 two - ten mile

The enemy fell back twenty miles.

- (10) nǐ gāo - le yídiǎn
 you tall - PFV a:little

You've gotten taller.

- (11) tā zuótiān lái de wǎn - le yídiǎn
 3sg yesterday come NOM late - PFV a:little

Yesterday s/he came a little late.

- (12) jīntiān gùpiào hángshì dī - le yídiǎn
 today stock market lower - PFV a:little

The stock market fell slightly today.

Sometimes the quantified event is a state whose limits are set by a phrase expressing the extent to which the subject is in that state. Sentences (13) and (14) illustrate these bounded states:

(13) zhèi — ge dìfang bu cuò
 this — CL place not bad

jùshì chǎo — le yídiǎn
 just noisy — PFV a:little

This place is not bad, it's just a little noisy.

(14) tā niánji bǐ wǒ dà — le
 3sg age COMP I great — PFV

jǐ — shí suì
 several — ten years

S/He is older than I by a few decades.

The following two examples can each have two interpretations, depending on whether the adjective describes a process or a state:

(15) a. (discussing how a friend has changed since his/her last visit)

tā pàng — le yídiǎn
 3sg fat — PFV a:little

S/He's gotten a little fatter.

b. (talking about candidates for a volleyball team)

tā pàng — le yídiǎn
 3sg fat — PFV a:little

S/He's a little (too) fat.

(16) a. (talking about a laundry mishap)

chènshān xiǎo — le sān cùn
 shirt small — PFV three inch

The shirt got smaller (i.e., shrank) by three inches.

b. (trying on clothes)

chènshān xiǎo — le sān cùn
 shirt small — PFV three inch

The shirt is (too) small by three inches.

Sentence (17) provides a good illustration of the contrast between just naming an event and presenting it as a unified whole by quantifying it:

(17) Zhāngsān zài bówùguǎn mén — kǒu děng Lǐsì.
 Zhangsan at museum door — mouth wait Lisi

děng — le sān — shí fēnzhōng
 wait — PFV three — ten minute

Zhangsan waited for Lisi at the entrance to the museum for thirty minutes.

The first mention of *děng* 'wait' is not presented as an event viewed in its entirety but simply names the event; it cannot take *-le*. The second mention of the verb, however, is bounded by a phrase stating the amount of time the 'waiting' took; here *-le* is required.

Similarly, a verb with a specified quantity of the direct object will also typically occur with *-le* because the quantified direct object serves to bound the event signaled by the verb. For illustration, consider sentences (18)–(25):

(18) tā shuō zuìjìn dàxué gài —
 3sg say recently university build —

le bù shǎo de xīn sùshè
 PFV not few NOM new dormitory

S/He said that the university had recently built many new dormitories.

(19) nèi — ge jǐngchá duì wǒ xíng
 that — CL police:officer to I perform

— le yī — ge lì
 — PFV one — CL salute

That police officer saluted me.

- (20) tā jīntiān mǎi — le hěh duō shū
 3sg today buy — PFV very many book

S/He bought a lot of books today.

- (21) tā zài miànbǎo — shang mó — le
 3sg at bread — on spread — PFV
- yídiǎn niú — yóu
 a:little cattle — oil

S/He spread a little butter on the bread.

- (22) wǒ fā — le tā wǔ kuài qián
 I fine — PFV 3sg five dollar money

I fined him/her five dollars.

- (23) tāmen fā — le wǔ — shí —
 they issue — PFV five — ten —
- ge qǐngtiē
 CL invitation

They sent out fifty invitations.

- (24) zhèi huí kǎoshì wǒ dé — le
 this time exam I obtain — PFV
- bā — shí fēn
 eight — ten point

I got eighty points on this exam.

- (25) qiáng — shang guà — le
 wall — on hang — PFV
- yī — fú huà
 one — CL painting

A painting { was hung }
 { had been hung } on the wall.

Sentence (26) is an interesting and typical example with *-le* in which the amount of time spent is expressed grammatically by a quantification of the object component of the verb-object compound *tán-tiān* 'discuss-universe = chat' (see section 3.2.5 of chapter 3 on verb-object compounds):

- (26) wǒmen tán — le yī yè
 we discuss — PFV one night
- de tiān
 — ASSOC universe

We talked all night.

What these examples show is that it is perfectly normal to use *-le* where the message being communicated has to do with bounding an event by naming a specific quantity of the direct object. It is crucial, however, to notice that *speakers can differ* in their judgment about how much a quantified direct object serves to bound an event. For example, take a sentence such as (27):

- (27) tā jiā yāng — le yī — ge
 3sg home raise — PFV one — CL
- hěn kě — ài de xiǎo māo
 very can — love NOM small cat

His/Her family had a very lovable little cat.

Some native speakers feel that *-le* is not necessary: in other words, they don't feel strongly that the quantified direct object, *yī-ge hěn kě-ài de xiǎo māo* 'a very lovable little cat', renders the event bounded. Some native speakers feel that when *-le* is used, (27) represents the beginning of a sequence of utterances about the small cat; in other words, they view the event as bounded, not because of the quantified direct object, but because it is the first in a sequence. Of course, many native speakers feel that sentence (27) is fine as it stands; they view the event as bounded simply because of the presence of the quantified direct object.

A recent experiment makes this point nicely.² A story containing sentence (28) was presented to sixty-two native Mandarin speakers. The author of the story had

written the sentence with the *-le*, but only one-third of the subjects thought the *-le* was necessary:

(28) hūrán zūfù xū — le yi kǒu qì
suddenly grandfather heave — PFV one mouth air

Suddenly, grandpa heaved a sigh.

What this example shows is that speakers can have different views about how bounded an event is, and this will determine whether they decide to use *-le* in certain situations. Those who would use the *-le* in sentence (28) feel that it is important to the message conveyed by the sentence that what grandpa gave was *one* sigh, while those who wouldn't use *-le* here feel that the fact that he sighed is more important than the sigh itself.

B. Definite or Specific Event

An event will also often qualify as bounded if the direct object is understood as a definite noun phrase (see section 4.2.5 of chapter 4 for a discussion of definiteness). Once again, the decision to use *-le* depends on the extent to which the event is judged by the individual speaker to be bounded. Here is an example showing various types of definite direct objects:

(i) Name:

(29) wǒ pèng — dào — le Lín Huì
I bump — arrive — PFV Lin Hui

I ran into Lin Hui (where the important information in the context is whom I ran into).

(ii) Pronoun:

(30) nǐ huī — le nǐ zìjǐ
you ruin — PFV you self

You destroyed yourself.

(iii) Genitive modifier:

(31) tā ráo — le tā — de
3sg spare — PFV 3sg — GEN

dírén le
enemy CRS

S/He spared his/her enemy.

(iv) Demonstrative Modifier:

(32) wǒ xiǎng — chu — lái — le
I think — exit — come — PFV

nèi — ge zì
that — CL character

I remembered that character.

(v) Relative clause modifier:

(33) A: nǐ zěnmē zhīdào Shànghǎi yǒu yī
you how know Shanghai exist one

— qiān — wàn rén ?
— thousand — ten:thousand person

How do you know Shanghai has ten million people?

B: yīnwèi wǒ kàn — le xīn
because I see — PFV new

chūbǎn de zīliào
publish NOM material

Because I looked at the newly published figures.

(vi) Noun phrase with *bā*:

(34)	tā	bā	chē	mài	—	le
	3sg	BA	car	sell	—	PFV

S/He sold the car.

Here is an example from Spanos (1977:45), which shows another way in which *-le* signals the specificity of an event.

(35)	tā	wèn	wǒ	zuótiān	wǎnshàng	zuò	(-le)	shénme?
	3sg	ask	I	yesterday	evening	do	—PFV	what

S/He asked me what I did last night.

In this sentence, out of thirty-nine speakers asked, only seven thought the *-le* should be there, while thirty-two felt it should not. Once again, though, speakers' judgments on this question depend crucially on the nature of the message they imagine the sentence is conveying. With *-le* the event is viewed as bounded and thus as specific; the subject of the sentence, *tā* 's/he', was asking for a specific list of activities in which the speaker of the sentence engaged, as if *tā* were a nurse in charge of making sure the speaker didn't do too much. Since this is a rather unusual speech context, it is no wonder that only seven people out of 39 thought *-le* should be used. Without *-le*, on the other hand, the sentence is quite neutral and implies that *tā* was just making casual conversation. Since this latter case corresponds to a very natural situation, it is reasonable that the majority of speakers would think of this as the most natural context for the sentence and would judge that it should have no *-le*.

As another illustration of the same point, we might contrast (36) *a* and *b*:

(36) a.	tā	xiě	—	cuò	—	le	nèi
	3sg	write	—	wrong	—	PFV	that
		—	ge	zì			
		—	CL	character			

S/He wrote that character wrong.

b.	tā	xiě	—	cuò	nèi	—	ge
	3sg	write	—	wrong	that	—	CL
		zì	le				
		character	CRS				

S/He has written that character wrong (as I thought s/he would).

Sentence (36) *a*, with *-le*, would be used in a context in which *nèi-ge zì* 'that character' was being singled out, for example, because it is being contrasted with another character that s/he wrote correctly. Sentence (36) *b*, without the perfective *-le*, on the other hand, would be used in a context in which what is important is not *nèi-ge zì* 'that character' as opposed to some other character, but the current relevance of the fact that s/he wrote the character wrong. Our translation suggests one of the possible ways in which this state of affairs might be currently relevant (see chapter 7 for more discussion on current relevance and the sentence-final particle *le*).

The fact that speakers do not agree on matters like this is often frustrating to people trying to learn Mandarin and to linguists trying to analyze Mandarin, who wish that a hard-and-fast "rule" could be stated. It is important to realize, however, that there *is* a rule, but that this rule depends on what the speaker judges to be the significant information the sentence is conveying in the context in which it is used. The reason that speakers disagree when they are presented with sentences in isolation is because they have to imagine what the real conversational situation might be, and they might come to different conclusions on this point. The rule that they actually use in talking to each other is simply this: When the overall conversation makes it important to emphasize the information in the definite direct object, either because one wants to go on to talk about it or because it contrasts with some other possible item that could have been mentioned, *-le* must be used.

C. Verbs with Inherent Bounded Meaning

Some verbs represent specific, bounded events by virtue of their meaning. One such verb is *sǐ* 'die', which has its end point built into its meaning. Another such verb is *wàng* 'forget':

(37)	tā	qù	—	nián	sǐ	—	le
	3sg	last	—	year	die	—	PFV

S/He died last year.

- (38) wǒ wàng — le tā — de dìzhǐ
I forget — PFV 3sg — GEN address

I forgot his/her address.

We should notice that the inclusion of the end point in the meaning of such verbs as *sī* 'die' and *wàng* 'forget' is an idiosyncrasy of Mandarin Chinese, not a universal feature of all languages of the world. For example, the English verb 'die' does not have the end point of dying included in its meaning, and therefore it is possible to use the verb in a durative aspect, as shown in (39):

- (39) S/He is dying.

Because of the inclusion of the end point of dying in the meaning of the Mandarin verb *sī* 'die', however, it cannot occur in the durative aspect; thus sentence (40), the Mandarin counterpart of sentence (39), is unacceptable:

- (40) *tā sī — zhe
3sg die — DUR

For the same reasons, the English verb 'forget' may, but its Mandarin counterpart, *wàng*, may not occur in the durative aspect, as shown by the acceptable English sentence (41) and the unacceptable Mandarin sentence (42):

- (41) S/He is forgetting his/her French.

- (42) *tā wàng — zhe tā — de Fǎwén
3sg forget — DUR 3sg — GEN French

Because they are inherently bounded, then, verbs such as *sī* 'die' and *wàng* 'forget' generally occur with the perfective aspect marker *-le*. An exception to this generalization is the use of such verbs to describe a situation that is not part of reality, called the *irrealis mode*. Irrealis mode in English is typically conveyed by the infinitive verb phrase following such verbs as *want*, *like*, *prefer*, *hope*, *expect*, and so forth; (43) is an example:

- (43) S/He { wanted } to die
 { wants }

The Mandarin counterpart of (43) is this:

- (44) tā yào sǐ³
3sg want die
S/He { wanted } to die
 { wants }

In (44) *sǐ* is in the irrealis mode. Irrealis verbs in general do not occur with the perfective aspect marker *-le* because they are not describing events viewed in their entirety.

Further examples in which the inherent meaning of the verb specifies its own end point are given in sentences (45)–(49). The verbs in these sentences generally occur with *-le*, except when they are used in the irrealis mode.

- (45) tā shuì — zhào — le ma?
3sg sleep — succeed — PFV Q

Did s/he fall asleep?

- (46) huǒ miè — le
fire go:out — PFV

The fire went out.

- (47) gǎizi diào — le
lid fall:off — PFV

The lid fell off.

- (48) zhèi — ge yǐzi huài — le
this — CL chair broken — PFV

This chair broke.

- (49) zhàdàn zhà — le
bomb explode — PFV

The bomb exploded.

D. First Event in a Sequence

Sometimes an event is bounded by being the first event in a sequence, where what is important is that after one event has taken place, another one happens or a new state materializes. In such cases, the first event is of interest as an unanalyzed whole; the speaker signals that its occurrence is *bounded* by the subsequent event. In these instances *-le* is used, and the sentence can often be translated with 'after', 'when', or 'now that' in English.

- (50) wǒ chī — wán — le nǐ chī
I eat — finish — PFV you eat

After I have finished eating, then you eat.

- (51) wǒ kàn — wán — le bào ,
I read — finish — PFV paper

jiù shuì
then sleep

When I finish reading the paper, I will go to sleep.

- (52) tā shuō de hěn qiáomào ,
3sg say CSC very skillful

ràng rén tīng —
let person hear —

le bu huì shēngqì
PFV not likely angry

S/He talks very skillfully so that when people hear him/her they don't get angry.

- (53) zěnmē pèng — le bēizi yě bu hē ?
how bump — PFV glasses also not drink

How come after you have touched glasses, you still don't drink?

- (54) chū — le zhèi — ge
exit — PFV this — CL

jiǎnchá — shì , wàitōu jiù
examination — room outside then

yǒu yínháng gùitai
exist bank counter

When you go out of this customs room, just outside there is a bank counter.

- (55) yǒu — le nèi — ge
exist — PFV that — CL

rìguāng — dēng , chúfáng
sun:light — lamp kitchen

jiù liàng duō le
then bright much CRS

Now that (they) have that fluorescent light, the kitchen is much brighter.

- (56) tā kāi — le mén , nǐ jiù
3sg open — PFV door you then

jìn — qu
enter — go

{ When } s/he opens the door, you go in.
{ If }

- (57) wǒ pào — le chá hē
I brew — PFV tea drink

I made some tea to drink.

(58)	wō	-	de	yǎnjīng	yǒu	máobing	kàn
	I	-	GEN	eye	exist	trouble	see
		-	duō	-	le	shū	
		-	much	-	PFV	book	
	jiu	bu	shūfu				
	then	not	comfortable				

I'm having trouble with my eyes; after I've read a lot, they don't feel good.

Sentence (50) nicely illustrates the independence of aspect from tense: both of the actions in (50) may be in the future at the time the sentence is spoken. Sentences (51), (53), and (56) show that the direct object doesn't need to be quantified in order for *-le* to appear if the event is the first in a sequence. Now, however, this raises an interesting point: there is often something strange and 'unfinished' about a sentence containing *-le* and a simple unquantified direct object noun. Thus, by themselves, sentences like the following seem incomplete and odd:

(59)	?wō	lǐ	-	le	fā
	I	cut	-	PFV	hair
	I had a haircut.				
(60)	?wō	hē	-	le	chá
	I	drink	-	PFV	tea
	I drank tea.				

The reason for this is not hard to understand: a simple unquantified direct object noun is usually indefinite and even nonreferential, and normally a simple verb phrase with such a direct object is *not* bounded. That is why such sentences need to be bounded by the addition of either a following clause or a sentence final particle *le* indicating current relevance (see chapter 7 for a discussion of *le*). Thus, for example, (59) becomes perfectly acceptable in contexts where it is followed by

another clause, as in (61), or where it occurs with *le*, signaling 'currently relevant state', as in (62):

(61)	wō	lǐ	-	le	fā	jiu	qù	sànbù
	I	cut	-	PFV	hair	then	go	take:walk
	I will take a walk as soon as I finish my haircut.							
(62)	wō	lǐ	-	le	fā	le		
	I	cut	-	PFV	hair	CRS		

I (have) had a haircut.

Sometimes, in the right context, an adverbial expression can serve the function of bounding the event. For example, in a situation in which the issue is *when* s/he got a haircut, sentence (63) could be used; similarly, if it is known that s/he got rich, but the issue is *where*, then sentence (64) would be appropriate:

(63)	tā	<u>zǎoshang</u>	lǐ	-	le	fā	
	3sg	morning	cut	-	PFV	hair	
	S/He got a haircut in the morning.						
(64)	tā	<u>zài</u>	<u>Jiāzhōu</u>	fā	-	le	cái
	3sg	at	California	issue	-	PFV	wealth

S/He got rich in California.

The important point to be drawn from this discussion is that understanding the grammar of a sentence always involves understanding how that sentence relates to the context in which it occurs. In this case, it is clear that a sentence describing an event never occurs in a vacuum, but is always embedded in some larger conversation or discourse context. Whether a sentence expresses a bounded event depends to a great extent on the nature of the conversation of which that sentence is a part.

So far we have seen that the conditions for the use of *-le* are quite straightforward: *-le* is used when the event described by a sentence is perfective, which means that the event is bounded, and an event is bounded (1) if its temporal or spatial limits are specified, (2) if it signals a specific event and its direct object is

definite, (3) if boundedness is inherent in the meaning of the verb of the sentence, or (4) if it is followed by another event.

For a clear understanding of the function of *-le*, it is equally important that we be aware of where *-le* cannot be used. The following section is devoted to this issue.

6.1.2 Where Not to Use *-le*

A. Semantic Conditions for *-le* Not Fulfilled

First, *-le* is never used with verbs expressing states that do not represent bounded events:

(65) wō xihuān (*-le) mùguā
I like -PFV papaya

I like papaya.

(66) tā xìng (*-le) Wú
3sg surname -PFV Wu

S/He is named Wu.

(67) nēi - ge dìfang hěn ānjing (*-le)
that - CL place very quiet -PFV

That place is very quiet.

(68) wō shì (*-le) nǐ - de gēge
I be -PFV you - GEN older:brother

I am your older brother.

For the same reason, *-le* does not occur with verbs denoting ongoing actions:

(69) tā shǒu - li ná - zhe
3sg hand - in hold - DUR

(*-le) shū
-PFV book

S/He is holding a book in his hand.

(70) tā zài liú (*-le) húzi
3sg DUR keep -PFV beard

He is growing a beard.

In other words, perfective *-le* is incompatible with the durative aspect markers *zài* and *-zhe* (see section 6.2 of this chapter) because the meanings of perfective (bounded) and durative (unbounded) aspect are incompatible.

Perfective *-le* is also incompatible with habitual or repeated events, since these are not bounded events viewed as a whole. For example, (71) and (72), signaling habitual events, are not acceptable with *-le*:

(71) tā tiān - tiān huí - qu (*-le)
3sg day - day return - go -PFV

S/He goes back every day.

(72) tā píngcháng mǎi (*-le) hěn duō shū
3sg usually buy -PFV very many book

S/He usually bought a lot of books.

Nor do we find *-le* with "potential" forms of resultative verb compounds (see section 3.2.3 of chapter 3 for discussion of these compounds). Because these forms refer to general states of ability or inability rather than to events viewed in their entirety, *-le* is not compatible with the potential forms. Thus, sentences (73)–(76), which contain resultative verb compounds with a potential infix, are unacceptable with *-le*:

(73) tā yā - bu - zhù (*-le) xuéshēng
3sg press - can't - hold:on -PFV student

S/He can't suppress the students.

(74) wǒ lā - bu - kāi (*-le) mén
I pull - can't - open -PFV door

I can't pull the door open.

(75)	nī	kàn	—	de	—	jiàn	(* <u>-le</u>)
	you	see	—	can	—	perceive	-PFV
		tā	—	de	liǎn	ma?	
		3sg	—	GEN	face	Q	

Can you see his/her face?

(76)	wǒ	jiǎng	—	de	—	guò	(* <u>-le</u>)	tā
	I	talk	—	can	—	pass	-PFV	3sg

I can outtalk him/her.

Perfective *-le* is also incompatible with the experiential aspect suffix *-guo* (see section 6.3 of this chapter for discussion of this point), as the following sentences show:⁴

(77)	wǒ	chī	—	guo	—	(* <u>-le</u>)	bǎlā
	I	eat	—	EXP	—	-PFV	guava

I have eaten guava before.

(78)	tā	qù	—	guo	(* <u>-le</u>)	Xiānggāng
	3sg	go	—	EXP	-PFV	Hong Kong

S/He has been to Hong Kong.

Finally, *-le* in general does not occur in negative sentences.⁵ Compare the *a* and *b* forms of the following pairs:

(79) a.	zhǐ	mài	—	guāng	—	le
	paper	sell	—	gone	—	PFV

The paper was sold out.

b.	zhǐ	méi	mài	—	guāng	(* <u>-le</u>)
	paper	not	sell	—	gone	-PFV

The paper wasn't all sold out.

(80) a.	tā	bō	—	cuò	—	le	hàomǎ
	3sg	dial	—	wrong	—	PFV	number

S/He dialed the wrong number.

b.	tā	méi	bō	—	cuò	(* <u>-le</u>)	hàomǎ
	3sg	not	dial	—	wrong	-PFV	number

S/He didn't dial the wrong number.

(81) a.	tā	mài	—	le	nèi	sān
	3sg	sell	—	PFV	that	three

—	zhī	jī
—	CL	chicken

S/He sold those three chickens.

b.	tā	bu	mài	(* <u>-le</u>)	nèi	sān
	3sg	not	sell	-PFV	that	three

—	zhī	jī
—	CL	chicken

S/He wouldn't sell those three chickens.

It is easy to see why *-le* does not occur in negative sentences: the meaning of negative sentences—that some event does not take place or that some state of affairs does not obtain—is incompatible with the meaning of *-le*, which is to signal a bounded event. An event that does not occur, of course, cannot in general be bounded (but see section 6.1.3 of this chapter for *-le* in negative imperatives; also see chapter 12 for further discussion of negation and aspect.)

B. A Perfectivizing Expression Takes the Place of *-le*

Often the conditions for the use of perfective *-le* would appear to be satisfied, and yet no *-le* appears. For example, (82)–(85) are four sentences expressing

bounded events viewed in their entirety, yet none has *-le*:

- (82) tā cóng fángzi — lí zǒu
3sg from house — in walk

dào Zhāngsān nàr
to Zhāngsān there

S/He walked from his/her house over to Zhangsan's place.

- (83) wǒ bǎ shōubiāo fàng zài chōuti — lí
I BA watch put at drawer — in

I put the watch in the drawer.

- (84) wǒ jì gěi tā yī — fēng xìn
I mail to 3sg one — CL letter

I sent him/her a letter.

- (85) wǒ xiào de zhàn — bu
I laugh CSC stand — can't

— qǐ — lái
— rise — come

I laughed so hard that I couldn't stand up.

Why do these sentences have no *-le*? The answer is that each contains *another* element that does the job of "perfectivizing" the verb. That is, each of the underlined morphemes or phrases in the above sentences serves to perform the same function that *-le* does, namely, to signal that the event is to be viewed as a complete whole. In (82)–(84), the perfectivizing expressions are the directional phrase *dào Zhāngsān nàr* 'to Zhangsan's place', the locative phrase *zài chōuti-lǐ* 'in the drawer', and the indirect object phrase *gěi-tā* 'to him/her', which put boundaries on the events of walking, putting, and sending by specifying their spatial limits. In (85) the perfectivizing expression is the complex stative phrase *de*

zhàn-bu-qǐ-lái 'so much that I couldn't stand up' (see chapter 22), which bounds the event of laughing by naming the extent to which it happened.

6.1.3 *-le* in Imperatives

Most of the time, imperatives do not have *-le*. The following examples of imperatives, for instance, do not have *-le*:

- (86) ná nǐ — de wàiyī
take you — GEN coat

Get your coat!

- (87) nǐ shāo zhèi dùn fàn
you cook this time food

You make the meal!

- (88) dì gěi wǒ nèi — ge tiáogēng
hand to I that — CL spoon

Hand me that spoon!

-Le can, however, be used in imperatives when there is some urgency about the action taking place, especially when something is to be disposed of or gotten rid of; (89)–(90) are examples:

- (89) yàn — le nèi — ge yào —
swallow — PFV that — CL medicine —

wánzi
pill

Swallow that pill!

- (90) hē — le nèi bēi yào
drink — PFV that cup medicine

Drink that cup of medicine!

Sometimes *-le* contrasts with the resultative verb ending *-diào* 'off' in an imperative, where *-le* expresses more urgency. For example:

(91) a. (neutral)

guān	—	<u>diào</u>	tā
turn:off	—	off	3sg

Turn it off (e.g., the radio).

b. (very irritated)

guān	—	<u>le</u>	tā
turn:off	—	PFV	3sg

Get rid of that noise (e.g., on the radio)!

(92) a. (neutral)

cā	—	<u>diào</u>	tā
erase	—	off	3sg

Erase it.

b. (with urgency)

cā	—	<u>le</u>	tā
erase	—	PFV	3sg

Get rid of it (e.g., what's on the blackboard)!

(93) a. (neutral)

tuō	—	<u>diào</u>	tā
take:off	—	off	3sg

Take it off (e.g., your ring—I want to try it on).

b. (with intensity)

tuō	—	<u>le</u>	tā
take:off	—	PFV	3sg

Take it off (e.g., your ring—I believe that you should never wear it again)!

(94) a. (neutral)

dào	—	<u>diào</u>	tā
pour	—	off	3sg

Pour it out.

b. (with intensity)

dào	—	<u>le</u>	tā
pour	—	PFV	3sg

Pour it out (once and for all and be done with it)!

The *-le* in these examples always correlates with a message in which it is the end point of an action that is important. When an action is to go on for a while, then no *-le* is used, and the verb may be reduplicated (see section 6.4 below):

(95) (taking a picture)

xiào	—	yi	—	xiào	(*-le)
smile	—	one	—	smile	-PFV

Smile a little!

Here is a pair of examples which illustrates this point. If someone wants you to open the door and leave it open, s/he could say:

(96)	kāi	—	<u>kāi</u>	mén
	open	—	open	door

Open the door a little!

If, however, the speaker wants you to get a bottle of soda open once and for all, then s/he might say:

(97) kāi — le tā
open — PFV 3sg

Open it!

In negative imperatives, with *bié* 'don't', it is also normal not to find *-le*, as (98)–(100) show:

(98) bié guān mén
don't close door

Don't close the door.

(99) bié jiā jiàngyóu
don't add soy:sauce

Don't add $\left\{ \begin{array}{l} \text{the} \\ \text{any} \end{array} \right\}$ soy sauce.

(100) bié dào chá
don't pour tea

Don't pour tea.

There is one type of situation in which *-le* must be used in a negative imperative, though, and that is when the imperative is a *warning* to the listener. Sentences (101)–(103) are examples:

(101) bié pèng — le lúzi
don't touch — PFV stove

Don't touch the stove!

(102) bié zhuàng — le gǒu
don't run:into — PFV dog

Don't run into the dog!

(103) bié tūn — le gútou
don't swallow — PFV bone

Don't swallow the bone!

The contrast can be seen clearly if we look at pairs of negative imperatives with and without *-le*:

(104) a. bié qiān — míng
don't sign — name

(You) don't (need to) sign your name.

b. bié qiān — le míng
don't sign — PFV name

Don't sign your name (I'm warning you)!

Sentence (104) *b* means 'Watch it, something bad will happen if you sign your name', but (104) *a* isn't a warning. The case is similar in this pair:

(105) a. bié xuǎn nèi — táng kè
don't select that — CL course

Don't take that course (I wouldn't bother if I were you).

b. bié xuǎn — le nèi — táng kè
don't select — PFV that — CL course

Don't take that course (you'll be sorry if you do).

Now, why is it that *-le* has the effect of making the negative imperative into a warning? The reason has to do with the sequencing function of *-le*, which we discussed above in section D of 6.1. An event in a negative imperative by itself is not a likely candidate for a bounded, or *perfective*, event, since the speaker is actually urging that it *not* happen. Therefore, we should expect never to find *-le* in negative imperatives. When *-le* does occur, however, we know that because the event can't be bounded in and of itself, it must be bounded by a following event,

which may or may not be expressed. Thus, to take (105) *b*, for example, a possible following clause, which could either be expressed or assumed, is provided in (106):

- (106) bié xuǎn — le nèi — táng kè,
 don't select — PFV that — CL course
 nǐ yòu gēn — bu — shàng
 you again keep — can't — ascend

Don't take that course; you won't be able to keep up again.

The same is true for all the other examples of *bié* imperatives with *-le*: they are always incomplete and must be understood in terms of a following clause, either assumed or actually present, giving the adverse consequences if the warning in the *bié* clause is not heeded. In many cases, the negative consequences are obvious enough that they don't need to be mentioned, as in the earlier example (101):

- (101) bié pèng — le lúzi
 don't touch — PFV stove

Don't touch the stove!

Here, since the natural setting would be one in which the stove is too hot to touch, it would generally be unnecessary to add in a following clause the information that the hearer would be burned otherwise. The implication is still 'or else . . .', but the hearer can fill in the rest. When it is not as clear why the warning is being given, then the following clause becomes more necessary. For example, if the warning is not to answer the phone, the reasons might not be clear. In such a case, the following clause specifying the consequence is more likely to occur:

- (107) bié jiē — le diànhuà , burán nǐ
 don't answer — PFV telephone otherwise you
 yòu yào shēngqì
 again will angry

Don't answer the phone; otherwise you'll get angry again.

We see, then, that the use of *-le* in warnings follows naturally from its use to signal the first event in a sequence. The second event that serves to bound the first

one is often understood and therefore not explicitly stated in a natural speech context.

6.1.4 *-le* Does Not Mean Past Tense

By now we have seen a number of examples showing that *-le* does not signal past tense. To recapitulate, we find *-le* in such non-past perfective sentences as imperatives:

- (108) hē — le tā
 drink — PFV 3sg

Drink it.

- (109) bié dā — pò — le bēizi
 don't hit — broken — PFV glass

Don't break the glass.

in sentences indicating simple futures:

- (110) míngtiān wǒ jiu kāichú — le tā
 tomorrow I then expel — PFV 3sg

I'll expel him/her tomorrow!

and in future or conditional sequence-of-action sentences:

- (111) wǒ chī — le fàn zài zǒu
 I eat — PFV rice then go

I'll go after I eat.

- (112) tā kāi — le mén , nǐ jiu
 3sg open — PFV door you then
 jìn — qu
 enter — go

{When
 If} s/he opens the door, you go in.

Furthermore, we know that many sentences expressing past events need not have any *-le*. For example, bounded events with perfectivizing expressions don't take *-le*:

- (113) zuótiān tā tiào zài chuáng — shang
yesterday 3sg jump at bed — on

Yesterday s/he jumped onto the bed.

- (114) tā bǎ ròu qiē — chéng xiǎo kuài
3sg BA meat cut — become small piece

S/He cut the meat into small pieces.

Events that are not explicitly bounded, however, also do not occur with *-le*, even if they refer to past time:

- (115) tāmen qiántiān jiào wǒ zài zhèlǐ děng
they day:before:yesterday tell I at here wait

The day before yesterday, they told me to wait here.

- (116) zuótiān yè — lǐ wǒ mèng
yesterday night — in I dream
— jiàn wǒ mǔqīn
— perceive I mother

Last night I dreamed about my mother.

- (117) nèi — běn shū shì wǒ xiě de
that — CL book be I write NOM

That book was written by me.

- (118) wǒ zǎo zhīdào yǒu yīdiǎn bu duì
I early know exist a:little not right

I knew a long time ago that something was wrong.

- (119) wǒmen dào bǎihuògōngsī qù mǎi dōngxī
we to department:store go buy thing

We went to the department store to buy some things.

- (120) tā wèn wǒ nǐ niánqīng de shíhòu
3sg ask I you young NOM time
zài nǎlǐ niàn — shū
at where study — book

S/He asked me where you went to school when you were young.

Why is it, then, that sentences with *-le* so often seem to be referring to past time? The answer is simple: even though *-le* doesn't mean past tense, many perfective events reported in speech are events that occurred prior to the time of speaking. This means that there is a correlation between events in the past and the appearance of *-le*: ordinarily, unless the context makes it clear that a different time is being referred to, a perfective sentence with *-le* will be understood to refer to past time. On the other hand, it does not follow from this that past-time events must be perfective; only those past-time events that are bounded will occur with *-le*.

6.1.5 *-le* Does Not Mean Completion

It is equally important to recognize that *-le* cannot be characterized as expressing completion. Typically, of course, an action that is bounded is also complete, but *-le* need not necessarily signal completed action. For instance, consider sentence (121):

- (121) qiáng — shàng guà — le yī —
wall — on hang — PFV one —
fù huà
CL painting

On the wall hangs a painting.

As it is used in (121), the verb *guà* 'hang' does not signal an action. Rather, it describes a stative event concerning the painting. The English translation accurately depicts this stative usage of the verb *guà* 'hang' in (121). The event described by (121) is bounded by the quantifying phrase *yī-fù huà* 'one painting', and *-le* is

present in (121). There is, however, no sense of completion being conveyed by the sentence.

Let us consider another example clearly showing that *-le* does not mean completion:

(122)	tā	pǎo	—	le	liǎng	—
	3sg	run	—	PFV	two	—
		ge	zhōngtóu	le		
		CL	hour	CRS		

S/He has run for two hours.

In (122), both the perfective *-le* and the sentence final *le* (see chapter 7) occur. A sentence such as (122), with both the perfective *-le* and the sentence final *le*, conveys the message that the event is bounded (in this case, the time phrase also serves to bound the event), and the starting point of an action, in this case, *pǎo* 'run', occurs before the time of speech, but the end point of the action is left open. In other words, in (122), the action of running might have ended before the time of speech, or it might end at the time of speech, or it might end at some time after the time of speech. Only the total context in which (122) occurs can determine what is the precise end point of the action in time. It is obvious that if *-le* were to signal completed action, sentences such as (122) could not be indeterminate with regard to the end point of the action denoted by the verb.

6.1.6 Summary

We have seen that the function and the use of *-le* are not mysterious once it is understood as a perfective marker and once the notion of perfectivity is made clear. The perfective marker *-le* is used for events that are viewed as bounded because (1) the events are quantified, (2) the events are specific, (3) the verbs have inherently bounded meanings, or (4) there are following events. We have also seen that *-le* can be omitted in the presence of another perfectivizing expression and that in certain instances speakers may be expected to make different decisions as to whether an event is sufficiently bounded to require *-le*.

Learning to control *-le* is one of the most difficult tasks facing a European-language speaker attempting to master Mandarin, partly because European languages have no feature quite like it. This task is further complicated by an equally elusive sentence-final *le* 'CRS' (discussed in chapter 7). If we begin, however, by abandoning any attempt to equate *-le* with a grammatical category such as tense in

fectivity and boundedness, we will be making a good head start in this challenging task.

Let's turn now to the other aspect markers of Mandarin.

6.2 The Durative Aspect

In the introduction to this chapter, we said that durative markers signal the ongoing, or durative, nature of an event.⁶ English uses the verb ending *-ing* together with the copula to express ongoing events, as in (123) and (124):

(123) She *is explaining* the grammar.

(124) He *was holding* the baby.

In Mandarin, there are two aspect markers that signal the durative nature of an event: the word *zài* and the suffix *-zhe*. The usage of the durative markers in a sentence depends on the meaning of the verb. In the following discussion we will correlate the occurrence of the durative markers with various semantic types of verbs.

6.2.1 Semantic Types of Verbs and the Durative Aspect Markers *-zhe*, *zài*

A. Activity Verbs.

As the name suggests, these verbs signal activity. The most apparent activity is, of course, an action, such as *pǎo* 'run', *dǎ* 'hit'. Action verbs constitute only a subset of activity verbs, however. There are other verbs, such as *xīnshǎng* 'appreciate', *kàn* 'read, look at', *yánjiū* 'research', and *xué* 'learn', which do not name actions but nevertheless represent activities. One way to describe activity verbs is that they generally signal the active participation and involvement of an animate subject in an event. Thus, such verbs as *pàng* 'fat', *yǒu qián* 'have money = rich', *shōudǎo* 'receive', *zhīdào* 'know', and *tīng-shuō* 'hear-say = hear (about some information)' are not activity verbs because they do not signal the active participation of an animate subject. For example, consider sentence (125):

(125)	Zhāngsān	shōudǎo	—	le	yi	—	fēng	xìn
	Zhangsan	receive	—	PFV	one	—	CL	letter

Zhangsan received a letter.

Although *Zhāngsān* is an animate subject of the verb *shōudǎo* 'receive', the sentence does not convey the message that Zhangsan is actively participating in the receiving of the letter.

some sort of activity. In fact, *Zhāngsān* in (125) is simply the passive receiver of a letter. Similarly, in (126):

- (126) *Zhāngsān* *hěn* *pàng*
Zhangsan very fat

Zhangsan is very fat.

the subject *Zhāngsān* is merely in a state that is described as “fat”; he is not actively participating in any activity.

Given “activity” as a semantic characterization of a class of verbs, we can state the first rule concerning the use of the durative markers:

(i) Only activity verbs can take *zài* to indicate the durative aspect.

The following sentences illustrate the rule stated in (i). Sentences (127)–(130) contain activity verbs and are well formed: but sentences (131)–(135), with nonactivity verbs, are unacceptable:

- (127) *Zhāngsān* *zài* *dǎ* *Lìsì*⁷
Zhangsan DUR hit Lisi

Zhangsan is hitting Lisi.

- (128) *wǒ* *zài* *xīnshǎng* *Bèiduōfēn* – *de* *yīnyuè*
I DUR appreciate Beethoven – ASSOC music

I am appreciating the music of Beethoven.

- (129) *Zhāngsān* *zài* *liàn* *pǎo*
Zhangsan DUR practice run

Zhangsan is practicing running.

- (130) *Lìsì* *zài* *jiěshì* *wénfǎ*
Lisi DUR explain grammar

Lisi is explaining the grammar.

- (131) **tā* *zài* *pàng*
3sg DUR fat

- (132) **wǒ* *zài* *zhīdào* *nèi* – *jiàn* *shì*
I DUR know that – CL matter

- (133) **Zhāngsān* *zài* *yǒu* *qián*
Zhangsan DUR exist money

- (134) **píngzi* *zài* *pò*
bottle DUR broken

- (135) **tā* *zài* *pèngjian* *péngyou*
3sg DUR run:into friend

There are also dialects of Mandarin which employ *-zhe . . . ne* or *zài . . . -zhe . . . (ne)* to signal the durative aspect for an activity verb: for example,

- (136) a. *Zhāngsān* *dǎ* – *zhe* *Lìsì* *ne*
Zhangsan hit – DUR Lisi REx

Zhangsan is hitting Lisi.

- b. *Zhāngsān* *zài* *dǎ* – *zhe* *Lìsì* *(ne)*
Zhangsan DUR hit – DUR Lisi REx

Zhangsan is hitting Lisi.

B. Verbs of Posture

In Mandarin there is a class of verbs that denote postures or physical dispositions of an entity at a location, including *zuò* ‘sit’, *zhàn* ‘stand’, *dūn* ‘squat’, *xiē* ‘rest’, *guì* ‘kneel’, *tǎng* ‘lie’, *tíng* ‘stop’, and *shuì* ‘sleep’. These verbs may occur with the durative aspect marker *-zhe* to signal the ongoing posture or physical disposition of an entity at a location. Sentences (137)–(141) will illustrate:

- (137) *tā* *zài* *fángzi* – *lǐ* *zuò* – *zhe*
3sg at house – in sit – DUR

S/He is sitting in the house.

- (138) *wǒ* *zài* *qiáng* – *shàng* *zhàn* – *zhe*
I at wall – on stand – DUR

I am standing on the wall.

- (139) Līsì zài kètīng — lǐ shuì — zhe
Lisi at living:room — in sleep — DUR

Lisi is sleeping in the living room.

- (140) chēzi zài wàimian tíng — zhe
car at outside stop — DUR

The car is parked outside.

- (141) tā zài chuáng — shàng tǎng — zhe
3sg at bed — on lie — DUR

S/He is lying on the bed.

C. Activity Verbs Signaling States Associated with Their Activity Meanings.

Consider the verb *ná* 'take'. It names an activity as it occurs in (142), and, as predicted by rule (i), it takes *zài* to express durativity:

- (142) tā zài ná bàozhǐ
3sg DUR take newspaper

S/He is {taking } newspapers.
 {picking up }

On the other hand, *ná* could mean a state associated with the activity of 'taking', namely 'holding', as in (143); here durativity is expressed by the suffix *-zhe*:

- (143) tā ná — zhe liǎng — běn shū
3sg take — DUR two — CL book

S/He is holding two books.

Consider another example, *guà* 'hang', which may be an activity verb, as shown in the imperative sentence (144):

- (144) nǐ bǎ nèi — ge zhàopiàn guà zài zhèr
you BA that — CL photograph hang at here

Hang that photograph here.

The same verb, however, can also be used to name a state associated with the activity of hanging, as in (145):

- (145) qiáng — shang guà — zhe yī —
wall — on hang — DUR one —
ge zhàopiàn
CL photograph

There is a photograph hanging on the wall.

A further example is the verb *chuān*, which can mean either 'put on' or 'be wearing'. With the former meaning, the verb is an activity verb, but with the latter meaning, the verb signals a state associated with the action 'put on'. The pair of sentences in (146) illustrates this semantic contrast:

- (146) a. tā zài chuān pí — xié
3sg DUR put:on leather — shoe

S/He is putting on his/her leather shoes.

- b. tā chuān — zhe pí — xié
3sg wear — DUR leather — shoe

S/He is wearing his/her leather shoes.

In (146) *a*, the verb *chuān*, as an activity verb, takes *zài* as the durative aspect marker; in (146) *b*, *chuān* denotes a state and takes *-zhe* as the durative aspect marker.

We can now express a rule with regard to an activity verb that denotes a state associated with its activity meaning:

(ii) An activity verb that signals a state associated with its activity meaning takes *-zhe* as the durative aspect marker.

Here are some further examples of this stative usage of activity verbs:

- (147) zài mén — kǒu — de bōli —
at door — mouth — ASSOC glass —
shang xiě — zhe sì — ge zì
on write — DUR four — CL character

On the glass in the doorway are written four characters.

- (148) wǒ wèn tā qián dōu zài nǎlǐ gē — zhe
 I ask 3sg money all at where put — DUR

I asked him/her where all his/her money had been put.

With regard to the rule stated in (ii), it should be pointed out that not all activity verbs can be used to denote a state. For example, *tiào* 'jump' is an action and is, therefore, an activity verb, but it cannot be used to describe a state. Thus (149) *a* is acceptable, but (149) *b* is not:

- (149) *a.* Zhāngsān zài tiào
 Zhangsan DUR jump

Zhangsan is jumping.

- b.* *Zhāngsān tiào — zhe
 Zhangsan jump — DUR

As is clear from the description in 6.2.1.B and the rule stated in (ii), the verbs that take *-zhe* as the durative aspect marker do not signal activity. On the other hand, not all nonactivity verbs can take the durative aspect marker *-zhe*. In fact, most of the nonactivity verbs cannot take any durative aspect marker. Thus examples (131)–(135) would be equally unacceptable if *zài* were replaced with the verbal suffix *-zhe*, as we can show by replacing *zài* with *-zhe* in (131):

- (150) *tā pàng — zhe
 3sg fat — DUR

D. *-zhe* . . . *ne* as an Intensifier

There is another usage of *-zhe* which is distinct from the durative function of *-zhe* discussed here: it may function as an intensifier together with the sentence-final particle *ne*. For example,

- (151) nèi — ge fángjiān hēi — zhe ne
 that — CL room black — INT REx

That room is pretty dark.

The meaning of (151) makes it clear that *-zhe* in such a context does not signal duration. Sentences like (151), however, appear only in certain northern dialects of

Mandarin. In those dialects in which it occurs, *-zhe* as an intensifier may be suffixed to any adjectival verb.

6.2.2 Complex Sentences with the Durative Aspect Marker *-zhe*

Finally, the durative aspect marker *-zhe* can also be used in the first of two clauses to signal that one event provides a durative background for another event. For example, in sentence (152),

- (152) xiǎo gǒu yáo — zhe wěiba pǎo le
 small dog shake — DUR tail run CRS

The small dog ran away wagging its tail.

the wagging of the tail is presented as the ongoing background to the running away.

The same can be said about these additional examples:

- (153) tā guāng — zhe jiǎo shàng — kè
 3sg bare — DUR foot ascend — class

S/He goes to class barefooted.

- (154) tā kū — zhe pǎo huí jiā qu le
 3sg cry — DUR run return home go CRS

S/He ran home crying.

- (155) nèi — zhāng huà dēi dēng — zhe
 that — CL painting must step — DUR
 yǐzi guà
 chair hang

That painting, you have to stand on a chair to hang.

- (156) tā nào — zhe yào mǎi dàyī
 3sg fuss — DUR want buy coat

S/He made a fuss about wanting to buy a coat.

(157)	tā	<u>xié</u>	—	<u>zhe</u>	yǎn	<u>xiào</u>	—	<u>zhe</u>
	3sg	slant	—	DUR	eye	smile	—	DUR
		kàn	wǒ					
		look	I					

Smiling, s/he looked at me out of the corner of his/her eye.

(158)	tā	<u>tǎng</u>	—	<u>zhe</u>	kàn	bào
	3sg	lie	—	DUR	look	paper

S/He was lying down reading the newspaper.

In this construction *-zhe* can be used with many different types of verbs, not just those that take it in simple sentences. For example, the verb *tīng* 'listen' would normally take *zài* as its durative marker, since it is an activity verb:

(159)	tā	<u>zài</u>	tīng	shōuyīnjī
	3sg	DUR	listen	radio

S/He is listening to the radio.

When *tīng* provides the ongoing background for another event, though, it can occur with *-zhe*, as in:

(160)	tā	tīng	—	<u>zhe</u>	shōuyīnjī	shuì	—
	3sg	listen	—	DUR	radio	sleep	—
		zháo	LE				
		achieve	PFV/CRS				

S/He fell asleep listening to the radio.

In order for an event to be durative, however, it must extend over a certain period of time. Thus, verbs that describe instantaneous, nonrepeatable activities cannot occur as the durative-background verb:

(161)	*tā	<u>sǐ</u>	—	<u>zhe</u>	fā	—	shāo
	3sg	die	—	DUR	put:forth	—	fever

(162)	*Xìnmei	<u>diào</u>	—	<u>zhe</u>	qián	shēngqì
	Xinmei	lose	—	DUR	money	angry

Since there are two verbs in complex sentences with *-zhe*, we might expect that each could be negated, with the scope properties differing according to which verb the negative occurs with (see section 12.1 of chapter 12 for a discussion of the scope of negation). Indeed, sentences (163) and (164) show that this expectation is justified:

(163)	tā	<u>bu</u>	<u>tǎng</u>	—	<u>zhe</u>	kàn	—	bào
	3sg	not	lie	—	DUR	read	—	paper

S/He doesn't read the paper lying down.

(164)	tā	bì	—	<u>zhe</u>	yǎn	<u>bu</u>	<u>shuō</u>	—	<u>huà</u>
	3sg	close	—	DUR	eye	not	say	—	speech

S/He had his/her eyes closed, and s/he was not saying a word.

In (163), since the negative particle *bu* precedes the entire verb phrase, that entire verb phrase is what is being negated: the whole activity of reading the paper while lying down is what s/he doesn't do. In (164), on the other hand, it is 'not saying a word' that is stated against the background of his/her eyes being closed.

Here is a further example of each type of negation:

(165)	wǒ	yixiàng	<u>bu</u>	<u>guāng</u>	—	<u>zhe</u>	jiǎo	pǎo
	I	always	not	bare	—	DUR	foot	run

I never run barefooted.

(166)	tā	kū	—	<u>zhe</u>	<u>bu</u>	<u>chī</u>	—	<u>fàn</u>
	3sg	cry	—	DUR	not	eat	—	food

S/He was crying and not eating.

Auxiliaries, on the other hand, normally occur before the *-zhe* verb in this construction, since it is generally the entire activity with its background which the speaker is claiming that the subject must, should, or is able to do. For example:

(167)	tā	<u>néng</u>	qí	—	<u>zhe</u>	mǎ	shè	—	jiàn
	3sg	can	ride	—	DUR	horse	shoot	—	arrow

S/He can shoot an arrow while riding a horse.

(168)	tā	yīnggāi	zuò	—	zhe	dǎ	—	zì
	3sg	should	sit	—	DUR	hit	—	word

S/He should type sitting down.

6.3 The Experiential Aspect

The aspect suffix *-guo* means that an event has been *experienced* with respect to some reference time.⁸ When the reference time is left unspecified, then *-guo* signals that the event has been experienced at least once at some indefinite time, which is usually the indefinite past:

(169)	wǒ	chī	—	<u>guo</u>	Rìběn	fàn
	I	eat	—	EXP	Japan	food

I've eaten Japanese food (before).

Negating a sentence with *-guo* denies that such an event has ever been experienced, and questioning it asks whether the event has ever been experienced:

(170)	wǒ	méi	chī	—	<u>guo</u>	Rìběn	fàn
	I	not	eat	—	EXP	Japan	food

I have never eaten Japanese food (before).

(171)	nǐ	chī	—	<u>guo</u>	Rìběn	fàn	méiyǒu ?
	you	eat	—	EXP	Japan	food	not

Have you ever eaten Japanese food (before)?

Here are some further examples:

(172)	wǒ	—	de	yá	yě	téng	—	<u>guo</u>
	I	—	GEN	tooth	also	hurt	—	EXP

My teeth have hurt before, too.

(173)	Zhāngsān	jié	—	<u>guo</u>	hūn	méiyǒu ?
	Zhangsan	marry	—	EXP	marriage	not

Has Zhangsan ever been married?

(174)	wǒ	shuāi	—	duàn	—	<u>guo</u>	tuǐ
	I	fall	—	break	—	EXP	leg

I fell and broke my leg once.

In other words, the focus of a sentence with *-guo* is not that an event has taken place, but that it has taken place at least once. The contrast between *-le* and *-guo* makes this distinction quite clear: the perfective *-le* signaling a bounded event typically conveys the message that the event took place, while *-guo* signals that an event has been experienced at least once. Consider the following examples as illustrations of this contrast:

(175) a.	tā	dédào	—	<u>le</u>	yi	—	ge	héping	jiǎngjīn
	3sg	obtain	—	PFV	one	—	CL	peace	prize

S/He won a peace prize.

b.	tā	dédào	—	<u>guo</u>	yi	—	ge	héping	jiǎngjīn
	3sg	obtain	—	EXP	one	—	CL	peace	prize

S/He has had the experience of winning a peace prize.

(176) a.	nǐ	kàn	—	jian	—	<u>le</u>	wǒ	—
	you	see	—	perceive	—	PFV	I	—
		de	yǎnjìng	ma ?				
		GEN	glasses	Q				

Have you seen my glasses (recently, around here? I can't find them)?

b.	nǐ	kàn	—	jian	—	<u>guo</u>	wǒ	—
	you	see	—	perceive	—	EXP	I	—
		de	yǎnjìng	ma ?				
		GEN	glasses	Q				

Have you ever seen my glasses?

(177) a.	tā	zài	Rìběn	zhù	—	le	sì	—
	3sg	at	Japan	live	—	PFV	four	—
		ge	yuè					
		CL	month					

S/He lived in Japan for four months.

b.	tā	zài	Rìběn	zhù	—	guo	sì	—
	3sg	at	Japan	live	—	EXP	four	—
		ge	yuè					
		CL	month					

S/He has had the experience of living in Japan for four months.

In the sentences with *-le*, the focus is on the event being viewed as a whole, which often leads to the inference that the event has already occurred, while in those with *-guo*, the focus is on whether the event has ever been experienced.

All the examples of *-guo* we have looked at so far have involved sentences with no reference time specified, and the translation of these sentences indicated that the event had been experienced at least once in the past, that is, prior to the time of speech. When a reference time is provided, then the focus of the sentence is on the event's having been experienced at least once with respect to that time. If there is no reference time specified or if the specified reference time is in the past, then the focus of the sentence with *-guo* is on the event's having been experienced at least once and *being over now*. The following two sentences convey similar messages, but the focus is different:

(178) a.	tā	qùnián	dào	Zhōngguó	qù	—	le
	3sg	last:year	to	China	go	—	PFV

S/He went to China last year.

b.	tā	qùnián	dào	Zhōngguó	qù	—	guo
	3sg	last:year	to	China	go	—	EXP

S/He went to China last year.

The focus of sentence (178) *a* is simply on the fact that this event happened. Nothing is said about whether s/he is still there. Sentence (178) *b*, on the other hand, assumes that s/he went to China and claims that this took place at least once during last year and is now over; this is why *b*, but not *a*, implies that s/he is now back from China. The subject's return is not part of the *meaning* of *-guo*, but it is part of the *message* of the *-guo* sentence because we can infer it from the meaning of *-guo*: if something has been experienced, it is over.

The basic distinction helps in understanding a number of similar pairs. For example, consider (179):

(179) a.	wǒ	jīnnián	xuǎn	—	le	Wú	Jiàoshòu
	I	this:year	select	—	PFV	Wu	professor
			—	de	kè		
			—	GEN	class		

I { took / am taking } Professor Wu's class this year.

b.	wǒ	jīnnián	xuǎn	—	guo	Wú	Jiàoshòu
	I	this:year	select	—	EXP	Wu	professor
			—	de	kè		
			—	GEN	class		

I have taken Professor Wu's course this year.

The *a* sentence in this pair provides the news that the speaker enrolled in Professor Wu's class, which might still be going on. The *b* sentence, with *-guo*, assumes that the speaker was enrolled in the course and claims that the experience is now over.

Finally, we can see why sentence (180) expresses the message that he no longer loves Miss Huang:

(180)	tā	ài	—	guo	Huáng	Xiǎojiě
	3sg	love	—	EXP	Huang	Miss

He once loved Miss Huang.

Once more we infer that if something has been experienced, it is over.

Now that the experiential meaning of *-guo* and the normal inferences that follow from it are clear, we can easily understand certain restrictions on its use. First, *-guo* makes no sense with verbs naming events that are not repeatable:

(181) *tā sǐ — guo
3sg die — EXP

(*S/He has died before.)

(182) *tā lǎo — guo
3sg old — EXP

(*S/He has been old before.)

Comparing (181) and (182) to (183), we can see that (181) and (182) are unacceptable because 'death' and 'being old' are not repeatable, while (183) is acceptable because 'being fat' is repeatable.

(183) tā pàng — guo
3sg fat — EXP

S/He has been fat before.

Second, because a person cannot be ordered to "experience" something (though s/he can certainly be ordered to *do* something), imperatives with *-guo* typically make no sense:

(184) *hē — guo chá!
drink — EXP tea

It is conceivable, however, that someone might comment that an event must be experienced *again*, so that we might hear an imperative sentence like:

(185) zhèi — ge dēi cóng — xīn zuò — guo
this — CL must from — new do — EXP

This has to be done once again.

Third, *-guo* is not used in a context in which the focus is on the simple fact that an event or a series of events occurred. These are contexts that call for a perfective

marker, such as *-le*, or a perfectivizing expression. For example:

(186) zuótiān Zhāngsān lái shuō tā xǐhuan gǒu
yesterday Zhangsan come say 3sg like dog
sūoyǐ wǒ jīntiān sòng { -le } tā
therefore I today give { *-guo } 3sg
{ -PFV }
{ *-EXP }
yī — tiáo gǒu
one — CL dog

Yesterday Zhangsan came to say that he likes dogs, so today I gave him a dog.

(187) wǒ jiějie qùnián jiéhūn , jīn — nián
I elder:sister last:year marry this — year
shēng { -le } yī — ge háizi
give:birth { *-guo } one — CL child
{ -PFV }
{ *-EXP }

My elder sister got married last year, and this year she gave birth to a child.

(188) wǒ zuótiān wǎnshàng kàn { -le } diànshì , féng { -le }
I yesterday evening watch { *-guo } TV sew { *-guo }
{ -PFV } { *-EXP }
liǎng — shuāng wàzi jiu qù shuì
two — pair sock then go sleep
— jiào
— sleep

Last night I watched TV, sewed two pairs of socks, and went to bed.

To sum up, we can say that the aspect marker *-guo* serves to signal that an event has been experienced at least once. Because of this basic meaning, it is not used for events that cannot in principle happen more than once, it is not found in imperatives, nor does it occur in sentences whose focus is the simple fact that an event happened.

6.4 The Delimitative Aspect

The *delimitative aspect* means doing an action ‘a little bit,’ or for a short period of time.⁹ This aspect is structurally represented by the reduplication of the verb (see section 3.1.1.A of chapter 3); this reduplication may optionally involve the morpheme *yi* ‘one’ between the verb and the reduplicated syllable, as shown in (189)–(195):

- (189) nǐ shì – (yi-) shì kàn
 you try – (one-) try see

Try it a little and see.

- (190) zhèi – ge huā dēi yǎng – (yi-)
 this – CL flower must cultivate – (one-)
- yang cái huì kāi
 cultivate only:then will open

This flower must be cultivated a little before it will bloom.

- (191) nǐ xǐhuān chàng – gē , nà nǐ jiù
 you like sing – song then you just
- chàng – (yi-) chang ba !
 sing – (one-) sing SA

You like to sing, so go ahead and sing a little!

- (192) nǐmen wèishenme bu xiān tāolùn – taolùn zhèi
 you:PL why not first discuss – discuss this
- ge wènti ne ?
 – CL problem REx

Why don't you first discuss this problem a little?

- (193) tā shuì – (yi-) shuì jiù hǎo
 3sg sleep – (one-) sleep then well

S/He will be well after sleeping a little.

- (194) tāmen tīng – (yi-) tīng Bèiduōfēn – de
 they listen – (one-) listen Beethoven – ASSOC
- yīnyuè jiù xǐhuān
 music then like

After they listen to the music of Beethoven a little, they'll like it.

- (195) wǒ wèn – (yi-) wèn zài juéding
 I ask – (one-) ask then decide

I'll decide after I inquire a little.

When *yi* ‘one’ is used in the reduplication, the *yi* plus the reduplicated syllable functions like a quantity adverbial of the type discussed in section 8.5 of chapter 8 on adverbs,¹⁰ as in:

- (196) zhèi – běn xiǎoshuō wǒ kàn – le sān cì
 this – CL novel I see – PFV three time

This novel I've read three times.

One intriguing piece of evidence suggesting that *yi* plus the reduplicated syllable does indeed function grammatically as a quantity adverbial is the fact that the perfective aspect marker *-le* may appear after the first verb in reduplication with *yi*, but not in reduplication without *yi*; for example:

- (197) a. tā shuì – le – yi – shuì
 3sg sleep – PFV – one – sleep

S/He slept a little.

- b. *tā shuì – le – shuì
 3sg sleep – PFV – sleep

This difference between (197) *a* and (197) *b* exists because, as we observed in section 6.1.1, the perfective *-le* can occur with a verb whose meaning is bounded by quantified phrase, but does not occur with a verb whose meaning is not bounded at all.

Another piece of evidence in favor of viewing the *yi* plus the reduplicated syllable as an adverbial is that without the *yi*, the reduplicated syllable is normally destressed and receives a neutral tone, but with *yi*, though not shown in (189)–(195), the reduplicated syllable retains its normal stress and its full tone, as seen in (197) *a*. Since quantity adverbials are generally stressed and have their normal tones, this too suggests that the combination of *yi* plus reduplicated syllable is grammatically a quantity adverbial.

If the verb being reduplicated is one signaling an activity leading to a natural end point, such as *cāi* ‘guess’ or *mǎi* ‘buy’, the delimitative aspect may suggest ‘trying to (verb)’, as in the following example:

(198) nǐ cāi – yi – cāi
 you guess – one – guess

You try to guess.

Since the meaning of the delimitative aspect involves doing something “a little bit,” several constraints on the types of verbs that may be reduplicated to indicate this aspect follow. First, the verb must be an activity verb. An activity verb may denote an action, as in *dǎ* ‘hit’, *zǒu* ‘walk’, *kàn* ‘look’, *tiào* ‘jump’, or it may imply activity of some sort, as in *xiǎoxīn* ‘be careful’. Thus, nonactivity verbs, such as *pàng* ‘fat’ and *yǒu* ‘exist’, cannot be reduplicated to show delimitative aspect:

(199) *nǐ pàng – pang
 you fat – fat

(200) *wūzi – li yǒu – you yi – ge hóuzi
 house – in exist – exist one – CL monkey

Second, those activity verbs that can undergo reduplication for the delimitative aspect must be volitional verbs. We will define *volitional verbs* as those that under normal circumstances imply volition on the part of the subject. For example, consider the English verb *hit*. It implies volition under normal circumstances, although one can say, ‘I didn’t intend to hit him; it was an accident,’ where the lack of volition is made clear. On the other hand, the verbs *forget* and *fall* are not

volitional, because under normal circumstances they imply a lack of volition. In other words, a volitional verb normally implies volition if the lack of volition is not explicitly stated, and a nonvolitional verb normally implies the lack of volition if there is no explicit statement to the contrary. Since the delimitative aspect means that the subject does something a little bit, it follows that only volitional verbs, that is, those expressing events over which one has some control, can be reduplicated to show delimitative aspect. Thus (201) is unacceptable because the verb is nonvolitional, whereas (202) is acceptable because the verb is volitional.

(201) *nǐ wàng – wang tā
 you forget – forget he

(202) nǐ wén – wen zhèi – duo huā
 you smell – smell this – CL flower

Smell this flower a little.

Third, a resultative verb compound (see section 3.2.3 of chapter 3) cannot be reduplicated for delimitative aspect. This is because the function of a resultative verb compound is to signal that a given event leads to a certain result. The focus on the result of the event with these compounds is incompatible with the delimitative aspect meaning of doing something for a little while. Hence, the resultative verb compound cannot be reduplicated in the delimitative aspect. Sentence (203) is an illustration:

(203) *nǐ dǎ – kai – dǎ – kai
 you hit – open – hit – open

 nèi – ge mén
 that – CL door

Finally, the delimitative aspect is particularly likely to occur in requests, as in:

(204) qǐng nǐ bǎ mén kāi – (yī-) kai
 please you BA door open – (one-) open

Please open the door.

(205)	nǐ	yào	kàn	—	(yī-)	kàn
	you	want	read	—	(one-)	read
		zhèi	—	piān	wénzhāng	
		this	—	CL	article	

You should read this article.

When one wishes to soften a request so that it will not appear harsh, the delimitative aspect is a perfect device to use, since it reduces the “weight” of the request on the hearer by saying that the action can be done “just a little.”

6.5 Summary

The functions of *-le*, *zài*, *-guo*, and reduplication have been presented here in terms of the concept of aspect, which signals how an event or situation is to be viewed. We can summarize our findings this way:

1. *-Le*: a bounded event viewed in its entirety.
2. *Zài*: an ongoing activity.
3. *-Zhe*: an ongoing posture or state resulting from an activity.
4. *-Guo*: an event viewed as having been experienced at least once.
5. Reduplication: an event viewed as happening a little bit.

Notes

1. This discussion is adapted from the introduction to Comrie (1976), to which the reader is referred for further discussion of aspect in a number of languages. In writing this chapter, we have also taken examples and descriptions from the following sources: Baron (1970), Teng (1975a), Spanos (1977, 1979), Rohsenow (1978), G.-T. Chen (1979), Kwan-Terry (1979), and Chao (1968), except that we do not agree with Chao's statement (p. 246) that *-le* expresses “completed action.” “Perfective,” as we will see, is not the same as “completed.” We have also benefited from discussion with R. McMillan Thompson, Paul Hopper, and Bernard Comrie.
2. See Spanos (1977, 1979) for extensive discussion of speakers' variation in the use of *-le*. Example (28) is taken up in Spanos (1977:61–64).
3. If ‘*le*’ occurs at the end of this sentence, we have

(i)	tā	yào	sǐ	<u>le</u>
	3sg	want	die	CRS

S/He wants to die.

in which the sentence-final *le* signals the current relevance of the sentence in the discourse context. It should be clear that the verb *sǐ* ‘die’ in (i) is still in the irrealis mode, which is not affected by the presence of *le*.

4. Combinations of *-guo* and ‘*le*’ do occur in sentence-final position, but these instances of ‘*le*’ represent the use of the sentence-final *le*, not the perfective aspect *-le*. Here is a typical example of *-guo* together with the sentence-final *le*:

(i)	zhèi	—	piān	wénzhāng	wǒ	kàn
	this	—	CL	article	I	read
					—	<u>guo</u>
					—	EXP
						<u>le</u>
						CRS

I've read this article.

We have two ways of knowing that this ‘*le*’ is the sentence-final CRS *le* and not the perfective aspect *-le*. One is that the sentence becomes unacceptable if the direct object is positioned after the verb:

(ii)	*wǒ	kàn	—	guo	le	zhèi
	I	read	—	EXP	CRS	this
				—	piān	wénzhāng
				—	CL	article

If the ‘*le*’ in (i) were the aspect marker *-le*, then sentence (ii) would be just as acceptable as (i). The second piece of evidence is that the *le* in (i) adds precisely the meaning of current relevance to sentence (i) which we expect of the sentence-final *le* (again, see chapter 7 for a full discussion of the meaning of *le*).

5. There is one exception: *-le* can occur in negative imperatives; see section 6.1.3 of this chapter. Note also that, as with *-guo*, *bu* can occur with the sentence-final *le*, as in:

(i)	nà	wǒ	<u>bu</u>	qù	<u>le</u>
	in:that:case	I	not	go	CRS

In that case I'm not going to go.

Again, see chapter 7 for discussion.

6. This section contains a number of ideas inspired by the work of G.-T. Chen (1979), Marney (1977:38–52), Chu (1978), and Teng (1979b).
7. In this section, some example sentences are translated into English in the past tense and some in the present tense. It is crucial to remember that Mandarin makes no tense distinction and that any of these examples could be understood either way. For the sake of readability, we will arbitrarily choose either an English present or English past translation and not give both each time.
8. This section has benefited from comments and examples in Ma (1977).
9. This section contains ideas from Chao (1968), from Wang (1947), and from unpublished work of Chui Lim Tsang, to whom the term *delimitative aspect* is also due.
10. As pointed out by Chao (1968:312).