

Each stem, theme, and derivational process has a specific presuppositional component that figures in the total surface construction in lexical derivation.

This specifically lexical structure is at once generative in its way and yet distinct from morphosyntax. It is not structurally or semantically irregular, as the Saussurean--Bloomfieldian tradition, in which as linguists we still live, would have it. It is regular, but the regularity is of a different order from what we like to see as grammar. In this morphologically complex language, the surface materials of lexical derivation are coextensive with those of morphosyntax, but the processes and their semantics are distinctive to what Sapir would call the "art" and "history" in words.

Notes

¹The meaning of any word or expression must then be a product of the grammatical and lexical aspects of "meaning." For a congenial development of such a multi-source notion of "meaning," see Putnam's (1975) interesting but linguistically oversimplified account.

²Note the parallel transformation, realized in historical time, of Indo-European "impersonal" constructions of cognitive and sense experience, with dative/accusative experiencer, to "personal" constructions, with overt nominative experiencer.

³Certain verbs appear to be rank-shifted from antipassive constructions with unmarked hierarchically specified $[-]_{4-15}$ allowing the necessary indirect mediopassivization. These quasi-stems have the form $...-x+i-gi-\sqrt{\text{Root}}...$, where the surviving cross-referencing Absolutive₃ codes the semantic 'Agent'.

⁴Compare English babble, Greek βᾶβᾶρᾶ, and similar delocutionaries.

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Verbs and Times in Chinese: Vendler's Four Categories

James H-Y. Tai

Southern Illinois University at Carbondale

0. Introduction

The semantic structure of Chinese verbs involving the notion of time is still relatively little understood.¹ The purpose of this paper is to identify some essential characteristics of the temporal structure underlying the Chinese verb system with a special reference to the four Vendler categories, and to venture a conjecture regarding a fundamental difference between Chinese and English with regard to the notion of time.

In his study of the time schemata of verbs in English, Vendler (1967) has arrived at four classes of verbs, i.e., activities, accomplishments, achievements, and states. These four classes of verbs have recently been studied in greater detail by Dowty (1979) in the context of lexical decomposition theory and Montague grammar. With several important modifications and improvements on the original Vendler work, Dowty has also correctly observed that Vendler's classification of surface action verbs once and for all as activities or accomplishments is somewhat misguided, since, among other reasons, we must take into consideration the whole predicate and not just the verb to distinguish activities from accomplishments. For instance, when with a goal or an extent expression, an activity verb such as 'to walk' behaves like an accomplishment verb. Or using Vendler's own example, 'to run' is an activity but 'to run a mile' is an accomplishment. Nevertheless, in view of the fact that verb semantics in Chinese pertaining to time has not yet been studied in relation to Vendler's four categories, it serves some purpose to start with the original four Vendler categories. In this paper, I wish to focus on differences rather than similarities between Chinese and English, and thereby lead to some observations with theoretical imports.

1. The Four Vendler Categories

For purposes of discussion, the time schemata for the four categories of English verbs are given in (1), Vendler's original examples in (2), and some additional examples identified by Dowty in (2)'.²

- (1) Activities: Continuous tenses with no set terminal point.
Accomplishments: Continuous tenses with set terminal point.
Achievements: Lacking continuous tenses, predicated only for single instants of time.
States: Lacking continuous tenses, predicated for a shorter or longer period of time.

(2) Activities	Accomplishments	Achievements	States
run	paint a picture	recognize	know
walk	draw a circle	find	love
write	run a mile	lose	have
drive a car	write a letter	die	desire
'(2)' seek	build	understand	be tall
listen to	kill	hear	hear
look for	put	see	see

As can be seen from (1), while activities and accomplishments allow continuous tenses, states and achievements don't. It is on the basis of this difference that Vendler considered the first two categories belonging to one 'genus' and the second pair belonging to another. However, he also noticed that while the notion of time, either periods or instants of time, is unique or definite in accomplishments and achievements, it is somehow not unique or definite in activities and states. Therefore, accomplishments and achievements share some properties which the other pair doesn't have. For example, the former pair can occur with an adverbial such as 'in an hour', the latter can't (as shown in (3) and (4)).

- (3) He painted the picture in an hour/He found the answer in an hour.
 (4) *He ran in an hour/*He loved Mary in an hour.

2. Activities and Accomplishments in Chinese
 Accomplishment verbs in English, when in past or perfect tenses, necessarily imply an attainment of the goal. Their supposed equivalents in Chinese do not contain such an implication as an inherent part of the meaning, even though the implication in question can sometimes emerge from the composite meaning of the whole predicate or the context explicitly or implicitly provided. To insure the attainment of goal, Chinese resorts to resultative verb compounds, of which the first element indicates action, the second the result. For example, 'to study' is an activity verb, but 'to learn' is an accomplishment verb. This can be detected by means of Vendler's tests as shown in

- (5) He has studied Chinese for five years.
 (6) *He has learned Chinese for five years.
 (7) *He has studied Chinese in five years.
 (8) He has learned Chinese in five years.
 (9) *It took him five years to study Chinese.
 (10) It took him five years to learn Chinese.

The fact that 'to learn' but not 'to study' implies the attainment of goal can be further discerned from the contrast between (11) and (12) in grammaticality.²

- (11) He studied Chinese but he still didn't know it.
 (12) *He learned Chinese but he still didn't know it.

It appears that the Chinese equivalent for 'to study' is xue, and that for 'to learn' is xue-hui 'study-know (how to)'. Xue-hui is a resultative verb compound with xue denoting action and hui result, or more specifically, the attainment of goal in this kind of verbs. Thus, the Chinese pair exhibits the same syntactic differences as the English pair. This is illustrated in

- (5) ' ta xue-le wunian de zhongwen (=5)
 (6) ' *ta xue-hui-le wunian de zhongwen (=6)
 (7) ' *ta zai wunian nei xue-le zhongwen (=7)
 (8) ' ta zai wunian nei xue-hui-le zhongwen (=8)
 (9) ' *ta hua-le wunian cai xue-le zhongwen (=9)
 (10) ' ta hua-le wunian cai xue-hui-le zhongwen (=10)
 (11) ' ta xue-le zhongwen, keshi hai bu hui (=11)
 (12) ' *ta xue-hui-le zhongwen, keshi hai bu hui (=12)

'To kill' in English is also an accomplishment verb which necessarily implies the death of the recipient of the action. Thus, (13) is ungrammatical.

- (13) * I killed John but he didn't die.

Most English-Chinese dictionaries translate 'to kill' as sha or sha-si. The latter has si 'to die' as the resultative complement. For many native speakers, sha alone normally implies the death of the recipient of the action. However, the fact that (14) is ungrammatical shows that it doesn't necessarily so imply. The ungrammaticality of (15) shows that only the resultative verb compound sha-si can guarantee the attainment of goal.³

- (14) Zhangsan sha-le lisi liangci, lisi dou mei si.
 John performed the action of attempting to kill Peter, but Peter didn't die.
 (15) *Zhangsan sha-si-le lisi liangci, lisi dou mei si.
 *John killed Peter twice, but Peter didn't die.

Similarly, Vendler's examples of accomplishment expressions such as 'to paint a picture' and 'to write a letter' may or may not imply the attainment of goal in Chinese, depending on the particular context which a native speaker happens to be in. Thus, it is true that for many native speakers, (16) and (17) may imply the attainment of goal. Yet, again, (18) and (19) suffice to show that the implication is not absolute.

- (16) wo zuotian hua-le yizhang hua
 I painted a picture yesterday.
 (17) wo zuotian xie-le yifeng xin
 I wrote a letter yesterday.

