Excessive serial verb construction
A quasi-resultative serial verb construction in Mandarin Chinese

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This paper identifies a distinct serial verb construction in Mandarin Chinese: the Excessive serial verb construction. This construction exhibits formal similarity to the Resultative serial verb construction, since both of them involve adjacent unmarked verbs. Despite the similarity, the former construction differs from the latter most evidently in that it conveys an excessive meaning rather than a resultative meaning. This paper proposes that there is a syntactic difference between the two constructions. In contrast to the tight structure in the Resultative serial verb construction, which can be represented as S[vp V1 V2] le. The Excessive serial verb construction has a looser structure, which is structurally S[[vpV1] [vp V2-le]]. With respect to diagnostics of constituency, the two constructions behave in different ways. This paper further argues that correlating with a distinct structure, the Excessive serial verb construction requires obligatory topicalization of its undergoer argument, a phenomenon that is not observed in the Resultative serial verb construction. This study thus contributes to representing the interaction between the semantic properties – in particular, the function of le in the two constructions – and the syntactic properties.

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