Verbal Reduplication and Verbal Classifiers in Chinese

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In this paper, after presenting previous analyses of verbal classifiers in Chinese — henceforth abbreviated Clv — we describe their syntactic and semantic characteristics. We compare the sequence V Q Clv to two reduplicated verb forms: (i) VV and (ii) V-yi-V. We show that verb reduplication cannot be equated with V Q Clv and that Clv are not DPs, but MPs. We posit a distinction between weak and strong Clv, according to their quantificational and aspectual properties. In conclusion a parallelism between a Chinese V Q Clv sequence and a light verb followed by a deverbal noun in English is established.

Key words: (a)telicity, [+control] predicates, (delimitative) aspect, light verb + deverbal noun, verbal reduplication, verbal classifiers

1. Introduction

Though the lexical category ‘verbal classifier’¹ is not commonly found in general

¹ I am very happy to dedicate this paper to my dear friend and colleague Beiluobei (貝羅貝). We struck up a friendship 40 years ago. I hope this ‘bond’ will last another 40 years.

I would never have been able to carry out research on this topic and then, finally, get down to writing it without the help of many colleagues and institutions both at home and, most of all, abroad.

In chronological order, I first thank Thekla Wiebusch, who included me in her European Commission-COST project, N° A31 “Stability and Adaptation of Classification Systems in a Cross Cultural Perspective”. Thekla has given me precious diachronic information on verbal classifiers, which, for lack of time, I have not been able to include here. I presented a first version of this paper in the panel she organized in Cracow, during the 10th International Cognitive Linguistics Conference (July 2007). Following this, I had to temporarily discontinue my work on this topic, but thanks to two institutions in Taiwan, I was able to resume my research in 2009. During a three-week stay as a visiting scholar at the National Taiwan Normal University (March) and a two-week stay as a guest of the Taiwanese Ministry of Education at the National Sun Yat-sen University (October), I was able to check data and hypotheses with colleagues. I would like to warmly thank Li Duanduan (University of British Columbia/NTNU), Tsai Mei-chih and Shyu Shu-ing (National Sun Yat-sen University) for sharing their time and intuition
linguistics books, this word class is nevertheless of utmost importance when describing East Asian languages in general, and Chinese in particular. In this paper, I would like to give a quantificational/aspectual definition of what a verbal classifier stands for in Chinese. After presenting previous work on this topic, I will compare verbal classifier constructions with other constructions, and in particular with two forms of verbal reduplication: VV and V-\(\text{-y}i\)-V. I will show that there are, at least, two main classes of verbal classifiers, which I label ‘weak verbal classifiers’ and ‘strong verbal classifiers’. Their use depends on the aspectual properties of the predicate they are in construction with. I extend my results to English light verb constructions where the light verb is followed by a deverbal noun.

2. Previous works on the topic

As far as contemporary Chinese is concerned, the most detailed presentations of verbal classifiers I know of are from Chao (1968) for a semantic classification and Paris (1981) for a syntactic description.

2.1 Chao (1968)

Whereas almost no Chinese grammar book lists the term ‘verbal classifier’ in their indexes, Chao’s grammar (1968) contains the most complete list of such items and

\footnote{1 Though Aikhenvald (2000) included verbal classifiers in her work, her description does not apply very readily to the Chinese language. In this paper I will abbreviate the expression ‘verbal classifier’ as Clv. The other abbreviations used are: Cln: Nominal Classifier; Q: Quantifier; and, Sfx: Suffix.}

\footnote{2 For Chinese verbal classifiers, see Zhang (2002); for various East and Southeast Asian languages, see Gerner (2007, 2009); and, for Vietnamese, see Nguyen (1995:89-106).}

\footnote{3 In Arabic and in Chinese, Fassi-Fehri & Vinet (2008) posit a four-way distinction to account for the classification of both nouns and verbs, based on their mereological properties. “… achievements are equated with individuals, accomplishments with groups, activities with kinds and states with masses” (op. cit: 56).}

\footnote{4 Some diachronic work has been done on Mandarin Clv, see, for instance, Hung (2000).}

\footnote{5 The category Clv does not appear in the indexes of the following reference grammars: Cheung et al. (1994), Huang, Li & Li (2009), and Ross & Ma (2006). I have found this label in Abbiati (1998) and Xu (1996) only.}
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labels them ‘measures for verbs’, abbreviated as Mv. In this paragraph I will use Chao’s abbreviation, i.e. Mv, but I will use Clv in the remainder of the paper. Chao’s semantic definition reads as follows: “a measure for verbs of action expresses the number of times an action takes place.” (ibid.: 615). From this definition, one gathers that an Mv is equivalent to a frequency marker. Chao lists 40 Mvs, which he distributes into three main (semantic) categories. These Mvs are also labelled ‘cognate objects’ (ibid.: 312, 615-620). These classes express:

1. the action of the verb (18 Mvs),
2. the body part which performs the action (7 Mvs) and
3. the instrument with which the action is performed (15 Mvs).

The first category is the biggest one. It includes the following items (among others): the verb itself, as in kan yi kan ‘to take a look’ or as in kankan ‘to have a look’. Other frequent Mvs are: hui ‘time’; ci ‘time’; bian ‘time’; tang ‘trip/time’; xia ‘stroke/time’; fan ‘a series of/time’, as in jiaoxun yi fan ‘to give a good scold’; quan ‘a round’ as in rao yi quan ‘to go for a round’; jiao ‘a sleep’ as in shui ji jiao ‘sleep on several occasions’; and guan ‘barrier’ as in guo wu guan ‘go through five passes’.

The second category comprises seven items. Shou ‘hand’, jiao ‘foot’, bazhang ‘palm’ as in da-le ta liang bazhang ‘slapped him twice’; quan1 ‘(a single encounter of the) fist’ as in ta zou-le wo yi quan ‘he gave me a blow’ and quan2 ‘(a hit of the) fist’; and kou ‘mouth’, yan ‘eye’.6

The most common Mvs which belong to the third category are: dao ‘knife’; jianzi ‘scissors’; futou ‘hatchet’ as in kan futou ‘chop slash’; bianzi ‘whip’, as in da bianzi ‘to whip’; zhen ‘needle’ as in zha zhen ‘to stick a(n acupuncture) needle’; jian ‘arrow’, as in she jian ‘to shoot an arrow’; and qiang ‘pistol’, as in fang qiang ‘to shoot’.

It is somewhat difficult to understand what Chao’s underlying classification criterion or criteria are.

First, many examples given in all three classes do not correspond to the semantic definition proposed. Guan ‘barrier’ in category one, quan ‘fist’ in category two or zhen ‘needle’ in category three, for example, do not correspond to the function and the meaning of a frequency marker, that is ‘time’.

6 For this category, it is interesting to note that Shao (2007) shows how in contemporary spoken Northern Mandarin the use of the verbal classifier yi ba is expanding, losing its original meaning of marking an action involving a hand, as in la yi ba ‘to give a hand’, ‘to help’. Thus, for example, according to Shao (ibid.: 16, 19), yi ba is found in collocations such as zai nuli yi ba ‘be more diligent’ or in shuang yi ba ‘to have some fun’. Some speakers of Taiwan Mandarin do not accept the latter examples, but would accept shuang yi shuang or shuang yi xia ‘to have some fun’.
Second, as an Mv is not defined syntactically, one gets the impression that whereas examples like *hui ‘time’, *ci ‘time’, *bian ‘time’, *tang ‘time’, and *xia ‘time’, in category one are genuine classifiers, other terms such as, for instance, *bazhang ‘palm’, *zheng ‘needle’ or *qiang ‘pistol’ can also be nouns. In the sequence *yi + *xia (or *bian, *tang, …), *xia (or *bian, *tang, …) is a genuine classifier: it cannot be preceded by other classifiers nor can it function as an argument. On the contrary, *zheng ‘needle’ can be preceded by a classifier and can be an argument. Compare *xia ‘time’ and *zheng ‘suture’/‘needle’ in the three pairs (1)-(6). Examples (1)-(2) look alike on the surface, but (3)-(4) and (5)-(6) show that *zheng ‘needle’, contrary to *xia ‘time’, evidences nominal properties. Whereas *yi gen *zheng ‘a needle’ is the object of the verb *huan ‘change’ in (6), *yi *xia ‘a bit’/‘a while’ is not the object *feng ‘to sew’ in (5).

(1) *yi  *xia
one time
‘once’/‘one time’

(2) *yi  *zheng
one stitch/needle
‘a stitch’/‘a suture’

(3) *yi  *ge  *xia
one Cln time

(4) *yi  *gen  *zheng
one Cln needle
‘a needle’

(5) *feng  *yi  *xia
sew one time
‘to sew a bit’/‘a short while’

(6) *huan  *yi  *gen  *zheng
change one Cln needle
‘to change needle’

In sum, Chao not only acknowledges the existence of a lexical category in Chinese, which he labels Mv, but he also presents a useful list of examples. The drawback of his categorization is that it mingles items having different syntactic properties — ‘real’ classifiers and classifiers which are also nouns. Moreover, his definition of Mvs, which is basically semantic, is too narrow. Mvs may indeed indicate frequency, but their semantic role is much wider than that. In the next section I will present some syntactic characteristics of Clvs.

2.2 Paris (1981)

In Paris (1981) I studied the different distributions of nominal and verbal classifiers in postverbal positions. I used nine tests to show that while the sequence Q Cln N does

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7 Here *yi ‘one’ stands for the whole paradigm of numerals er ‘two’, san ‘three’, etc.
8 The following is only a brief summary of the results I obtained in 1981.
9 The nine tests include demonstrative and adjectival insertion, passive bei NP and active ba NP
form a constituent — a nominal one — the sequence Q Clv N does not. Q(uantifier) subsumes the list of all possible numerals.

Thus, though (7) and (8) share the same surface structure, they are constructed very differently: the postverbal constituents, namely yi ben shu and yi xia shu respectively, do not allow the same bracketing. Compare (9) and (10). In (9) the sequence yi ben shu is a nominal constituent, in (10) yi xia shu is not a nominal constituent.

(7) Ta kan-le yi ben shu.
    he read-Sfx one Cln book
    ‘He read a book.’

(8) Ta kan-le yi xia shu.
    he read-Sfx one Clv book
    ‘He did a bit of reading.’

(9) Ta kan-le NP[(yi ben) shu]NP
(10) Ta kan-le *NP[(yi xia) (shu)]*NP

In terms of surface constituents, (10) should be analyzed as (11).


The sequence (yi xia) (shu) is composed of two autonomous sub-constituents. Yi xia is part of the VP and shu of the PredP. The relationship between V and NP is equivalent to that between a verb and its object.

Four more tests can be added to the nine constituency tests I used previously to ascertain that Q Cln N and Q Clv N do not share the same structure. These tests are:

(i) question formation by means of duoshao ‘how much’/‘how many?’,
(ii) movement of the quantifier phrase (QP) past the object noun,
(iii) modification by the approximative marker zuoyou ‘around’ and
(iv) sentence coordination.
2.2.1 Question formation by means of *duoshao* ‘how much’, ‘how many’?

A [Q Cln] constituent can stand as an answer to a question containing the interrogative (nominal) quantifier *duoshao* ‘how much?’ / ‘how many?’, as (12) and (13) show. But the [Q Clv] sequence *yi yan* ‘a glance’ in (15) cannot constitute an answer to *duoshao* in (14).

(12) Ta mai-le *duoshao*?
    he buy-Sfx how many
    ‘How many [books] did he buy?’

(13) Ta mai-le *yi ben*.
    he buy-Sfx one Cln
    ‘He bought one [book].’

(14) *Ta kan-le *duoshao*?
    he look-Sfx how.much

(15) Ta kan-le *yi yan*.
    he look-Sfx one eye/Clv
    ‘He cast a glance.’

2.2.2 The position of [Q Clv] with respect to the postverbal noun

While a nominal QP cannot occupy both the pre- and post-nominal object positions, a verbal QP can. From (16), (17) cannot be formed, but from (18), (19) can.

(16) Ta xiang mai *yi ben* shu.
    he want buy one Cln book
    ‘He would like to buy a book.’

(17) *Ta xiang mai shu *yi ben*.
    he want buy book one Cln

(18) Ta xiang hui *yi tang* jia.
    he want return one Clv home
    ‘He would like to go home once.’

(19) Ta xiang hui jia *yi tang*.
    he want return home one Clv
    ‘He would like to go home once.’
2.2.3 Modification by means of *zuoyou* ‘about’

While a nominal QP can be followed by *zuoyou* ‘around’ within an NP, as shown in (20), a verbal QP cannot, as seen in (21).\(^{10}\)

(20) Ta kan-le san shi *chang zuoyou* de Jingju.
he look-Sfx three ten Clv approximately de Peking opera
‘He saw around thirty performances of Peking opera.’

(21) *Ta qu-le san shi *ci zuoyou* de Beijing.
he go-Sfx three ten Clv approximately de Peking

More crucial to the idea that Q Clv forms a constituent with the verb that precedes it (and not with the noun that follows it) is the test of sentence coordination.

2.2.4 Sentence coordination

Example (22) below is not acceptable because the second Q Clv has been elided in sentence-final position. The fact that *yi xia* ‘a bit’ is compulsory after the verb *tian* ‘to lick’, as can be seen in (23), shows that *yi xia* is part of the VP and that it carries relevant information. If it did not, it would be deleted. (23) is ambiguous between a strict and a sloppy reading of the anaphoric possessive pronoun *tade* ‘his’.

(22) *Zhangsan tian-le *yi xia ta de bingbang, Lisi ye tian-le *∅.*
Zhangsan lick-Sfx one Clv he de ice bar Lisi also lick-Sfx ∅

(23) Zhangsan tian-le *yi xia ta de bingbang, Lisi ye tian-le
Zhangsan lick-Sfx one Clv he de ice bar Lisi also lick-Sfx

yi xia.
one Clv

a. ‘Zhangsan licked his ice bar a bit and Lisi also licked Zhangsan’s ice bar.’
b. ‘Zhangsan licked his ice bar a bit and Lisi also licked his (own) ice bar a bit.’

In sum, while in the “V [Q Cln N]” sequence, Q Cln and the following N entertain a relationship of dependence and of quantification, in the “V [Q Clv N]” sequence, it is Q Clv and the preceding V which entertain a relationship of dependence and of quantification. Clv and N do not entertain a relationship of dependence. By ‘dependence’

\(^{10}\) See Paris & Vinet (2010). The intended meaning of (21) is: ‘He went to Peking approximately 30 times’.
I mean selectional restrictions. Seen in this light, nominal and verbal classifiers share important common points. The bracketing of the constituents as in (11) above:

\[
\]

is meant to account for the dependency between V and its following Q Clv phrase.

In this section, I have presented Chao’s classification of ‘measures for verbs’, as markers of frequency. Then I have proposed the results of my own syntactic analysis of the sequence Q Clv N. I have laid emphasis on the syntactic/semantic dependency between the Q Clv constituent and its preceding V.

In the following sections, I will compare constructions containing a reduplicated verb with constructions containing a verb followed by Q Clv. In Chao’s and Li & Thompson’s books, verbal reduplication patterns such as VV and V-yi-V are said to be (semantically) equivalent to a V Q Clv construction. I will try to evaluate in what respect this proposition is well grounded.

3. The comparison between the reduplication patterns VV and V-yi-V, on the one hand and V yi Clv, on the other

Verb reduplication in Mandarin can take (at least) two forms: either the repetition of the verb, or the repetition of the verb preceded by the quantifier yi ‘one’, giving the following two surface patterns: VV and V-yi-V. Such forms are labelled a ‘delimitative aspect’.\(^{11}\) Both Chao (1968) and Li & Thompson (1981) draw parallels between these two types of verb reduplications, equating the former with the latter.\(^ {12}\) Moreover, both forms of verb reduplication are also equated to the sequence V Q Clv, i.e. verb followed by a quantifier + a verbal classifier. In other words, the three patterns VV, V-yi-V and V Q Clv are considered to be equivalent. For Li & Thompson (ibid.: 233), “the yi plus the reduplicated syllable functions like a quantity adverbial”, as in san ci ‘three times’.

If it is certainly true that these three forms do share some aspectual and pragmatic properties, I will show, however, that none of them is strictly equivalent to the other two. I will first present the similarities between these three patterns and then stress their dissimilarities.

\(^{11}\) This terminology is commonly used to describe this aspect not only in Sinitic languages. For uses referring to Mandarin and Cantonese, see — among others — Xiao & McEnery (2004) and Matthews & Yip (1994), respectively. For references regarding this terminology as used in Slavic linguistics, see Filip (2000).

\(^ {12}\) “This reduplication may optionally involve the morpheme yi between the verb and the reduplicated syllable”, Li & Thompson (1981:232).
3.1 VV, V-\textit{yi-V} and V \textit{yi} Clv: identity of behaviour

In this section I will first study the similar co-occurrence restrictions among the three verbal forms VV, V-\textit{yi-V} and V \textit{yi} Clv regarding:

(i) durative markers — such as the adverb \textit{zhengzai} and the final particle \textit{ne}, and
(ii) the degree adverbial \textit{shaowei} ‘somewhat’.

Then I will look at the degree to which the behaviour of these three patterns is or is not identical.

3.1.1 Similarities: aspectual and pragmatic properties

The durative adverb \textit{zhengzai} ‘precisely’ cannot occur with VV, with V-\textit{yi-V} nor with V \textit{yi} Clv, as (24)-(26) illustrate.

(24) *Ta \textit{zhengzai kan-kan} shu.
    he precisely at look-look book

(25) *Ta \textit{zhengzai kan-yi-kan} shu.
    he precisely at look-one-look book

(26) *Ta \textit{zhengzai kan yi xia} shu.
    he precisely at look one while book

The final particle \textit{ne}, which, among other things, indicates continuity, is also incompatible with VV, with V-\textit{yi-V} and with V \textit{yi} Clv, as (27)-(29) illustrate.

(27) *Tamen \textit{ting-ting yinyue ne}.
    they listen-listen music ne

(28) *Tamen \textit{ting-yi-ting yinyue ne}.
    they listen-one-listen music ne

(29) *Tamen \textit{ting yi xia yinyue ne}.
    they listen one while music ne

In an imperative sentence, the degree adverbial \textit{shao(wei)} ‘a little’, which attenuates the illocutionary force of the order, is compatible with the three forms VV, V-\textit{yi-V} and V \textit{qi} Clv, as shown in (30)-(32).
But note that all Clvs are not interchangeable. Thus, while the Clv *xia* ‘a while’ is acceptable in (32), it cannot be replaced by the Clv *ci* ‘time’, contrary to Li & Thompson’s claim. Thus, example (33), where *ci* ‘time’ is a substitute for *xia* ‘time’ in (32), is not well formed.

(33) * Ni shaowei deng yi ci!
you a bit wait one time

In the following I will present some more dissimilarities between the three forms VV, V-*yi*-V and V *yi* Clv.

### 3.1.2 VV, V-*yi*-V and V *yi* Clv: non-identity of behaviour

What (32) and (33) above show is that *xia* cannot be used in the same context as *ci*. Hence the general definition which Chao provides for Clvs does not hold (see §2.1 above). If it were true that ‘a measure for verbs of action expresses the number of times an action takes place’, then both (32) and (33) should be equally acceptable. From the pair of examples (32) and (33), we can posit the existence of two main types of verbal classifiers:

- (i) those such as *ci* ‘time’ which *count* the number of occurrences an event takes place, and
- (ii) those such as *hui* ‘a while’, or *zhenzi* ‘a moment’, which *measure* a (short) interval during which an event takes place.

The verbal classifier *xia* ‘time’/‘a while’ is ambiguous: it can either mark the frequency of an event, and thus be substituted by *ci* ‘time’ or it can be substituted by *hui*
‘a while’, when it indicates an interval. Example (34) below is ambiguous: it has two readings (34a) and (34b). In (34a), the predication is punctual/telic, hence *xia* indicates a frequency; in (34b), the predication is durative, hence *xia* indicates an interval. Thus there exists a mutual dependency between the aspectual value of the predicate and the Q Clv it is in construction with.

(34) Ta tui-le wo yi xia.
    he  push-Sfx I one time/while
    a. ‘He pushed me once.’
    b. ‘He pushed me a while.’

Now that I have established two (semantic) classes of Clvs — the quantitative and the measure Clvs — and their relationships with the predicates that precede them, I will use well formed V Q Clv sequences and compare them to VV and V-yi-V constructions. I will use both syntactic and morphological arguments to oppose the two groups.

From the grammatical Q yi Clv examples (35) and (37), one cannot derive a corresponding VV form, nor a V-yi-V form, as shown in (36) and (38), respectively.

(35) Ta bing-le yi zhenzi. (36) *Ta bing-bing
    he  be.sick-Sfx one while
    he  be.sick-be.sick
    ‘He was sick for a while.’

(37) Tui teng-guo yi ci. (38) *Tui teng-yi-teng
    leg hurt-Sfx one Clv
    leg  hurt-one-hurt
    ‘[My/his…] leg hurt once.’

Examples (35) and (37) contain [–control] predicates *bing* ‘to be sick’ and *teng* ‘to hurt’. As is well known, such types of predicates can hardly be repeated in Mandarin.13 This is why (36) and (38) are ungrammatical. Hence the set of verbs which allow reduplication — be it in the form of the VV or the V-yi-V pattern — is smaller than the set of verbs which allows a Q Clv. V Q Clv do not co-occur with markers of ‘total’ duration as *zhengzai* or *ne* — see (26) and (29) — but they do with markers indicating ‘partial’ or short duration, see (34b).

Secondly, the V Q Clv sequence is (morphologically) different from both the VV and the V-yi-V patterns in that Q Clv is a free form. On the contrary, the second V in VV and the yi-V in V-yi-V are not autonomous: they are bound forms. Whereas (V) (Q Clv) is composed of two constituents, both (VV) and (V-yi-V) constitute only one

single constituent: they are $X^\circ$. Examples (40) and (42), which are derived from (39) and (41), are ill formed; the direct object Xiao Li has moved between the two syllables of song-song in (40) and between deng and yi deng in (42).

\[
(39) \quad \text{Ni qu song-song Xiao Li.} \\
\text{you go send.off-send.off Xiao Li} \\
\text{‘Please, send Xiao Li off.’}
\]

\[
(40) \quad *\text{Ni qu song Xiao Li -song} \\
\text{you go send.off Xiao Li -send.off}
\]

\[
(41) \quad \text{Ni deng-yi-deng Xiao Li!} \\
\text{you wait-one-wait Xiao Li} \\
\text{‘Wait for Little Li a bit!’}
\]

\[
(42) \quad *\text{Ni deng Xiao Li -yi-deng} \\
\text{you wait Xiao Li -one-wait}
\]

Contrary to the pairs (39)-(40) and (41)-(42), (43)-(44) is well formed. Both the surface orders (Q Clv) (Object) and (Object) (Q Clv) are permitted.

\[
(43) \quad \text{Ni deng yi xia Zhangsan!} \\
\text{you wait one while Zhangsan} \\
\text{‘Wait for Zhangsan for a while!’}
\]

\[
(44) \quad \text{Ni deng Zhangsan yi xia!} \\
\text{you wait Zhangsan one while} \\
\text{‘Wait for Zhangsan for a while!’}
\]

Thirdly, in the so-called ‘tentative construction’, i.e. a construction where a reduplicated verb is followed by the verb kan ‘to look’, the VV and the V-yi-V forms are not equivalent at all. While the VV pattern is acceptable, as in (45), V-yi-V is not, as in (46).

\[
(45) \quad \text{Ni pao-pao kan!} \\
\text{you run-run look} \\
\text{‘Let’s see how you run!’}
\]

\[
(46) \quad *\text{Ni pao-yi-pao kan!} \\
\text{you run-one-run look}
\]

Fourthly, the dissimilarity between the V-yi-V pattern, as in (49) on the one hand, and the V+Q Clv sequence, as in (47) and (48) on the other hand, manifests itself clearly in the lian...ye/dou (negative) constructions. Both yi ci in (47) and yi xia in (48) indicate a
minimum quantity — be it one time [+count] or one interval [–count]/[+measure] — that the event of reading requires to take place. This is why such quantifying expressions can enter the (negative) lian…ye/dou ‘even’ construction, as in (50) and (51). But as yi kan in (52) renders the (negative) lian…ye/dou construction ungrammatical, one can only conclude that [V] yi Clv and [V] yi V do not carry the same semantic function. If they did, (52) should be acceptable, but it is not.

(47) Kan yi ci!
look one time
‘to look [at something] once’

(48) Kan yi xia!
look one moment
‘to look [at something] a bit’

(49) Kan yi kan!
look one look
‘to cast a glance at’

(50) Ta lian yi ci dou bu xiang kan.
he even one time all Neg want look
a. ‘He does not even want to look once.’
b. ‘He does not even want to look at all.’

(51) Ta lian yi xia dou bu xiang kan.
he even one time/while all Neg want look
a. ‘He does not even want to look once.’
b. ‘He does not even want to look a bit.’

(52) *Ta lian yi kan dou bu xiang kan
he even one look all Neg want look

Finally, note in passing, that if VV and V-yi-V share many syntactic and semantic characteristics, they are not identical phonologically. In a VV form, the second form is toneless, but in a V-yi-V form, the second V keeps its tone.

In sum, in this section, by means of five tests, I have shown that the two verbal reduplicated patterns — VV and V-yi-V — do not behave alike syntactically, semantically or phonologically. I have opposed the reduplicated forms, V-yi-V, to the V Q Clv pattern. The (syntactic) distribution of V Q Clv is wider than that of V-yi-V, because it is less constrained semantically.

V Q Clv is acceptable with [–control] predicates, but VV and V-yi-V are not.
In conclusion, VV cannot be equated to V-\(y_i-V\), which itself cannot be equated to V Q Clv, contrary to what has very often been claimed in the literature.

In the following, I will dwell a little more on the opposition between to two classes of Clv, which I mentioned above in §3.1.2.

### 4. The two classes of Clvs: weak and strong

In this section, I will try to justify why it is necessary to posit that there are (at least) two classes of verbal classifiers in Mandarin. Then I will very briefly present some constructions in English and in French that function similarly to Chinese Clvs.

#### 4.1 Weak and strong Clvs in Chinese

The syntactic properties of Q Clv that I have described above all indicate that Q Clv are not DPs:\(^{14}\) they are measure phrases (MPs) — just like \(y_i\) sui ‘one year’ or \(y_i\) mi ‘one meter’ in (53) and (54).

(53) Ta lao-le \(y_i\) sui.
    he be.old-Sfx one year
    ‘He aged one year.’

(54) Ta pao-le \(y_i\) mi lu.
    he run-Sfx one meter road
    ‘He ran one meter.’

Q Clv expressions are not referential. They do not introduce a discourse referent, nor can they be the head of a relative clause. They are incorporated\(^{15}\) into the verb. Two types of Clvs can be distinguished as follows: those which allow Q to be the whole range of numbers (\(y_i\) ‘one’, \(liang\) ‘two’, \(san\) ‘three’, etc.), and those which only allow \(y_i\) ‘a’, a marker of indefiniteness. I will call the first ones “strong Q Clvs” and the second ones “weak Q Clvs”.

The distinction between these two classes is grounded on syntactic evidence. Strong Q Clvs can have scope, as seen is the (negative) \(lian…ye/dou\) construction above in

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\(^{14}\) Note that whereas some Chinese linguists, like Ding (1961) label them as \(zhun\) \(binyu\) ‘quasi objects’, some others, like Liu et al. (1983) label them as \(shuliang\) \(binyu\) ‘quantificational complements’. For me, verbal classifiers are predicational, hence they are not objects \(binyu\), but complements \(binyu\).

\(^{15}\) I use the term ‘incorporated’ in the sense of Farkas & De Swart (2003).
examples (50) and (51). They indicate the number of times an event takes place. In a word, they are markers of frequency. As opposed to strong Q Clvs, “weak Q Clvs” do not have a broad scope, they are scopally inert and simply indicate an occurrence of an event; see examples (61) and (64)-(65).

Examples (55) and (56) contain strong Clvs. Yi ‘one’ can be substituted by other numbers and with the indefinite ji ‘some’ (‘1 to 9’), see (57) and (58). Such strong Clvs can enter a (negative) lian…ye/dou ‘even’ construction, see (59) and (60).

(55) Ta kan-le ni yi yan.  
he look-Sfx you one eye
‘He cast a glance at you.’

(56) Ta qu-le yi tang.  
he go-Sfx one Clv
‘He went once.’

(57) Ta kan-le ni ji yan.  
he look-Sfx you several eye
‘He cast a glance at you several times.’

(58) Ta qu-le ji tang.  
he go-Sfx several Clv
‘He went several times.’

(59) Ta lian yi yan ye mei kan ni.  
He even one eye also Neg look you
a. ‘He did not even cast a glance at you.’
 b. ‘He did not look at you at all.’

(60) Ta lian yi tang ye mei qu.  
he even one Clv also Neg go
a. ‘He did not even go once.’
 b. ‘He did not go at all.’

The weak Q Clv yi tiao ‘a startle’, contained in (61) below, allows neither the substitution of yi with san ‘three’, for example — as shown in (62) — nor the movement of yi tiao in preverbal position in a lian…ye/dou ‘even’ construction, as in (63). Example (63) shows that yi tiao has a narrow scope.

(61) Ta xia-le wo yi tiao.  
he frighten-Sfx I one Clv
‘He frightened me.’
Other examples of weak Clvs can be found in (64) and (65). In this pair of examples, yi ‘a’ cannot be substituted by liang ‘two’.

(64) Ta ma-le Zhangsan yi/*liang dun.
    he curse-Sfx Zhangsan one/*two a while
    ‘He gave Zhangsan a good scolding.’

(65) Ta la-le wo yi/*liang ba.
    he pull-Sfx I one/*two handle
    a. ‘He gave me a hand.’
    b. ‘He helped me.’

The opposition between weak and strong Clvs that I have proposed for Chinese is not ad hoc. It can also be used to characterize some parallel phenomena in Indo-European languages, such as English and French.16

4.2 V a N in English and V yi Clv in Mandarin

In my view, the counterparts to Chinese Clv constructions can be found in English, in predicative constructions composed of a light (causative) verb — such as to have, to take, to give — followed by a nominalized verb. In (66) the light verb is have, in (67) take and in (68) give.

(66) To have a chat, a taste, a try, a cry, a fall, a go…
(67) To take a peek at, a glance at, a swim, a seat…
(68) To give a gasp, a kiss, a read, a fright, a hand…

The semantic distinction between verbs like to chat, to swim and to gasp, etc. and their light verbs counterparts to have a chat, to take a swim and to give a gasp, etc. is aspectual. Whereas the former pattern indicates unbounded/homogeneous predications,

16 I will not treat French here as I did in my oral presentations at Krakow and Poznan. The noun coup in French functions as an equivalent to a verbal classifier in Mandarin. For an illuminating analysis, see Gross (1984).
i.e. mass predications, the latter indicates bounded/punctual, i.e. countable predications. Hence, the function of the *a N* in an English <light V a N> construction is similar to that of *yi Clv* in a <V yi Clv> construction in Mandarin. The function of Mandarin *yi* Clv is to bound, to limit the predication that V indicates. Such a limitation can be twofold. It can either create a sub-interval where the predication is homogeneous, as in (5) above, or it can introduce an end point, as in (15) above. Examples (5) and (15) are repeated here as (69) and (70) for the sake of convenience.

(69) * feng yi xia*  
* = sew one time  
(5) ‘to sew a bit’/‘a short while’

(70) * Ta kan-le yi yan.*  
* = he look-Sfx one Clv  
(15) ‘He cast a glance.’

That Q Clv does bound the predication is proven by the fact that durative aspectual markers such as the preverbal *zai* ‘be…ing’ or the verbal suffix -*zhe* ‘-ing’ are incompatible with Q Clv, as shown in (71) and (72). The elision of the Q Clv *yi xia* would render (71) grammatical. The substitution of -*zhe* with the telic marker -*le* would render (72) well formed.

(71) *Wo zai deng yi xia huoche.*  
* I be...ing wait a while train  
(72) *Ta kan-zhe wo yi yan.*  
* he look-Sfx I one eye  

Only if the function of V *yi* Clv is understood in aspectual terms can we understand why the Q Clv sequence *yi xia* is ambiguous, see (73) (same as (34) above). When the predication is atelic, *yi xia* bounds it by restricting it to a sub-interval; *yi xia*, then, translates as ‘a bit’, ‘a short while’ and can be substituted by *yi hui(r)* ‘a short while’, as in (73) and (74).

When the predication is telic, hence it is seen as a whole or restricted to a point, *yi xia* translates as ‘once’/‘one time’, that is to say it is a frequency marker. Only in the latter case are *xia* and *ci* ‘time’ synonymous. See (73) and (75).

(73) * Ta tui-le wo yi xia.*  
* = He push-Sfx I one time/while  
(34) a. ‘He pushed me once.’  
   b. ‘He pushed me a while.’
(74) Ta tui-le wo yi huir\xia.
He push-Sfx I one while
‘He pushed me a while.’

(75) Ta tui-le wo yi ci\xia.
He push-Sfx I one time
‘He pushed me once.’

The syntactic and semantic parallelism between the two patterns V yi Q Clv in Mandarin and V a N in English can be drawn further. In the same way as yi ‘a’/‘one’ can be interpreted either as an indefinite article ‘a’ or as a cardinal number ‘one’, a in English can also be understood in two different ways.

When a reads as the indefinite article, it cannot be substituted by one, two etc. All the examples in (76) are ill formed.

(76) *to give two frights, *to give two reads, *to take two glances at, *to have two struggles with, *to have two goes

When a is equivalent to the cardinal number ‘one’, substitution with other numbers is allowed, as in (77). As is well known, in stage-level predications, quantifying on the direct object can be interpreted as quantifying on the number of events, see Krifka (1989, 1992). Hence two in example (77) below is interpreted as the frequency marker twice or as on two occasions, as shown in (78). Saying that two events described as ‘someone making a phone call’ took place is equivalent to saying that ‘someone made a phone call twice’.

(77) to make/give two phone calls, to take/have two drinks, to take two breaks…
(78) to call twice, to have a drink/to take a break on two occasions…

If Mandarin yi or English a are not interpreted as marking numbers, it is then impossible to say that yi Q Clv or a N are equivalent to frequency markers. When the number of times the event took place must be indicated, this is done by having recourse to a frequency marker; compare (79) and (80).

(79) *to have two reads, to have three struggles with someone etc.
(80) to have a read twice, to have a struggle with someone three times etc.
5. Concluding remarks

In this paper I have tried to highlight the tight aspectual relationship which exists between the V and its following Q Clv in a V Q Clv construction in Chinese. I have shown that, contrary to the standard assumptions:

(i) V Q Clv and VV/V-yi-V reduplication patterns do not function alike, neither syntactically nor semantically, and
(ii) it is not accurate to characterize a Clv only as an indicator of frequency.

Because verb reduplication — whether in the form of a VV or V-yi-V pattern — only limits a predication and does not make it countable, one can predict that it cannot be equivalent to a V Q Clv construction. This is all the more true given that, in a V Q Clv sequence, Q can stand for liang ‘two’, san ‘three’, etc. but in V-yi-V reduplicated pattern, yi can never be substituted with liang ‘two’, san ‘three’, or any other number.

A Clv is a measure phrase: it limits and bounds a stage-level predication it is in construction with in two different ways. With what I have called ‘weak verbal classifiers’, a Clv simply bounds the predication. Yi, which precedes Clv, is understood as an indefinite marker — it cannot be substituted by liang ‘two’, etc. and yi Clv is scopeless. With strong verbal classifiers, a Clv bounds the predication, renders it telic, and thus makes it countable. Yi is understood as a number and can be substituted by liang ‘two’, san ‘three’, etc.; yi Clv can have a broad scope in a lian…yeli ‘even’ construction.

Drawing a distinction between the two classes of verbal classifiers in terms of the roles they play in the quantificational domain is, I hope, more fruitful than listing verbal classifiers according to their lexical properties. Otherwise, for example, how could we explain that even though both zui ‘mouth’ and jiao ‘foot’ are body parts, they do not function alike? From (81) one cannot predict that (82) cannot be derived, whereas (84) can be derived from (83).

(81) cha yi zui
insert one mouth
‘to interrupt’

(82) *cha ji zui
insert several mouth

(83) ti yi jiao
kick one foot
‘to give a kick’

(84) ti ji jiao
kick several foot
‘to give several kicks’

In short, even though the label ‘verbal classifier’ does not belong to the set of meta-linguistic terms used to describe languages in the Indo-European tradition, this label could be used to describe some constructions in English (or in French). By drawing a comparison between yi Clv in Mandarin and a N in English, where N is a verbal noun, I have tried to show that these constructions share similar properties. These similarities probably explain why the equivalents of ‘a hand’, which are italicized in the three examples (85)-(87) — *a hand* in English, *yi ba* in Mandarin and *un coup de main* in French — could adequately be labelled verbal classifiers.

(85) to lend (X) *a hand*

(86) la (X) *yi ba*
   ‘to lend (X) a hand’/‘to help (X)’

(87) donner *un coup de main* (à X)
   give a Clv of hand (to X)
   ‘to help (X)’
References


