Durational Complements and Their Constructions in Chinese  
(with Reference to French)*

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In this paper it is shown that, in Mandarin Chinese, post-verbal durational complements are found in three (rather than only two) syntactic patterns. The cooccurrence restrictions between the verb suffix -le and the final particle le are studied in relation to two French markers il y a, on the one hand, and il y a que, on the other. A parallelism is drawn between the uses of tenses in il y a que constructions in French and the (im)possibility of verb copying in related constructions in Mandarin.

Key words: Chinese, French il y a / il y a que, durational complements, verb copying, verb suffix -le, final particle le, stage-level predication, pluractional predication

1. Introduction

As is well known, the verb copying construction is typically used in Chinese when postverbal durational, frequency, resultative and extent/degree complements follow a verb, which is itself followed by a constituent,¹ thus explaining the contrast in grammaticality between the pairs (1)-(2) and (3)-(4). In (1) and (3) the postverbal complement is a durational complement; in (2)-(4) it is a degree complement.

(1) *xia yu hen jiu le (3) xia yu xia-le hen jiu le
fall rain very long F.P. fall rain fall-Sfx. very long F.P.
it has been raining for a long time

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¹ I am grateful to S. Chuang, L. Prevot and E. Zeitoun for their insightful comments on this paper. Any errors or shortcomings are my responsibility. The abbreviations used are: Cl.: Classifier; F.P.: Final Particle; Neg.: Negative; Sfx.: Suffix.

² It is generally assumed that this constituent is a nominal object, but PPs are also allowed, as (i):
(i) hua, ta gua zai qiang shang gua-le yi ge zhongtou le
painting he hang at wall on hang-Sfx. one Cl. hour F.P.
he has been hanging paintings on the wall for one hour
In this paper, I will not deal with frequency, resultative nor with extent/degree complements. I will concentrate on durational complements. I will study:

(i) the cooccurrence restrictions between different types of predications and durational complements and
(ii) the aspectual restrictions which render verb copying (im)possible.

Firstly, I will present some previous analyses on this topic. Secondly, by paying attention to some data which have gone slightly unnoticed at the syntax/semantics interface, I will study the types of syntactic constructions in which durational complements appear. I will briefly compare some facts in Mandarin Chinese with their French counterparts. I would like to point out that, contrary to what is commonly assumed in the literature, durational complements enter three (not just two) different syntactic patterns.

2. Previous approaches

No matter whether they focus their attention only on syntax or on the syntax/semantics/pragmatics interface, most of the works I know of lack some degree of descriptive adequacy.

I will first present a piece of research carried in the generative paradigm and then one in the functional paradigm.

2.1 Syntactic approaches

Durational Complements and Their Constructions in Chinese

(5) IP
   NP₁  I’
      I   VP
         NP₂  V’
              V  NP₃

«A definite/referential object NP occurs in the Spec of VP position and an indefinite/non-referential object NP occurs within V’ (as sister to V)» (op. cit: 209). Such an analysis nicely accounts for the well-known distributional constraints between definite and indefinite object NPs with respect to durational complements in Mandarin.

Under this approach, the ungrammaticality of (6) is due to the fact that the indefinite object and the durational complement² compete for the same position, as sisters of V in V’. The copying of the verb *deng* ‘to wait’, as in (7), remedies the ungrammaticality of (6).

(6) *ta deng ren yi ge zhongtou le
   he wait person one Cl. hour F.P.
(7) ta deng₁ ren deng₂-le yi ge zhongtou le
   he wait person wait-Sfx. one Cl. hour F.P.
   he has been waiting for someone (for) one hour

In (8) the definite object, whether it is the proper name *Zhangsan* or the personal pronoun *wo* ‘I’ are generated in a higher position than the indefinite object *ren* ‘a person’ in (6). The verb moves out of V’, giving the well-formed surface word order (8), illustrated in example (9).

(8) Subject + Verb₁ + [+definite] Object + t₁ + Durational complement.
(9) ni deng Zhangsan/wo yi hui(r) ba
   you wait Zhangsan/I one moment F.P.
   (please) wait for Zhangsan/me for a moment

Such a derivation is attractive, but it poses three problems. On the one hand, it

² Tang (1994:645) generates the durational (and frequency) complements as adjuncts to the VP.
does not allow one to predict that an alternative word order, as evidenced in (10) below, is well-attested. In (9) Zhangsan precedes the durational complement yi hui(r) ‘one moment’, in (10) it follows it.

(10) ni deng yi hui(r) Zhangsan ba³
    you wait one moment Zhangsan F.P.
    (please) wait for Zhangsan for a moment

On the other, it treats durational complements on a par with objects, a fact which remains to be justified. (At least) two tests prove that durational complements and direct objects behave differently in the syntax. The postverbal constituents in (11) and (12) seem to pattern alike, but they do not. First, in (13) the interrogative counter part of the object huoche ‘train’ in (11) is shenme ‘what?’, where as one of the interrogative counterparts of the durational complement yi ge zhongtou ‘one hour’ in (12) is duo jiu ‘how long?’, as in (14). Shenme is nominal in (13), duo jiu is predicative in (14).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>(11)</th>
<th>(12)</th>
<th>(13)</th>
<th>(14)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ta deng-le huoche</td>
<td>ta deng-le yi ge zhongtou</td>
<td>ta deng-le shenme?</td>
<td>ta deng-le duo jiu?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>he wait-Sfx. train</td>
<td>he wait-Sfx. 1 Cl. hour</td>
<td>he wait-Sfx. what</td>
<td>he wait-Sfx. much long</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>he waited for the train</td>
<td>he waited (for) one hour</td>
<td>what did he wait for?</td>
<td>how long did he wait?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Secondly, a direct (indefinite nominal) object — liang ge huaping ‘two vases’ in (15) — can be relativized, in which case the clitic suo can appear in the relative clause, cf. (16).

(15) ta dapo-le liang ge huaping
    he break-Sfx. two Cl. vase
    he broke two vases

(16) [(ta suo dapo de) liang ge huaping]...
    he suo break de two Cl. vase
    two vases that he broke...

As can be expected from (17), the durational complement shi fen zhong ‘ten

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³ This sentence is not easily accepted by speakers of Taiwan Mandarin, but this word order is attested in Beijing Mandarin, see Jia (1985), among others. Ernst (1994) studies the word order differences between adjuncts in Taiwan Mandarin and in Beijing Mandarin.
minutes’ cannot be relativized in (18).

(17) ta ku-le shì fenzhong
    he cry-Sfx. ten minute

(18) ??[(ta suo ku de) shì fenzhong]...
    he suo cry de ten minute

Thirdly, different types of [+definite] objects should be taken care of, because proper names do not behave syntactically in the same way as personal pronouns do. \(^4\) Zhangsan and wo ‘I’ are both definite and occupy the same syntactic positions in (10) = (19) and (20). But (20), where wo ‘I’ follows the durational complement, is ungrammatical.

(10) ní dēng yì hui(r) Zhangsan ba
    you wait one moment Zhangsan F.P.

(19) (please) wait for Zhangsan for a moment

(20) *nǐ dēng yì hui(r) wǒ ba
    you wait one moment I F.P.

Thus, the difference between (19) and (20) cannot be accounted for in purely syntactic terms. Situations similar to those in (19) and (20) can be found in French or in English, where a weak form of an object pronoun cannot appear in sentence final position, cf. (21) in French and (22) in English.

(21) *donne moi le
(22) *give me it

A demonstrative pronoun, which may bear stress and may be contrasted can, however, appear in sentence final position, as in (23) and (24).

(23) donne moi cela
(24) give me this

Rather than attributing different lexical weights to personal pronouns as opposed to demonstrative pronouns, as Abeillé and Godard (2000) do, I believe that the difference which is at stake here is a difference in informational values. A personal pronoun can

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\(^4\) This distributional restriction has been noticed many times, especially with frequency complements. Among others, see Li (1987), Paris (1988a, b), Ernst (1996), Gu (1997), Tsao (1987, 1990), Cheng et al. (1997).
neither represent new information nor be mentioned for the first time in discourse, but a demonstrative pronoun can.\textsuperscript{5}

To sum up, the derivation of indefinite vs. definite NPs in different syntactic (and scope) positions as proposed by Cheng et al. (1997) accounts for some cooccurrence restrictions between objects NPs and durational complements in Mandarin Chinese, but not for all of them.

### 2.2 Functional approaches

In this section, I will concentrate mostly on Tai’s (1989, 1999) propositions.

Tai (1989) — and also Chang (1991) — associate the presence vs. the absence of verb copying to a semantic difference. (26), where the verb is copied indicates a repetitive or durative situation, while (25), where the verb is not copied, indicates a resultative predication. In their perspective, the verb copying construction is iconic:\textsuperscript{6} its word order parallels the temporal sequence of events thereby following Tai’s principle labelled P.T.S. [Principle of Temporal Sequence]. In such an approach, the repetition of the linguistic elements corresponds either to the repetition or to the duration of the event referred to in the conceptual world.

\begin{align*}
(25) & \text{ wo gei ta xie xin yi ge yue le } \\
& \text{ I give he write letter one Cl. month F.P.} \\
& \text{ it has been a month since I wrote him a letter (durative resultant state)} \\
(26) & \text{ wo gei ta xie}_1 \ xin \ xie_2-\text{le yi ge yue le } \\
& \text{ I give he write letter write-Sfx. one Cl. month F.P.} \\
& \text{ I have been writing to him for a month (repetitive events)}
\end{align*}

(25) does not contain any copy of the verb \textit{xie} ‘write’, but (26) does. (25)-(26) carry different meanings. (25) emphasizes the duration of time elapsed after the completion of the event \textit{xie xin} ‘write a letter/letters’, while (26) describes the repetition of the activity of letter writing during a certain time interval, i.e. \textit{yi ge yue} ‘one month’.

Tai (1999) characterizes the possibility and impossibility of verb copying and provides a finer grained analysis. He posits an interaction between semantic, pragmatic

\textsuperscript{5} This is different from Tang’s (1994:661) pragmatic principle of «from old to new», in that I set a contrast between the different forms of pronouns (weak and strong forms) and their respective positions. (21) above is acceptable if the word-order is different, as in (i):

(i) \textit{donne le moi} \\
Maint is the strong form of the first person singular pronoun.

\textsuperscript{6} Paris & Peyraube (1993) question this approach.
Durational Complements and Their Constructions in Chinese

and phonological principles, each of which applying with a typicality condition. Thus, he ascribes different semiotic functions to the two patterns (I) and (II) illustrated by (25) and (26), respectively. Henceforth, I will label these patterns (I) and (II).

(I) Subject + Verb + Direct Object + Durational complement (lapse of time)
(II) Subject + Verb + Direct Object + Verb + Durational complement (duration of time)

Pattern (I) «is more in tune with the function of lapse of time», whereas pattern (II) «is more in tune with the function of duration of time» (op. cit: 109-110). Tai points out that, in order to determine whether verb copying is allowed or not, the (semantic) type of events involved is more important than aspectual considerations. If only aspectual differences were taken into account, (27) and (28), which both refer to achievements, should behave alike with regard to verb copying. But this is not the case: (27) allows verb copying, whereas (28) disallows it.

(27) ta ru dang ru-le wu nian le7
     he enter party enter-Sfx. five year F.P.
     it has been five years since he joined the party
(28) *ta faxian zhei jian shi faxian-le liang nian le8
     he discover this Cl. matter discover-Sfx. two year F.P.

The grammatical counterpart of (28) is (29), whose grammatical pattern is (I).

(29) ta faxian zhei jian shi liang nian le
     he discover this Cl. matter two year F.P.
     it has been two years since he discovered this matter

(27) and (29) behave alike semantically but not syntactically, as far as verb copying is concerned. (27) follows pattern (II), (29) pattern (I). Semantically, both indicate that, after the completion of the telic events (i.e. ru dang ‘join the party’ and faxian zhei jian shi ‘discover this matter’), a (resultant) state holds true until speech time. But to (27), one can associate (30), which follows pattern (I). Thus, the well-formed pair (29)-(30) is built on the same syntactic pattern. In (29)-(30) there is no syntax/semantics mistach.

7 Jia (1985).
8 Tai (1999).
In conclusion, as noticed by Tai, the verb copying construction is compatible with both durative (or activity) and repetitive (or non semelfactive telic) predications — pattern (II). But what has gone less noticed are the constraints on aspectual markings in pattern (I).

3. Cooccurrence restrictions between the suffix -le, the final particle le and durational complements

Paul (1988) proposes to assign biunivocally two different syntactic structures to the two semantic interpretations associated with patterns (I) and (II). According to her, (31) corresponds to a resultative predication: the durational complement is the main predicate of the sentence and what precedes it is a sentential subject.9 (32), which involves copying indicates duration.

(31) [S[S wo gei ta xie xin s] [VP yi ge yue VP] le s]
    it has been a month since I wrote him a letter
    resultative predication, pattern (I)
(32) wo [VP[V'1 gei ta xie xin] [V'2 xie-le yi ge yue] VP] le]\(^{10}\)
    I have been writing to him for a month
    activity predication, pattern (II)

She notices that in the pattern (I) the verb cannot be marked by the suffix -le, as the contrast in acceptability between (33)-(34) and (35)-(36) shows, but that there are cases where such a suffixation is optionally allowed, as in (37).

(33) ta bi-ø ye yi nian le
    he finish grade one year F.P.
    he has been a graduate for one year
    it has been one year since he graduated
(34) *ta bi-le ye yi nian
    he finish-Sfx. grade one year

9 See also, among others, Teng (1975), Li (1987), Ernst (1996), Cheng et al. (1997).
10 Tsao (1987) treats the first V’ of (32) as a secondary topic; Paul (2000:267) argues against the treatment of verb copying as a construction where both V₁ and V₂ are inside the VP.
(35) ta ru ø dang yi nian le
he enter party one year F.P.
it has been one year since he joined the Party

(36) *ta ru-le dang yi nian
he enter-Sfx. party one year

(37) ta dao(-le) Taiwan yijing you yi ge yue le
he arrive-Sfx. Taiwan already have one Cl. month F.P.
he has been in Taiwan for a month now
it has been month since he arrived in Taiwan

Paul attributes the difference in grammaticality between (34)/(36) and (37) to the fact that the suffix -le is disallowed in the presence of a ‘real’ object, while it is allowed, though not mandatorily, when the postverbal constituent is a locative phrase, cf. (37). The impossibility of verb suffixation in (34)/(36) is due to the fact that embedded sentential subjects are nominalized propositions, hence they cannot accept any marking on their verbs.  

In the following, I will show that Paul’s explanation of the (possible) presence of verbal -le is ad hoc. Many other examples where the presence of -le in a resultative predication is allowed or even mandatory can be adduced. This is to say that the pattern S + V-le + O + D.C le is very productive in constructions containing durational complements in Mandarin.

3.1 The presence of suffix -le

As (38)-(39) below show, there exist other examples where the verb must be suffixed with -le and where the object is not locative.

(38) jia dui ying-le/*(-le) nei chang qiu yijing hao ji tian le  
A team win-Sfx. that Cl. ball already good few day F.P.
it has been quite a few days since team A won the ball game
(yi dui haishi bu fuqi)
(B team still Neg. admit
(but team B still wouldn’t admit their failure)

(39) ta da-sui-le/*(-le) nei kuai boli liang tian le, hai mei you ren zhuyi
he beat-break-Sfx.that Cl. glass two day F.P. still Neg. have person notice
it’s been two days since he broke that glass, but nobody has noticed it

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11 Cheng et al. adopt the same analysis for frequency predicates (1997:209).
12 (38) and (39) are borrowed from Gu (1997).
3.2 The presence of the final particle *le*

Apart from the presence of the verbal suffix *-le*, in most research works heed has not been paid to the importance of the role played by the final particle *le* in examples such as (40)-(41).\(^\text{13}\) (42)-(43) are ungrammatical, because achievement verbs, whether they are transitive, as *ying* ‘win’ or intransitive as *si* ‘die’, are compatible with adverbials indicating a location in time (i.e. duration-dating adverbials) as in (40)-(41), but not with durational complements (i.e. duration-measuring adverbials), cf. (42)-(43).

(40) jia dui liang ge zhongtou yiqian ying-le nei chang qiu
A team two Cl. hour before win-Sfx. that Cl. ball
A team won the ball game two hours ago
l’équipe A a gagné ce match il y a deux heures\(^\text{14}\)
il y a deux heures l’équipe A a gagné ce match
(41) ta shi nian yiqian si-le
he ten year before die-Sfx.
he died three days ago
il est mort il y a dix ans
(42) *jia dui ying-le nei chang qiu liang ge zhongtou ø
A team win-Sfx. that Cl. ball two Cl. hour ø
(43) *ta da-sui-le nei kuai boli liang tian ø
he beat-break-Sfx. that Cl. glass two day F.P.

Syntactically and semantically, durative/\([+\text{homogeneous}]\) predications differ from change of state verbs/\([-\text{homogeneous}]\) predications: they can cooccur with durational complements in the absence of the final particle *le*. (44)-(45) are well-formed, contrary to (42)-(43).

(44) ta ku-le san tian ø
he cry-Sfx. three day ø
he cried for three days

\(^{13}\) Except for Ma (1981).

\(^{14}\) From (40) on I provide both the English and French translations to the Mandarin examples. The difference between *il y a* ‘ago’ and *il y a que* ‘it has been...since’ stands out clearly. Notice that *il y a* in (40)-(41) has a wider distribution than *il y a que*. *Il y a que* is restricted to sentence initial position, whereas *il y a* appears both in sentence initial and in sentence final positions.
The presence of the final particule *le* is mandatory to transform (42)-(43) into well-formed sentences, (46), (39) and (47). The semantic function of the cooccurrence between the durational complement and the final particle consists in indicating the interval of time elapsed between the completion of the process described by *ying* ‘win’, *dasui* ‘break’ or by *si* ‘die’ and speech time.

(46) jia dui ying-le/*(-le) nei chang qiu yijing hao ji tian le
    = A team win-Sfx. that Cl. ball already good few day F.P.
(38) it has been quite a few days since team A won the ball game
    il y a déjà plusieurs années que l’équipe A a gagné ce match
(47) ta de pengyou si-le/*(-le) (yijing) shi nian le
    he de friend die-Sfx. already ten year F.P.
    it has been ten years (already) since his friend died
    il y a déjà dix ans que son ami est mort
    cela fait déjà dix ans que son ami est mort

What remains to be explained now are the different discourse circumstances under which (40)-(41) can be used, as opposed to (46)-(47). To my mind, there exists a striking parallelism between the absence vs. presence of the final particle *le* in Chinese, on the one hand, and the uses of two markers of time duration in French — i.e. *il y a* and *il y a que* — on the other. Note in passing that the French translations of (40)-(41) and (46)-(47) are different.

3.3 *Il y a* and *il y a que* in French

As Berthonneau (1993:55) has very convincingly shown, in French *il y a* and *il y a que* both mark the same temporal reference, but their discursive/cohesive function is different. Whereas *il y a* is only used to locate two points in time — speech time and a time anterior to speech time — *il y a que* is used in context where a justification is needed. *Il y a que* establishes a temporal distance between a past event and speech time — *il y a* does that too — but, contrary to *il y a*, *il y a que* establishes a relationship

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15 The difference between *il y a...que* and *cela fait...que* in (46)-(47) corresponds to a difference in register: *cela fait...que* is more colloquial than *il y a...que.*
not between points in time, but between situations (and their relations). Thus, while (48) simply localizes the death of Général de Gaulle in time, (49) would be used in a context where the death of Général de Gaulle is commemorated (such as in a radio or T.V. report).

(48)  *il y a vingt et un an mourait le Général de Gaulle*
(49)  *il y a vingt et un an que mourait le Général de Gaulle*

If a parallelism can be drawn between Chinese and French, then a preverbal temporal phrase in Chinese translates as *il y a* — cf. (40)-(41) — whereas a postverbal durational phrase corresponds to *il y a que* — cf. (46)-(47) — when they are in construction with telic predications.

The contexts provided by Gu (1997) for examples (38)-(39), as well as for (47), now find a justification. (38)-(39) — as well as (47) — are used not to simply locate an event in time, because a preverbal time adverbial would suffice to achieve this goal, see (40)-(41). The postverbal durational phrase in (38)-(39) establishes a causal link between a situation prevalent at speech time (team B does not want to acknowledge its defeat) and relates it to as preceding event (the winning of team A). The same explanation applies to the following example, also borrowed from Gu (1997:133).

(50)  *ta de pengyou si-le yijing shi nian le, Lisi ti-qilai hai he de friend die-Sfx. already ten year F.P. Lisi mention-Sfx. still changchang gandao nanguo often feel sad it has been ten years since his friend died, but Lisi often still feels sad when he mentions him*  

*il y a déjà dix ans que son ami est mort, lorsqu’il en parle Lisi ressent souvent du chagrin*

4. Conclusion

Durational complements always occupy the postverbal position in affirmative sentences in Mandarin Chinese. They are found in two syntactic patterns, for which a

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16 In negative sentences, the durational complement stands in preverbal position for scope (c-command) reasons. As it is not in the scope of negation, it has to precede the verb *chouyan* ‘smoke’, as in (i).

(i)  *ta san ge zhongtou dou mei chouyan*  

he three Cl. hour all Neg. smoke  

for three hours, he has not smoked
one-to-one correspondence between syntax and semantics cannot be established. For instance, one cannot associate univocally the meaning of activity/duration to pattern (II), as there exist durative predications which admit no copying of the verb, as in (51).

(51) ta jiao-ø fayu yi nian le  
he teach French one year F.P.  
he has been teaching French for a/one year

(52) ta jiao fayu jiao-le yi nian le  
he teach French teach-Sfx. one year F.P.  
he has been teaching French for a/one year

(51) exhibits pattern (I) and (52) pattern (II) and they are synonymous. So, as a consequence, it is not is exact to only attribute a resultative meaning to (I).

In this paper, I have laid stress on the distribution of -le in pattern (I). The alternation between ø and -le is part and parcel in the grammar of durational constructions in Mandarin Chinese. Hence, (I) should be stated more accurately. It should be rewritten as follows:

(Ia) Subject + Verb + ø + Direct Object + Durational complement (+ le)

The comparison between French il y a and il y a que and its equivalents in Mandarin Chinese has allowed me to bring to the surface the existence of a third pattern — noted (Ib) below — that is one where the (transitive) V is necessarily suffixed by -le and where the presence of the sentence final particle le is mandatory.

(Ib) Subject + Verb -le + Direct Object + Durational complement + le

Notice that, as such a construction indicates how the consequences of a preceding completed event are relevant at speech time, V-le is tantamount to a resultative predication. Hence, the well-known constraints which apply to objects of resultative predications, apply here too. Thus, from (53), one cannot derive (54).

(53) ta gai-hao-le na dong fangzi hen duo nian le (pattern (Ib))  
he build-finish-Sfx. that Cl. house very many year F.P.  
it has been many years since he built that house

In (54) both the resultative suffix hao ‘to finish’ following the verb gai ‘build’ and the definite determiner of the object fangzi ‘house’ have been deleted, yielding an ungrammatical sentence.
The absolute necessity to distinguish between pattern (Ia) and pattern (Ib) is obvious in the comparison between (53) and (55) below. (53) indicates a [−habitual]/[−iterative] predication, (55) a [+habitual]/ [+iterative] predication.

(53) ta gai-le fangzi hen duo nian le
    he build-Sfx. house very many year F.P.

(55) ta gai-ø ø fangzi (yijing) hen duo nian le (pattern (Ia))
    he build-ø ø house already very many year F.P.
    he has been building houses for many years (already)

Hopefully, this piece of research has shown that it is mandatory to take aspectual distinctions into account when dealing with sentences containing a durational complement and a verb which is not copied in Mandarin. (53) and (55) can be opposed in terms of aspect and consequently in terms of types of predication. The very same is true in French where (56) and (57) can be opposed by using different tenses and different markings on the object. The tense used in (56) is the *passé composé* (present perfect) and the object is definite/singular; the tense used in (57) is the *présent* (present) and the object is indefinite/plural.

(56) * il y a longtemps qu’il a construit cette maison
(57) il y a longtemps qu’il construit des maisons

Only a [+bounded] predication allows a variant with *il y a*, cf. (58). As expected, an unbounded predication does not, cf. (59).

(58) il a construit cette maison il y a longtemps
(59) *il construit cette maison il y a longtemps

The double constrast between (i) *il y a* and *il y a que* and (ii) *passé composé/*présent in French finds a direct counterpart in Mandarin. A stage-level/bounded predication like (53) does not permit verb copying, cf. (60), whereas an iterative or pluractional17 predication like (55) does, cf. (61).

(60) *ta gai na dong fangzi gai-hao-le hen duo nian le18
    he build that Cl. house build-finish-Sfx. very many year F.P.

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17 This term is borrowed from Van Geenhoven (2004).
(61) ta gai fangzi gai-le he n duo nian le (pattern (II))
he build house build-Sfx. very many year F.P
he has been building houses for many years

I hope that by setting in contrast some aspects of the grammar of Mandarin and of
the grammar of French, I have helped the reader understand some puzzling facts about
the syntax/semantics interface of durational constructions in both languages.

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