

# On the “one+verbal classifier” sequence as a delimitative aspect marker in Taiwanese Southern Min

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This paper studies the “one+verbal classifier” sequence *tsit-ê* that appears after an indefinite object complement in Taiwanese Southern Min. We call it the post-complement (PC) *tsit-ê*. While the *tsit-ê* sequence can be a durative phrase when it is immediately preceded by a verb, the PC *tsit-ê* cannot be replaced by the durative phrase *tsit-ê-á* ‘a while’ (*tsit-ê* plus the diminutive suffix *á*) or other durative phrases. We show that the PC *tsit-ê* is a sentence-final particle, not a durative phrase serving as a predicate or complement. Moreover, it marks delimitativity, which means ‘termination in a short time.’ It is the same kind of delimitativity that verb reduplication in Mandarin Chinese expresses despite the fact that the latter targets on the verb and is more selective in terms of the verb types that it can occur with. Moreover, the PC *tsit-ê* carries the ‘down-play’ meaning. Syntactically, we suggest that it heads an AspP, which occurs above a vP.

**Keywords:** verbal classifier, durative phrase, the delimitative aspect, the ‘down-play’ meaning, Taiwanese Southern Min

## 1. Introduction

*Tsit-ê* (一下), a sequence composed of the numeral *tsit* ‘one’ and the verbal classifier *ê*, can appear at the post-complement (PC) position in Taiwanese Southern Min (TSM). It can be pronounced as *tsit-leh*, *e* or *leh* (commonly written as 咧, 勒, or simply *e*).<sup>1</sup> For the sake of simplicity, only *tsit-ê* is used in the constructed exam-

1. The following example, taken from a soap opera called *Sichóngzòu* ‘Quartet’, uses *leh*.

- (i) 好 啦! 唉! 按呢 行路 行 規 工, 來 洗 一 下 手--咧。  
*Hó lah! Eh! Ân-ne kiâ<sup>n</sup>-lôo kiâ<sup>n</sup> kui kang, lâi sé tsit-ê tshiú--leh.*  
fine PRT PRT such walk walk whole day come wash TSIT-E hand LEH  
‘Fine. Hey, I have walked the whole day. I just want to wash my hands.’

(*Sichóngzòu* ‘Quartet’, Episode 5)

For an example using *e*, please see (26).

ples. As shown in (1), the *tsit-ē* sequence occurs after the indefinite object complement *tsá-tng* ‘breakfast’ in (1a), *m̄ng* in (1b) and *tshài* ‘food’ in (1c). Both (1a) and (1b) are declarative sentences expressing the speaker’s desire to do something. In the two examples, the volitional modal *beh* ‘want’ and auxiliary-like motion verbs *lâi* ‘come’ and *lâi khi* ‘come go’ are used. The second clause in (1c), which contains the deontic modal *tiòh* ‘have to’, is a command, or more precisely, a mild suggestion:

- (1) a. 我 欲 來 食 早頓--一下。  
*Guá beh lâi tsiáh tsá-tng--tsit-ē.<sup>2</sup>*  
 1SG want come eat breakfast TSIT-E  
 ‘I just want to eat my breakfast.’
- b. 你 先 食。我 (來 去) 開 門--一下。  
*Lí sing tsiáh. Guá (lâi khi) khui m̄ng--tsit-ē.*  
 2SG first eat 1SG come go open door TSIT-E  
 ‘You eat first. I will just go open the door.’
- c. ...佢 拚 幾lō 杯，嘛 著 互 我 食 菜--一下。  
*...kah in piànn kúi-lō pue, mā tiòh hōo guá tsiáh tshài--tsit-ē.*  
 with 3PL compete several glass also have.to HOO 1SG eat food TSIT-E  
 ‘I competed with them and drank several glasses of wine. Just let me eat some food.’ (From “Taiwanese Concordancer”)<sup>3</sup>

All three examples seem to have the meaning of ‘do something a little’.<sup>4</sup> In addition, it softens the tone of the speech and makes it sound more humble or polite. The speaker of (1a) states that it will be quick for them to eat their breakfast or even implies that eating their breakfast is something insignificant. The speaker of (1b) asks the addressee to eat first and informs the addressee that it won’t be long for them to open the door and then come back to join the addressee. Finally, the speaker of (1c) is pleading with the addressee to let them eat some food at least for a short period of time.

The PC *tsit-ē* can also occur after the object complement when the object is modified by the durative phrase *tsit-ē-á* ‘a while’ (*tsit-ē* plus the diminutive suffix *á*) or another numeral-verbal classifier sequence, as shown in (2).

2. We thank one of the reviewers for providing us with the example in (1a) and their interpretation of it.

3. <http://ip194097.ntcu.edu.tw/TG/concordance/form.asp>

4. For the sake of simplicity, we simply use ‘just’ to translate the meaning of the PC *tsit-ē*.

- (2) a. 我 欲 來 食 一下仔 早頓--一下。  
*Guá beh lâi tsiáh tsit-ê-á tsá-tng--tsit-ê.*  
 1SG want come eat TSIT-E-SF breakfast TSIT-E  
 'I just want to eat my breakfast.'
- b. 逐家 來 啉 一下仔 茶--一下。  
*Ták-ke lâi lim tsit-ê-á tê--tsit-ê.*  
 everyone come drink TSIT-E-SF tea TSIT-E  
 'Everyone just come and drink tea.'
- c. 你 摸 兩下 耳仔--一下。  
*Lí bong n̄ng-ê hīnn-á--tsit-ê.*  
 2SG touch two-CL ear-SF TSIT-E  
 'You just touch your ear twice.'

As we can see, the object complements *tsá-tng* 'breakfast' in (2a) and *tê* 'tea' in (2b) are modified by the durative phrase *tsit-ê-á* 'a while'. The PC *tsit-ê* seems to convey the same meaning as *tsit-ê-á*. However, the PC *tsit-ê* does not seem to be redundant in (2c) as the object complement is modified by the numeral-verbal classifier sequence *n̄ng-ê* 'twice'.

The examples in (3) clearly show that PC *tsit-ê* does not mark the duration of the verb. In (3a), the sentence-final *tsit-ê* is directly preceded by a durative phrase that indicates the duration of the verb, while in (3b) it directly follows an achievement verb. Once again, the presence of the *tsit-ê* seems to mean 'do something in a short time', but the short duration should not be associated with the verb *lí* 'divorce' in (3b) because it is an achievement verb and does not take a durative phrase that marks the duration of the action.<sup>5</sup>

- (3) a. 你 先 離開 台北 三 工--一下。  
*Lí sing lí-khui Tâi-pak sann kang--tsit-ê.*  
 2SG first leave Taipei three day TSIT-E  
 'You just stay away from Taipei for three days before doing anything else.'

5. The extended Vendlerian classification of situation types include the following (Vendler 1957; Smith 1997): activities such as *run*, *walk*, and *swim*, achievements such as *arrive*, *die*, *notice*, *realize*, and *reach*, accomplishments such as *read (a book)* and *build (the house)*, states such as *love*, *know*, and *believe*, and semelfactives such as *blink* and *sneeze*. The classification originally targets verb types, but since it involves the verb as well as its arguments, situation types are thus not simply verb types. In general, achievements and semelfactives are punctual, while activities, accomplishments, and states are durative. On the other hand, activities and semelfactives do not have a result state (atelic), and they are different from achievements and accomplishments which involve a change-of-state (telic).

- b. 恁 清彩 離--一下。  
*Lín tshìn-tshái lî--tsit-ê.*  
 2PL lightly divorce TSIT-E  
 ‘Just get a divorce. Take it lightly.’

Note that there is an important difference between the examples in (2) and (3a). The durative phrase *tsit-ê-á* precedes the object in the examples in (2a) and (2b), but the durative phrase *sann kang* follows the object *Tâi-pak* ‘Taipei’ in (3a). It has been observed that durative phrases occur in different positions with respect to different verb types or situation types in Mandarin Chinese (MC) (Ernst 1987; Li 1987; Lin 2008, among others). Lin (2008) distinguishes two types of durative phrases depending on whether a verb involves a change of state or not: P(rocess)-related and R(esult)-related. TSM works the same way. The durative phrase *jī-tsáp nî* ‘twenty years’ in (4) is a P-related durative phrase, because the verb it occurs with, i.e. *khui* ‘drive,’ is an activity verb and does not induce a change of state. The durative phrase marks the duration of the driving event (Lin’s (2008) Event Duration reading) and can occur either before or after the object. On the other hand, the durative phrase in (5) is R-related because it involves an achievement verb *kàu* ‘reach,’ which is punctual and involves a change of state. The durative *tsáp hun-tsing* ‘ten minutes’ marks the duration of the result state of the reaching event (Lin’s (2008) Result State reading) and occurs only after the object.

- (4) a. 我 已經 開 計程車 二十 年--矣。  
*Guá í-king khui kè-tîng-tshia jī-tsáp nî--ah.*  
 1SG already drive taxi twenty year ASP  
 ‘I have driven a taxi for twenty years.’
- b. 我 已經 開 二十 年 (個) 計程車--矣。  
*Guá í-king khui jī-tsáp nî (ê) kè-tîng-tshia--ah.*  
 1SG already drive twenty year E taxi ASP  
 ‘I have driven a taxi for twenty years.’
- (5) a. 阮 已經 到 終點 十 分鐘--矣。  
*Guán í-king kàu tsiong-tiám tsáp hun-tsing--ah.*  
 1PL already reach destination ten minute ASP  
 ‘It has already been ten minutes since we reached the destination.’
- b. \*阮 已經 到 十 分鐘 終點--矣。  
 \**Guán í-king kàu tsáp hun-tsing tsiong-tiám--ah.*  
 1PL already reach ten minute destination ASP  
 ‘It has already been ten minutes since we reached the destination.’

For this reason, the R-related durative phrase *sann kang* ‘three days’ in (3a) has to occur after the object *Tâi-pak* ‘Taipei.’ This is why (6) is ruled out:

- (6) \*你 先 離開 三 工 台北--一下。

\**Lí sing lí-khui sann kang Tâi-pak--tsit-ē.*

2PL first leave three day Taipei TSIT-E

‘You just stay away from Taipei for three days before doing something else.’

For more discussion of the two readings and the position of the PC *tsit-ē*, please see § 2. From the discussion above, we conclude that the PC *tsit-ē* does not indicate the duration of the verb.

Finally, consider an example of the PC *tsit-ē* which involves a causative:

- (7) 你 共 彼 領 衫 洗 予 較 清氣--一點仔--一下。

*Lí ka hit-niá sann sé hōo khah tshing-khì--tsit-tiám-á--tsit-ē.*

you KA that-CL clothing wash HOO more clean

‘You wash that clothing and make it just a little bit cleaner.’

In this example, *tsit-ē* occurs after the causative complement *hōo khah tshing-khì tsit-tiám-á* ‘to make it a little bit cleaner’. The causative complement has two parts: the causative marker *hōo* and the resultant complement introduced by the stative verb *tshing-khì* ‘clean’. Moreover, the stative verb *tshing-khì* takes *tsit-tiám-á* as a complement marking a differential in comparison. The additional *tsit-ē* makes the whole sentence sound more polite.

In general, as indicated in the above examples, the PC *tsit-ē* seems to carry a ‘down-play’ meaning and it might mark the short duration of the whole event, not the duration of the action denoted by the verb. We shall have to pin down the meaning of the PC *tsit-ē* and shall need a position to accommodate it. Crucially, this position is not allowed for other durative phrases such as *tsit-ē-á* ‘a while’ or *gōo hun-tsing* ‘five minutes’. None of the PC *tsit-ē* in the above examples can be replaced by *tsit-ē-á* ‘a while’ or *gōo hun-tsing* ‘five minutes’. For example:

- (8) a. \*我 欲 來 食 一下仔 早頓--一下仔／五 分鐘。

\**Guá beh lái tsiáh tsit-ē-á tsá-tng--tsit-ē-á/gōo hun-tsing.*

1SG want come eat TSIT-E-SF breakfast TSIT-E-SF/five minute

‘I just want to eat my breakfast for a while/for five minutes.’

- b. \*逐家 來 啉 一下仔 茶--一下仔／五 分鐘。

\**Ták-ke lái lim tsit-ē-á tê--tsit-ē-á/gōo hun-tsing.*

everyone come drink TSIT-E-SF tea TSIT-E-SF/five minute

‘Everyone just come and drink tea for a while/for five minutes.’

What is the analysis of the PC *tsit-ē*? Is it a predicate, a complement, or a sentence-final particle? In this paper, we formulate the two hypotheses below:

- (9) a. The hypothesis A: The PC *tsít-ē* is a predicate or a complement.  
 b. The hypothesis B: The PC *tsít-ē* is a sentence-final particle.

Given the two hypotheses, if we can show the hypothesis A is not supported, it will leave us with the hypothesis B.

In terms of meaning, we shall show that just like verb reduplication in MC, the PC *tsít-ē* marks the delimitative aspect, which, according to Li & Thompson (1981: 232), means doing an action ‘a little bit,’ or for a short period of time. More specifically, we define it as ‘termination in a short time’.

Before we leave this section, a note about how an X *tsít-ē(-á)* sequence is pronounced is in order. Four patterns of pronouncing such a sequence can be identified, as shown in (10). (X can be any segment; <#> means no tone sandhi is applied to its preceding segment and as a result the preceding segment carries its citation tone; <=> means tone sandhi is applied to its preceding segment; <.> means the preceding segment carries its citation tone and its following segment carries a neutral tone).<sup>6</sup> (The tone value system is adopted from Chang (2001): 1st tone: 55, 2nd tone: 53, 3rd tone: 21, 4th tone: 32, 5th tone: 13, 7th tone: 33, 8th tone: 54)

- (10) a. X *tsít* [54]-*ē* [33] → X= *tsít* [32]= *ē* [33]#  
 b. X--*tsít* [54]-*ē* [33] → X. *tsít* [32]= *ē* [21]  
 c. X *tsít* [54]-*ē* [33]-*á* [53] → X= *tsít* [32]= *ē* [33]# *á* [53]#  
 d. X--*tsít* [54]-*ē* [33]-*á* [53] → X. *tsít* [32]= *ē* [21]= *á* [21]

In general, a segment in TSM undergoes tone sandhi unless it occurs at the end of a phrase, a sentence or a tone group (Chen 1987). X *tsít-ē* in (10a) follows the regular tone sandhi pattern, with tone sandhi applied to X and *tsít*. Different from (10a), X in (10b) carries its citation tone, while *tsít* undergoes regular tone sandhi and *ē* is neutralized with a fixed low tone [21]. X *tsít-ē-á* in (10c) is more complicated in involving two tone groups, with X *tsít-ē* forming a tone group following the tone sandhi pattern in (10a) and the diminutive suffix *á* in another tone group. Finally, different from (10c), X in (10d) keeps its citation tone, while both *tsít* and

6. A segment with a neutral tone (輕聲) in TSM, according to Chang (2001: 116), is atonic in the sense that the segment loses its citation tone, a process which can be considered a kind of tone sandhi. What makes this type of tone sandhi differ from the regular kind that we mentioned in the text is that the preceding segment involved does not change its tone value. There are two kinds of neutralization in TSM: *suíqián biàndiào* (隨前變調) ‘flexible tone sandhi’ and *gùdìng biàndiào* (固定變調) ‘fixed tone sandhi.’ The flexible kind changes its pitches based on its preceding tone. The fixed kind carries the low tone [21] no matter what tone its preceding segment carries. There are dialectal differences in the tone sandhi that involves the diminutive suffix *á*. Please see Chang (2001: 120–121).

$\bar{e}$  undergo regular tone sandhi and  $\acute{a}$  is neutralized with a fixed low tone [21]. The PC *tsit-ē* focused on in this paper follows the pattern in (10b).

The rest of the paper is organized as follows. In § 2, we show that, unlike *tsit-ē-á*, the PC *tsit-ē* function as neither predicate nor complement. Given the two hypotheses, the hypothesis B wins out. In § 3 we argue for the aspectual analysis; § 4 discusses the ‘down-play’ meaning; and, finally, § 5 consists of concluding remarks.

## 2. The PC *tsit-ē* is a sentence-final particle

In this section, we discuss the hypothesis A and the hypothesis B and show that unlike *tsit-ē-á*, the PC *tsit-ē* cannot be a durative phrase functioning as a predicate or a complement. Given the two hypotheses, the hypothesis B is thus supported. Moreover, we show the PC *tsit-ē* is a sentence-final particle at a lower edge.

### 2.1 The hypothesis A or The hypothesis B?

As suggested in the literature for the analysis of durative phrases in MC (see Li 1987), there are two main proposals: (S=CP in current theory)

- (11) a. [<sub>S</sub> [<sub>S</sub> NP<sub>1</sub> V (NP<sub>2</sub>)][<sub>VP</sub> Duration]] (The Predicate Structure)  
(e.g., Teng 1975)  
b. [<sub>S</sub> NP<sub>1</sub> [<sub>VP</sub> V (NP<sub>2</sub>) Duration]] (The Complement Structure)  
(e.g., Mei 1972; Huang 1982; Li 1985; and Ernst 1987)

The one in (11a) is the Predicate Structure, in which the durative phrase is analyzed to be the main predicate, which is predicated of a sentential subject, and the other one in (11b) is the Complement Structure, in which the durative phrase functions as the complement of the verb. Furthermore, following Ernst (1987), Li (1987) distinguishes two types of interpretation of a durative phrase. *Sān nián* ‘three years’ in (12a) measures ‘the duration since the completion of an event (SCE)’, whereas *hěn jiǔ* ‘a long time’ in (12b) marks the duration of the event.

- (12) a. 我 來 美國 三 年 了。 (MC)  
Wǒ lái Měiguó sān nián le.  
1SG come America three year ASP  
‘It has been three years since I came to America.’

- b. 他 看 我 很 久。 (MC)  
*Tā kàn wǒ hěn jiǔ.*<sup>7</sup>  
 3SG look 1SG very long  
 ‘He has been looking at me for a long time.’

The two readings are, however, referred to in Lin (2008) as R(esult)-related reading and P(rocess)-related reading. He shows convincingly that the ‘since completion’ reading is not correct. Consider the following example given below.

- (13) 約翰 把 門 關了 三個 小時 了。 (MC)  
*Yuēhàn bǎ mén guān-le sān-ge xiǎoshí le.*  
 John BA door close-ASP three-CL hour ASP  
 ‘It has been three hours since John closed the door.’ (Lin 2008: 43)

According to Lin, (13) is true in situations where the consequent state of the door being closed lasts for three hours. If the door were opened again by John two hours after he closed it, (13) can no longer be true. The durative phrase *sān-ge xiǎoshí* ‘three hours’ thus measures the result state. We shall thus follow Lin’s distinction of the two types of interpretations and call the two readings ‘Event Duration reading’ and ‘Result State reading.’

Two conclusions that Li (1987) reaches are relevant for our study. First, she shows that both structures are needed and both structures allow either the Result State reading or the Event Duration reading. When the situation described involves no change of state or non-completion of the event, the durative phrases measure the duration of an event. When the situation described involves a change of state or the completion of an event, durative phrases are interpreted as denoting the duration of the result state. The evidence comes from position of adverbials, verb reduplication, scope of negation, major boundary pauses and constituency.

The application of Li’s tests to the TSM counterparts also shows that both structures are available and both structures should have either interpretation. First, consider the use of the adverb *í-king* ‘already’ in the following example, in which the durative phrase *sann nî* ‘three years’ measures the event of sleeping.

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7. Please note that if the pronoun in this example is replaced by an indefinite NP such as *yī-gè rén* ‘one person’, the sentence becomes unacceptable, as shown below:

- (i) \*他 看 一 個 人 很 久。 (MC)  
 \**Tā kàn yī-gè rén hěn jiǔ.*  
 3SG look one-CL person very long  
 ‘He looked at one person for a long time.’

As pointed out by Huang et al. (2009: 95), bare NP objects must occur after a durative or frequency phrase, while definite NPs can occur before it.



- (14) a. 伊 按呢 睏 已經 三 年--矣。  
*I àn-ne khùn í-king sann nî--ah.*  
 3SG that.way sleep already three year ASP  
 'It has been three years since he slept in that way.'
- b. 伊 已經 按呢 睏 三 年--矣。  
*I í-king àn-ne khùn sann nî--ah.*  
 3SG already that.way sleep three year ASP  
 'He has slept in that way for three years.'

Crucially, as an adverb, *í-king* 'already' cannot modify *sann nî* 'three years' if the latter is a nominal complement. The appropriate analysis of (14a) then requires a Predicate Structure. On the other hand, for *í-king* in (14b) to scope over the durative phrase, the durative phrase has to be a complement, not a predicate. A Complement Structure is thus needed.

The scope of the negative marker *bô* also shows that two structures are needed. Consider an example in which a change of state is involved, as in (15).

- (15) a. 伊 無 來 台北 已經 四 年--矣。  
*I bô lâi Tâi-pak í-king sì nî--ah.*  
 3SG not.have come Taipei already four year ASP  
 'It has already been four years since he hasn't come to Taipei.'
- b. 伊 無 來 台北 四 年。  
*I bô lâi Tâi-pak sì nî.*  
 3SG not.have come Taipei four year  
 'He hasn't been to Taipei for four years.'

The durative phrase *sì nî* 'four years' in (15) marks the result state. The two sentences differ in that *bô* in (15b), but not *bô* in (15a), scopes over the durative phrase. The contrast supports different structures for them. If we analyze (15a) as having a sentential subject and a predicate, then *bô* will be confined in the sentential subject and will not be able to scope out. Then there is no way for *bô* to scope over the durative phrase. On the other hand, if we assign a complement analysis to (15b), then we can explain why *bô* in this example can scope over the durative phrase.

A Predicate Structure is also supported when the sentential subject moves as a constituent:

- (16) 伊 無 來 台北, 我 聽講 已經 四 年--矣。  
*I bô lâi Tâi-pak, guá thia<sup>n</sup>-kóng í-king sì nî--ah.*  
 3SG not.have come Taipei 1SG hear already four year ASP  
 'I heard that it had been four years since he stopped coming to Taipei.'

Therefore, Li's (1987) analysis for the MC data works for the TSM counterparts. In a sentence such as (17), where a change of state verb is involved, the durative phrase should have the Result State reading and both structures should be possible. The durative phrase *tsit-ê-á* can be a predicate or a complement. In the Complement Structure, the verb has two complements: the first one is the object *Tâi-pak* and the other one is the durative phrase *tsit-ê-á*.

- (17) 你 離開 台北--一下仔。  
*Lí lî-khui Tâi-pak--tsit-ê-á.*  
 2SG leave Taipei TSIT-E-SF  
 ‘You stay away from Taipei for a while.’<sup>8</sup>

Now consider the two analyses for the PC *tsit-ê*. To begin with, the Predicate Structure cannot be applied to the PC *tsit-ê*. Consider the example in (2b), repeated in (18a). The Predicate Structure for (18a) may mean the event of coming to drink tea for a while lasts for a while, which makes no sense.

- (18) a. 逐家 來 啲 一下仔 茶--一下。 (= (2b))  
*Tâk-ke lâi lim tsit-ê-á tê--tsit-ê.*  
 everyone come drink TSIT-E-SF tea TSIT-E  
 ‘Everyone just come and drink tea.’  
 b. \*<sub>[CP</sub> [<sub>CP</sub> *Tâk-ke lâi lim tsit-ê-á tê*]<sub>[VP</sub> *tsit-ê*]<sub>]</sub>  
 everyone come drink TSIT-E-SF tea TSIT-E

On the other hand, the Complement Structure cannot be applied to the PC *tsit-ê* either. Consider the example in (19). As pointed out by a reviewer, (19) is felicitous if the durative phrase *sann kang* ‘three days’ is considered to be a short period of time. However, if the PC *tsit-ê* occupies another complement position, a problem arises because the verb in each example will take three complements, i.e. *Tâi-pak* ‘Taipei,’ *sann kang* ‘three days,’ and *tsit-ê*. This is not an attested structure in TSM, as shown in (20a).

- (19) 你 先 離開 台北 三 工(--一下)。  
*Lí sing lî-khui Tâi-pak sann kang(--tsit-ê).*  
 2SG first leave Taipei three day TSIT-E  
 ‘You just stay away from Taipei for three days before doing anything else.’

8. A reviewer asked the meaning difference between the predicate structure and the complement structure in this example. The meaning may turn out to be very similar with the difference being in the focus. For the predicate structure to be felicitous, one may have to put stress on *tsit-ê-á* and apply *tsit* [32] = *ê* [33] # *á* [53] # to it, rather than *tsit* [32] = *ê* [21] = *á* [21]. Moreover, it might require some contrast in meaning. Please see our discussion in Footnote 8 below.

- (20) a. \*阿明 已經 買 [一間 厝] [予 伊] [三 年]--矣。  
*\*A-bîng í-king bué [tsit-king tshù] [hōo i] [sann nî]--ah.*  
A-bîng already buy one-CL house for 3SG three year ASP  
‘It has been three years since A-bîng bought a house for him.’  
b. 阿明 買 一間 厝 予 伊 已經 三 年--矣。  
*A-bîng bué tsit-king tshù hōo i í-king sann nî--ah.*  
A-bîng buy one-CL house for 3SG already three year ASP  
‘It has been three years since A-bîng bought a house for him.’

In (20a), the di-transitive verb *bué* ‘buy’ takes two complements and the durative phrase that follows the second complement is not allowed. In contrast, (20b) is acceptable with *sann nî* ‘three years’ serving as a predicate.<sup>9</sup>

From the above discussion, we know the analysis of the PC *tsit-ē* cannot be a predicate because it suffers a meaning conflict. Neither can it be a complement because in some examples, there will be three complements following the verb. Given the two hypotheses, the hypothesis A is thus ruled out and the hypothesis B is supported.

## 2.2 The PC *tsit-ē* as a low sentence-final particle

### 2.2.1 Research on CP layers in Mandarin Chinese

Since Rizzi’s split CP hypothesis (1997), research in Mandarin Chinese has shown that there are many layers of CPs. For example, Paul (2014; 2015) proposes three-layered CPs for sentence-final particles:

- (21) (TP) < C<sub>low</sub> < Force < Attitude

9. See the discussion of the following MC example in (i) in Huang et al. (2009: 94).

- (i) 我 送 給 他 金銀珠寶 兩次。  
*Wǒ sòng gěi tā jīnyínzhūbǎo liǎng-cì.*  
I award for he money.jewelry two-CL  
‘I awarded him money and jewelry twice (and other things once).’ (MC)

While (i) is acceptable, *liǎng cì* ‘twice’ has to have a contrastive interpretation. According to the authors, the two objects in (i) forces the frequency phrase to be a predicate. In contrast, the frequency phrase in (ii) does not have the same requirement.

- (ii) 他 打過 那些 壞蛋 兩次。  
*Tā dǎ-guò nàxiē huàidàn liǎng-cì.*  
3SG beat-ASP those bad.guy two-CL  
‘He beat those bad guys twice.’ (MC)

## (22) The examples of the three classes of root complementizers (Paul 2015: 284)

| C1 (low C)                                  | C2 (force)                                       | C3 (attitude)                       |
|---|--|-------------------------------------|
| <i>le</i> currently relevant state          | <i>ba</i> <sub>IMP</sub> (advisative <i>ba</i> ) | <i>a</i> softening                  |
| <i>lái</i> <i>zhe</i> recent past           | <i>ba</i> <sub>Qconfirmation</sub>               | <i>bà</i> <i>le</i> understatement  |
| <i>ne</i> <sub>1</sub> continuing situation | <i>ma</i> yes/no question                        | <i>ei</i> gentle reminder           |
| .....                                       | <i>ne</i> <sub>2</sub> follow-up question        | <i>ma</i> dogmatic assertion        |
|   | .....  | <i>ne</i> <sub>3</sub> exaggeration |
|   |  | <i>ou</i> impatience                |
|   |  | <i>zhene</i> intensifier            |

C1 is mainly related to aspect/tense meaning, while C2 marks sentence types and C3 spells out the speaker's subjective tone.

Along the same line, Pan (2015) shows that the higher a functional projection is, the more subjective its interpretation is. Subjectivity refers to the speaker's evaluation or commitment or opinion. Moreover, in terms of embeddability, the higher a functional projection is, the harder it is to embed. For this reason, sentential aspects and *only*-type focus can be embedded and be interpreted within a subordinate clause because they are not directly linked to the speaker's attitude. For example, as shown in (23), *éryǐ* 'only' can be embedded in a subordinate clause.

## (23) 他們 剛才 只 是 吵架 而已 的 說法 不 能 (MC)

[<sub>OnlyP</sub> *Tāmen gāngcái zhī shì chǎojià* [<sub>only<sup>o</sup></sub> *éryǐ*]] *de shuōfǎ bù néng*  
 3PL just.now only be quarrel only DE rumor not can  
 使 人 信服。  
*shǐ rén xìnǔ.*  
 make people convince

'The rumor that they were only quarreling just now is not convincing.'

(Pan 2015: 13)

Moreover, the exclusive *éryǐ* has to occur in a position higher than sentential aspect *le*:

## (24) a. [[[ 她 不 去 巴黎 ] [了]] [而已]]。 (MC)

[<sub>OnlyP</sub> [<sub>S.ASP</sub> [<sub>TP</sub> *Tā bù qù Bāilí*] [<sub>S.ASP<sup>o</sup></sub> *le*]] [<sub>only<sup>o</sup></sub> *éryǐ*]]  
 3SG not go Paris ASP only

'She only does not go to Paris anymore, (but she will still visit France.)'

(Pan 2015: 13)

- b. \*她 不 去 巴黎 而已 了。 (MC)  
 \*Tā bù qù Bālí éryǐ le.  
 3SG not go Paris only ASP  
 Intended meaning ‘She only does not go to Paris anymore, (but she will still visit France.)’ (Pan 2015: 13)

Pan (2015) proposes the following hierarchy of sentence-final particles in MC, including those that mark various types of questions.

- (25) AttitudeP2 (*ne*) > AttitudeP2 (*a, ya, ou, ao, ai, ei, bei, na, ba* (uncertainty)) > Special  
 QuestionsP > Illocutionary ForceP > Only-focusP > Sentential.AspectP > TP

Similarly, Erlewine (2017) also posits that *éryǐ* is located between *vP* and *TP*.

## 2.2.2 Five arguments for the low sentence-final particle analysis

Five arguments show that the PC *tsit-ē* is a sentence-final particle that occurs at the lower edge. First, *e* in (26), which is a reduced form of *tsit-ē*, is followed by *lah*, an attitude particle similar to the MC *a* that softens the tone.

- (26) 唉！嫂子，我先入來洗一下手--e--啦。  
 Eh! Só-á, guá sian jip-lâi sé tsit-ē tshiú--e--lah.  
 PRT Sister 1SG first enter wash TSIT-E hand LEH/E PRT  
 ‘Hey! Sister! I’m just going to wash my hands first.’  
 (Sìchóngzòu ‘Quartet,’ Episode 16)

If *lah* in (26), just like *a* in MC, belongs to C3, then the PC *tsit-ē* cannot be high in C3.

Second, the PC *tsit-ē* can occur in an embedded sentence:

- (27) [伊去食一下仔飯--一下爾爾]的講法真可疑。  
 [I khi tsiáh tsit-ē-á pñg--tsit-ē niā-niā] ê kóng-huat tsin khó-gí.  
 3SG go eat TSIT-E-SF food TSIT-E only E rumor really dubious  
 ‘The rumor that he was just there to eat is really dubious.’

Third, the meaning of the following example shows that the PC *tsit-ē* has to scope under the modal. Consider the following examples, which contain a modal and the PC *tsit-ē*.

- (28) a. 你哪著遐趕緊？你應該啲一下仔茶--一下。  
 Lí ná tiòh hiah kuá<sup>n</sup>-kín? Lí ìng-kai lim tsit-ē-á tê--tsit-ē.  
 2SG why then that hurry 2SG should drink TSIT-E-SF tea TSIT-E  
 ‘Why do you have to be in such a hurry? You should just drink some tea.’

- b. ....佢 *in* 拚 幾 *lō* 杯，嘛 著 互 我 食 (= (1b))  
 ...*kah in piàⁿ kúi-lō pue, mā tiòh hōo guá tsiah*  
 with 3PL compete several glass also have.to HOO 1SG eat  
 菜--一下。  
*tshài--tsit-ē.*  
 food TSIT-E  
 ‘I competed with them and drank several glasses of wine. Just let me eat  
 some food.’ (from “Taiwanese Concordancer”)
- c. 我 欲 來 食 早頓--一下。 (= (1a))  
*Guá beh lái tsiah tsá-tng--tsit-ē.*  
 1SG want come eat breakfast TSIT-E  
 ‘I just want to eat my breakfast.’

The modals in (28) include the following: *ing-kai* ‘should’ in (28a), *tiòh* ‘have to’ in (28b), and *beh* ‘want’ in (28c). In Cinque (1999), the former two belong to  $\text{Mod}_{\text{necessary}}$  while the latter  $\text{Mod}_{\text{volitional}}$ . The meaning of (28a), for example, is {it should be the case that...}, which shows that the necessity modal has the scope over the whole clause and thus the PC *tsit-ē*.

Fourth, the *liân* construction in (29) shows that the PC *tsit-ē* forms a constituent with the verb sequence *lim tsit-ē-á tê* that precedes it:

- (29) 伊 無 閒 甲 連 [啲 一下仔 茶--一下] 都 無法度。  
*I bô ing kah liân [lim tsit-ē-á tê--tsit-ē] to bô-huat-tōo.*  
 1SG not free to.the.extent even drink TSIT-E-SF tea TSIT-E all not.possible  
 ‘He is just too busy to drink tea.’

According to Shyu (1995: 12–14), what can be *lián*-focused in MC include NPs, VPs, and CPs. An example that involves a VP being focused is given below:

- (30) 張三 連 [到 阿拉斯加 玩] 都 夢想/不想。 (MC)  
*Zhangsān lián [<sub>VP</sub> e dào Ālāsījiā wán] dōu mèng-xiǎng/bù xiǎng.*  
 Zhangsan even arrive Alaska travel all dream/not want  
 ‘Zhangsan dreams even of going/doesn’t even want to go to Alaska.’

Presumably, the same analysis can be applied to the *liân* construction in TSM. Given the fact that the verb sequence proposed in (29) cannot be a CP, it has to be something smaller than a CP. This shows the PC *tsit-ē* cannot be located in C.<sup>10</sup>

Fifth, from the meaning, the focus marker *niā-niā* ‘only’ should take scope over the PC *tsit-ē*, but under the scope of the volitional modal *beh* ‘want.’

10. As one of the reviewers correctly points out, the fact that the modal *bô-huat-tōo* ‘not possible’ is not *lián*-focused or ‘stranded’ shows that the modal is higher than the PC *tsit-ē*.

- (31) 伊 欲 去 食 一下仔 飯--一下 爾爾。  
*I beh khì tsiáh tsit-ē-á p̃ng--tsit-ē niā-niā.*  
 3SG want go eat TSIT-E-SF food TSIT-E only  
 ‘He just wants to eat for a while.’

*Niā-niā*’s counterpart in Mandarin, *éryǐ*, as we mentioned above, is argued to occur at the extended vP phase edge (Erlewine 2017) or more specifically in a position between S.Aspp (sentential aspect markers *láizhe*, *bàle*) and iForceP (illocutionary force particles and operators such as the yes-no question marker *ma*, the weak imperative marker *ba*, the presupposed yes-no question marker *ba*, ...) (Pan 2015). Given the fact that the PC *tsit-ē* scopes lower than *niā-niā* ‘only’, the PC *tsit-ē* has to be a low sentence-final particle.

### 3. The PC *tsit-ē* marks delimitativity

In § 3.1, we discuss the delimitativity expressed by verb reduplication in MC. § 3.2 has two major parts. First, § 3.2.1 and § 3.2.2 provide two arguments for the support of the analysis of the PC *tsit-ē* as marking the delimitative aspect: its sensitivity to verb/situation types, and its interaction with negation. Second, § 3.2.3 defines delimitativity as ‘termination in a short time’. Finally, § 3.3 argues that the PC *tsit-ē* does not mark telicity. A short summary is given in § 3.4.

#### 3.1 Delimitativity in Mandarin Chinese

It is well known that Chinese grammaticalizes its aspectual viewpoints (outer aspect), employing the perfective aspect marker *-le*, the experiential aspect marker *-guò*, the durative marker *-zhe* and the progressive marker *zài* (Smith 1997). The PC *tsit-ē* does not have a counterpart in MC. The “one+verbal classifier” sequence *yī-xià* in MC can occur before an indefinite object *cài* ‘food’, but not after it:

- (32) a. 你 讓 我 吃 一下 菜。 (MC)  
*Nǐ ràng wǒ chī yī-xià cài.*  
 2SG let 1SG eat one-CL food  
 ‘Just let me eat some food.’  
 b. \*你 讓 我 吃 菜 一下。 (MC)  
 \**Nǐ ràng wǒ chī cài yī-xià.*  
 2SG let 1SG eat food one-CL  
 ‘Just let me eat some food.’

- c. \*你 讓 我 吃 一 下 菜 一 下 。 (MC)  
 \*Nǐ ràng wǒ chī yī-xià cài yī-xià.  
 2SG let 1SG eat one-CL food one-CL  
 ‘Just let me eat some food.’

The delimitative aspect, nevertheless, is realized by verb reduplication in MC. Li & Thompson (1981: 232) first propose that verb reduplication marks the delimitative aspect, which means ‘doing an action “a little bit”, or for a short period of time.’ In terms of forms, Li & Thompson maintain that verb reduplication may optionally involve the numeral *yī* ‘one’ between the verb and the reduplicated one, as shown below:

- (33) 你 喜 歡 唱 歌 , 那 你 就 唱 (一) 唱 吧 ! (MC)  
 Nǐ xǐhuān chàng gē, nà nǐ jiù chàng (yī) chàng ba!  
 2SG like sing song then 2SG then sing one sing PRT  
 ‘You like to sing, so just go ahead and sing a little bit!’

Furthermore, Li & Thompson list several constraints on the types of verbs that may be reduplicated.

- (34) a. Verbs that can undergo reduplication for the delimitative aspect must be activity verbs, including action verbs, such as *zǒu* ‘walk’, or *dǎ* ‘hit’ or others like *xīnshǎng* ‘appreciate’ and *yánjiù* ‘research’. (Non-activity verbs such as *pàng* ‘fat’ and *yǒu qián* ‘have money’ are excluded.)  
 b. They must be volitional verbs, such as *dǎ* ‘hit’. (Non-volitional verbs such as *wàng* ‘forget’ are excluded.)  
 c. Resultative verb compounds such as *dǎ-kāi* ‘open’ cannot be reduplicated for the delimitative aspect because the focus on the result of the event is incompatible with the meaning of doing something for a little bit.  
 d. The delimitative aspect is likely to occur in requests because it reduces the ‘weight’ of the request on the hearer by saying the action can be done ‘just a little’.

Following Li & Thompson (1981), Xiao & McEnery (2004: 155) maintain that verb reduplication marks the delimitative aspect, which is a perfective aspect indicating a holistic transitory situation. Perfective aspect is a kind of viewpoint aspect (outer aspect), which according to Smith (1997), establishes a relation between the assertion time (AT) and the event time (ET). If ET is included in AT, there is an external view of the situation seen as a whole (the perfective viewpoint), whatever its actual length. If AT is included in ET, there is an internal view of the situation (the imperfective viewpoint).



### 3.2 Delimitativity in Taiwanese Southern Min

#### 3.2.1 The PC *tsit-ē* is sensitive to verb/situation types

Perfective aspect is sensitive to verb/situation types. For example, the perfective *le* in MC is compatible with accomplishments and achievements because they are intrinsically bounded and telic, but it is not quite compatible with states or activities because both states and activities are unbounded and non-telic (Xiao & McEnery 2004: 100–113). We have seen in the previous section that the delimitative aspect is sensitive to verb/situation types. If the PC *tsit-ē* marks the delimitative aspect, we should expect that it is sensitive to verb/situation types. The prediction is born out. The PC *tsit-ē* requires a dynamic situation. Thus, it is not compatible with a state verb describing a state.

#### State

- (35) a. 我 知影 這件 代誌。  
*Guá tsai-iánn tsit-kiānn tài-tsì.*  
 1SG know this-CL matter  
 'I know about this matter.'
- b. \*我 知影 這件 代誌--一下。  
 \**Guá tsai-iánn tsit-kiānn tài-tsì--tsit-ē.*  
 1SG know this-CL matter TSIT-E  
 'I know about this matter.'

In contrast, all other types of verbs/situation types, i.e. activity verbs (bounded or unbounded), accomplishment verbs with quantized objects, semelfactives, and achievements, are fully compatible with the PC *tsit-ē*:

#### Activity

- (36) a. 我 欲 來 食 早頓--一下。 (=1a)  
*Guá beh lâi tsiáh tsá-t̀ng--tsit-ē.*  
 1SG want come eat breakfast TSIT-E  
 'I just want to eat my breakfast.'
- b. 我 欲 來 食 一下仔 早頓--一下。 (=2a)  
*Guá beh lâi tsiáh tsit-ē-á tsá-t̀ng--tsit-ē.*  
 1SG want come eat TSIT-E-SF breakfast TSIT-E

#### Accomplishment

- (37) 我 欲 來 寫 一兩張仔 批--一下。  
*Guá beh lâi siá tsit-n̄ng-tiu<sup>n</sup>-á phue--tsit-ē.*  
 1SG want come write one-two-CL-SF letter TSIT-E  
 'I just want to write one or two letters.'

**Semelfactive**

- (38) a. 你 瞞 一下仔 目睷--一下。  
*Lí nih tsít-ē-á bák-tsiu--tsít-ē.*  
 2SG blink TSIT-E-SF eye TSIT-E  
 ‘You just blink for a while.’
- b. 你 摸 兩下 耳仔--一下。  
*Lí bong n̄g-ē hīnn-á--tsít-ē.*  
 2SG touch two-CL ear-SF TSIT-E  
 ‘You just touch your ear twice.’ (= (2c))

**Achievement**

- (39) 你 先 離開 台北 三 工--一下。  
*Lí sing lî-khui Tâi-pak sann kang--tsít-ē.*  
 2SG first leave Taipei three day TSIT-E  
 ‘You just stay away from Taipei for three days before doing something else.’ (= (3a))

Moreover, the PC *tsít-ē*, just like verb reduplication, can only occur with volitional verbs. A non-volitional verb such as *lak* ‘lose,’ cannot occur with the PC *tsít-ē*.

- (40) \*伊 落 喙齒--一下， 就.....  
 \*I lak tshui-khí--tsít-ē, tō...  
 3SG lose tooth TSIT-E then  
 ‘After he just lost his teeth, then...’

The above examples in this section show that the PC *tsít-ē* is sensitive to the type of the verb it occurs with or the type of situation it is related to.

Before we leave this section, it should be pointed out that stative verbs are acceptable in imperative constructions if they can be coerced into an episodic (process or event) interpretation. For example, *understand* in English has an event (telic) interpretation in the imperative sentence (41). Similarly, *liōng-kái* ‘understand’ in (42) has an episodic interpretation, which makes the PC *tsít-ē* possible.

- (41) Please understand (get the point) that I am only trying to help you!  
 (Mourelatos 1978: 419)
- (42) 請 諒解 牧師--一下。  
*Tshiánn liōng-kái Bók-su--tsít-ē.*  
 please understand Pastor TSIT-E  
 ‘Please just understand Pastor.’

### 3.2.2 The interaction between the PC *tsit-ē* and negation

The negative counterpart of the perfective marker *ah*, according to Lien (2001), is *iáu-buē* ‘not yet’. Thus the negative counterpart of (43a) is (43b), which also shows that *iáu-buē* cannot occur with *ah*. As shown in (43c), neither can *ah* occur with the negative marker *bô* ‘not have’, which marks the non-existence of an event.

- (43) a. 掠 著--矣  
*liáh tióh--ah*  
 catch arrive ASP  
 ‘having caught’  
 b. 猶未 掠 著 (\*--矣)  
*iáu-buē liáh tióh(\*--ah)*  
 not.yet catch arrive ASP  
 ‘having not caught yet’  
 c. 無 掠 著 (\*--矣)  
*bô liáh tióh(\*--ah)*  
 not.have catch arrive ASP  
 ‘didn’t catch’

Now consider the PC *tsit-ē*. So far, we have seen the examples that contain the PC *tsit-ē* express either the speaker’s desire or suggestion. In the following example, the sentence with the PC *tsit-ē* expresses a past event.

- (44) A: 阿英 咧?  
*A-Ing leh?*  
 A-Ing PRT  
 ‘Where is A-Ing?’  
 B: 伊 去 買 (一下仔) 菜--一下 (, 隨 轉--來)。  
*I khi buē (tsit-ē-á) tshài--tsit-ē (, suí tng--lâi).*  
 3SG go buy TSIT-E-SF food TSIT-E right.away return  
 ‘She just went to buy some food. (She will be back soon.)’

If the PC *tsit-ē* marks the delimitative aspect, which is a perfective marker, then it should not be compatible with the negative marker *bô* as the latter negates the existence of an event. The prediction is borne out:

- (45) \*伊 無 去 買 (一下仔) 菜--一下。  
 \*I bô khi buē (tsit-ē-á) tshài--tsit-ē.  
 3SG not.have go buy TSIT-E-SF food TSIT-E  
 ‘She didn’t just go buy some food.’

### 3.2.3 Delimitativity as ‘termination in a short time’

The two arguments in § 3.2.1 and § 3.2.2 above support the analysis that the PC *tsit-ē* marks the delimitative aspect. A pressing question one may ask is what is the delimitative aspect. To begin with, it should be pointed out that according to Comrie (1976: 22), “perfectivity is by no means incompatible with overt expression of the duration of a situation”. He gives two examples as follows.

- (46) a. 罷工 持續了 五 天。 (MC)  
*Bàgōng chíxù-le wǔ tiān.*  
 protest continue-ASP five day  
 ‘The protest lasted for five days.’
- b. *postojal/prostojal tam čas* (Russian)  
 ‘he stood there for an hour’

The MC example in (46a) is given to show that the perfectivity marker *le* can occur with a verb which indicates duration, i.e. *chíxù* ‘continue’. As for the Russian examples in (46b), Comrie comments that “the sole function of the perfectivizing prefixes *po-* and *pro-* with verbs of this class is to indicate temporally restricted, but nonpunctual, situation; i.e. here it is the lexical meaning of the verb in *po-* or *pro-* that explicitly expresses duration.” He cites Isačenko (1962: 391–393, 394) in using the term “delimitative” to refer to such verbs in *po-*, and the term “perdurative” for such verbs in *pro-*. Interestingly, the discussion of *po-* leads Dickey (2007: 336) to distinguish two types of delimitativity. Dickey calls the resultative/telic delimitativity that occurs in cases of a relatively very long period of time ABSOLUTE DURATION, and the delimitativity in cases of a relatively short and often indefinite period of time RELATIVE DELIMITATION. He argues that *po-* has changed from mainly marking resultative/telic delimitativity to marking atelic delimitativity from old Russian to modern Russian (from the eleventh century to the nineteenth century). The former usage is replaced by *pro-*. According to Dickey, this development reflects a shift in its semantic prototype from PATH/SURFACE-CONTACT to INGRESSIVE-PARTIAL TRAJECTORY. The change may be induced by spatial *po-* with determinate motion verbs. Old Russian *poiti* ‘go’ could express either some initial portion of a motion event (ingressive-partial trajectory) or the complete motion event (full trajectory). Only the former meaning survives in modern Russian.

Corre (2015), on the other hand, argues that *po-* is a telic marker (situation type), adopting a more relaxed version of telicity: it suffices for an event to be either non-divisive or non-homogeneous to be telic. The preverb *po-*, according to Corre, is not lexical telicity (presence of the event’s inherent culmination), but rather terminativity. *Po-* indicates that an entire episode took place, regardless of

the final state of the (often-unexpressed) affected object or of the duration of the episode.

Different types of delimitativity and the historical change in Russian are inspiring. First, we posit that delimitativity in TSM should be defined as ‘termination in a short time’. We shall show in the next section that it does not mark telicity though. Moreover, the fact that the PC *tsít-ē* often occurs with motion verbs such as *lâi* ‘come’ and *lâi khi* ‘come go’ (as in (1a) and (1b)) though not in all examples may suggest that it may start with these verbs and later occur with other verbs. More research can be done with respect to the historical development.<sup>11</sup>

### 3.3 Delimitativity and telicity

The analysis of the PC *tsít-ē* as a delimitative aspect marker raises an issue concerning telicity. Being a kind of perfectivity, however, does not imply telicity (cf. the perfective *-le* in MC, Xiao & McEnery 2004: 95–100). In some cases, the “for a while” meaning may target the completion of an action, but it does not have to. For example, it is likely that the speaker of (47a) intends to convey that the completion of his breakfast will not take a long time, as evidenced in (48) (<#> means pragmatically odd). However, the example in (49) only means ‘eating some food’. The speaker makes a plea for his/her addressee to let him/her have some food after having drunk many glasses of wine. It is unlikely that speaker intends to mean the whole eating event has to be completed.

- (47) 我 欲 來 食 早頓--一下。 (=(1a))

*Guá beh lâi tsiáh tsá-tng--tsít-ē.*

1SG want come eat breakfast TSIT-E

‘I just want to eat my breakfast.’

- (48) 我 欲 來 食 早頓--一下， #無 食 完 無 要緊。

*Guá beh lâi tsiáh tsá-tng--tsít-ē, #bô tsiáh uân bô iàu-kín.*

1SG want come eat breakfast TSIT-E not.have eat finish not.have matter

‘I just want to eat my breakfast. It’s fine if I don’t finish it.’

11. Here is a sentence found in the playscript of 金花女 *Jīn huā nǚ*, published during Ming Dynasty’s Wanli era.

- (i) 阿嫂， 你 且 那 處 坐， 我 入來 去 繡花--一下。

*A-só, lí tshiánn ná tè tsē, guá lip-lâi khi siù-hue--tsít-ē.*

Sister.in.law 2SG please stay place sit 1SG enter-come go embroider tsit-e

‘Dear Sister-in-law, please sit and stay here. I will go in to the room to do some embroidery.’ (Chen 2020: 176)

(i) Contains two motion verbs, i.e. *lip-lâi* ‘enter-come’ and *khi* ‘go’, and the PC *tsít-ē*. It remains to be seen whether early texts that contain the PC *tsít-ē* occur with motion verbs only.

- (49) .....佢 *in* 拚 幾 *lō* 杯，嘛 著 互 我 食 (=(1b))  
 ...*kah in pià<sup>n</sup> kúi-lō pue, mā tiòh hōo guá tsiáh*  
 with 3PL compete several glass also have.to HOO 1SG eat  
 菜--一下。  
*tshài--tsit-ē.*  
 food TSIT-E  
 ‘I competed with them and drank several glasses of wine. Just let me eat some food.’  
 (from “Taiwanese Concordancer”)

Nevertheless, telicity is compatible with the delimitative aspect if the completion of the event is viewed to be quick.

- (50) a. 你 共 窗仔門 開--開--一下。  
*Lí ka thang-á-m̄ng khui--khui--tsit-ē.*  
 2SG KA window open open TSIT-E  
 ‘Just open the window.’  
 b. 你 共 盒仔 闔--起來--一下。  
*Lí ka áp-á hâp--khí-lâi--tsit-ē.*  
 2SG KA box-SF close-up TSIT-E  
 ‘Just close the box.’

In the two examples above, the completion is clearly marked by the resultative complements *khui* ‘open’ and *khí-lâi* ‘up’ respectively.

Finally, it should be pointed out that although we argue that just like verb reduplication in MC, the PC *tsit-ē* expresses the delimitative aspect, we do not claim that they behave exactly the same. The two differ in the verb types that they can occur with.<sup>12</sup> As we have mentioned in § 3.1 above, Li & Thompson (1981) posit that verb reduplication in MC can be applied to dynamic and volitional verbs. Xiao & McEnery (2004: 155) further suggest that only verbs with the features of [+dynamic] and [–result] can be reduplicated. They report that of the 38 reduplicated verbs found in the Weekly corpus, there are 36 activities and two semelfactives. All inherently telic verbs are excluded:

- (51) a. \*寫 寫 一／這封 信 (MC)  
*\*xiě xiě yī/zhè-fēng xìn*  
 write write one/this-CL letter  
 ‘just write a/this letter’

12. We thank a reviewer for raising this question.

- b. \*贏 贏 那場 比賽 (MC)  
*\*yíng yíng nà-chǎng bǐ-sài*  
win win that-CL match  
‘just win that match’
- c. \*喝醉 喝醉 (MC)  
*\*hē-zuì hē-zuì*  
drink-drunk drink-drunk  
‘just get drunk’

(51a) involves an accomplishment, (51b) an achievement and (51c) a resultative compound. In contrast, the object in (52) can occur after the reduplicated verb because it is not quantified and it is thus not telic.

- (52) 喝 喝 茶 (MC)  
*hē hē chá*  
drink drink tea  
‘just drink tea’

The PC *tsit-ē* behaves differently. It can be followed by a quantified object as we see in the case with an accomplishment verb in (53a), repeated from (37), and with a resultative/causative complement as in (53b) (also see (50a)).

- (53) a. 我 欲 來 寫 一兩張仔 批--一下。 (= (37))  
*Guá beh lâi siá tsit-n̄ng-tiu<sup>n</sup>-á phue--tsit-ē.*  
1SG want come write one-two-CL-SF letter TSIT-E  
‘I just want to write one or two letters.’
- b. 你 共 窗仔門 開--開--一下。 (= (50a))  
*Lí ka thang-á-m̄ng khui--khui--tsit-ē.*  
2SG KA window open open TSIT-E  
‘Just open the window.’

A plausible analysis for the difference is that verb reduplication involves the verb only, while the PC *tsit-ē* is a sentence-final particle that has the scope over the whole vP. The reduplicated form may function like a quantified object or a resultative complement, which delimits the event denoted by the verb. For an analysis that employs an event structure, please see Arcodia et al. (2014; 2015).

### 3.4 Summary

In this section, we show that the PC is a marker for the delimitative aspect and we define it as marking ‘termination in a short time’. Moreover, we show though it can be compatible with telicity, it does not mark telicity itself. If the analysis of the PC *tsit-ē* as a marker for the delimitative aspect is on the right track, then combin-

ing with the conclusion we have reached in § 2 that the PC *tsit-ē* is a low sentence-final particle, we can reach the conclusion that it projects as an AspP. Adopting the view that AspP takes *vP* as proposed in Borer (2005a; b), Travis (2005), and Shen (2004) for MC, we can conclude that the PC *tsit-ē* heads AspP and is higher than *vP*.

#### 4. The ‘down-play’ meaning

We have briefly discussed the ‘down-play’ meaning of the PC *tsit-ē* in § 1. The same kind of meaning is shown to exist in a special use of the nominal classifier *ge* in MC as a verbal classifier in Shu (2012:667). One of the tests Shu uses involves two evaluative adverbs *jiù* and *cái*: the former marks the consequent clause of *if*-clauses, while the latter marks the consequent clauses of *only if*-clauses.

- (54) a. 你 去 吃 個 一 片 披 薩， 就 能 去 看 電 視。 (MC)  
*Nǐ qù chī gè yī-piàn pisa, jiù néng qù kàn diànshì.*  
 you go eat CL one-M pizza then can go watch TV  
 ‘(Just) eat one slice of pizza, then you can go watch TV.’
- b. 你 去 吃 (\*個) 一 片 披 薩， 才 能 去 看 電 視。 (MC)  
*Nǐ qù chī (\*gè) yī-piàn pisa, cái néng qù kàn diànshì.*  
 you go eat CL one-M pizza only.then can go watch TV  
 ‘Only if you eat one slice of pizza can you go watch TV.’

The antecedent clauses in (54) are different. The former in (54a) is a sufficient condition, while that in (54b) is a necessary condition. The contrast in (54) shows that the verbal classifier *ge* cannot be part of the necessary condition because it functions to down-play the tone and thus does not convey a necessary condition.

The same kind of argument can be used to show the ‘down-play’ meaning of the PC *tsit-ē*. Example (55a), but not (55b), can be felicitously used when one wants to complain that the price of everything rises.

- (55) a. 你 去 買 菜--一 下， 就 知。  
*Lí khì bué tshài--tsit-ē, tō tsai.*  
 2SG go buy food TSIT-E then know  
 ‘Just go buy some food, then you know.’
- b. \*你 去 買 菜--一 下， 才 知。  
 \**Lí khì bué tshài--tsit-ē, tsiah tsai.*  
 2SG go buy food TSIT-E only.then know  
 ‘Only if you go buy some food will you know.’



The same kind of argument can also be used to show that this ‘down-play’ meaning also exists in the *tsit-ē-á* that follows the verb and precedes an object as in (56).

- (56) a. 你 去 買 一下仔 菜 (--一下) , 就 知。  
*Lí khì bué tsit-ē-á tshài(--tsit-ē), tō tsai.*  
 2SG go buy TSIT-E-SF food TSIT-E then know  
 ‘Just go buy some food, then you know.’
- b. \*你 去 買 一下仔 菜 (--一下) , 才 知。  
 \**Lí khì bué tsit-ē-á tshài(--tsit-ē), tsiah tsai.*  
 2SG go buy TSIT-E-SF food TSIT-E only.then know  
 ‘Only if you go buy some food will you know.’

Interestingly, as pointed out by one of our consultants, it seems the prenominal durative phrase *tsit-ē-á* (or simply *tsit-ē*) alone in examples as (56a) can perfectly convey the meaning of ‘for a while’ as well as the meaning that the action is insignificant. The PC *tsit-ē* is not needed.

On the other hand, while we judge the following sentence to be acceptable, a native speaker we consulted reports that (57) is somewhat redundant with the suffix *-á* and the PC *tsit-ē*.

- (57) 你 先 離開 台北--兩三 工仔--一下。  
*Lí sing lî-khui Tâi-pak--n̄ng-sann kang-á--tsit-ē.*  
 2SG first leave Taipei two-three day-SF TSIT-E  
 ‘You just stay away from Taipei for two or three days before doing something else.’

In fact, Lien (2011) suggests that *tsit-ē* in general is a downtoner, which is used to mitigate the tone of speech and to make it less significant and thus more polite. According to Zhang (2016), downtoners are expressions that introduce vagueness into a proposition or increase the degree of vagueness of an utterance, such as *sort of*, *kind of*, or *a bit* in English. We thus claim that the ‘down-play’ meaning comes from the delimitative marker itself, just like other instances of *tsit-ē* and other phrases that contain the diminutive suffix *-á*.

## 5. Concluding remarks

This paper argues that the post-complement *tsit-ē* in TSM marks delimitativity, which is a perfective aspect that means ‘termination in a short time’. Though it is compatible with telicity, it does not mark telicity. Syntactically, it may be projected as an AspP, which is above *vP*.

It should be noted out that in some cases *tsit-ē* can be ambiguous between two meanings. If *tsit-ē* immediately follows a verb which can take a durative phrase, *tsit-ē* may be ambiguous between an aspectual meaning and a durative meaning. For example, the *tsit-ē* in (58a) may be a delimitative aspect marker, or a durative phrase as *tsit-ē-á* in (58b) and *tsit kang* in (58c).

- (58) a. 你 歇--一下。  
*Lí hioh--tsit-ē.*  
 2SG rest TSIT-E  
 ‘Just have a rest/Rest for a while.’  
 b. 你 歇--一下仔。  
*Lí hioh--tsit-ē-á.*  
 2SG rest TSIT-E-SF  
 ‘Just rest for a while.’  
 c. 你 歇--一工。  
*Lí hioh--tsit kang.*  
 2SG rest one day  
 ‘Rest for one day.’

*Tsit-ē* in (59), however, is not ambiguous. It contrasts with (58a) in having an achievement verb that cannot take a durative phrase: *lí* ‘divorce.’

- (59) 佢 清彩 離--一下。  
*Lín tshin-tshái lí--tsit-ē.*  
 2PL lightly divorce TSIT-E  
 ‘Just get a divorce. Take it lightly.’ (= (3b))

On the other hand, our proposed analysis predicts that two occurrences of *tsit-ē* should be possible, one being a durative phrase and the other being the aspectual marker. The prediction is born out:

- (60) .....總是 我 毋 識 規矩，請 大人 較 費神，你 為  
 ...*tsóng--sī guá m̄ sik kui-kí, tshiánn tái-lîn kah huì-sîn, lí uī*  
 after.all 1SG not know rule please 2SG.POSS.honor more tiring 2SG for  
 我 講--一下--咧。  
*guá kóng--tsit-ē--leh.*  
 1SG talk TSIT-E LEH  
 ‘...After all, I don’t know rules. I am sorry to trouble you. Can you please just explain it for me?’  
 (語苑 *Go-en*<sup>13</sup> 24, 3-17-7)

13. 語苑 *Go-en* (*Yǔyuàn*) is a journal published between 1908 to 1941 in Taiwan under Japanese rule.

The example in (60) shows that *tsit-ē* can occur with *leh*, which is a reduced form of *tsit-ē*.

In general, if our analysis of the PC *tsit-ē* as marking delimitativity is on the right track, we have shown the “one+verbal classifier” sequence can function as a perfective marker. It expresses what verb reduplication expresses in MC, despite the fact that the latter targets the verb and is more restricted in selecting the types of verb with which it can occur. It remains to be seen whether other languages see the same usage of a durative phrase as the delimitative aspect marker. Diachronically, from the fact that the PC *tsit-ē* occurs with motion verbs such as *lâi* ‘come’ and *lâi khì* ‘come go’ though not in all examples is worth pursuing whether its presence is originally associated with these verbs.

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## Abbreviations

|       |   |
|-------|---|
| ASP   | aspect  |
| BA    | preverbal object marker in Mandarin Chinese     |
| CL    | nominal or verbal classifier                    |
| DE    | nominal modification marker in Mandarin Chinese |
| E     | nominal modification marker in TSM              |
| HOO   | causative marker in TSM                         |
| KA    | preverbal object marker in TSM                  |
| LEH/E | reduced forms of the PC <i>tsit-ē</i> in TSM    |
| M     | measure word                                    |
| MC    | Mandarin Chinese                                |
| PC    | post-complement                                 |
| PRT   | particle  |

SF        suffix  
 TSIT-E   one plus the verbal classifier  
 TSM    Taiwanese Southern Min

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