

## **Classifier and Construction: The Interaction of Grammatical Categories and Cognitive Strategies \***

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This paper examines a Mandarin construction that involves the general classifier, *ge*, when the element to its right is not a N(P). Through usage-based investigation, V-*ge*-Comp is identified as a construction in vernacular Mandarin that expresses the attainment of an unusual resultant state. It is argued that the meaning of the construction relies critically on a reanalysis of the Comp as a noun-like element. The foregrounding discourse function of classifiers in general and the special status of *ge* as a generalized classifier help motivate this reanalysis and render the meaning of the construction. Our account points to prototypicality and contiguity as two fundamental notions in the perceptual basis of linguistic structure. Our account also highlights the patterned and prefabricated characteristics of language as well as the flexibility and indeterminacy in linguistic categories.

Key words: classifier, construction, reanalysis, linguistic categories

### **1. Introduction**

Classifier is an extensively studied topic in Chinese linguistics. In recent decades, this topic has been treated from the perspectives of semantics (e.g., Ahrens 1994, Ahrens & Huang 1996, Erbaugh 1986, 2000, Loke 1994, Myers 2000, Shi 1996, Tai 1992, 1994, Tai & Chao 1997, Tai & Wang 1990, Tzeng et al. 1991, Yau 1988, 邵敬敏 1993, 劉小梅 1994, 1997), discourse pragmatics (e.g., Sun 1988, Li 2000a, b),

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acquisition (e.g., Polio 1994, Chang-Smith 2000), and historical grammaticalization (e.g., Loke 1997, 李訥, 石毓智 1998, 李艷惠, 石毓智 2000, 石毓智 2001). While using discourse as data and investigating the cognitive/pragmatic motivations that give rise to the phenomena under examination, the present study attempts to approach classifiers from a new perspective, i.e., considering their behavior in constructions.

A construction, in the framework of Construction Grammar, is a word or a phrasal pattern that has meanings and functions of its own (Fillmore et al. 1988, Goldberg 1995). It is “a form-meaning pair ... such that some aspect of [the meaning] is not strictly predictable from [the construction]’s component parts or from other previously established constructions” (Goldberg 1995:4). Beyond the Construction Grammar framework, linguists who study stretches of authentic discourse, spoken or written, have long recognized the fuzzy distinction between lexis and grammar because native speakers’ speech often displays chunks of language that are better analyzed as phrases or semi-phrases rather than as a rule-governed syntactic structure with its various slots filled with independently chosen lexical items (e.g., Pawley & Syder 1983). Recent corpus-driven studies of language echo this observation and point to the notion of pattern (e.g., Ono & Thompson 1995, Stubbs 1996, 2001, Hunston & Francis 2000, Bybee & Hopper 2001). Corpus evidence shows that a particular sense (of a word) typically occurs only in a limited set of environments. Through repeated use, the sense/word and its co-occurring words form a pattern. Corpus evidence also supports the other side of the same coin: patterns also illustrate constraining power in selecting only a limited set of words as their compatible components. The mutual dependence of patterns and words indicates the importance of lexical and conceptual information in the grammatical representation of what we want to communicate. As a result, lexis and grammar should be treated as two ends of a continuum rather than two notions independent of each other (Halliday 1991, Sinclair 1991).

Following recent interests in applying the Construction Grammar framework to the study of the Chinese language (e.g., 黃居仁 et al. 1999) and in exploring the collocational aspect of semantics from the discourse perspective (e.g., Huang 2000, 陶紅印 2001, Tao 2001), this paper examines a Mandarin pattern in which the general classifier, *ge*, is not positioned next to a NP, as is typically expected. The pattern, V-*ge*-C(omp), is frequently used in vernacular speech and writing. For example, 嚇個半死 *xia-ge-ban-si* scare-GE-half-dead ‘scared half to death’. This pattern is identified as a construction that expresses, if it has not fully grammaticalized to encode, a specific meaning: attainment of an unusual resultant state (designated by the Comp). We propose that the *ge* in V-*ge*-C is an extended use of the classifier *ge*, and the C is interpreted as noun-like through a perceptually based reanalysis. We argue that it is the foregrounding discourse function of classifiers in general and the generalized,

non-binding semantic restriction of *ge* that both syntagmatically motivate the reanalysis and pragmatically render the meaning of the V-*ge*-C construction. In other words, the prototypicality and the contiguity in linguistic structure are key concepts employed in this analysis. The study of V-*ge*-C, furthermore, highlights the indeterminacy in linguistic categoriality and the adaptive nature of language that characterize the patterned, prefabricated speech that we use every day.

Methodologically, different from works done within the Construction Grammar framework, which typically base their analyses on decontextualized data, this study advocates an empirical approach to the theorizing about constructions by considering data from everyday language use. The V-*ge*-C construction is mainly used in the casual register. It occurs not only in most spoken genres such as conversation, but also in certain written genres such as narrative, where language may approximate the daily vernacular use. While both spoken (conversational) and written data are consulted for this study, examples cited in this paper are extracted from the Sinica Corpus (marked as SC), which mostly consists of written Chinese in contemporary Taiwan (Huang and Chen 1992). A small portion of the data was supplemented by the language used on the internet (marked as IL). When necessary, constructed examples are provided for comparison's sake (not marked). In the following, Section 2 surveys the subtypes of the V-*ge*-C construction. Section 3 discusses the variation of the construction and other patterns similar to V-*ge*-C. Section 4 describes the meaning of the construction by examining the types of C that can appear in the construction. Section 5 presents the main arguments of this paper about *ge* and C. Section 6 considers the advantages and disadvantages of the analysis. Section 7 is a conclusion.

## 2. Types of C in V-*ge*-C

The V-*ge*-C construction is a pattern recognized in general discussions of Modern Chinese grammar (e.g., 呂叔湘 1980, 劉月華 et al. 1983/1996). We begin our discussion by introducing the three types of C in V-*ge*-C following 劉月華 et al. 1983/1996.

Type 1 C is typically an adjectival expression characterizing the state in which the S or O is in as a result of the action designated by the verb. The adjectival expression could range from a one-word stative verb to a clause. Consider the following examples:

- (1) 孩子的成長只有現在，電影我卻可以等老的時候以後再拍個夠。  
*Haizi de chengzhang zhi you xianzai, dianying wo que keyi deng lao de*  
*shihou yihou zai **pai ge gou***

Child POSS growth only have now movie I rather can wait old DE time afterward then shoot GE enough

‘My kid will have his childhood only once (so I have to be with him now), but I can wait until later to act in movies, and **as much as I want**.’ (SC)

- (2) 另一次打球時，距離估計錯誤，撞到牆上，撞個真正頭破血流。

*Ling yici da qiu shi, juli guji cuowu, zhuang dao qiangshang, **zhuang ge zhenzheng toupo xieliu***

Another time play ball time distance estimate wrong hit to wall-surface hit GE really head-break blood-flow

‘At another time at ball game, because (I) miscalculated the distance, (I) bumped (myself) into a wall and (my) head **got injured badly**.’ (SC)

Type 2 C characterizes the continuous state of the taking place of an action. This type of C usually consists of a negative adverbial phrase expressing incessantness. The V-ge-C construction indicates, in the following examples, that “the subject (the cellphone) is in a state of incessant ringing”, and “the subject (we) is in a state of incessant talking”, respectively:

- (3) 五天旅遊，陳丁榮的大哥大響個不停，他一面談公務，一面為母親解說，拍 V 八。

*Wutian lüyou, Chen Dingrong de dageda **xiang ge buting**, ta yimian tan gongwu, yimian wei muqin jieshuo, pai V-ba*

Five-day travel Chen Dingrong POSS cellphone ring GE incessant s/he one-hand talk business one-hand for mother explain shoot V-8

‘During the five-day tour, Chen Dingrong’s cellphone **kept ringing**. He discussed business (on the phone), explained (the scenery) to his mother, and shot (the scenery) with a camcorder all at the same time.’ (SC)

- (4) 在一旁的弟弟和媽媽早就跟周公約會去了，我們還是說個沒完。

*Zai yipang de Didi he Mama zaojiu gen Zhougong yuehui qu le, women haishi **shuo ge meiwan***

At one-side DE brother and mother early-on with Zhougong date go ASP we still talk GE no-stop

‘At our side, Mother and my younger brother had already fallen asleep, but we were **still talking (and could not stop)**.’ (SC)

Type 3 C is typically a phrase expressing quantity, such as time duration, percentage, etc. Consider the following examples:

- (5) 他們的筆記自然成為搶手的“祕笈”，總得轉印個好幾次。  
*Tamen de biji ziran chengwei qiangshou de “miji”, zong dei **zhuan yin ge haoji ci***  
 Their POSS notes naturally become hot DE secret-book always have-to xerox  
 GE several-times  
 ‘Their (class) notes naturally became some hot “sacred books”, and would **be copied quite a number of times.**’ (SC)
- (6) 如果每天能讓孩子唸個二三十分鐘，就很能收到效果。  
*Ruguo meitian neng rang haizi **nian ge ersanshi fenzhong**, jiu hen neng shou dao xiaoguo*  
 If everyday can let child read GE twenty-thirty minute then INT can receive to effect  
 ‘If you can have the child **read (it) for about 20 or 30 minutes**, it will be effective.’ (SC)

The first two types of V-ge-C construction share a commonality, i.e., they typically characterize the state that the subject or object is in as a result of the verbal action. Moreover, the state designated by Type 1 or Type 2 C is an “unusual” state. The word “unusual” is used here as a cover term to denote any state that is considered special, extraordinary, or perhaps an extreme situation, or involves excessiveness, or is “stretched to the limit” compared to the norm. For example, in (2) 撞個真正頭破血流 *zhuang ge zhenzheng toupo xieliu* ‘(head) got injured badly’ is presented as an unusual (and negative) situation that no one would like to be in; in (3) 響個不停 *xiang ge buting* ‘(cellphone) ringing incessantly’ is presented as an unusual (and maybe exaggerated) state about cell phones. In like fashion, Type 3 C designates an “unusual” quantity pertaining to the state in which the subject or object is in as a result of the verbal action. Thus, for (5), given the typical world in which class notes are only for the owner to read, the situation in which some people’s class notes are requested by other people and need to be copied quite a number of times for circulation can be considered unusual. However, the “unusualness” of the quantity is not always on the excessive end of the scale. It could refer to a quantity that is “smaller” or “lesser” than the “norm”. Thus, the quantity C in (6), 二三十分鐘 *ersanshi fenzhong* ‘20 or 30 minutes’ is not a time duration of excessive length. Rather, it suggests a short period, given the context. Whether larger or smaller than the norm, the designated quantity is characterized as “unusual”. Therefore, we suggest that the C in V-ge-C, in all three types, designates an “unusual” state.

### 3. V-ge-C variation and other similar constructions

Let us now take a look at the variations of the V-ge-C construction. An even more colloquial variation of the V-ge-C construction is V-ta-ge-C, which can occur when the object of the verb is not explicitly presented (such as at a preposed position with *ba*). The *ta* in the construction is presumably the third person singular pronoun. This variation works for all the three types of C. The following is a Type 1 example:

- (7) 埋伏在附近，趁夜裡探它個究竟。  
*Maifu zai fujin, chen ye li tan ta ge jiu jing*  
 Hide at nearby take-chance night in explore TA GE after-all  
 ‘hide at a nearby place, and **check it out** during the night’ (IL)

Type 1 and Type 2 are respectively associated with some other patterns. Type 2 V-ge-C is straightforward. It is generally equivalent to the Adv-V pattern. For example, 響個不停 *xiang ge bu ting* ‘ring incessantly’ is equivalent to 不停地響 *bu ting de xiang* ‘ring incessantly’. Type 1 V-ge-C is in many ways similar to V-de-C, the canonical verb complement structure in Chinese expressing result. Many Type 1 V-ge-C expressions can be replaced by V-de-C with the meaning almost unchanged. Some of these examples can even allow *de* and *ge* to co-occur, as V-dege-C. For example:

- (8) 擠 – 個/得/得個 – 水洩不通  
*ji - ge/de/dege - shuixie bu tong*  
 crowded GE/DE/DEGE water-release NOT through  
 ‘so crowded that there’s no way to get through’
- (9) 砸 – 個/得/得個 – 粉碎  
*za - ge/de/dege - fensui*  
 smash GE/DE/DEGE powder-broken  
 ‘smash to pieces’

In some contexts, the Type 1 C in V-ge-C can follow V directly without any interfering element. In the following example, *ge* can be omitted when the proposition of the entire expression is largely retained, i.e., 談個清楚 *tan ge qingchu* and 談清楚 *tan qingchu* express the same propositional meaning here.

- (10) 與我太太談個清楚  
 yu wo taitai *tan ge qingchu*  
 with my wife talk GE clear  
 ‘talk with my wife to **straighten things out**’ (SC)

On the other hand, many other Type 1 V-ge-C examples cannot be replaced by V-de-C, V-dege-C, nor V-C. For example (“zero” means no interfering element):

- (11) 探 – 個/??得/??得個/??zero – 究竟  
 tan - ge/??de/??dege/??zero - jiuqing  
 explore GE/??DE/??DEGE/??zero after-all  
 ‘try to figure out’
- (12) 接 – 個/??得/??得個/??zero – 正著  
 jie - ge/??de/??dege/??zero - zhengzhao  
 catch GE/??DE/??DEGE/??zero right-on  
 ‘catch (something/someone) right on target’

#### 4. Attainment of the unusual state

In this section, we want to argue that V-ge-C as a construction expresses the attainment of the unusual state designated by the C.

The special meaning of V-ge-C is most distinct when it is compared with its Type 1 near-“equivalent”, V-de-C. While both constructions convey the same proposition, the relationship between V and C is characterized differently. In V-de-C, C is simply marked as the resultant state of V, but in V-ge-C, C is treated as an unusual—or sometimes the maximum or even excessive—extent to which the resultant state can reach. The V-ge-C construction focuses on the perfectiveness of the resultant state, i.e., only when the designated resultant state is complete and the unusual “point” is reached can the V-ge-C construction be used. Thus, while in many examples C is expressed through a stative verb, what the entire construction expresses is not just that the state obtains, but that the maximum extent of that state is reached. Consider the following examples:

- (13) 把桌上的玻璃砸個粉碎  
 ba zhuo shang de boli za ge fensui  
 BA table on DE glass smash GE powder-broken  
 ‘**smash** the glass on the table **into pieces**’ (SC)

- (14) 跳進浴缸裡泡個舒服  
*tiao jin yugang li pao ge shufu*  
 jump into bathtub in bathe GE comfortable  
 ‘jump into the bathtub to **enjoy the utmost comfort (of bathing)**’ (SC)
- (15) 不妨今天再看個明白  
*bufang jintian zai kan ge mingbai*  
 might-as-well today again look GE clear  
 ‘why not **take a good look** (at it) again today’ (SC)
- (16) 讓他們倆在那裡吵個痛快  
*rang tamenlia zai nali chao ge tongkuai*  
 let they-two at there quarrel GE to-one’s-heart’s-content  
 ‘let them **fight/quarrel to their hearts’ content**’ (SC)
- (17) 讓大家玩個盡興  
*rang dajia wan ge jinxing*  
 let everyone play GE exhaust-interest  
 ‘to make everyone **enjoy most fun**’ (SC)
- (18) 專程坐飛機去釣個過癮  
*zhuancheng zuo feiji qu diao ge guoyin*  
 special-trip take airplane go fish GE satisfy-craving  
 ‘take a flight (to there) to **satisfy the craving for fishing**’ (SC)
- (19) 他放任自己喝個爛醉  
*ta fangren ziji he ge lanzui*  
 he indulge self drink GE rotten-drunk  
 ‘He indulged himself to **drink to oblivion.**’ (SC)

The states described in the examples above are all gradable. For example, the V-ge-C in (13), 砸個粉碎 *za ge fensui* ‘smashing the glass into pieces’, can characterize real situations of different degrees of impact. Smashing something into ten pieces can be expressed by *fensui*, but smashing it into a hundred pieces can also be expressed by *fensui*. However, the V-ge-C construction expresses the reaching of, so to speak, the superlative stage of the state. In other words, the state has been completed to its maximum extent. Examples (14) to (16) are similar to (13) in that the C in them expresses a state that can be seen as scalar. By contrast, the C in examples (17) to (19) already expresses the extreme extent, or the superlative stage, to which the action designated by the verb can be carried out.

Needless to say, whether a state is unusual or not is mostly a subjective decision.



Back to Type 1 C, we notice that many Type 1 V-ge-C examples in our data are idioms or lexicalized phrases. They are in fact conventionalized expressions characterizing some unusual states. They are conventionalized expressions exactly because the designated unusual states are socio-culturally acknowledged as unusual by the collective judgment of the speech community. Consider the following examples, in which 片甲不留 *pianjia bu liu* ‘(killing to the extent that) nothing is left (in the battlefield)’ and 水落石出 *shui luo shi chu* ‘the water recedes and the stones are exposed—so the reality is clear’ are idioms taking the C position:

(20) 把敵人殺個片甲不留

*ba diren sha ge pianjia bu liu*

BA enemy kill GE piece-armor NEG stay

‘kill all the enemies—to the extent that nothing is left’

(SC)

(21) ...下定決心非把事情弄個水落石出不可。

*xia ding juexin fei ba shiqing nong ge shui luo shi chu bu ke*

make definite mind have-to BA matter get GE water fall stone out NEG may

‘determined to straighten up the whole matter—to the extent that “the water recedes and all the stones are exposed”’

(SC)

To sum up, the V-ge-C construction carries a special meaning because the C expresses not only an aspect of a state (i.e., extent/degree for Type 1 and 2 or quantity for Type 3) but also that that aspect of the state is considered unusual. Some of the C expressions literally designate an unusual state as they are socio-culturally conventionalized expressions for such situations. In some other cases, the C expressions themselves do not suggest “unusualness”; it is the construction that derives the “unusual” reading.

## 5. What does *ge* do in V-ge-C?

Before we approach the question of how the V-ge-C construction derives the “unusual” reading for the state designated in C, let us examine what *ge* is doing in this construction. Is the *ge* in V-ge-C related to the general classifier *ge*? That is, are the two *ge*’s a case of polysemy or homonymy? Certainly the two *ge*’s are written with the same Chinese character in modern/contemporary Chinese texts. This, although not a piece of direct linguistic evidence proving the semantic relationship between the two uses/senses, indicates a likely association, or, at least, an attributed association, in folk etymology. On the other hand, to the author’s knowledge no use

of *ge* as in V-*ge*-C (without the company of a preceding numeral) is found in other Chinese dialects. The lack of parallel development in other dialects may discourage us to attempt the polysemy analysis, but it cannot rule out the polysemy analysis as one of the plausible treatments.

The major argument against the polysemy analysis is structural. In the V-*ge*-C construction, *ge* is preceded by a verb and followed by a complement. Structurally this collocational combination is too different from the prototypical collocational schema we have of a classifier, in which *ge* is accompanied by an (optional) numeral to its left and a noun (phrase) to its right, i.e., (NUM-)CL-NP. We propose that a conceptual approach to the problem is in favor of the polysemy analysis: the C in V-*ge*-C can be re-analyzed as noun-like through its syntagmatic contiguity with *ge*, which, based on its prototypical collocational pattern, exerts a nominalizing effect on the element to its right. In other words, the *ge* in V-*ge*-C is a (metaphorical?) extension of its prototypical classifier use through a conceptual mapping between linguistic categories. This analysis critically hinges on the recognition that nouns/nominals and adjectives/adjectivals share some conceptual similarities. No matter whether the C structurally consists of a word or a clause, it semantically denotes a state the subject or the object is in. States are about properties and attributes. In this regard, the C is like an adjectival, which shares with nouns, especially non-referential nouns, the characteristic of denoting a set of attributes or properties. It is true that the prototypical uses of nouns are quite distinct from the prototypical uses of adjectives. Nouns are prototypically used to refer, especially referring to concrete, countable entities. However, the non-referential use of nouns does not display these prototypical (discourse) features of nouns. Non-referential nouns are more like adjectives because they are property-ascribing, abstract, and non-countable (Hopper & Thompson 1984, Leech & Li 1995, 張伯江, 方梅 1996). Thus, to the extent that the adjectival C is similar to the non-referential noun in that they both denote attributes and properties, the *ge* that precedes C is acting as a nominalizer, which promotes, as it were, the “nounhood” in the adjectival C.

The nominalizer analysis of the *ge* in V-*ge*-C is, furthermore, motivated by the discourse function of classifiers in general and the special status of *ge* as a general classifier. Discourse studies of classifiers have pointed out that even though quantifying and classifying are the two basic functions of classifiers, the use of numeral-classifier (NUM-CL) before a noun or noun phrase (NP) is pragmatically motivated: the NUM-CL expression is a grounding device to highlight the salience of the NP in the discourse. Li (2000a, b) shows that while referential classified NPs (i.e., NUM-CL-NP) usually occur in either foregrounded or presentative clauses to introduce foregrounded entities or new participants into the discourse, non-referential classified NPs are mainly used as predicative after verbs such as 是 *shi* ‘be’ or 像

*xiang* ‘like’ or in presentative sentences, and they refer to a generic group. “What is foregrounded, then, is the attributes of the nouns... It is the attribute(s) commonly known to that group that is (are) foregrounded” (Li 2000b:1126). Furthermore, one of the characteristics of these non-referential classified NPs is that “the numeral, when occurring right after the main verb, can be left out” (Li 2000b:1127). That is, in the non-referential context, the “NUM-CL-NP” construction is often reduced to “CL-NP”.

While Li did not give details on exactly which classifiers are used in the non-referential and generic way in her data, the examples she provides all contain the general *ge*. Erbaugh (2000) reports that in her Mandarin data (the “pear story” narratives), sortal classifiers (such as 條 *tiao* ‘extended object’) are rare: Overall, while 43% of nouns do not appear with any classifier, 54% appear with *ge* and only 3% with sortal classifiers. Indeed, *ge* is an obvious favorite given that the classifier is now a morphosyntactic marker for the NP’s salience in discourse. *Ge* is semantically vacuous and therefore generalized and non-binding: Unlike sortal classifiers, it does not set any semantic restrictions on the type of head nouns that can go along with it. We can say that the classifying function of *ge* is reduced to the minimum. In the “(NUM)-CL-NP” string, it does, as sortal classifiers do, foreground the attributes of the N; however, unlike sortal classifiers, it does not provide any classifying information about these attributes. In other words, *ge* only tells you that the following noun represents certain attributes—whatever they are and however you figure out what they are!

We see a parallel in the relationship between *ge* and its following element in the *ge*-NP of NUM-CL-NP and the *ge*-C of V-*ge*-C. As said above, the adjectives and the non-referential nouns are both property-ascribing. This is the perspective from which we can see how non-referential nouns are like adjectives. The other side of the same coin is to see how adjectivals in the V-*ge*-C construction can come close to nouns. As demonstrated by Type 1 C and Type 2 C, when the maximum point of a state is reached, this superlative stage should be the best exemplar of the state (designated by the adjectival), and conceptually it is plausible to perceive it as an entity that has the (set of) attribute(s) designated by the adjectival. In the case of Type 3 C, it is even easier to perceive the designated quantity as an entity.

The collocation of *ge* and the C pragmatically renders the reading of “unusualness” into the C. As shown before, many C expressions literally designate unusual situations (e.g., 半死 *ban si* ‘half dead’ or 爛醉 *lan zui* ‘drink to oblivion’), but there are also many other C expressions that do not literally suggest anything unusual. However, in the V-*ge*-C construction, the “unusual” reading, such as the maximum reading for Type 1 C, is always available (e.g., 做個夠 *zuo ge gou* ‘do (something) as much as one can’). We argue that this reading results from the interaction of the foregrounding discourse

function of *ge* as a marker for focus of attention, and the understanding of the following C as a set of attributes. When the collocation of *ge* and C suggests that the C is something to be focused on, it is a pragmatic inference that what C stands for has to be special and unusual. Morphosyntactically, the *ge* and the C nest to each other to the right of V in V-*ge*-C and they together generate the meaning of the entire construction, “V (to attain) the unusual C state”. The extension of *ge* from its prototypical classifier use (to characterize the described proposition/“content”) to the use in this construction (to characterize the describing of the described—which involves the speaker’s subjective evaluation) is one of the widely attested paths of directionality in semantic change (Traugott 1982, Sweetser 1990).

Our approach to the interaction of *ge* and its “head” finds a parallel in Ahrens & Huang’s (1996) treatment of nominal classifiers and their head nouns as a semantic coercion phenomenon. In the generative semantics framework, Ahrens and Huang argue that nouns do not just refer to individuals. Rather, nouns can be coerced by different types of classifiers to refer to kinds and events. Consider the following examples, in which the “individual” interpretation in (a) and the “event” interpretation in (b) of the noun are brought out by different classifiers:

- (22) a. 一具電話  
*yi ju dianhua*  
 one CL telephone  
 ‘one telephone’  
 b. 一通電話  
*yi tong dianhua*  
 one CL telephone  
 ‘one phone call’
- (23) a. 一架飛機  
*yi jia feiji*  
 one CL airplane  
 ‘one airplane’  
 b. 一班飛機  
*yi ban feiji*  
 one CL airplane  
 ‘one flight’

The above examples illustrate that the event information can be brought out from a noun by a classifier. Our analysis of the V-*ge*-C construction works the other way round. We see that the classifier can coerce the entity information from a complement denoting state.

## 6. The advantages and disadvantages of the analysis

The analysis we offer here is not perfect. First, the analysis may imply a treatment of the *ge* in V-*ge*-C as a nominalizer (and C as the “nominalized”). This could be counter-intuitive given that Modern Chinese nominalization is prototypically realized in the “nominalized-nominalizer” word order, as illustrated by the word order of the canonical nominalizer in Chinese, *de*, and the VP that is nominalized in the following example:

- (24) 賣水餃的  
*mai shuijiao de*  
 sell dumpling DE  
 ‘(the person) who sells dumpling—dumpling-seller’

We would argue that the claim we want to make is not so much about *ge* having acquired a grammatical status as a nominalizer nominalizing what is in the following as about the interaction of elements in a construction and the derivation of the meaning of the entire construction as a consequence of the interaction of these elements.

On the other hand, there are also some merits in this analysis. First, syntactic evidence provides further support to our view that C is virtually noun-like. For Type 1 C, the most striking difference between V-*ge*-C and V-*de*-C is that V-*ge*-C can take the aspect marker 了 *-le*, while V-*de*-C cannot. Consider the V-*le*-*ge*-C examples in the following:

- (25) 一不小心踩到肥皂，摔了個四腳朝天，痛死我了！  
*yi bu xiaoxin cai dao feizao, shuai le ge sijiao chaotian, tongsi wo le*  
 one NEG careful step at soap fall LE GE four-foot toward-sky pain-to-death I  
 LE  
 ‘Without paying attention I stepped on the soap, and **fell on my back**. It really hurt!’  
 (SC)
- (26) 她休養這些天來，登山，划船，露營等以前無暇享受的活動都做了個夠。  
*Ta xiuyang zhexie tian lai, dengshan, huachuan, luying deng yiqian wuxia*  
*xiangshou de huodong dou zuo le ge gou*  
 She rest these day since climb-mountain row-boat, camping etc. before  
 no-time enjoy DE activity all do LE GE enough  
 ‘During the days when she took a break, she **did a lot of** hiking, boating, and  
 camping, the activities that she’d had no time to enjoy before.’ (SC)

The V-*le-ge*-C string in the above examples cannot be replaced by \*V-*le-de*-C, as ??摔了得四腳朝天 ??*shuai le de si jiao chao tian*, and ??做了得夠 ??*zuo le de gou*, respectively. The two particles, *-le* and *de*, are paradigmatically competitive at the post-verbal position. For our purpose here, then, *de* is, just like *-le*, a verbal element marking “what happened”, and the C in V-*de*-C is a complement providing part of the information about “what happened”.

The V-*le-ge*-C construction, on the other hand, is strongly reminiscent of the commonly seen V-*le-ge*-N pattern, in which the nominal *ge* and the N constitute the NP, and the NP is an argument to the V. By analogy, we can say that the consequence of our analysis of V-*ge*-C is that C becomes a (quasi-)argument to V. The following are respectively an example of (traditionally defined) intransitive V and transitive V in V-*ge*-C.

- (27) 小女孩一次又一次哭個夠，開始變得落寞寡言。

*Xiao nühai yici you yici ku ge gou, kaishi bian de luomo guayan*

Small girl once again once cry GE enough start become DE lonely lack-speech

‘The little girl **cried a lot**, and became depressed and quiet.’ (SC)

- (28) 她一氣之下，放火把淨慈寺燒個精光。

*Ta yi qi zhixia, fang huo ba Jingcisi shao ge jingguang*

She once mad under set fire BA Jingci-temple burn GE completely-bare

‘She got mad and set fire to **burn down** the Jingci Temple.’ (SC)

As the last example shows, when the V is transitive, there are three arguments (i.e., 她 *ta* ‘she’, 淨慈寺 *Jingcisi* ‘Jingci Temple’, and 精光 *jingguang* ‘completely bare’). This analysis is reminiscent of other *ba* sentences in which the argument at the final position is unquestionably a noun:

- (29) 我把汽車加了油。

*Wo ba qiche jia le you*

I BA car add LE gas

‘I added **gas** to the car.’

In other words, the nominalizer analysis of the *ge* in V-*ge*-C, which creates one more (quasi-)argument for V, seems not particularly odd, given that the same argument structure is found existing in Chinese on independent grounds.

The greatest advantage of the present analysis is that it accounts for the indeterminacy in some “V-*ge*-X” examples where the element following *ge* can be

treated either as a noun or as a (Type 1) complement. This indeterminacy is especially outstanding when the V and X are originally components of an idiomatic expression. Consider the following examples:

- (30) ...史奴比卻因此撲了個空，掉進池裡了。  
*Shinubi que yinci **pu le ge kong**, diao jin chi li le*  
 Snoopy however therefore throw LE GE empty fall enter pond in LE  
 ‘... because of this, Snoopy **missed it**, and fell into the pond.’ (SC)
- (31) 國家大事你們這些敗類懂個屁！  
*guojia da shi nimen zhexie bailei **dong ge pi***  
 nation big matter you-(pl.) these loser understand GE fart  
 ‘You losers, you **know nothing** about (serious matters such as) national affairs!’ (SC)
- (32) 跳板裡面敷蓋了一層防滑的質料，以防止選手不小心滑個倒栽蔥。  
*tiaoban limian fugai le yiceng fanghua de zhiliao, yi fangzhi xuanshou bu xiaoxin **hua ge daozaicong***  
 spring-board inside cover ASP one-layer anti-slippery DE material so prevent-from contestant NEG careful fall GE upside-down-onion  
 ‘The springboard is applied with a coat of anti-slippery material to prevent contestants from **toppling over and “becoming an upside-down onion”**.’ (SC)

In (30), the element following *ge*, 空 *kong* ‘empty’, is adjectival when considered in isolation. However, it is probably preferable to analyze it as part of the idiomatic verbal expression, 撲空 *pukong* ‘miss (target—someone or some event)’. When this expression is combined with the V-ge-X pattern, is 空 *kong* back to be an adjectival C, or a N? By contrast, the element following *ge* in (31), 屁 *pi* ‘fart’, is a noun when considered in isolation. However, it is probably also preferable to take it as part of the pejorative phrasal pattern, V-個-屁 V *ge pi* ‘V shit—V nothing’, in which the literal meaning is no longer in focus. In this idiomatic use, is 屁 *pi* ‘fart’ a N, or rather a C—expressing the “unusual” state? Lastly, the element following *ge* in (32), 倒栽蔥 *daozaicong* ‘upside-down-positioned onion’, is also a noun when considered in isolation. Since the verb, 滑 *hua* ‘slip, slide’, can be both transitive and intransitive, should 倒栽蔥 *daozaicong* ‘upside-down-positioned onion’ be interpreted as the noun/object, or the complement/resultant (and “unusual”) state, as part of the idiomatized expression? The V-ge-X in (32) happens to be very similar to that in (25), 摔了個四腳朝天 *shuai le ge sijiao chaotian* ‘fall so that all four limbs are toward the sky—fall on the back’. 四腳朝天 *sijiao chaotian* ‘all four limbs are toward the sky’ is

an idiomatic expression describing state and is far from being a noun when considered in isolation. Should (25) and (32) then be analyzed differently?

Thus, the element following the V-*ge* string displays an array of grammatical categories ranging from adverbials to adjectivals/adjectives, quantity phrases, and nouns. From construction's perspective, however, these examples merely form a continuum that demonstrates different degrees of patterned speech that allow different degrees of syntactic flexibility. At one end of the continuum, we have some V-*ge*-C/N that are highly idiomatic and "frozen", such as the examples shown earlier, (11) 探個究竟 *tan ge jiuqing* 'try to figure out' and (12) 接個正著 *jie ge zhengzhao* 'catch (something/someone) right on target'. Somewhere in the middle, we have phrasal patterns that allow for choice to a certain extent, such as (31) V-個屁 V *ge pi* 'V shit—V nothing', in which the V is open. Further toward the other end of the continuum is the prototypical and productive V-*ge*-C/N, in which both V and C/N are open and the combination does not have to be idiomatic at all, such as (2) 撞個真正頭破血流 *zhuang ge zhenzheng toupo xieliu* '(head) got injured badly'. Constructional flexibility also manifests at the *ge* position, as attested by the paradigmatic variation between *ge* and *dege* in certain cases shown in earlier examples, (8) 擠 – 個/得個 – 水洩不通 *ji - ge/dege - shuixie bu tong* 'so crowded that there's no way to get through', and (9) 砸 – 個/得個 – 粉碎 *za - ge/de/dege - fensui* 'smash to pieces'. In yet some other cases, the construction can show up with a third person singular pronoun, *ta*, as V-*ta-ge*-C/N, as shown in example (7) 探它個究竟 *tan ta ge jiuqing* 'check it out'.

If V-*ge*-C is clearly a construction with specialized constructional meaning, specialized internal syntactic and lexical restrictions and flexibilities, as well as productivity, we are then forced to acknowledge its status as a grammatical unit and the interaction and constraints that take place among its constituent members. Our point is that only the polysemous interpretation of the relationship between the *ge* in V-*ge*-C and the general classifier *ge* can account for the reanalysis of the C in some examples and the indeterminacy of the C/N in some other examples. Moreover, the analysis is cognitively attractive because it is based on prototypicality and contiguity, two key cognitive notions that are fundamental to human conceptualization.

## 7. Conclusion

In this paper, we have offered a cognitively motivated analysis of V-*ge*-C in Modern Chinese, in which we propose that the *ge* in V-*ge*-C is polysemous to the general classifier *ge*. The perceptual premises for this proposal are that adjectives/adjectivals and non-referential nouns, although of different grammatical categories, share the "property-ascribing" function in discourse. The foregrounding



discourse function of classifiers in general and the special status of *ge* as a semantically generalized classifier further motivate the extended use of *ge* from its prototypical role as a marker of “the attributes/properties ascribed to a noun/entity”, to marking “the attributes/properties found in an adjectival/state” in this construction. The reanalysis of C as noun-like is possible also because there is a parallel contiguity relationship between “*ge*-C” and “*ge*-N(P)”, both a chunk standing to the right of V. The reading of C as “unusual” is derived as a pragmatic inference when C is preceded by the foregrounding *ge*, although many C expressions are already conventionalized expressions characterizing unusual situations. The interaction of these syntagmatically contiguous elements renders the meaning of the V-*ge*-C construction as “V (to attain) the unusual C state”.

A number of observations regarding V-*ge*-C as a construction/pattern also emerge from this study. First, the distribution of this construction in terms of both discourse types and frequency is limited compared to that of the classifier use of *ge*. The skewed distribution exemplifies the prototype theory as applied to polysemy: some of the multiple meanings of a form (e.g., *ge*) are more widespread, and some other meaning(s) are more restricted. Second, V-*ge*-C displays the typical characteristic of prefabricated, patterned speech chunks: the pattern selects words; the words select the pattern; and the words select each other. This tendency is best illustrated by the phrasal patterns and idiomatic expressions involving this construction, in which the component elements cannot be separated, semantically or syntactically, from the overall construction. Third, V-*ge*-C also shows us that the function of a construction as a whole is not predictable from its components. The meaning that V-*ge*-C expresses, “V (to attain) the unusual C state”, is the result of the interaction of the meaning of *ge* and the meaning of C as they are positioned next to each other and preceded by V. As discussed above, without *ge*, V-C or any of the other similar patterns do not express the same meaning.

Finally, this analysis offers support from Mandarin to the emergent grammar hypothesis (Hopper 1987, 1988, 1998), which proposes to view language as ever evolving, linguistic structure as fluid and dynamic, and grammar as the entrenched (but constantly updated) patterns of routinized use. In this view, speakers’ conceptual knowledge and communicative intentions are prior to grammar. The speakers’ conceptual knowledge and communicative intentions determine the organization of the discourse, and the cognitive strategies that speakers employ to organize their discourse determine the manipulation of linguistic elements. Grammar is at the service of socio-communicative purposes and the cognitive strategies for interaction. The extended use of *ge*, the reanalysis of the C, and the flexibility and indeterminacy in grammatical categorization that we have witnessed in this study are evidence for the adaptive nature of language.

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## 量詞與句式：語法項類與認知策略的互動

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本文探討華語中量詞後面不跟名詞的句式。語料庫調查顯示，V-個-Comp 這樣的句式表示“達到一種非比尋常的情況”。這個句式的分析重點在於把補語當成名詞性的成分。量詞凸顯名詞在篇章中地位的功能，以及“個”作為一個沒有語意限制的量詞，這兩者都是“個”後補語可當成名詞成分的機制，也幫助整個句式得到其特定的句式意義。我們的分析點出語法結構中兩項重要的認知基礎：典型與鄰近關係。我們的討論也顯示句型與片語是語言結構的本質，而在認知策略的主導下，語法項類常呈現彈性與不定性。

關鍵詞：量詞，句式，再分析，語言項類