The absence/presence of aspectual markers in narrative discourse in Mandarin
## Time in Translation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PIs</th>
<th>PhDs</th>
<th>Post-Docs</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><img src="image1.png" alt="Image 1" /></td>
<td><img src="image2.png" alt="Image 2" /></td>
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<td><img src="image5.png" alt="Image 5" /></td>
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<td><img src="image7.png" alt="Image 7" /></td>
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</table>

- Variation at the syntax/semantics interface
- Initial focus on tense/aspect
- Initial focus on Western European languages
- Context (sentence-discourse-dialogue)
- Data- and theory-driven use of parallel corpora
From data to theory: Translation Mining
Translation Mining

Data from translation corpora allows us to visualize variation across tense/aspect systems of languages and study it in detail.

Example 1: translations of Camus’ *L’Étranger*, Chapter 1
GERMAN

- Perfect
- Simple Past
J’ai lu le dossier de votre mère.

Translations

German

Ich habe die Akte Ihrer Mutter gelesen.

English

I’ve read your mother’s file.

Spanish

Ha leído el expediente de su madre.

Italian

Hé letto la pratica di vostra madre.

Dutch

Ik heb uw moeders map doorgelezen.
Translation Mining

Data from translation corpora allows us to visualize variation across tense/aspect systems of languages and study it in detail.

Example 1: translations of Camus’ *L’Étranger*, Chapter 1

Example 2: translations of *Harry Potter*, Book 1, Chapter 1
ENGLISH

Simple Past

Past Continuous

Present

Pluperfect

Perfect
Simple Past
Imparfait
Present
Perfect
Pluperfect
From theory to data: the presence/absence of aspectual markers in Mandarin
Unmarked forms only receive a stative/generic interpretation. Episodic interpretations require aspectual markers.

Sun (2014:226)

> Put this generalization to the test for our data.
Sun's generalization

Unmarked forms only receive a stative/generic interpretation. Episodic interpretations require aspectual markers.

Sun (2014:226)

> Put this generalization to the test for our data. Narrative (past) data from Camus, Chapters 1-3.

> Make grateful use of our translation data.

> Build towards a richer account.
Putting Sun’s generalization to the test
## Rationale

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stative interpretations</th>
<th>Eventive interpretations</th>
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<tr>
<td>can be bare</td>
<td>cannot be bare</td>
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**Contexts that — in European languages would go:**

- Imparfait (French)
- Imperfecto (Spanish)
- Präteritum (German)
- Simple Past (English)

**Imperfective Past Cluster**

- Passé Composé (French)
- Pretérito Indefinido (Spanish)
- Perfekt (German)
- Simple Past (English)

**Perfective Past Cluster**
The Imperfective Past Cluster

**Stative interpretations**
- can be bare

Contexts that – in European languages would go:

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**Imperfective Past Cluster**

Il lui *fallait* une garde. French
Necesitaba *una enfermera*. Spanish
Sie *brauchte* Pflege. German
She *needed* a nurse. English

Ta *xuyao* you ren zhaoliao. English
She need have person take care
The Perfective Past Cluster

Eventive interpretations
cannot be bare

Contexts that – in European languages would go:

- Passé Composé (French)
- Pretérito Indefinido (Spanish)
- Perfekt (German)
- Simple Past (English)

Perfective Past Cluster

J’ai pris le tram [...] French
Tomé el tranvía [...] Spanish
Ich habe die Strassenbahn genommen [...] German
I caught the tram [...] English

Wo cheng che qu haibin yuchan X
I take tram go shore bathing spot
## Quantitative data

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Prediction based on Sun’s generalization
## Quantitative data

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- 68% of all Perfective Past Cluster verbs
- 73% of all bare verbs
- Two-way association PPC/bare verbs (NPMI) = 0

Our data
Interim conclusion/discussion

> Sun’s generalization predicts a strong negative association between the Perfective Past Cluster and bare forms.

> This prediction is not borne out.

> Part of the explanation lies in the limitation of our methodology: contexts that are eventive in European languages can be rendered as stative in the Mandarin translation. (N=18)

> Other special cases involve when clauses (N=2), negation with mei(you) (N=6), cleft structures with shi...de (N=5) and the yibian... yibian (‘while...while’) construction (N=2).
Interim conclusion/discussion

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59% of all eventive clauses
63% of all bare clauses

Two-way association eventive/bare clauses (NPMI) = -0.1
Towards a richer account
Working assumption

Marking aspectual information for events is truly optional.

Marking aspectual information for events is obligatory but run-of-the-mill aspectual markers are not the only option.
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Strategy

> Make an inventory of alternative ways of marking aspectual information.

> Check their explanatory potential for the unmarked eventive data.
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Inventory

Stronger information gets precedence over weaker information

Le marks simple boundedness. Sources of telicity marking are stronger.

Within the verbal domain

Result Verb Compounds (RVCs)

Within clauses

Endpoint markers (e.g. goal arguments)

Across clauses

Clauses conveying consequent states
Avoid double marking

We would never say *shui-le-le*.

An interesting dynamic twist to this principle is that if two verbs refer to the same event, we need only add an aspectual marker (or endpoint marker) to one of them.

**Dynamic aspectual marking**
Inventory

- Result Verb Compounds (RVCs)
- Endpoint markers (e.g. goal arguments)
- Clauses conveying consequent states
- Dynamic aspectual marking
Strategy

> Make an inventory of alternative ways of marking aspectual information.

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Strategy

> Make an inventory of alternative ways of marking aspectual information.

> Check their explanatory potential for the unmarked data.
Result Verb Compounds (RVCs)

Ta feng shang xin.
He close up envelope

‘He closed the envelope.’
Wo zou de shihou, tamen yizhi
I leave DE moment they all the way

song wo dao menkou.
accompany I to doorway

‘When I left, they came to the door with me.’
Clauses conveying consequent states

Wo shi Xiaoli hen xingfu.

‘I made Xiaoli very happy.’
Wo cheng che qu haibin yuchang.
I take tram go shore bathing spot

‘I caught the tram going to the bathing station at the port.’
Discussion

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**Stative/generic clauses**

**Eventive clauses**

34% of all eventive clauses
50% of all bare clauses
Two-way association eventive/bare clauses (NPMI) = -0.2
Discussion

> We still only find a very mild negative association between eventive and bare verbs.

> Interestingly, the vast majority of unmarked eventive cases that are left involve a single verb class: verbs of saying like shuo ‘say’ (N=77).

\[
\text{Wo shuo: “dui”} \\
\text{I say right} \\
\text{‘I said , “Yes”.’}
\]

We consider it unlikely that the high frequency of bare uses of verbs of saying is accidental.
Discussion

> Interestingly, the vast majority of unmarked eventive cases that are left involve a single verb class: verbs of saying like *shuo* ‘say’ (N=77).

  Wo *shuo*: “dui”
  I say right
  ‘I said, “Yes”.’

We consider it unlikely that the high frequency of bare uses of verbs of saying is accidental.

> One way to look at them is to assume that the (in)direct speech that follows them is the realization of the result of saying.
## Discussion

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2% of all eventive clauses

6% of all bare clauses

Two-way association eventive/bare clauses (NPMI) = -0.6
Conclusion
Unmarked forms only receive a stative/generic interpretation. Episodic interpretations require aspectual markers.

Sun (2014:226)

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Unmarked forms only receive a stative/generic interpretation. Episodic interpretations need to be marked by one of a variety of aspectual markers.

Sun’s extended generalization

- Classical aspectual markers
- Result Verb Compounds (RVCs)
- Result of saying
- Endpoint markers (e.g. goal arguments)
- Clauses conveying consequent states
- Dynamic aspectual marking
Conclusion

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Narrow verbal domain

Across clauses/sentences
Thank you for your attention!

http://time-in-translation.hum.uu.nl/
‘The street lamps made the first few stars that were appearing in the night sky look quite pale.’
Yihuier, yi ge laotou xing le,
After a while, one old people wake up LE,
shijingde kesou.
fiercely cough

‘After a while, an old man woke up and coughed fiercely.’
Special cases

Ta yizhi zai xiao [...]  
She continuously ZAI laugh

Ta haishi xiao [...]  
she still laugh

‘She was still laughing.’