Durative Complements
in the Hakka Verb Copying Construction[*]

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This paper provides an analysis of the ambiguous interpretations of the durative complements in the Hakka verb copying construction, schematically represented as "NP_1 V-NP_2 V C_3", in terms of the constructional approach and the cognitive approach. This study has the following proposals. First, the interpretation of the durative complement hinges crucially on the aspectual properties of the V-NP_2 unit. Second, contrary to what is generally assumed, a verb copying sentence may be ambiguous between the continuity reading and the repetition reading and can be viewed as a case of constructional polysemy. Third, such ambiguities arise due to the interaction between the episodic/generic duality of the V-NP_2 unit and the duration/lapse of time duality of the durative complement and are a natural consequence of the gestalt effect. Finally, the varying degrees of markedness of such a sentence, influenced by world knowledge, depend mainly on the compatibility of the V-NP_2 unit and the durative complement.

Keywords: verb copying, durative complement, constructional polysemy, gestalt, Hakka

1. Introduction

The study of the Mandarin verb copying construction (henceforth VC construction), skeletally represented as "NP_1 V-NP_2 V C_3", has been a fairly persistent topic since the 1980s (Huang 1982, 1988, Tsao 1987, Paris 1988, 2006, Tai 1989, 1999, Li 1990, Chang 1991a, 1991b, Hsieh 1992, Liu 1995, 1996, 1997, Gouguet 2004, 2006, Fang 2006, Fang and Sells 2007, Cheng 2007, Tieu 2008, among many others). In this construction, the verb is copied after its direct object when in the presence of certain adverbial elements (Li and Thompson 1981:442). For example, consider the durative complement in (1a), the direction complement in (1b), and the resultative complement in (1c).

(1) a. wo   shui-jiao   shui-le   san-ge   zhongtou (Tai 1999, ex. 1a)[1]

     I   sleep-sleep sleep-ASP three-CL hour

     我   睡覺   睡了   三個   鐘頭

     'I slept for three hours.'

   b. women zou-lu   zou   dao shichang le

     we   walk-road walk to   market   SFP

     我們   走路   走   到   市場   了

     'We walked to the market.' (Li and Thompson 1981:444, ex. 8b)

   c. Baoyu qi-ma   qi-lei   le   (Hsieh 1992, ex. 9)

     Baoyu ride-horse ride-tired SFP

     寶玉   騎馬   騎累   了

     'Baoyu rode a horse and (as a result Baoyu) became tired.'

Previous analyses, which have laid a sound foundation for further research, fall into two groups according to the perspectives they take. From the point of view of diachronic changes, the chief concerns are when the VC construction came into being and where it came from (e.g., Li and Shi 1997, Shi and Li 2001). Linguists dealing with the construction from the synchronic perspective focus on issues like the head of the construction (e.g., Li and Thompson 1981, Huang 1982, Tsao 1987, Chang 2003), the determinants of the applicability of the construction (Huang 1982, 1984, Tai 1999, Cheng 2007, among others), the discourse function that the V-NP$_2$ unit serves in the construction (e.g., Cheng 1976, Tsao 1987, and Hsieh 1992), and the semantics of the construction (Liu 1997, Tai 1999, among others).[2] Many important insights have been gained through such various discussions. Since the complexity exhibited by the Mandarin VC construction interests linguists enormously, only scant attention was given to the VC construction in Hakka (Chiang 2003, Lai 2006, Tseng 2008, Yeh 2008, among others), which is the focus of the present study. This research aims to bridge this gap in the hope of facilitating the typological studies of Chinese dialects. Specifically, I will concentrate on the interaction between the VC construction and the durative complement in constructing the meaning of a given VC sentence. It is suggested that the possibility of associating the same VC sentence with different semantic interpretations is a natural result of some potential Gestalt effect (cf. Langacker 1987, Iwata 2005, Chen 2008).

    This paper is formatted as follows: Section 2 reviews some previous studies on the

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[1] For reasons of consistency and clarity, glosses of some quoted examples have been expanded or slightly modified. The following abbreviations are used for their corresponding grammatical functions: CL, classifier; SFP, sentence-final particle; PHA, phase marker; SUF, suffix; NEG, negation; ASP, aspect marker.

[2] Due to limitation of space, I will not review the literature on these subjects here, but will refer the reader to relevant works for details.

semantic interpretations of the durative complement in the VC construction, which will help me to crystallize questions that this study aims to address. Section 3 introduces the theoretical frameworks the present study is based on. A constructional analysis is provided in Section 4 and the factors that lead to the gestalt effect in interpreting a VC sentence are discussed in Section 5. Section 6 concludes the study by summarizing the analysis and by discussing the implications of the results.

2. Literature review

In this section, I will first offer an overview of some representative studies and then highlight the range of empirical facts that any successful theory must account for.

Tai (1989, 1999) has the basic insight that the presence or absence of verb copying yields differences in meanings, namely, the durative complement in a VC sentence is used to denote the duration of the action, as in (2a), while that in a non-VC counterpart is used to emphasize the duration of time which elapsed after the completion of the action, as in (2b).

(2) a. wo gei ta   xie xin   xie-le   yi-ge   yue   le (Tai 1999, ex. 22)
       I   to   him write letter write-ASP one-CL month SFP
       我 給   他   寫   信   寫了   一個   月   了
       'I have been writing to him for a month already.'
    b. wo gei ta   xie xin yi-ge   yue   le (Tai 1999, ex. 21)
       I   to   him write letter one-CL month SFP
       我 給   他   寫   信   一個   月   了
       'It has been a month since I wrote him a letter.'

For Tai (1999), the semantic distinction between the two sentence patterns is clear and obvious. Nevertheless, a closer look at the Hakka VC sentences complemented by durative adverbials suggests that such an account should be reconsidered. Consider examples such as the following:[3]

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[3] The data in this study are mainly based on the dialect of Sixian Hakka in Hsinpu, Hsinchu. This dialect is actually a hybrid of Sixian Hakka and Hailu Hakka. Sub-dialectal differences are expected, but I have to leave the issue for further investigation for reasons of verb space. "The Taiwan Hakka Romanization System (臺灣客家語拼音方案)" promulgated by National Languages Committee, Ministry of Education (教育部國語推行委員會) in 2009 is used to render the data.

(3) a. nai   rhiu   ngin   se   shin   se   ted   sam   si   diamzhung   han   m

where   have   person   wash   body   wash   PHA   three   four   CL   still   NEG

奈   有   人   洗   身   洗   忒   三   四   點鐘   還   毋

honghi-loi? (M1:56)[4]

rise-come

亢起來

'Why is it the case that a person has been taking a bath for three to four hours and still doesn't want to get it done?'

b. Amin   sii   cha-e   sii   gia   shib-ngien le

Amin   drive   car-SUF   drive   several   ten-CL   SFP

阿明   駛   車仔   駛   幾   十年   咧

'It has been several decades since Amin started driving.'

c. liavui   tin-shui   tin   gia   ngid   le[5]

here   suspend-water   suspend   several   day   SFP

這位   停水   停   幾   日   咧

'It has been several days since water supply was suspended.'

Each of the durative adverbials in the VC sentences in (3), beyond dispute, has a different semantic connotation: it expresses the duration of the action in (3a), it denotes the lapse of time since the action was initiated in (3b), and it indicates the lapse of time since the action was completed in (3c).[6] I identify them as the duration of time reading, the initial-point lapse of time reading and the final-point lapse of time reading, respectively. The semantic differences in (3) are clear indications that the durative complements in the VC construction do not uniformly denote the duration of the action, as suggested by Tai (1989, 1999). In fact, parallel cases in Mandarin Chinese are also adduced in Tai (1999) even though Tai does not expressly point out the semantic differences among them. Consider examples in (4).

(4) a. ta   shang-ke   shang-le   san-ge   zhongtou   (Tai 1999, ex. 13)

3sg   attend-class   attend-ASP   three-CL   hour

他   上課   上了   三個   鐘頭

'He has attended the class for three hours.'

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[4] In addition to the constructed examples used to illustrate certain points, the Hakka data presented here come from the following sources: *Miaolixian keyu gushiji*1, 2 (苗栗縣客語故事集 1, 2) *'Miaoli Hakka storybooks* (vol. 1-2)', abbreviated as M1 and M2, and *Dongshizhen keyu gushiji* 7 (東勢鎮客語故事集 7) 'Dongshi Hakka Storybooks (vol. 7)', abbreviated as D7.

[5] I would like to thank one of the anonymous reviewers for pointing out this analysis to me.

[6] The duration of time reading and the initial-point lapse of time reading correspond to Tai's (1999) continuity reading and the repetition reading, respectively.

b. Liu laoshi jiao hanyu jiao-le sanshi nian le (Tai 1999, ex. 42)

Liu teacher teach Chinese teach-ASP thirty year SFP

劉 老師 教 漢語 教了 三十 年 了

'Teacher Liu has been teaching Chinese for thirty years.'

c. ta diu che diu-le yi nian le (Tai 1999, ex. 30a)[7]

3sg lose car lose-ASP one year SFP

他 丟 車 丟了 一 年 了

'It has been one year since he lost his car.'

In fact, the actual situation is more complicated in that the duration of time reading and the initial-point lapse of time reading may obtain with the same VC sentence.[8] As indicated by the English translations, the Hakka example in (5), a case of constructional polysemy in the sense of Goldberg (1995), is actually ambiguous between the duration of time reading (5i) and the initial-point lapse of time reading (5ii).

(5) Amin sii cha-e sii dong giu le

Amin drive car-SUF drive very long SFP

阿明 駛 車仔 駛 當 久 咧

i. 'Amin has been driving for a long time.'

ii. 'It has been a long time since Amin started driving.'

The fact that (5) is open to two interpretations has mostly been ignored in the literature and, therefore, deserves a closer look. In this paper, I aim to re-examine the semantic ambiguities of this construction within a constructional approach and a cognitive approach. Specifically, I would like to address the questions of when and why the semantic ambiguities arise. I propose that it is the episodic/generic duality of the V-NP$_2$ unit and the duration/lapse of time duality of the durative complement that lead to the gestalt effect in interpreting a given VC sentence and that the meaning of

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[7] The following examples illustrate this phenomenon as well.

(i) ta ru-dang ru-le wu-nian le (Paris 2006:295, ex. 27)

  3sg enter-party enter-ASP five-year SFP

  他 入黨 入了 五年 了

  'It has been five years since he joined the party.'

(ii) women ting-ke ting-le yi-tian (Jia 1985:25)

  we suspend-class suspend-ASP one-day

  我們 停課 停了 一天

  'It has been one day since we suspended classes.'

It should be noticed that (i) is in fact ambiguous: it has a dynamic reading, meaning that the process of his application for admission to the party lasted five years, and a static reading, meaning that his party membership continued for five years. It is the second reading that concerns us here.

[8] The reason why example (5) is only open to the two interpretations will be discussed in Section 4.

such a sentence is the result of the interaction of all the components, including the construction itself, in this syntactic configuration.

3. Theoretical frameworks

In this study, I attempt to explore the questions mentioned above in terms of Construction Grammar (CG below) and the gestalt theory, which I shall take up in turn in the following sections.

3.1 Construction Grammar

During the past four decades, theories of syntactic structures and derivations have become more and more complex and abstract. In response to this situation, some linguists have tried to find a proper balance between syntax and semantics and to chart new directions for linguistic research. One of the alternatives is the constructionist approach, namely, Construction Grammar (e.g., Fillmore et al. 1988, Kay and Fillmore 1999, Goldberg 1995, 2006, Jackendoff 1997). The primary motivation for CG, evolving out of Case Grammar (Fillmore 1968, 1977) and Frame Semantics (Fillmore 1982, 1985), is the insight that the properties of a construction need not be—actually, often are not—compositionally derived from the properties of its parts. Regarding this view, a construction, the basic unit of analysis and representation, is posited if and only if something about its form, meaning, or use is not strictly predictable from other aspects of the grammar (Goldberg 1995:4). In principle, a construction can be of any size (morpheme, phrase, clause, sentence, etc.), indicating that no strict division is assumed between the lexicon and syntax, both of which pair form with meaning. Central to the CG framework is the idea that no linguistic unit can be given a more basic status in grammar. A corollary which follows is that no distinction is made between the "core" parts and the "peripheral" parts of a language. This presents a striking contrast to, for example, transformational grammar. Instead, it is suggested that attempts to explain the peripheral parts of language in most of the structures that we use in everyday discourse, such as *Thank you* and *See you*, are actually peripheral.

As a multi-dimensional theory, CG includes in a construction all the information, including syntactic, semantic, pragmatic, etc. Constructions only differ in the extent to which they make use of these resources. On the other hand, as a mono-stratal theory, all the information mentioned above resides at one and the same level of representation. That is, CG is non-derivational. Actual constructs are therefore not generated, but licensed, by particular abstract constructions.

The pattern congruity shown in (6), the English ditransitive construction, provides a piece of evidence in favor of the CG analysis.

(6) a. I gave him a gift.
    b. I baked him a cake.

The central sense of the ditransitive construction is argued to be 'X CAUSES Y to RECEIVE Z'. Typically, it is predicted that only a three-place predicate is compatible with the ditransitive construction, such as *give* in (6a). It is, however, not difficult to find an example like (6b), where a two-place predicate like *bake* is used ditransitively. As pointed out by Goldberg (1995:141), *I baked him a cake* can only mean that I baked a cake with the intention of giving it to him. It cannot mean that I baked the cake as a demonstration of cake-baking or that I baked the cake so that he would not have to bake it. It would be ad hoc to posit such a sense of *bake* as 'X intends to cause Y to receive Z by baking'. The "intended transfer" aspect of meaning can be better viewed as being derived from the whole construction, instead of from the verb itself. It can thus be demonstrated that the constructional meaning emerges as long as the verb (even a two-place predicate) can fit into the construction.

3.2 The gestalt theory

As one of the precursors of the CG model, the gestalt theory contends that "the meaning of the whole is greater than the meaning of the parts" (Lakoff 1977:239). That is, the whole is different from the sum of its parts. It should, therefore, be noted that the meanings of the components will constrain, but do not provide, the interpretation of the whole. Typical examples given in illustration of this description are idioms. It is often the case that idiomatic expressions, such as *kick the bucket* or *keeps tabs on*, bear some meaning that cannot be calculated by knowing the word meanings of the individual components.

An adequate gestalt point of view on linguistic phenomena should be able to account for what might be called the double analyzeablility (Lakoff 1977:245). Take, for example, *keeps tabs on*, which has two passives, as in (7).

(7) a. Harry's activities will be kept tabs on. (Lakoff 1977:245)
    b. Tabs will be kept on Harry's activities.

Example (7) may have two different syntactic realizations, depending on the syntactic point of view that one takes. In the model being advocated here, this is a natural

consequence of the gestalt effect, which allows certain wholes to be analyzed in more than one way and to be looked at from different perspectives. In fact, such an analysis can find its root in the gestalt psychology. Consider the famous example of gestalt shift such as the Rubin's vase, as illustrated in Figure 1.
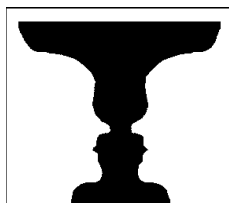
Figure 1. Rubin's vase

Above is an ambiguous figure in which the brain switches between seeing a vase and/or two faces. As one can see, the ambiguous perceptual experiences pop back and forth in an unstable fashion between two or more alternative interpretations. This picture is also an excellent demonstration of the figure-ground distinction the brain makes during visual perception. If the white area is seen as the ground, a vase (the figure) stands out and is brought into prominence. In contrast, if the black area is seen as the ground, the two faces pop out and are chosen as the figure. The point to note with regard to this illustration is that "the same scene is open to two different interpretations" (Iwata 2005:370), or that "it is normally possible to structure the same scene with alternate choices of figure" (Langacker 1987:120). Therefore, it is the overall picture that determines the appropriate interpretation, rather than the net effect of the individual pieces.[9]

4. A constructional analysis

In this section, a constructional analysis of the Hakka VC construction will be provided. I begin with the establishment of the VC construction in Section 4.1 and then proceed to the discussion of constructional polysemy in Section 4.2.

4.1 The Hakka VC construction

There seems to be a widespread view in the literature regarding the Mandarin VC construction that this construction routinely denotes the sense of continuity or repetition (e.g., Liu 1997, Tai 1999). The same observation can also be obtained with the Hakka VC construction complemented by a durative complement, as shown by the

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[9] For more examples on gestalt shifts, see Lakoff (1977:246-247).

contrast between (8a) and (8b-e) in grammaticality.

(8) a. *Amin da-lan   boli   da-lan   sam ngid le
        Amin hit-broken glass hit-broken three day SFP
        阿明   打爛   玻璃   打爛   三   日   咧
        Intended: 'Amin has broken the glass for three days.'

   b. Amin niab mug niab gui   hazhiu   le
      Amin wink eye wink whole afternoon   SFP
      阿明 目聶 目   目聶 歸   下晝   咧
      'Aim has been winking his eyes for the whole afternoon.'

   c. comagai shid-zhiu shid an giu   ne (D7:92)
      why   eat-lunch eat   so long SFP
      做麼介   食晝   食   恁 久   吶
      'Why did (my dad) have lunch for such a long time?'

   d. Amin co gaivui co   gui   hazhiu   le
      Amin sit there sit whole afternoon SFP
      阿明 坐 該位 坐   歸   下晝   咧
      'Amin has been sitting there for the whole afternoon.'

   e. hoi   ngai zhong kim-e   zhong an giu   (M2:90)
      harm I   guard gold-SUF guard so long
      害   涯   掌   金仔   掌   恁 久
      '(It's your) fault to let me be in charge of the gold for such a long time.'

The situation types of the V-NP$_2$ units in my five examples are achievement, semelfactive, accomplishment, state, and activity, respectively (Vendler 1967, Smith 1991). The semantic feature [durative] differentiates the first two from the others, with the first two being non-durative. However, it should be noticed that when an instantaneous verb constellation is combined with an external durative adverbial, as in (8b), the value of the adverbial overrides that of the verb constellation (Smith 1991:135). Such a verb constellation is then labeled as a derived activity. In other words, the repetitive semelfactive, which is durative, is viewed as a special case of activity. The distributional facts in (8), therefore, render further support to the claim that the VC construction denotes the sense of continuity or repetition, either of which encodes the meaning of duration.[10] Such an interpretation is semantically motivated

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[10] For a similar view, please see Zhang (1997:37), who claims that, in most Chinese dialects, verbs that do not express duration or voluntary repetition cannot be reduplicated, Liu (1997:4), who holds that verb copying sentences are frequently used to express habitual or iterative activities, and Tai (1999:102-107), who suggests that the event type of a sentence involving verb-copying is typically one in which the situation can be repeated or continued.

in that "the repetition of the verb has a natural semiotic function of signifying the repetition of an activity" (Tai 1999:102).[11] Put differently, this construction is iconically motivated since it bears a diagrammatical resemblance to the structure of a human being's conceptual world (Tai 1993).[12] It is generally acknowledged that verbs of instantaneous change-of-state event type are semantically incompatible with verb-copying (e.g., Tai 1993:168-169). A case in point is *Amin da-lan boli da-lan sam ngid le* (Amin hit-broken glass hit-broken three day SFP) '(Intended) Amin has broken the glass for three days.', which is ruled ungrammatical in that the inherent semantic specification of the VC construction and the situation type of the V-NP$_2$ unit are in conflict (cf. Hsieh 1992, Liu 1997).

It is, nevertheless, noteworthy that "the semantic condition on verb copying has to do with the event type of a sentence and not merely with the aspectual value of the main verb" (Tai 1999:106-107). Evidence in favor of this view comes from the observation that achievement predicates, which are non-durative, are sometimes attested in the VC construction. Even though the achievement predicate *da-lan* 'break' in (8a) is incompatible with the Hakka VC construction, it is not difficult to find sentences like (3c) and (9), both of which indicate that, after the completion of the telic events (i.e., *tin-shui* 'suspend water' and *biongliau* 'take a holiday'), a resultant state holds true until speech time. That is, while verb-copying is unacceptable in (8a), it is allowed in (3c) and (9) despite the fact that the three examples all involve achievement verbs and are supposed to behave alike with regard to verb copying.

(9) ngai biongliau   biong sam ngid le
    I   take:a:holiday take   three day SFP
    涯 放寮   放   三   日   咧
    'It has been three days since I took the holiday.'

I take this contrast in grammaticality as a clear indication that aspectual considerations alone are not enough in determining whether verb copying is allowed or not. As mentioned above, verbs that are compatible with verb copying have to be durative. The fact that some achievement predicates do occur in the VC construction seems to directly contradict our claim and, therefore, calls for an explanation.

A closer scrutiny of the examples at hand suggests that there exists a substantial

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[11] As noticed by Lakoff and Johnson (1980:127-128), all cases of reduplication in languages are instances where MORE OF FORM stands for MORE OF CONTENT. Other examples of this metaphor include iteration (e.g., *He is very very very tall.*) and extended lengthening of a vowel (e.g., *He is bi-i-i-i-ig!*).

[12] Haiman (1980) distinguishes two types of iconicity. One is diagrammatic iconicity and the other imagic iconicity.

difference between the two types of achievement predicates, namely, whether the resultant state brought about by the V-NP$_2$ sequence is permanent or transitory. In the case of *da-lan* 'break', the broken state is permanent and cannot be changed again. If a state will never be changed again, it makes little sense to talk about the duration of such an everlasting state. However, in the case of *biongliau* 'take a holiday', the state of taking a holiday potentially has an end (Jia 1985, Tai 1999:107, cf. Lin 2009) and the durative complement is used to highlight the continuation of the resultant state.[13] In view of these observations, I propose that only those achievement verbs which yield endable resultant states are compatible with verb copying. Even though the event designated by the V-NP$_2$ unit is instantaneous, the resultant state is durative and the requirement that the VC construction encode the meaning of duration is met.

Another issue that warrants discussion is the interpretation of the durative complement in the VC construction. As mentioned in Section 2, the durative adverbial in a VC sentence may denote the duration of an event, time lapse since the event took place, or time lapse since the action is completed. One question that comes up immediately is how to pair the right semantic interpretation with a given VC example. Here, I suggest that the interpretation of the durative complement in the Hakka VC construction hinges crucially on the temporal properties of the V-NP$_2$ unit. When the V-NP$_2$ sequence is an achievement predicate, only the third reading is accessible. Given that an instantaneous event is finished as soon as it starts, it does not make sense to talk about the duration of such an event or the length of time which elapsed after this punctual action was initiated. This explains why only the resultant state that holds after the completion of a telic instantaneous event is grammatically significant.

I found a different, though similar, picture with derived activities (= repetitive semelfactives). These predicates, presenting a series of repetitive instantaneous events, allow only the initial-point lapse of time reading in that it is meaningless to talk about either the interval of an instantaneous event or the interval between repetitive punctual events. On the other hand, when the V-NP$_2$ unit is a state, only the duration of time reading is available in that, if a state holds for an interval, it is true at each moment down to the smallest subinterval, rendering change of state, crucial for the second and third readings, irrelevant.

Finally, when this unit denotes an activity or an accomplishment, the first two

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[13] According to Paris (1988:424-426), duration-measuring adverbs, which answer questions marked by *duo jiu* 'how long', are subdivided into two categories: those that are bounded and those that are unbounded. The first type is exemplified by an example such as (8e). Given that the durative complement is predicated of an activity, the time interval is continuous and no mention of the preceding state/event is made. In the second type, the interval is preceded by a change of state, as in *men kai-le hao jiu le* (door open-ASP good long SFP) 'The door has been open for a long time'. Here, the interval is limited by an upper boundary followed by a subsequent resultant state.

readings can be obtained, viz., sentences of this kind are open to two interpretations.[14] The fact that activities are atelic renders the final-point lapse of time reading inaccessible. The reason why accomplishments are not compatible with the same reading has been pointed out by Liu (1997), who claims that verb copying is only applicable to sentences indicating imperfectivity. When an accomplishment co-occurs with a durative expression, the time interval indicated by the durative adverbial may pertain to the initial or the final endpoint. Reaching the final endpoint implies perfectivity, which runs counter with the imperfectivity requirement of verb copying.[15] In summary, the interpretation(s) a given VC sentence may obtain is(/are) closely related to the aspectual structures of the V-NP_2 unit. Among the five situation types, only activities and accomplishments, both of which are durative and dynamic, may create ambiguity, an issue that will be dealt with in more details in the following sections. I take the Hakka VC sentences that were discussed above as evidence in support of the widely held view that the VC construction denotes the sense of continuity or repetition, either of which encodes the meaning of duration.

Though it is now clear that the V-NP_2 unit in the VC construction has to be durative, one question which immediately arises is: Where does the meaning of continuity/repetition come from? One intuitive and possible answer is to attribute the new meaning directly to the verb and then include the verb in the lexicon as a new lexical entry. For example, in a sentence like (8e), we may assign the sense 'to be in charge continually' to the verb *zhong* 'to be in charge'. Some evidence, nevertheless, suggests that this proposal falls short of accounting for data in a natural way, especially when viewed from the point of view of language acquisition. Language learners will be burdened with the vast bulk of lexical information if rampant specifications of lexical items are allowed in this way. Given the supportive examples, it appears that the proposed sense occurs consistently in this particular syntactic configuration, indicating that associating this semantic interpretation directly to the construction can be seen to be more parsimonious than positing additional verb senses. In view of the fact that the interpretation of this construction is not fully predictable from the semantics of its components, a new construction is posited as follows:

(10) Syntax: NP_1 V-NP_2 V C_3
     Semantics: X_1 has been doing Y_2 for the period of Z_3

The subscripts in (10) indicate the correspondences between syntax and semantics. That is, X_1, Y_2, and Z_3 are mapped to NP_1, NP_2, and C_3, respectively.

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[14] I will return to this issue in Section 4.2.

[15] According to Comrie (1976), imperfective are divisible into habitual and continuous, the latter of which can be further divided into progressive (for dynamic verbs) and nonprogressive (for statives).

4.2 Constructional polysemy

In this section, I will shift focus to the ambiguity latent in a given VC sentence whose V-NP$_2$ unit denotes a durative dynamic event type, viz., an activity or an accomplishment. As pointed out in Section 2, such a sentence does not uniformly denote the duration of the action, as suggested by Tai (1989, 1999). Consider (11), an example semantically distinct from (8e).

(11) Amin tug   shu   tug   gia   shib ngien le
     Amin read book read several ten year   SFP
     阿明   讀   書   讀   幾   十   年   咧
     'It has been several decades since Amin started attending school.'

Example (11) does not mean that the activity of attending school has lasted for several decades. Rather, it indicates that several decades have passed since Amin began attending school. That is, the action of attending school is not a continuous one, but is done by Amin repeatively. A pair like (8e), bearing the durative reading, and (11), bearing the initial-point lapse of time reading, is viewed as a case of constructional polysemy, i.e., the same syntactic configuration is paired with different but related senses (Goldberg 1995:31-34). Therefore, the Hakka VC construction posited in (10) is revised as in (12). Note that the durative reading and the initial-point lapse of time reading correspond to Tai's (1999) continuity interpretation and repetition interpretation, respectively.

(12) Syntax: NP$_1$ V-NP$_2$ V C$_3$
     Semantics:
     i.   The durative reading: (continuity)
          X$_1$ has been doing Y$_2$ for the period of Z$_3$.
     ii. The initial-point lapse of time reading: (repetition)
          It has been Z$_3$ since X$_1$ started doing Y$_2$.

The claim that this is a case of constructional polysemy raises a question: What is the relation between continuity and repetition that allows one to become an extension of the other? Under the general assumption, one meaning is the earlier meaning of the construction, and the other is added when the meaning of the construction generalizes (cf. Bybee et al. 1994). Based on the temporal structures of the events involved, it can be argued that the repetition interpretation is an extension of the more basic continuity interpretation. By definition, continuity means keeping doing something without

interruption and repetition means doing something over and over again. (13) is illustrative:

(13) a. Continuity: ————————————▶
     b. Repetition: - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - -▶
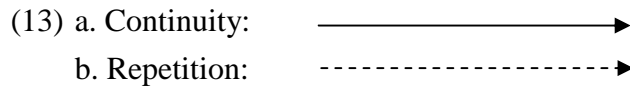
Each dash on the time axis in (13b) represents an occurrence of the action. When the occurrences become frequent and constant, they are viewed as if they were a continuous event. On the present account, repetition is regarded as a special case of continuity. Within the cognitive model, Lakoff (1987) emphasizes the important role that natural image-schema transformations play in motivating polysemy. Take, for example, the multiplex-mass transformation, which is anything but arbitrary. It is, in fact, a direct reflection of one's visual experience because "a sequence of points is seen as a continuous line when viewed from a distance" (ibid.:442).[16] Put differently, the distinction among the individual occurrences of a repetitive action is blurred out such that it conceptually becomes a single continuous action.

From a diachronic point of view, the development from continuity to repetition discussed here does not constitute a surprise when compared with other languages. According to Heine and Kuteva (2002:93), "continuous" is one of the source domains from which the habitual meaning is developed. Also, in their studies of the evolution of grammar, Bybee et al. (1994:158-159) observe that, in their database, some of the grams, i.e., lexical items, which mark habitual, may also be used to indicate iterative action. Both habitual and iterative indicate that an action is repeated, but the former describes a situation in which the different occurrences are on separate occasions, while the latter means that the action is repeated on the same occasion. In regard to the directionality of the development of habitual and iterative, they maintain that iterative is the earlier form. The motivation for such an argument is that the only change necessary for iterative to generalize to include habitual is the loss of restriction that the repetition be on a single occasion. In addition, the early sources of habitual grams that they have examined do not actually denote repetition of an action. In other words, when habitual generalizes, it is unlikely to encompass iterative meaning. Based on these previous studies, I suggest that a usual pathway of the development is from continuous, through the path of iterative, to habitual.

I will return now to the issue of constructional polysemy. I suggest that the two

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[16] The natural visual relationship is also illustrated by a sentence like *The guards were posted all over the hill* (Lakoff 1987:428). Here, *over* denotes the sense of 'covering'. This is the case, on the grounds that, when one moves back, there is a point at which one ceases making out the individual guards and starts perceiving a mass. This perceptual experience explains why *over* is linked to the covering schema.

senses are related by an Ip (polysemy inheritance) link, as illustrated in Figure 2 (Goldberg 1995:67-100). The rectangle in boldface represents the dominating construction. The central *continuity* sense is inherited by the *repetition* extension, which is indicated by the arrow. Under the constructional approach, each extension constitutes a minimally distinct construction: the repetition sense is minimally different from the central continuity sense even though all information about syntactic specifications is inherited form the central sense.
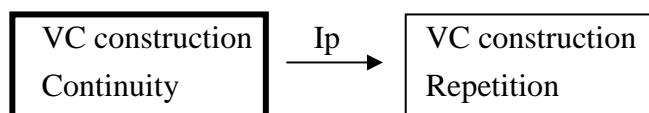
VC construction Continuity	Ip →	VC construction Repetition

Figure 2. The relation between the two senses

The existence of the constructional polysemy lends further support to the constructional approach: it is the interaction of all the components of the syntactic configurations, including not only the main predicate but also the syntactic frame, that determines the exact meaning of an expression. In other words, the meaning of an expression is the result of integrating the meanings of the lexical items into the meanings of the construction in question. By doing so, compositionality is saved in a weakened form (Goldberg 1995:16).

5. Gestalt effect in the sense interpretation

It should be recalled from a previous discussion that a Hakka VC example whose V-NP_2 unit is an activity or an accomplishment is ambiguous between the continuity reading and the repetition reading. Example (5), repeated below in (14), is a case in point.

(14) Amin sii   cha-e   sii   dong giu le
　　 Amin drive car-SUF drive very long SFP
　　 阿明　駛　　車仔　　駛　　當　久　　唎
　　 i.　'Amin has been driving for a long time.'　　　　　(continuity)
　　 ii.　'It has been a long time since Amin started driving.'　(repetition)

It is interesting to note that two different interpretations may be obtained even though normally only one specific reading is available within a given context. In addition, ambiguity tends to arise especially when the durative adverbial denotes a non-specific length of time, as in (14). The two readings can be disambiguated if the durative complement denotes a specific length of time, as in (15). Three hours is a short period

of time, rendering the car-driving activity a continuous one. It is, nonetheless, absolutely impossible for a person to drive continuously for three years. The second reading of (15) can, therefore, only be interpreted in such a way that three years have passed since Amin started driving.

(15) Amin sii   cha-e   sii   {sam-diamzhung/sam-ngien} le
     Amin drive car-SUF drive three-hour/ten-year   SFP
     阿明 駛   車仔   駛   三點鐘/三年   咧
     i. 'Amin has been driving for three hours.'   (continuity)
     ii. 'It has been three years since Amin started driving.'   (repetition)

As will emerge more clearly below, I contend that it is the episodic/generic duality of the V-NP$_2$ unit and the continuity/repetition duality of the durative adverbials that are at play in the sense interpretations (cf. Chen 2008).

Example (14) is an ambiguous example which switches between the continuity reading and the repetition reading. Such a case reminds us of the gestalt effect in visual perception, as shown by the ambiguous figure of the Rubin's vase (see Figure 1). The answer to the question of why ambiguity arises in (14) lies in the fact that the same V-NP$_2$ sequence can be interpreted either as an episodic occurrence or as a generic event and the fact that the same durative adverbial can be interpreted either as duration or as lapse of time. Logically, each sentence would hopefully generate four possible interpretations, determined by multiplying the number of possibilities each variable has, i.e., 2 x 2 = 4. Nevertheless, only two readings are available with (14), namely, the continuity-episodic scheme and the repetition-generic scheme.[17] I propose that the interpretation variance hinges crucially on the Semantic Compatibility Condition (henceforth SCC), which ensures that there is no semantic conflict among components within a construction. The varying degrees of markedness of a given VC sentence can be accounted for if SCC is taken into consideration. If a sentence satisfies SCC, an unmarked reading, which is more transparent and accessible, is derived. Nonetheless, when SCC is not strictly observed, a more marked sense, which is more opaque and obscure, is generated. Consider, for instance, (16), an example parallel to (14).

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[17] Due to semantic conflicts, the continuity-generic scheme and the repetition-episodic scheme are systematically excluded.

(16) Amin shib fan   shib sam   ngien le
　　　Amin eat   rice eat   three year   SFP
　　　阿明 食   飯   食   三   年   咧
　　　i. 'It has been three years since Amin started eating rice.' (unmarked)
　　　ii. '#Amin has been eating rice for three years.'　　　(marked)[18]

(16i) is a more accessible reading than (16ii), whose reading is quite marked, though not impossible. For (16ii) to be felicitous, the V-NP$_2$ unit has to be interpreted as an episodic event and Amin has to have such a gigantic appetite, one where he cannot resist to eat for three consecutive years. Nevertheless, the fact that a person may eat continuously for three years passes the imagination to conceive. This reading, therefore, becomes unacceptable/questioned by a native speaker. It should be noted that our encyclopedic knowledge of the world plays an important role here. That is, such a judgment has nothing to do with grammaticality, but has something to do with one's perception of the world. Even though both readings are equally well-formed within the present theory, the second one is considered inaccessible in that the situation described here is, according to our common experience of the world, beyond the realm of possibility. In other words, the discussion here is not in regard to grammaticality but in relation to the relative accessibility or transparency of the (well-formed) reading available (cf. Her 2007:240-242).

On the basis of a similar line of reasoning, the second reading of (17) involves a much higher degree of opacity.

(17) Amin sii   cha-e   sii   sam-diamzhung le
　　　Amin drive car-SUF   drive three-hour   SFP
　　　阿明 駛   車仔   駛   三點鐘   咧
　　　i. 'Amin has been driving for three hours.'　　　(unmarked)
　　　ii. '#It has been three hours since Amin started driving.' (marked)

It should be easy for one to conceive an appropriate context for (17i) to be acceptable. For example, Amin has been driving for three hours since he set out on the return journey and has not yet arrived home. However, the second reading in (17), though acceptable, does not come immediately to mind. In one context, one has to imagine a world in which people are ephemeral. The brief existence renders three hours a long enough period of time, so that three hours' driving can be viewed as a repetitive activity and thus a generic event. Or, imagine another situation where Amin is a beginner, who just learned how to drive. In such a context, Amin was given plenty

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[18] Semantic infelicity is indicated by '#'.

of practice time in driving and the repetitive reading becomes more natural despite the fact that such a reading is still quite opaque.[19] This can be taken as an indication that context, as well as our world knowledge, plays an important role in the interpretation of a given VC sentence.

I shall now return to example (14), repeated below as (18), whose durative adverbial denotes a non-specific length of time.

(18) Amin   sii   cha-e   sii   dong giu   le
     Amin   drive car-SUF drive very   long SFP
     阿明   駛   車仔   駛   當   久   咧
     i.   'Amin has been driving for a long time.'   (continuity)
     ii. 'It has been a long time since Amin started driving.' (repetition)

Unlike (16) and (17), both readings in (18) are equally transparent. This is the case because the durative adverbial does not specify a specific length of time, which opens up the possibility of flexible interpretations. *Dong giu* 'very long' may refer either to a "short" period of time that the car-driving activity lasted or to a "very long" period of time that Amin's driving skills were repeatedly demonstrated, rendering car-driving Amin's repetitive/habitual behavior. *Sii cha-e* 'drive a car' is assigned the episodic reading in the first case and the generic reading in the second.

In summary, the accessibility of the possible readings of a Hakka VC sentence depends mainly on the compatibility of the V-NP$_2$ unit and the durative adverbial. The more compatible the components are, the more accessible a reading is. The SCC, which may be influenced by context and our encyclopedic knowledge of the world, also explains the varying degrees of markedness of a VC sentence, namely, the more strictly the condition is observed, the less marked the interpretation is.

6. Conclusion

Drawing on previous works on the Mandarin VC construction, this paper focuses on the ambiguous interpretations of the durative adverbials in the Hakka VC construction. In summary, this study consists of four main ideas. First, the interpretation(s) of the durative complement in the Hakka VC construction hinges crucially on the temporal properties of the V-NP$_2$ unit and ambiguity arises only when this unit denotes a durative dynamic situation type, viz., an activity or an accomplishment. Second, contrary to what is presented in the literature, a Hakka VC sentence may be ambiguous between the continuity reading and the repetition reading,

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[19] I would like to express my gratitude to one anonymous reviewer for pointing out this analysis to me.

with the latter being a polysemous extension from the former. The fact that the same form is paired with different but related senses indicates that this is a case of constructional polysemy. Third, such semantic ambiguities arise due to the interaction between the episodic/generic duality of the V-NP$_2$ unit and the duration/lapse of time duality of the durative complement. This explains why a given VC sentence may switch between the continuity sense and the repetition sense. This phenomenon can be viewed as a natural consequence of the gestalt effect. Finally, the accessibility of the possible readings of such a sentence depends crucially on the compatibility of the V-NP$_2$ unit and the durative adverbial. The more compatible these components are, the more accessible a reading is. The semantic compatibility condition, which may be influenced by our world knowledge and context, also explains the varying degrees of markedness of such a VC sentence, namely, the more strictly the condition is observed, the less marked the interpretation is.

If my analysis of the Hakka VC construction complemented by a durative adverbial is acceptable, it should have the following implications. First, by integrating the cognitive model and the constructional model to deal with the semantic interpretations of the durative complements in the Hakka VC construction, this study approaches the VC construction from a different perspective and provides a finer-grained analysis. The constructional approach serves as a tool to further cement the relationship which exists between form and meaning and the cognitive motivations explain why a specific form-meaning correspondence should exist and is natural. Second, though the construction as a whole rather than the verb alone is considered to carry meanings, the role played by the lexical meanings of the verb in the construction cannot be ignored. It has been demonstrated in this paper that only those verb classes whose meanings are compatible with the constructional meaning can be integrated into the Hakka VC construction. That is, a more in-depth analysis of a given construction is made possible only when one has a better understanding of the interaction between lexical entries and the construction in question. Finally, this research should deepen and facilitate our understanding of the nature of the VC constructions of the Chinese languages in general and may serve as a basis for further investigation of the relevant issues.

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客語動詞複製結構中的時間補語

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本研究從構式和認知的角度探討客語中帶時間補語的動詞複製結構（NP_1 V-NP_2 V C_3）所呈現的歧義現象。主要論點如下：首先，時間補語的詮釋主要取決於 V-NP_2 的時貌特點。其次，與傳統分析不同之處在於這樣的句子具有「持續」和「重複」兩種不同的解讀，是一種結構上多義的現象。再來，這種歧義肇因於 V-NP_2 的「單獨事件/泛指事件」的二元性與時間補語的「持續/經歷時間」的二元性之間的互動，是潛在的完形效應作用下自然產生的結果。最後，在這種動詞複製結構中，不同解讀的可接受度主要取決於 V-NP_2 和時間補語之間的相容性，這個相容性條件會受到我們的世界知識影響，也可以用來解釋這種句子有標性的強弱。

關鍵詞：動詞複製、時間補語、結構上的多義、完形、客語