

TWO PROGRESSIVE ASPECT MARKERS IN CHINESE

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1. THE USE OF zài

This article sets out to show that there are two progressive aspect markers (PAM) in Chinese which exhibit certain similarities as well as differences in meaning. The two markers are zài 在 and -zhe 着. The meaning of zài will be examined first. Compare the following sentences:

tāmen	yǐjīng	zài	hē	tāng	le
他们	已经	在	喝	汤	了
they	already	(PAM)	drink	soup	(marker of new situation)

'They are already taking their soup.'

tāmen	yǐjīng	hēle	tāng	le
他们	已经	喝了	汤	了
they	already	drink (perfect aspect marker)	soup	(marker of new situation)

'They have already taken their soup.'

tāmen	yǐjīng	hēguò	tāng	le
他们	已经	喝过	汤	了
they	already	drink (experiential aspect marker)	soup	(marker of new situation)

'They have already taken their soup.' OR

'They have taken soup before.'

tāmen 他们 they	yǐjīng 已经 already	yào 要 (imminent aspect marker)	hē 喝 drink	tāng 汤 soup	le 了 (marker of new situation)
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'They are already about to take their soup.'

These sentences are distinguished from one another in that the action of taking soup is seen to be at different phases of development. In the first sentence, the action is in progress; in the second, it is completed; in the third, it is completed and forms part of the experience of the persons referred to; and in the last, it is imminent or about to take place. Next, compare the following:

háizi 孩子 child	yòu 又 again	zài 在 (PAM)	kū 哭 cry	le 了 (marker of new situation)
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'The child is again crying.'

háizi 孩子 child	yòu 又 again	kūqǐlái 哭起来 cry (inchoative aspect marker)	le 了 (marker of new situation)
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'The child again starts crying.'

In the first sentence, the action is in progress whereas in the second it is inchoative. Then too contrast the meaning of *zài*, -le (to be distinguished from *le*, the marker of new situation, which is not bound to a preceding verb and which occurs finally in a clause), -guò, yào and -qǐlái in the above sentences and that of -xiàqù in the following sentence:

bié 别 don't	kūxiàqù 哭下去 cry (continuative aspect marker)	le 了 (marker of new situation)
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'Don't keep on crying.'

Here -xiàqù indicates the continuation of the action of crying from a specific time. When *zài* is thus seen to be in contrast with *yào*, -le, -guò, -qǐlái and -xiàqù and to form with them (as well as with -zhe which will be discussed later) a closed system of items all indicating phase of development or aspect, there is reason to believe that *zài* is a grammatical aspect marker on a par with the others. This is further supported by the observation that although *zài* (as well as *yào*)

is not morphologically bound to the verb as *-le*, *-guò*, *-qǐlái* and *-xiàqù* (which are generally recognised as grammatical aspect markers of the language) are, it is never used independently of the verb; on the contrary it is always tied to it, with or without intervening adverbial elements. In this light, *zài* (and *yào*) may justifiably be considered an affix, not to the verb itself, but to the verb phrase (which may consist of the verb alone or the verb plus adverbial elements). For these two reasons, it is proposed here that *zài* (as well as *yào*) should be recognised as a grammatical aspect marker of Chinese.

It has been suggested earlier that *zài* is used to indicate an action in progress. It is necessary to examine the meaning of this aspect marker in greater detail. Examples of the use of this marker are useful for this purpose.

- (1) chēhùo fāshēng de shíhòu, tāmen zài shuōxiào
 车禍 发生 的 时候, 他们 在 说笑
 car accident happen (marker of subordination) time, they (PAM) joke

'When the car accident happened, they were joking.'

- (2) dāng wǒ líkāi de shíhòu, tāmen zài tāolùn
 当 我 离开 的 时候, 他们 在 讨论
 when I leave (marker of subordination) time, they (PAM) discuss

zhèjiàn shì
 这件 事
 this (noun classifier) matter

'When I left, they were discussing this matter.'

- (3) wǒmen zhěnggè xiàwǔ dōu zài niàn shū
 我们 整个 下午 都 在 唸 书
 we whole (noun classifier) afternoon all (PAM) study

'We were studying the whole afternoon.'

- (4) jiǎshǐ míngtiān wǒ huílái de shíhòu nǐmen
 假使 明天 我 回来 的 时候 你们
 if tomorrow I return (marker of subordination) time you

hái zài dǎ pái, wǒ biàn kāichú nǐmen
 还 在 打 牌, 我 便 开除 你们
 still (PAM) play card, I consequently dismiss you

'If you are still playing cards when I return tomorrow, I will dismiss you.'

- (5) wúlùn wǒ shénme shíhòu huí jiā, tā dōu zài
 无论 我 什么 时候 回 家, 他都 在
 no matter I what time return home, he always (PAM)
 kàn shū
 看 书
 read book

'No matter what time I return home, he is always reading.'

- (6) kàn! nàzhī mǎ zài chī cǎo
 看! 那只 马 在 吃 草
 look! that (noun horse (PAM) eat grass
 classifier)

'Look! that horse is eating grass.'

- (7) wàimiàn zài xià - yǔ
 外面 在 下 雨
 outside (PAM) come down rain

'It's raining outside.'

- (8) shāngkǒu zài chū - xuè
 伤口 在 出 血
 wound (PAM) come out blood

'The wound is bleeding.'

In all the above sentences, a specific time is erected to which the action referred to in the sentence is related as being in progress at the time. In sentences (1) to (5), this time is explicitly stated: the time of the car accident, the time of the speaker's departure, a specific afternoon, the time when the speaker returns the next day, and whenever the speaker returns home. In sentence (6), this time juncture is understood to be the time when the speaker points with his finger at the horse and utters the sentence. This time juncture however need not be explicitly referred to in a sentence but may be understood from the context of discourse. The point to be noted is that whenever *zài* is used (the same applies to other aspect markers), a specific time is either explicitly or implicitly referred to. In sentences (7) and (8), in the absence of evidence pointing to the contrary, the time could be said to be the time of utterance.

Since *zài* indicates action in progress and since an action can only be said to be in progress if it takes up an appreciable period of time, a corollary to this is that *zài* carries a certain durative quality. It is this durative quality in *zài* which probably accounts for the incompatibility between *zài* and such verbs as *dàodá* 到达 'arrive',

huílái 回来 'return', yíshī 遗失 'lose', fāxiàn 发现 'discover', and sǐ 死 'die' that belong to an aspectual-semantic group of verbs which may be labelled transitional event verbs. One semantic characteristic of these verbs is that the transition designated by these verbs is momentary (hence the incompatibility between these verbs and zài), though the approach to that transition may take up an appreciable period of time.

In discussing the meaning of zài, it is useful to make reference to a distinction Comrie draws between the imperfective and the perfective (the term perfective is not to be confused with the term perfect: the latter refers to the phase when an action has been completed. So too the term imperfective is not to be confused with the term progressive, though some have used the former to refer to the progressive aspect). A perfective verb, according to Comrie (1976:3-4):

... presents the totality of the situation referred to without reference to its internal temporal constituency: the whole of the situation is presented as a single unanalysable whole, with beginning, middle and end rolled into one; no attempt is made to divide this situation up into the various individual phases that make up the action of entry. Verb forms with this meaning will be said to have perfective meaning, and where the language in question has special verbal forms to indicate this, we shall say that it has perfective aspect The other forms ... do not present the situation in this way, but rather make explicit reference to the internal temporal constituency of the situation.

The other forms are the imperfective verb forms. In the light of this distinction, a verb marked by zài can be said to be an imperfective verb form for it presents the action as stretched out in time so that the action is analysable into various internal phases and attention is drawn to the middle of the action, as it were. Verbs marked by -qǐlái and -xiàqù are imperfective in this sense as they indicate the beginning and the continuation of an action respectively. Verbs marked by -le, -guò and yào, on the other hand, are perfective verbs as they present an action as a single whole, the whole of which is completed in the case of -le and -guò and the whole of which is about to occur in the case of yào.

It should be noted that zài is used only when the linguistic or situational context calls for the adoption of the particular angle of vision or aspect emphasis that zài carries. In making a timeless statement like

niú	gēng	tián,	mǎ	chī	cǎo
牛	耕	田,	马	吃	草
cow	work	field,	horse	eat	grass

'Cows work the field and horses eat grass.'

for example, there is no reason for seeing the actions as stretched out in time, nor any reason for putting emphasis on a specific time juncture when the actions are in their course of development, so *zài* is not used. Instead, the actions are seen as whole units without any aspect implications and so the unmarked verb form is used. Similarly, if a child wants to find out what a particular horse generally eats, without reference to any particular time juncture, he says

māma,	nàzhī	mǎ	chī	shénme?
妈,	那只	马	吃	什么?
mother,	that (noun	horse	eat	what
	classifier)			

'Mother, what does that horse eat?'

However, if he wants to find out what that horse is eating at a specific time, then he says

māma,	nàzhī	mǎ	zài	chī	shénme?
妈,	那只	马	在	吃	什么?
mother,	that (noun	horse	(PAM)	eat	what
	classifier)				

'Mother, what is that horse eating?'

or

māma,	nàzhī	mǎ	chīzhe	shénme?
妈,	那只	马	吃着	什么?
mother,	that (noun	horse	eat (PAM)	what
	classifier)			

'Mother, what is that horse eating?'

The use of *-zhe* will be discussed at a later stage. A speaker will also choose the unmarked verb form if he wishes to indicate the occurrence of an action (whether realised or potential) without focusing attention on any specific time and the stage of development the action has reached at this time. So he says:

gāngcái	tāmen	yíge	tán	qín,	yíge
刚才	他们	一个	弹	琴,	一个
just now	they	one (noun	play	piano	one (noun
		classifier)			classifier)

chàng	gē
唱	歌
sing	song

'Just now one of them played the piano and one of them sang.'

Here each of the two actions is presented as a single whole like a dot on a line representing the time continuum. The time reference indicates the location of this dot on the line (the time-when of the action) and not an independently selected time to which the action is related. The same can be said of

děng	yíhuìr	nǐmen	yíge	tán	qín,	yíge
等	一会儿	你们	一个	弹	琴	一个
wait	a while	you	one (noun classifier)	play	piano	one (noun classifier)

chàng	gē
唱	歌
sing	song

'In a little while, one of you play the piano and one of you sing.'

where each of the two actions is seen as a single whole to be performed in the future. In the earlier sentence with past time reference as well as in this second sentence with future time reference, the actions performed or to be performed are seen as whole units and there is no call for looking into their internal temporal constituency and singling out one particular phase within their course of development for special mention. It is the absence of any need to call attention to the actions as in their course of development that accounts for not using *zài* in both sentences.

2. THE USE OF -zhe

Apart from *zài*, there is another marker which is used to indicate action in progress at a specific time. This is the marker -zhe. Scholars of the Chinese language have unanimously agreed that it is an aspect marker of the language. Some have suggested that it may be used interchangeably with *zài*, though they prefer to classify the latter as an adverb rather than a grammatical aspect marker. Zhāng Zhì-gōng (1957:94), for example, suggests that

... when a certain action, event or state is seen at a given point of time to be in progress or in a state of continuance, then generally the adverb zhèng 正, zài 在 or zhèng zài 正在, etc. is added before the verb, or the verb suffix -zhe is added after it, or both may be used simultaneously. [the translation is mine]

The same point has earlier been made by Gāo Míng-kǎi (1948:377) who says: "When an occurrence is seen as in continuous development ... this is expressed in the spoken language by -zhe, zài, zhèng zài ... -zhe." [the translation is also mine].

An important point in the present article is that *zài* and *-zhe* are distinguished in meaning and use, though both involve the notion of something (either an action or a state) going on or in progress. The term 'in progress' here is used in a very broad sense to include, not only the progress or development of an action (this is the sense in which the term is generally used), but also the continuance of a state. In other words, the term 'in progress' is here used stripped of its dynamic implication. This particular use of the term is suggested by the use of *-zhe* in Chinese which reflects that a sentence indicating an action in progress is not necessarily dynamic in nature. A sentence like

tā	shǒulǐ	názhe	yìběn	shū
他	手裡	拿着	一本	书
he	in hand	carry (PAM)	one (noun classifier)	book

'He is carrying a book in his hand.'

can hardly be said to be dynamic. To accommodate this meaning and use of *-zhe*, the term 'in progress' is used in the present study in a broad sense stripped of any inherent dynamic implication.

-zhe is used in a number of ways. The first use is exemplified in the following sentences:

zhuōzishàng	bǎizhe	yì	píng	huā
桌子上	擺着	一	瓶	花
table	place (PAM)	one	vase	flower

'On the table is placed a vase of flowers.'

qiángshàng	guàzhe	yìfú	huà
牆上	掛着	一幅	画
wall	hang (PAM)	one (noun classifier)	picture

'On the wall is hung a picture.'

shìnèi	fàngzhe	liǎngtiáo	bǎn	dòng
室內	放着	兩條	板	凳
room	place (PAM)	two (noun classifier)	wood	bench

'In the room are placed two wooden benches.'

chuángshàng	duīzhe	hěny	duō	yángwáwa
床上	堆着	很	多	洋娃娃
bed	heap (PAM)	very	many	doll

'Many dolls are heaped on the bed.'

which all have the structure

locative expression + verb with -zhe + noun phrase

With sentences of this kind, the action designated by the verb is not itself in progress; instead, it is completed. The effect of the action however is sustained at the time in question. What is 'in progress' or in continuance, therefore, is not the action but the state resulting from it. This interpretation is supported by the observation which Fàn Fāng-lián (1963:386-95) has made that the -zhe in such sentences can be replaced by the perfect aspect marker -le, without affecting the meaning of the sentences. The first of the above sentences can be used to illustrate the point: when

zhuōzishàng	bǎizhe	yì	píng	huā
桌子上	擺着	一	瓶	花
table	place (PAM)	one	vase	flower

is changed to

zhuōzishàng	bǎile	yì	píng	huā
桌子上	擺了	一	瓶	花
table	place (perfect aspect marker)	one	vase	flower

there is no change in meaning at all. In the last sentence, the use of -le indicates that the action of placing the vase of flowers on the table is completed. But the completion of the action also means that a new state prevails, the state of the vase of flowers being on the table. Here it can be seen that the distinction between a dynamic predication and a stative predication is not always maintained. Here both sentences are essentially expressive of a state despite the fact that in both an action is indicated. This stative quality of the two sentences under discussion can be supported by the fact that the verb in both can be replaced by either the verb of existence yǒu 有 or the verb 'to be' shì 是 without affecting the meaning of the sentences, as Fàn Fāng-lián (1963) has pointed out. Instead of the two sentences where the verb is marked by -zhe or -le, one can equally say

zhuōzishàng	{ yǒu 有 exist shì 是 be }	yì	píng	huā
桌子上		一	瓶	花
table		one	vase	flower

'On the table is a vase of flowers.'

without introducing any essential change in meaning.

It is interesting to note that in sentences with the structure

locative expression + verb with -zhe + noun phrase

zài cannot be used in place of -zhe: it is impossible to have

*zhuōzishàng zài bǎi yì píng huā
 桌子上 在 擺 一 瓶 花
 table (PAM) place one vase flower

This points to one essential difference between zài and -zhe: whereas a verb (or verb phrase) marked by zài is necessarily accompanied in a sentence by a noun (or noun phrase) which represents the agent responsible for the action, -zhe is not restricted in use in this way. In a sentence like

zhuōzishàng bǎizhe yì píng huā
 桌子上 擺着 一 瓶 花
 table place (PAM) one vase flower
 'On the table is placed a vase of flowers.'

neither of the two noun phrases, zhuōzishàng and yì píng huā, represents the agent. The use of zài in place of -zhe in such a sentence, as has been said, is impossible. Where zài is used, the sentence carries obligatorily a noun phrase representing the agent, as in

tā zài tán qín
 他 在 彈 琴
 he (PAM) play piano
 'He is playing the piano.'

and

dìqiú zài xuánzhuǎn
 地球 在 旋轉
 earth (PAM) revolve
 'The earth is revolving.'

-zhe is used to indicate the continuance of a state resulting from the completion of an action in a different kind of sentence. Here the agent is given, as in

(1) tā chuānzhe yíjiàn xīn yīfú
 她 穿着 一件 新 衣服
 she wear (PAM) one (noun classifier) new dress
 'She is wearing a new dress.'

- (2) tā dòng yě bú dòng de zhànzhe
 他 动 也 不 动 地 站着
 he move also not move (marker of sub-ordination) stand (PAM)

'He stands motionless.'

- (3) tā zhěngtiān dōu guānzhe mén
 他 整天 都 关着 门
 he all day all close (PAM) door

'He keeps the door closed all day.'

- (4) tā chángcháng bìzhe yǎnjīng
 他 常常 闭着 眼睛
 he often shut (PAM) eye

'He often keeps his eyes shut.'

One possible interpretation of sentence (1) is that the action of putting on a new dress is completed but the effect persists: the person referred to is still wearing her new dress. In sentence (2), the action of standing up is completed but the effect of someone being in a standing position is still in continuance. In sentence (3), the action of closing the door is completed, but the resultant state of the door being closed prevails. In sentence (4), the action of shutting one's eyes is completed, but the resultant state of having one's eyes shut still persists. Here it can be seen how sometimes the same verb-base is used to indicate an action which brings into being a certain state as well as to indicate the resultant state of the action: so *chuān yīfù* 穿衣服 'put on one's clothes', *zhànqǐlái* 站起来 'stand up' (note here that the addition of the directional complement *qǐlái* is necessary to indicate the action of standing up as distinguished from the state of being in a standing position, *zhànzhe* 站着), *guān mén* 关门 'close the door' and *bì yǎnjīng* 闭眼睛 'shut one's eyes' bring in respectively the states of *chuānzhe yīfù* 穿着衣服 'having one's clothes on', *zhànzhe* 站着 'being in a standing position', *guānzhe mén* 关着门 'having one's door closed' and *bìzhe yǎnjīng* 闭着眼睛 'having one's eyes shut'. In all these instances in which *-zhe* is used, *-zhe* indicates that the state resulting from the performance of an action is sustained (the state is in progress, as it were, to use the term in a broad sense).

A somewhat similar use of *-zhe* is its use with what are now currently referred to as stative verbs or adjectives as they are traditionally called. In the following sentences, *-zhe* indicates that a certain state is sustained or in progress:

tā de yǎnjīng zhǒngzhe, yīfù hái
 他 的 眼睛 肿着, 衣服 还
 he (marker of sub- eye swollen (PAM), clothes still
 ordination)

shīzhe
 湿着
 wet (PAM)

'His eyes are swollen and his clothes are still wet.'

háizi de biànzi-shāo quǎnzhe, yòu
 孩子 的 辫子梢 卷着, 又
 child (marker of sub- pig-tail end curl (PAM), also
 ordination)

huáng yòu jiāo
 黄 又 焦
 yellow also burnt

'The tips of the child's pig-tails are curled, (looking) both yellowish and burnt.'

tiān hái zǎozhe, tàiyáng hái xiézhè
 天 还 早着, 太阳 还 斜着
 day still early (PAM), sun still slant (PAM)

'The day is still early and the sun is still in a slanting position.'

dà fēng bǎ liǔ-shù chuīde wānzhe
 大 风 把 柳树 吹得 弯着
 strong wind (marker of object willow tree blow till bend (PAM)
 pre-position)

'The strong wind blew till the willow tree was bent.'

tā hóngzhe liǎn, yíjù huà yěh bù shuō
 他 红着 脸, 一句 话 也 不 说
 he red (PAM) face, one (noun word also not say
 classifier)

'He reddened his face (blushed) and didn't say a word.'

the last sentence may also be written as

tā de liǎn hóngzhe, yíjù huà
 他 的 脸 红着, 一句 话
 he (marker of sub- face red (PAM), one (noun word
 ordination) classifier)

yěh bù shuō
 也 不 说
 also not say

'His face was red and he didn't say a word.'

In these sentences, the state that is sustained is sometimes clearly the result of some initial transitional event, so a willow tree is in a bending position because it has been bent; in other cases, as in *tiān hái zǎozhe*, it is difficult to say whether any transitional event is involved. In all such sentences in which the verb is a stative verb and as such partakes of a stative or descriptive quality, the use of *zài* in place of *-zhe* is totally unacceptable. This points to the conflict between *zài* and a stative predication.

Another use of *-zhe* is exemplified in the following:

wàimiàn	chuīzhe	dà	fēng
外面	吹着	大	风
outside	blow (PAM)	strong	wind

'Strong winds are blowing outside.'

shìnnèi	màozhe	yì-céng-céng	yānwù
室内	冒着	一层层	烟雾
room	come out (PAM)	layers	smoke

'Smoke is coming out from the room.'

tā	zhěngtiān	dāidāi	de	wàngzhe	xiàngpiàn
他	整天	呆呆	地	望着	相片
he	all day	blank	(marker of subordination)	stare (PAM)	photo

'He keeps staring at the photo blankly all day.'

fùqīn	duì	wǒ	dèngzheyǎn,	xiàomàzhe
父亲	对	我	瞪着眼,	笑骂着
father	at	me	open wide (PAM) eye,	joke scold (PAM)

'Father kept his eyes wide open at me and kept scolding me jokingly.'

where the actions are clearly seen as in progress. Here there is no question of the actions being completed. However, in this use of *-zhe* to indicate action in progress, *-zhe* seems to carry a certain stative quality. This stative quality is most apparent in sentences where *-zhe* is used to mark a subordinate verb in a verb-plus-verb series, as in

tā	xiàozhe	shuō
他	笑着	说
he	laugh (PAM)	speak

'He spoke smilingly.'

tā pǎozhe lái
他 跑着 来
he run (PAM) come
'He came running.'

tā suǒzhe méitóu xiǎng zhègè wèntí
他 锁着 眉头 想 这个 问题
he knit (PAM) brow consider this (noun
classifier) question
'Knitting his brows, he considered this question.'

In all three cases, the first verb marked by -zhe is subordinated to the second, main verb and describes the action which accompanies the second action. In other words, the first verb describes the manner in which the action designated by the main verb is done. This subordinate verb marked by -zhe therefore has a descriptive function and reflects the stative quality in this verb form. In the following sentence:

wǒ mànmande zǒu, shùzhe dìshàng de
我 慢 慢 地 走, 数 着 地 上 的
I slowly walk, count (PAM) ground (marker of sub-
ordination)

hóng zhuān
红 砖
red brick

'I walked slowly, counting the red bricks on the ground.'

the verb marked by -zhe designates the action which accompanies the action of walking. Here again the verb marked by -zhe takes on a descriptive or stative quality, being expressive of the manner in which another action is done. A verb in the -zhe form may also appear as the main verb in a sentence, as in

nà tiān wǎnshàng, tāmen liǎng rén zài hǎibiān
那 天 晚上, 他们 两 人 在 海 边
that day night, they two persons in seaside
màn bùzhe, mèngxiǎngzhe měimǎn de jiāng lái
漫步着, 梦想着 美 满 的 将 来
stroll (PAM), dream (PAM) beautiful (marker of sub-
ordination) future

'That night, the two of them strolled (were strolling) along the seaside, and dreamed (were dreaming) of their beautiful future.'

where a scene, rather than an action as such, is depicted. In prose writing in particular, a sentence where the main verb is marked by -zhe is used more for background description than for plot-advancing narration. This again points to the descriptive quality in -zhe.

It is worth noting that in all instances in which a verb marked by -zhe is subordinated to another verb and represents the action which accompanies the main action, the use of zài in place of -zhe is impossible. It is not possible, for example, to have

*tā	zài	suǒ	méitóu	xiǎng	zhègè	wèntí
他	在	锁	眉头	想	这个	问题
he	(PAM)	knit	brow	consider	this (noun classifier)	question

or

*wǒ	mǎnmǎnde	zǒu,	zài	shù	dìshàng	de
我	慢 慢 地	走,	在	数	地 上	的
I	slowly	walk,	(PAM)	count	ground	(marker of subordination)

hóng	zhuān
红	砖
red	brick

The impossibility of such a substitution supports the theory that whereas a verb marked by -zhe carries a certain descriptive or stative quality and leads one to see an action in progress as a state of action sustained, a verb marked by zài is more dynamic and leads one to see an action in progress as a dynamic carrying out of an activity rather than as a state of action sustained.

3. CO-OCCURRENCE OF zài AND -zhe WITH SEMANTIC VERB GROUPS

One way of highlighting the similarity as well as difference between these two aspect markers is to show their possibilities of co-occurrence with various semantic verb groups. It appears that while there are certain semantic verb groups which co-occur with both aspect markers, there are others which are repugnant to them, and yet others which co-occur with -zhe but not with zài, thereby reflecting an essential difference between the two markers.

The first group of verbs may be termed dynamic durative verbs and are identifiable by their compatibility with both zài and -zhe. Semantically these verbs indicate actions which may be extended over a period of time, and examples include:

kū	哭	'cry'
xiào	笑	'laugh'
tán-huà	谈话	'talk'
chuī-kǒushào	吹口哨	'whistle'

xǐ-zǎo	洗澡	'bathe'
biǎoyǎn	表演	'perform'
xiǎng	想	'think'

Within this group of verbs there is a sub-group each member of which designates an action which, taken singly, is instantaneous and yet each is infinitely repeatable and may therefore be performed over an extended period of time in the form of a series of repeated acts. This sub-group includes verbs like:

hūxī	呼吸	'breathe'
késòu	咳嗽	'cough'
tī	踢	'kick'
tiào-dòng	跳动	'jump up and down'

and when these verbs co-occur with *zài* or *-zhe*, a series of repeated acts rather than one single occurrence of an action is meant.

On the other hand, as has been said, there are verb groups which resist both *zài* and *-zhe*. One such group includes members like:

shì	是	'be'
yǒu	有	'have, exist'
děngyú	等於	'equal'
bāokuò	包括	'include'
shǔyú	屬於	'belong to'
zhí	值	'be worth'
dàibiǎo	代表	'represent'

for which the term relation verbs may be used. These verbs are recognisable by being either totally repugnant to the perfect aspect marker *-le* or, if they take this marker, the marked and the unmarked forms are identical in meaning. For example, *bāokuò* and *bāokuòle* are not distinguishable in meaning. (It has to be pointed out that in this group of relation verbs, there is one particular member, *yǒu*, which is found to co-occur with *-zhe* under certain limited and describable circumstances, as Zōu Guó-tǒng (1956:39) has pointed out. However, where *-zhe* is used with *yǒu*, *-zhe* is void in meaning and may be dropped without affecting the meaning of the sentence in any way.)

The group of verbs denoting various psychic states like

míngbái	明白	'understand'
xiāngxìn	相信	'believe'
xìnrèn	信任	'trust'
zhīdào	知道	'know'
pèifú	佩服	'admire'

are also repugnant to both *zài* and *-zhe*. It is interesting to note that, like the relation verbs, these psychic verbs either resist the perfect aspect marker *-le*, or if they take this marker, the marked and the unmarked forms are not distinguished in meaning.

The group of auxiliary verbs with members like

kéyǐ	可以	'can'
huì	会	'will probably'
yīnggāi	应该	'should'
gǎn	敢	'dare'

are also incompatible with *zài* and *-zhe*. Indeed, a defining feature of these verbs is their inability to take any aspect markers at all. Besides the semantic verb groups just mentioned, there are also certain verbs or verb phrases which are either aspectual verbs in themselves in that they designate certain aspectual notions like

kāishǐ	开始	'begin'
jìxù	继续	'continue'
wán	完	'finish'

or they carry some aspectual particle, as

kàn-jiàn	看見	'see'
yù-dào	遇到	'meet'
kǎo-shàng	考上	'take examination and pass it'
chī-wán	吃完	'finish eating'

These verbs or verb phrases which inherently convey some aspectual notion are found to resist co-occurrence with *zài* and *-zhe*.

Then finally there are certain verb groups which, while they resist co-occurrence with *zài*, are found to take *-zhe*. One such verb group may be referred to semantically as verbs of existence, including items like

cúnzài	存在	'exist'
shēngcún	生存	'exist'
huó	活	'live'
mímàn	弥漫	'pervade'

Since existence is not a dynamic action, the use of *zài* with these verbs is impossible. However, the state of being in existence may be sustained and hence *-zhe* is found to co-occur with these verbs. Another group of verbs which resist *zài* but may co-occur with *-zhe* is the group of what may be referred to as posture verbs, like

zhàn	站	'stand'
zuò	坐	'sit'
tǎng	躺	'lie'
kǎo	靠	'lean against'

When these verbs are marked by *-zhe*, they indicate the result of the performance of some initial action designated by the same verb-base (with or without a directional complement). So the action of *zhànle qǐlái* 站了起来 'having stood up' results in the state of *zhànzhe* 站着 'standing', and the action of *kǎole zài yǐzishàng* 靠了在椅子上 'having leaned against the chair' results in the state of *kǎozhe yǐzi* 靠着椅子 'leaning against the chair'. One last group of verbs need to be mentioned: this is the group of stative verbs or adjectives which are totally repugnant to *zài* but some of which are used with *-zhe* to indicate the continuance of a state, as in

wāizhe zuǐ-jǎo	歪着咀角	'keeps one's mouth corners in a slanting position'
qīngzhe bùfá	轻着步伐	'keeps one's steps soft'
hēizhe liǎn	黑着脸	'keeps one's face dark' (i.e. gloomy-looking)
chénmòzhe	沉默着	'keeps silent'
tiándì fāngzhe	地荒着	'field remains unattended to'

In summing up, it can be said that both *zài* and *-zhe* are used to indicate an action or state in continuance or in progress, using the latter term 'in progress' in a broad sense to include continuance of a state. For this reason, they may both be termed progressive aspect markers. This also explains why these two aspect markers are sometimes found to co-occur with each other, though each resists co-occurrence

with other aspect markers in the system. However, there is also an important difference between *zài* and *-zhe* which is that the former is much more dynamic in nature than the latter: *zài* is used to indicate an action in active progress, whereas *-zhe* is used to indicate the continuance of a state which may be a state resulting from the completion of an action or simply a state of being which does not essentially involve an active action, or it is used to lead one to see an action in progress as a state of action sustained. This difference makes it impossible for one to be used in place of the other in certain circumstances.

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