

## Beyond Telicity: Reframing Mandarin Phase Complements through a Grammar of Boundedness

This paper argues that Mandarin phase complements (PCs), with *wan* ‘finish’ in V-V compounds as a case study (1), realize a distinct aspectual operator, boundedness, and that their nominal restrictions follow from a syntax-driven notion of DP maximality. The proposal derives the characteristic VP-DP dependency induced by PCs and situates Mandarin within a cross-linguistic typology of range assignment, revealing systematic parallels and contrasts with Slavic perfective prefixation.

- (1) Wo chi **wan** le san kuai binggan, #dan shi mei chi wan  
 1SG eat finish PFV three CL cookie but NEG eat finish  
 ‘I finished eating three cookies, #but didn’t finish (them).’

I argue against analyses that reduce PCs to telicity or termination morphology (Sybesma, 2017; Woo, 2021; Gu, 2023). I propose that *wan* spells out a boundedness operator  $\text{Bnd}(P)=\lambda e'\exists e[P(e)\&Q_{\max}(e,e')]$ , where  $Q_{\max}(e,e')$  relates a quantity-structured process  $e$  to its maximal boundary stage  $e'$ . It forces predication at a boundary stage, excluding proper internal stages from the truth conditions. This clarifies several otherwise puzzling properties of PC constructions: e.g., process presupposition and event-type constraints, the incompatibility with PROG, and since-completion interpretations under duration phrases.

On the nominal side, I challenge “definiteness effect” accounts (Cheng & Sybesma, 1999). I propose that *wan* selects DPs that satisfy DP maximality, the conjunction of two independent constraints: (i) internal closure on the DP’s quantity domain and (ii) a non-vacuous maximum. These conditions capture the core nominal profile under *wan*, while the VP-DP linkage is mediated by a structure-preserved mapping between nominal and eventive quantity structure in incremental-theme configurations (Krifka, 1989, 1992).

Formally, I implement the analysis in Borer’s Exoskeletal Syntax by positing a dedicated BndP on the verbal spine hosting an open boundary-related value  $\langle e \rangle_{\text{Max}}$ , paired with a parallel Max head in the nominal domain. PCs like *wan* merge at Bnd and act as direct range assigners: they value both the eventive quantity variable  $\langle e \rangle_{\#}$  and  $\langle e \rangle_{\text{Max}}$ , and, when an internal argument is present, bind into the nominal domain. Interaction with the Single Valuation Constraint (cf. Borer, 2005) predicts the exclusion of externally pre-closed or vacuously maximal DPs and the confinement of weak/numeral DPs to specific readings.

Typologically, Mandarin occupies a hybrid position: it allows English-like indirect range assignment via DPs in Spec-AspQ, yet also deploys Slavic-like direct range assignment via PCs. Crucially, Mandarin differs from Slavic in how cross-domain effects are regulated: a dedicated BndP layer, DP-internal flexibility of weak determiners with respect to specificity (cf. Enç, 1991), and the language-specific requirement of DP maximality jointly yield a distinctive co-occurrence profile.

- (2) Co-occurrence of aspectual morphology with nominal types

Nominal type	Strong Q, Dem-NP	Weak Q, NumP	Cl-N	Bare N	Generic/Existential
Mandarin PCs	√	√ (strong only)	*	√ (strong only)	*
Slavic prefixes	*	√ (weak only)	NA	√ (strong only)	*

Overall, Mandarin PCs emerge as direct range assigners whose effects are not reducible to telicity or termination but are governed by a principled grammar of boundedness and maximality.

### Selected references

- Borer, H. (2005). *The normal course of events* (Vol. 2). Oxford University Press.
- Cheng, L. L.-S., & Sybesma, R. (1999). Bare and not-so-bare nouns and the structure of NP. *Linguistic Inquiry*, 30(4), 509–542.
- Gu, Q. (2023). Telicization in Mandarin Chinese. *Journal of Linguistics*, 59(3), 465–497.