

## MAKING SOME PROGRESS ON THE PROGRESSIVE ASPECT *ZÀI* IN MANDARIN CHINESE

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### ABSTRACT

Taking into account data hitherto neglected, this article examines the progressive aspect *zài* 在 in Mandarin Chinese and related issues. We argue in favour of the constituency [<sub>AspP</sub> *zài* 在 [V-*zhe* 着]] and demonstrate important syntactic and semantic differences between the progressive aspect *zài* 在 and the durative aspect *-zhe* 着. Importantly, unlike ‘*zài* 在 V’, ‘V-*zhe* 着’ is only acceptable as the sole predicate in a root sentence when interpretable as a (derived) state. Otherwise, the presence of the progressive aspect *zài* 在 is required: ‘*zài* 在 V-*zhe* 着’. This crucial role of *zài* 在 is often obscured by its phonological fusion (*haplology*) with the preposition *zài* 在 ‘at’ heading an immediately following prepositional phrase: NP [<sub>AspP</sub> *zài* 在 [<sub>VP</sub> [<sub>PP</sub> *zài* 在 NP] [V-*zhe* 着 NP]]] => NP *ZÀI* 在 NP V-*zhe* 着 NP. The presence/absence of an underlying progressive aspect *zài* 在 (having fused with the preposition *zài* 在) is reflected in the choice of negation. Since the progressive aspect *zài* 在 must be negated by *méi* 没, not *bù* 不, it follows that no underlying aspectual *zài* 在 is present when it is *bù* 不 that negates a VP with a *zài* 在 PP adjunct:

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NP *bù* 不 [<sub>VP</sub> [<sub>PP</sub> *zài* 在 NP] VP]. By contrast, when there is an underlying aspectual *zài* 在, the negation *méi* 没 is required, resulting in the surface sequence ‘NP *méi* 没 *zài* 在 NP VP’. Finally, given that a subset of auxiliaries, some stative verbs as well as state-denoting ‘V-*zhe* 着’ are negated by *méi* 没, negation of ‘*zài* 在 VP’ by *méi* 没 is compatible with the status of ‘*zài* 在 VP’ as a state, hence able to be true at a moment.

## KEYWORDS

Durative aspect *-zhe* 着 Haplology Negation *bù* 不 vs *méi* 没 Finiteness

## 1. INTRODUCTION

When wanting to examine the progressive aspect in Mandarin Chinese, one first needs to decide whether besides the clear case of the progressive aspectual auxiliary *zài* 在 in ‘*zài* 在 VP’, the sequence *zhèng* 正 (‘just’) *zài* 在 (‘PROGR’) is likewise to be included as another realization of the progressive aspect. While in most of the Chinese literature, this sequence is presented as an adverb, i.e., as one word, *zhèngzài* 正在 ‘just’, Sun Hongyuan (2014) and Martin et al. (2020) treat *zhèngzài* 正在 as a bisyllabic word variant of the progressive aspect *zài* 在. As we will see, none of the above scenarios is correct. Instead, the sequence ‘*zhèng* 正 *zài* 在 VP’ is to be analysed as the adverb *zhèng* 正 ‘just, right then’ preceding the progressive aspect head *zài* 在, which in turn selects the following verbal projection as its complement:

- (1) [<sub>AspP</sub> [<sub>Adv</sub> *zhèng* 正 ‘just’] [<sub>AspP</sub> *zài* 在 [<sub>VP</sub> VP]]]

This analysis not only allows us to correctly predict the cases where *zhèng* 正 ‘just, right then’ and progressive *zài* 在 can only occur on their own, but also to obtain the correct distribution and well-formedness conditions for the progressive aspect *zài* 在 itself.

The article is organized as follows. Section 2 provides evidence for our analysis in (1) where the adverb *zhèng* 正 ‘just, right then’ precedes and modifies the verbal projection headed by the progressive aspect *zài* 在. Section 3 turns to the structural analysis of the sequence ‘*zài* 在 V-*zhe* 着’ and the syntactic and semantic differences between the progressive aspect

## 汉语进行体标记“在”新议

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## 摘要

本文探讨迄今为止在汉语进行体标记“在”及相关研究方面被忽略的问题。我们赞成进行体“在”和持续体“着”共现的句法结构为 [AspP 在 [V-着]]，并认为其体现了二者之间重要的句法和语义区别。不同于“在 V”，当“V-着”表示派生的同质性状态时，它只在根句作为主要谓词才会被接受。否则，进行体“在”需要出现。“在”的这一关键性作用常常由于引导介词短语的与它语音融合的介词“在”的出现而被掩盖。深层结构的进行体“在”的隐现反映在否定词的选择上。由于进行体“在”必须被“没”否定，而非“不”，所以当“不”否定包含“在 PP”附加语的 VP 时，进行体“在”不出现。相反，当进行体“在”出现时，句子被否定时要求“没”出现，从而出现表层结构的顺序为“NP 没 [[在 NP] VP]”。

## 关键词

持续体 -着 合体 (haplology) 否定词“不”和“没” 限定性