

VIII: THE ASPECT MARKERS 「过」 AND 「着」

1. The aspect marker 过 - attached to a functionive verb (FV-过) - has *two* functions, one of which is to indicate past experience, i.e., whether or not the subject has ever done a certain thing. The negative of 过 is indicated by 没过 or 没有过。As in the case of the aspect marker 了, the object of the FV follows 过 (FV过 obj.; not FV-obj. 过).

你去过长城吗？ 我去过（长城）。 没有去过。 没去过。
张艺谋拍的那部电影，学生都看过。
他们都看过那部电影，就我没看过。 not 他们都看那部电影过，……
由于中国的一胎化政策，很多妇女都堕过胎。 not ……堕胎过
她已经快四十岁了，还没结过婚呢。
人要吃过苦才真正知道人生的乐趣。
我没吃过什么苦，可是我知道人生的乐趣啊！
你吃过「全聚德」的烤鸭就不会想吃别的店的烤鸭了。

Interrogative forms involving 过:

…V过O吗？ 你吃过北京烤鸭吗？ 我当然吃过北京烤鸭！
我还没吃过北京烤鸭。 我不吃肉，所以当然没吃过北京烤鸭。
…V过O没有？ 你往美国打过电话没有？ 打过，可是因为太贵，所以不常打。
我从来没往美国打过电话。 我家没有电话，所以从来没打过长途电话。
……有没有V过O…？ 你有没有说过谎话？ 有，可是只说过一次。
所有人都说过谎话！谁说他没说过谎话，他就是在说谎话！

2. The other function of 过 - equal in importance to the first - is to indicate whether or not the subject has done a routine activity within a certain normal time period. In other words, the 过 is used to indicate having gone through a routine process.

他每天吃过晚饭都要出去散散步。
小明，你已经刷过牙了，不能再吃糖了！
今天的报纸我还没看过，请别拿走哦！
这一课的录音带你听过没有？ 还没呢，我预备今天晚上听。（还没呢=还没听过呢）

The pitfall in this usage of 过 is that, in the English speaker's mind, there is a linguistic groove for the idea of "have you ever..." (the first function of 过 discussed above), but none for the idea of "have you...(routine process)." So the English speaker tends to use the verb-了 aspect marker (indicating completion of action) where the 过 aspect marker would be more appropriate.

3. Combining 过… with the Verb-了: To indicate that the subject has had the experience of doing something or has gone through a routine process and has done it to completion. This is actually conceptually redundant, but the redundancy conveys the nuance of having done something *thoroughly* rather than *casually*.

这一课的录音带，我听过了，但是还没完全听懂。

我跟他说过那件事，可是他忘了。 vs. 我跟他说过了那件事，可是他忘了。
(I mentioned that matter to him...) (I've talked over that matter with him,...)

我看过那本书，可是记不得多少了。

(I've read that book [perhaps casually], but...)

vs. 我看过了那本书，对西藏才有了一点儿了解。

(I've read that book [probably fairly thoroughly],...)

小王和他父母讨论过那件事，但是父母并没表示什么意见。

(had a casual, maybe even perfunctory discussion)

vs. 小王和他父母讨论过了那件事，心里就舒服多了。

(had a pretty thorough discussion)

The negative form:

小王没和他父母讨论过那件事就自己做了决定。(Note: 没 precedes the coverb 和)

我从前没考虑过童年对我一生的影响。现在我才知道它对我的影响太大了。

他们结婚已经三十多年了，感情一直很好，从来没吵过架。

在北京的人多半没去过台湾，可是他们很喜欢吃台湾菜。

Remember: 了 is "cancelled" by 没 in the negative. The following sentences are incorrect:

wrong: 他们都没去过了西安。 wrong: 老师，我还没学过了那个字。
✓他们都没去过西安。 ✓老师，我还没学过那个字。

wrong: 她小时候在家没做过了家事，结了婚以后才学会做的。

✓她小时候在家没做过家事，结了婚以后才学会做的。

(cf. XIV.9.b. re the 是...的 pattern)

4. Combining 过... with the Sentence-了:

- a. 过 indicates that the subject has had the experience of doing something or has gone through a routine process. The Sentence-了 serves to indicate "change" (the nuance of "change" may be very weak), to convey a mild sense that time is moving on, or to round out a sentence:

别做什么菜了，我已经吃过晚饭了。

(round out sentence: without the 了 at the end, the sentence would end too abruptly)

我看过今天的报了。

(indicate change: i.e. 刚才我还没看过，现在看过了。)

在 IUP 学习了一个暑期，才算是真正吃过苦了。

(indicate change: 没在 IUP 学习过就不能算是吃过苦。)

- b. Together with quantification of the action or event, the combination of ～过… with the Sentence-了 indicates that the subject has gone through an action/event a certain number of times or for a certain amount *up to the present*, and the process may be continuing.

| | |
|------------|--|
| 他离过三次婚。 | He was divorced three times. |
| 他离过三次婚了。 | He has had three divorces (up 'til now). |
| 他已经离过三次婚了。 | He has already had three divorces (up 'til now). |

张艺谋的电影，我虽然看过很多部了，可是每一部都和以前的不一样。
(fan of Zhang Yimou's who is likely to catch every new movie that Zhang makes)

他这一辈子写过十来本书，教过几千个学生，却没恋爱过。
(summing up a person's life)
(what is the difference between 教过几千个学生 and 教过几千个学生了?)

他已经写过十来本小说了，但是肚子里还有不少没写出来的故事。
(there are more books to come)

医生已经试过很多不同的药了，可是还没找到一种能治这种病的。
(doctors will continue to experiment with more drugs...)

5. The aspect marker 着: 着 is often called the "progressive aspect marker," but this gives the misimpression that it can be equated with the progressive tense in English (which is manifested by the progressive suffix "-ing" in verbs). In reality, 着 is used mainly to indicate a "sustained state." The sustained state is not necessarily static, but it is an ongoing state:

他们在餐馆里坐着。 他们在餐馆里坐着等朋友。
他在床上躺着，眼睛还睁着，好像在想着什么似的。
请你在这儿等着，我去一下厕所，马上就回来。
我在路上走着走着，忽然想起童年的事情来了。
你是看着他长大的，应该知道他童年的很多事情吧？

The sustained state can be a state achieved as a result of an action, i.e. the verb can be a FV:

他把那幅国画挂在墙上了。(action)
墙上挂着一幅国画。(resultant sustained state)
我一到了清华，就把家人的照片放在桌子上了。(action)
我的桌子上放着我妻子、孩子的照片，这样我就不想家了。(resultant sustained state)
黑板上写着今天要练习的生词和句型。(sustained state)
我脸上和衣服上又没有写着什么，她怎么知道我的家庭背景呢？(sustained state)

The progressive tense in English is usually not translated into Chinese with the aspect marker 着, despite the native English speaker's inclination to equate 着 with the progressive tense.

| | |
|------------------------------|-----------------------|
| 我们正在上课呢。现在不能接电话。 | wrong: 我们在上着课呢。 |
| 我们正在谈中国的人口问题。 | wrong: 我们正在谈着中国的人口问题。 |
| 他们还在吃饭，等一会儿再来吧。 | wrong: 他们还在吃着饭，…… |
| 政府正在解决经济问题，现在需要的不是批评而是人民的合作。 | |

The idea of "in the midst of doing something" is conveyed by the adverb 在 or 正在, and not by the aspect marker 着。

6. The aspect marker 着 may be used with the first verb in a double-verb sentence, whereby the first verb refers to a sustained "background" against which the primary activity (conveyed by the second verb) takes place.

他们现在不忙，就是在那儿坐着聊天儿。

张教授身体不好，所以得坐着讲课。

他有个奇怪的习惯，喜欢一边听着古典音乐，一边做功课。

现在有不少家庭都看着电视吃饭，这样就失去了沟通的机会。

7. Chinese grammarians recognize three other "verbal aspects" (动词的状态), which are not manifested by verb aspect markers, but by totally different grammatical constructions. We introduce them here for the sake of comprehensiveness:

"Inchoative aspect" (开始态): Begin to do something, when it comes to doing something

V-起来: 东西贵起来了 大家都笑起来了。 听起来容易，做起来难。

"Continuative aspect" (继续态):

V-下去: 请说下去。 我干不下去了。 活不下去了。

The above two "aspects" are manifested through a sentence structure called the "resultative complement" (which does not necessarily entail "result"), which will be the substance of Lecture XII.

"Trial aspect" (尝试态): Reduplicating a FV to indicate that something is done casually or on a trial basis.

看看 听听看 试试 试试看 做做看

8. When a V-O is used with an aspect marker (了, 过 or 着), the object follows the aspect marker, e.g.:

吃了饭没有? 我们吵过架 睁着眼睛

Since some verbs are bisyllabic, how do we determine whether a two-syllable word is a bisyllabic verb or a V-O compound? The pitfall is that many single verbs in English translate into V-O compounds in Chinese.

Examples of bisyllabic verbs:

恋爱: 没恋爱过 帮助: 帮助过他 沟通: 沟通过 练习: 练习了半天
讨论: 讨论了很久 收拾: 收拾了东西 休息: 休息了一会儿

Examples of V-O compounds:

吵架: 没吵过架 帮忙: 帮了我的忙 教书: 教过书 堕胎: 堕过胎
看书: 看着书吃饭 打球: 打了两个小时的球

When you are uncertain as to whether a two-syllable word is a bisyllabic verb or a V-O compound, use one of more of the following tests:

- The two syllables of a bisyllabic verb tend to be synonyms, e.g. 帮助、休息、恋爱。
- The second syllable of a V-O is a *noun*, and serves the grammatical function of a generic object in the absence of a specific object.

V-O with generic object: 看书 教书 打球 吃饭
V-O with specific object: 看小说 教汉语 打篮球 吃西餐

- In some Chinese dictionaries, such as the 《现代汉语辞典》, the romanization of V-O compounds has a double slash symbol // between the V and the O to indicate separability, e.g.

教书 jiāo//shū 吵架 chǎo//jià 堕胎 duò//tāi

This symbol is not used in bisyllabic verbs, e.g.

讨论 tāolùn 恋爱 liàn'ài 沟通 gōutōng

Exercise: Identify each of the following two-syllable word as either a bisyllabic verb or a V-O.

| | | | |
|----|----|----|----|
| 分手 | 考察 | 面临 | 道歉 |
| 主张 | 估计 | 革命 | 鼓掌 |
| 出事 | 吹牛 | 起床 | 睡觉 |
| 出事 | 见面 | 培养 | 罚款 |
| 打架 | 放心 | 理解 | 认识 |
| 打听 | 保险 | 毕业 | 罢工 |
| 生气 | 保证 | 陪同 | 担心 |
| 丢脸 | 拜访 | 欺负 | 举办 |
| 丢脸 | 拼命 | 结婚 | 讲价 |
| 吃苦 | 洗澡 | 开始 | 辞职 |
| 吃惊 | 降价 | 照相 | 参加 |

Answers (not in student's copy):

| | | | |
|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| 分手 V-O | 考察 verb | 面临 verb | 道歉 V-O |
| 主张 verb | 估计 verb | 革命 V-O | 鼓掌 V-O |
| 出事 V-O | 吹牛 V-O | 起床 V-O | 睡觉 V-O |
| 出事 V-O | 见面 V-O | 培养 verb | 罚款 V-O |
| 打架 V-O | 放心 V-O | 理解 verb | 认识 verb |
| 打听 verb | 保险 V-O | 毕业 V-O | 罢工 V-O |
| 生气 V-O | 保证 verb | 陪同 verb | 担心 V-O |
| 丢脸 V-O | 拜访 verb | 欺负 verb | 举办 verb |
| 丢脸 V-O | 拼命 V-O | 结婚 V-O | 讲价 V-O |
| 吃苦 V-O | 洗澡 V-O | 开始 verb | 辞职 V-O |
| 吃惊 V-O | 降价 V-O | 照相 V-O | 参加 verb |