

## **From a Motion Verb to an Aspect Marker: A Study of *Guo* in Mandarin Chinese\***

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This paper aims to explore the various senses that *guo* possesses and discuss the motivations responsible for its semantic and syntactic diversity. Starting as a motion verb, *guo* has extended its use to a noun, a verb complement, part of a complex postverb as in *guolai* and *guoqu*, and a well-known EXPERIENTIAL marker. However, most of the previous studies on this lexeme focused mainly on its function as an aspect maker; little has been investigated about its core meaning and the relatedness among its various usages. In this paper, with an emphasis on the cognitive-linguistic processes involved, an image schema capturing the semantic basis of the path-related senses of *guo* will be proposed, and this will serve as the conceptual ground for its non-path-related uses, which will also be discussed. It will be demonstrated that extensions of its core meaning are made possible via metaphorical transfers from the SPATIAL to TEMPORAL, CONCRETE to ABSTRACT, and OBJECTIVE to SUBJECTIVE domains. Besides, with different profiles specified, *guo* can act either as a verb, meaning 'to pass over/across', or a noun, denoting 'a mistake'. Most important of all, I claim that in the V-*guo(lai/qu)* compounds with no path-related senses, those verb compounds behave like polarity items with restricted distributions, evidenced by their compatibility with negation, questions, and the *hai* construction, which implies a marginal sense. Furthermore, it will be shown that the choice of *lai* or *qu* is systematically rather than randomly determined. Lastly, possible grammaticalization paths concerning the word *guo* will be offered.

Key words: image schema; metaphorical extension; grammaticalization; profile

### **1. Introduction**

The lexical item *guo*, as a motion verb, has various but related senses. (1)-(3) are examples.

(1) a motion verb meaning 'to cross'

過河 *guo he* 'to cross a river', 過馬路 *guo malu* 'to cross a road', 過橋

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*guo qiao* ‘to cross a bridge’, 過磅 *guo bang* ‘to cross a scale to weigh’

(2) a motion verb meaning ‘to go through or over’

過山洞 *guo shandong* ‘to go through a tunnel’

過關 *guo guan* ‘to go through a checkpoint’

(3) a motion verb meaning ‘to pass by’

過門不入 *guo men bu ru* ‘to pass by the door without entering’

匆匆而過 *chong chong er guo* ‘to pass by hurriedly’

Besides these path-related senses, it can be employed to denote the meaning of ‘to transfer’:

(4) 過繼 *guo ji* ‘to adopt a child of one’s relative as one’s own’

過戶 *guo hu* ‘to transfer ownership (of bonds, stocks, property) from one person to another’

It can even be used to signify temporal relations, as in (5):

(5) 過日子 *guo rizi* ‘to pass the days to live’, 過年 *guo nian* ‘to pass the year’

What’s more, it means ‘to surpass’ in (6) and has the function of illustrating ‘excessiveness’ as in (7):

(6) 過期 *guo qi* ‘to have passed the deadline’, 過分 *guo fen* ‘to go beyond the norm’, 過人 *guo ren* ‘to surpass others’, 過癮 *guo yin* ‘to do something to one’s heart’s content’

(7) 過火 *guo huo* ‘to go beyond proper limits’

過慮 *guo lu* ‘to be worrying too much’

It can also act as a noun, meaning ‘a mistake’:

- (8) 過錯 *guo cuo* ‘a mistake’

In addition, *guo* is surfaced as a verb complement expressing the result of the path-related action as in (9) or that of a non-path related sense in (10):

- (9) 跳過 *tiao guo* ‘to jump over/across’, 通過山洞 *tong guo shandong* ‘to go through a tunnel’, 經過家門 *jing guo jiamen* ‘to pass by the door’  
(10) 勝過 *sheng guo* ‘to win over’, 通過考試 *tong guo kaoshi* ‘to pass an exam’, 經過三天 *jing guo san tian* ‘three days have passed’

Given this, it is not uncommon to find *bu* or *de* in these V-R compounds, as shown in (11):

- (11) 比不得過 *bi bu/de guo* ‘to be able/unable to be superior to’, 說不得過 *shuo bu/de guo* ‘to be able/unable to outtalk’, 瞞不得過 *man bu/de guo* ‘to be able/unable to hide the truth’

More specifically, *guo* can combine with *lai* and *qu* to form verb compounds like *guolai* and *guoqu*, which can further act as complex verbal complements in V-*guolai(qu)*:

- (12) 看不過去 *kan bu guoqu* ‘to be unable to overlook’, 說不過去 *shuo bu guoqu* ‘to be unacceptable to one’s sense of propriety or justice’, 昏過去 *hun guoqu* ‘to pass out’, 忙不過來 *mang bu guolai* ‘to be too busy to handle’, 轉不過來 *zhuan bu guolai* ‘to be unable to understand’, 照顧不過來 *zhaogu bu guolai* ‘to be unable to take care of’, 改過來 *gai guolai* ‘to correct one’s mistake; to change’, 醒過來 *xing guolai* ‘to come

around’

Last but not least, *guo*, when following a verb in sentences, can either indicate the completion of the action or be manifested as an EXPERIENTIAL aspect marker, specifying that the event or action designated by the verb happened at least once prior to a reference time:

(13) 你 現在 不能 去, 吃 過 飯 再 去。

Ni xianzai buneng qu, chi guo fan zai qu.

2SG now cannot go eat GUO rice then go

‘You cannot go now; go after you have had the meal.’

(14) 我 去 過 美國 兩 次。

Wo qu guo meiguo liang ci.

1SG go GUO America two times

‘I have been to America twice.’

With all these facts, I will, following Lakoff’s (1987) figure/ground distinction in dealing with the word ‘over’, propose a central schema and its elaborations for the variants of the motion verb *guo*. Then with the focus on the end point of the profiled relation, the nominal use of *guo* can be justified. And through metaphorical extension, all the other non-path-related senses of *guo* will be elegantly explained. In particular, *guolai* and *guoqu* as V-R compounds or complex verb complements will be examined. Lastly, possible grammaticalization paths of *guo* will be offered.

## 2. Theoretical Background

Grammaticalization has long been conceived of as a process whereby a lexical item with its meaning ‘bleached’ or ‘weakened’ comes to assume a grammatical function (Hopper & Traugott 1993, Heine, Claudi & Hunnemeyer 1991). According to Heine et al. (1991), what motivates and underlies this is a specific cognitive principle called the ‘principle of the exploitation of old means for novel functions’ by Werner

and Kaplan (1963:403). Given this principle, concrete concepts are used to describe or explain abstract phenomena. Heine et al. (1991:28) claim that

‘In this way, clearly delineated and/or clearly structured entities are recruited to conceptualize less clearly delineated or structured entities, non-physical experiences are understood in terms of physical experiences, time in terms of space, cause in terms of time, or abstract relations in terms of kinetic processes or spatial relations, etc.’

This view not only corresponds to the general semantic changes that a word may undergo but also reflects the major characteristic of metaphor, mappings from the concrete domain to the abstract and from the objective to the subjective. Besides, as is often maintained by cognitive linguists, what may serve as source concepts are those elementary human experiences, related with the physical state, behavior, or the environment of human beings. Since space is our primary sphere of experience, no wonder we humans are inclined to base abstract concepts on the spatial notion (Heine et al. 1991). Henceforth, words denoting movement such as ‘come’ and ‘go’ are cross-linguistically known to serve as source concepts. In this paper, I will adopt such a cognitive-semantic approach to account for various uses that the word *guo* possesses by highlighting the importance of metaphorical transfer of lexical semantic/image schema and context-induced reinterpretation (cf. Liu 1997).

According to Lakoff (1987), an image schema is a simple and basic cognitive structure derived from our everyday experiences in the world. It is a mental picture revealing how the world is perceived. By means of it, not only can concrete concepts be activated but abstract phenomena can be fully explained via the metaphorical extension of this central schema. To represent a cognitive configuration of a concept, one needs to be equipped with three elements, namely (a) trajector, which moves along, (b) a path, and is seen as being related to, and (c) a landmark. The relationship of trajector, path, and landmark can suffice to distinguish one concept from another as well as to account for the various senses of a concept, which do not diverge much from the central schema. Besides, these mental images can provide metaphors with the source models, and assist us in conceptualizing abstract categories and cognitive

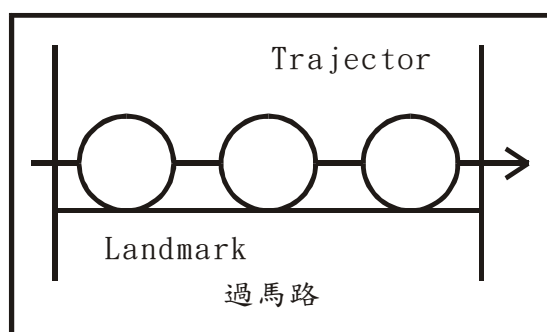
models. Through metaphor, a mapping from one cognitive model onto another, abstract concepts can thus be generated and easily understood.

### 3. The Polysemous *Guo*

#### 3.1 *Guo* as a Full-fledged Verb

##### 3.1.1 The central image schema for *guo*

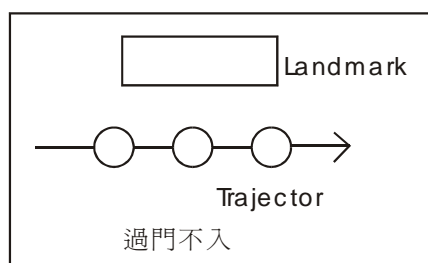
In view of the polysemous nature of *guo*, I propose a central image schema for its crossing sense, which can later be referred to other related senses, the going-through/over sense and the passing-by sense. First of all, let's start with a graphic representation of the image schema of GUO, which underlies the example 過馬路 *guo malu* 'to cross a road':



**Figure 1.** Central schema for GUO

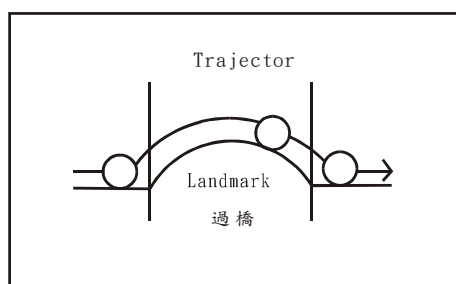
In this schema, the arrow represents the path that the trajector is moving along, and the path goes all the way across the landmark from the boundary of one side to the boundary of the other side. That is, the trajector moves across the landmark, the road. One point worthy of note is that there is contact between the trajector and the landmark. This schema undoubtedly fits other examples such as 過街 *guo jie* 'to cross a street' and 過磅 *guo bang* 'to cross a scale to weigh'. Although the drawing in Figure 1 indicates contact between the trajector and the landmark, there are instances without contact or even instances with the sense of 'going through'. In other words, as long as some information is added to the central schema, other related senses of *guo* can be derived. For example, we may specify that there is no contact between the trajector

and the landmark as in (3) 過門不入 *guo men bu ru* ‘pass by the door without entering’ and 匆匆而過 *chong chong er guo* ‘pass by hurriedly’, shown schematically below:

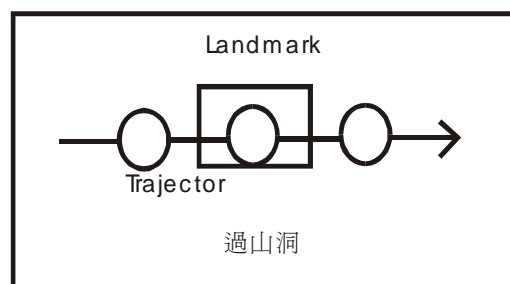


**Figure 2.** Variant of the central schema for GUO

The landmark can also be of various nature; that is, it may be viewed as different geometric shapes: as an arc in 過橋 *guo qiao* ‘to cross a bridge’, illustrated in Figure 3, or as a vertical or three-dimensional form with a passage through it as in 過山洞 *guo shandong* ‘to go through a tunnel’ and 過關 *guo guan* ‘to go through a checkpoint’, presented schematically in Figure 4:



**Figure 3.** Variant of the central schema



**Figure 4.** Variant of the central schema

In summary, with a few modifications to the central schema of *guo*, elaborations can thus be generated. More accurately, the relationship between the variants of the schema can be due to rotation of the landmark (vertical vs. horizontal) or transformation of the landmark (two dimensional vs. one dimensional) (cf. Lakoff 1987). It is also noticed that there may be contact or no contact between the trajector

and the landmark and that in some cases the trajector can even move through the landmark.

### 3.1.2 Metaphorical extensions of the verb *guo*

By means of elaborations, we can account for the various path-related uses of the motion verb *guo*. As for phrases in (4), (5), (6), (7), and (8), we need to rely on conceptual metaphors to give us an elegant explanation.

Take 過日子 *guo rizi* ‘to pass the days to live’ for example. The reading is based on a structural mapping from the cognitive model SPACE onto the model TIME. What is ‘crossed’ is not an area but a certain amount of time, with boundaries. In other words, the semantic shift is attributed to spatial metaphor TIME IS SPACE, wherein the meaning ‘cross’ is transferred from the spatial to the temporal domain. Mapping of this kind is universally found and can satisfactorily account for cases such as 過年 *guo nian* ‘to pass the year’ and 過生日 *guo shengri* ‘to pass the birthday’.

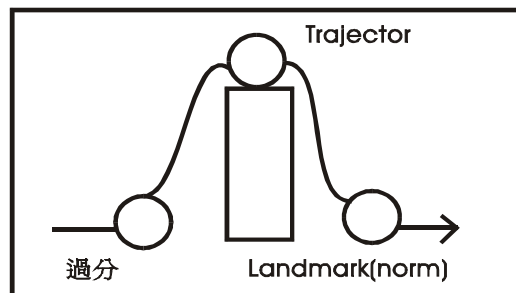
As is often the case, the beginning point and the ending point of a path are often at different locations in space. Cases such as 過戶 *guo hu* ‘to transfer ownership (of bonds, stocks, property) from one person to another’ and 過繼 *guo ji* ‘to adopt a child of one’s relative as one’s own’, in which either the ownership or the entities undergo transference, involve a change of state. Therefore, the relationship can be easily understood as coding a metaphorical change of location. This means that a change of state, transference in these cases, can be easily understood in terms of a motion verb and its ‘movement’ to a new ‘location’. In this way, the meaning of ‘transfer’ can be obtained. The trajector, identified with the objects or persons transferred, originates in one place and ends in another.

As for (6) 過期 *guo qi* ‘to have passed the deadline’, 過分 *guo fen* ‘to go beyond the norm’, 過人 *guo ren* ‘to surpass others’, and 過癮 *guo in* ‘to do something to one’s heart’s content’, we rely on models of the concrete world to conceptualize abstract phenomena. In these phrases, the common concept is that of ‘to surpass’. To express the concept with the central image schema provided, the landmark is no longer a concrete object; instead, it may refer to the deadline, the



present, the ordinary people, etc. That is, an objective reference point comes to be identified with the ground. It may be called a norm/standard as in 過分 *guo fen* ‘to go beyond the norm’, a reference time or place relevant for the situation as in 過期 *guo qi* ‘to have passed the deadline’. In the cases of 過人 *guo ren* ‘to surpass others’ and 過癮 *guo in* ‘to do something to one’s heart’s content’, the state of superiority, i.e. surpassing ordinary people, and that of overwhelming enjoyment are evoked.

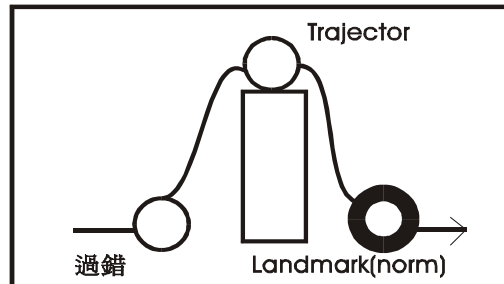
In most cases, however, when some entity passes over the norm, it exceeds the limit, goes into extremes, and thus often invites the inference of ‘excessiveness’, which results in the negative sense embodied in phrases like (7) 過火 *guo huo* ‘to go beyond proper limits’ and 過慮 *guo lu* ‘to be worrying too much’. In these cases, the metaphor PASSING OVER A NORM IS OVER is exploited. And the norm will be envisioned as a vertical scale, indicating the amount or number appropriate or relevant for the event under discussion. The schema is illustrated below:



**Figure 5.** Schematic representation for the concept of ‘to surpass’

A well-known avenue of semantic extension is for the profile of a complex relation to be restricted to its final state; the extended meaning then constitutes a stative relation (Talmy 1996). A good example of it is the static use of the preposition *over* in *The painting is over the fireplace*. In this case, it is the final state of the movement ‘over’ that is highlighted (cf. Lakoff 1987). Along the same lines, *guo* can be interpreted as ‘a mistake’ if the result caused by the path over the norm is specified. Figure 6 illustrates the schematic representation of the nominal use of *guo*. Therefore, following Talmy’s (1996) framework of path windowing, the fictive or imaginary path

can assist us in conceptualizing the static use of *guo*, a noun in (8) 過錯 *guo cuo* ‘a mistake’.



**Figure 6.** Schematic representation of the static/nominal use of GUO

Furthermore, based on the trend of language development and ‘the principle of exploitation of old means for novel functions’, it is natural and plausible that a nominal *guo* can be recruited as an intransitive verb through the shifting of functions as in 過則勿憚改 *guo ze wu dan gai* ‘When making mistakes, do not be afraid of mending your ways.’

So far, it is demonstrated that the extensions of the central schema can successfully account for the non-path-related senses of the verb *guo* and its nominal use. What should be noted is that the landmark can be conceptualized either as an amount of time or as a norm, the path over which carries the sense of excessiveness and may often, though not necessarily, result in a negative sense.

### 3.1.3 On *guolai* and *guoqu*

As is well-known, directional verbs such as *lai* and *qu* are often called deictic verbs. *Lai* means ‘toward the speaker’ and *qu* means ‘away from the speaker’. Therefore, when they function as verbal complements or V2 in resultative verb compounds, they indicate the direction of the whole movement or action. Schematically speaking, when it is the path-related senses of *guo* that are being discussed, *guolai* signals the movement toward the speaker, and *guoqu*, away from the speaker, as exemplified below:

(15) 車 過來 了, 上 車 吧。

Che guolai le, shang che ba.

Car GUOLAI LE, on car PRT

‘Here comes the car; get on it.’

(16) 他們 剛剛 過去。

Tamen ganggang guoqu.

3PL just GUOQU

‘They just went over.’

However, as is noted by Lu (1980), *guoqu* and *guolai* mean much more than the basic sense illustrated in (15) and (16). *Guolai* can be used to indicate the experience of getting over an obstacle, as in (17) and *guoqu* can signal that a certain amount of time has passed (18), that a certain state of affairs no longer exists (19), or even that a death is designated (20):

(17) 大 風 大 浪 我 都 過 來 了, 這 點 小 風 浪 算 什 麼?

Ta feng ta lang wo dou guolai le, zhe dian xiao feng lang suan sheme?

Big wind big wave 1SG DOU GUOLAI LE this bit small wind wave count what

‘I have experienced great difficulties and challenges; this little challenge counts little to me.’

(18) 三 個 小 時 過 去 了, 事 情 還 是 沒 完 成。

San ge xiaoshi guoqu le, shiqing haishi mei wancheng.

Three CL hour GUOQU LE thing still not finish

‘Three hours have passed, but this (thing) has not been finished yet.’

(19) 危 險 期 已 經 過 去 了。

Weixian qi yijing guoqu le.

Dangerous period already GUOQU LE

‘The critical period has already passed.’

(20) 他 祖 父 昨 天 過 去 了。

Ta zufu zuotian guoqu le.

3SG grandfather yesterday GUOQU LE

‘His grandfather died yesterday.’

These specific meanings unquestionably are derived from the compositional meanings of phrases *guolai* and *guoqu*. As is well-established and will be discussed in the following section, *guo* can be used as an EXPERIENTIAL aspect marker denoting experiences either in the domain of space or that of time. The metaphor at work is PASSING IS EXPERIENCING. So there is no doubt about the use of *guo* with an experiential sense in these cases.

The choice of either *qu* or *lai* should be attributed to the inherent properties that each word possesses. Based on Huang’s (1977) analysis of the semantics of *lai*, expressions involving a state-changing verb and postverbal *lai* together indicate an entry into a normal state. It follows that *lai* should be chosen in (17), for all the obstacles have been cleared and the speaker has returned to a normal state. Besides, Huang offers an explanation about the use of *qu*. According to him, the moving-time metaphor is responsible for locutions such as *qunian* ‘last year’ and *lairi* ‘the coming days’. That is, by applying the moving-time metaphor, we treat time as the trajector in motion in the central schema and the ego as the stable reference point, the landmark. Time ‘moves’ in the direction of the speaker. Along these lines, the future will be identified with *lai*, while the past, *qu*. That is how the relatedness of *guoqu* with time in (18) is justified. Because of the frequent association of *guoqu* with time, the phrase 過去 *guoqu* is lexicalized, denoting the sense of ‘(in the) past’. Besides, there is a strong tendency for the reference point to be equated with the moment of speaking, which indicates a high degree of subjectivity as in 過去十年 *guoqu shi nian* ‘the past ten years’. Moreover, as is discussed by Chen (1997), *qu* in Southern Min is primarily associated with the meanings of decay, disappearance, or indicates adversative aspects of a certain state. This is the same with *qu* in Mandarin. In (19), the use of *guoqu* specifies the disappearance of the critical period, while *guoqu* in (20) denotes the ceasement of existence or disappearance of a living state, that is, the ending of life.

All in all, in the resultative verb compound of *guolai* or *guoqu*, *lai* and *qu*

designate the result, the main focus of the phrase. The reading of the whole phrases primarily depends on the inherent properties/senses of these two words. No wonder that *lai* and *qu* play such a significant role in the interpretation of these sentences.

### 3.2 *Guo* as a Verbal Complement

In the previous sections, only the various uses of the full-fledged verb *guo* are under examination. However, *guo* is often found to act as a verbal complement in resultative verb compounds. For instance, *guo* can act as a verbal complement when the person or the object moves along with the action, exemplified in (21) and (22).

(21) 他 跳 過 那 條 溝 了。

Ta tiao guo na tiao gou le.

3SG jump GUO that CL ditch LE

‘He jumped over the ditch.’

(22) 我 接 過 獎 狀 走 下 台 去。

Wo jie guo jiangzhuang zou xia tai qu.

1SG take GUO prize walk down stage go

‘I took the prize with the hand and went off the stage.’

In these cases, *guo* still denotes the path-related sense, motion, even though what undergoes movement may be a person or an object. On the other hand, cases such as 經過 *jing guo* ‘to go through’, 通過 *tong guo* ‘to pass’, and 勝過 *sheng guo* ‘to win over’ can also be observed:

(23) 我 通 過 考 試 了。

Wo tong guo kaoshi le.

1SG pass GUO exam PRT

‘I have passed the exam.’

(24) 在 經 過 種 種 磨 難 之 後, 他 變 得 更 成 熟 了。

Zai jing guo zhongzhong muonan zhihou, ta biande geng chengshou le.

In experience GUO kind-kind difficulty after 3SG become more mature PTR  
 ‘After experiencing all kinds of difficulties, he became more mature.’

(25) 這一次，我勝過你了。

Zhe yi ci, wo sheng guo ni le.

This CL time 1SG win GUO 2SG LE

‘This time, I excelled you.’

It goes without saying that 經過 *jing guo* ‘to go through’ and 通過 *tong guo* ‘to pass’ can denote path-related senses.<sup>1</sup> In the above sentences (23) to (25), the metaphorical use of *guo* is employed and the central schema serves as the source model. Via metaphorization, the ‘landmark’ has turned from a concrete one into an abstract one. Following Liu (1997), the path schema suggests the concept of ‘getting through an obstacle or challenge’. The landmark for the moving entity to pass over or through is conceptualized no longer as a norm as in previous cases like 過分 *guo fen* ‘to go beyond the norm’ and 過期 *guo qi* ‘to have passed the deadline’ but as an **obstacle or challenge** in life. As long as a person passes over the obstacle or challenges he faces, then he can continue his path in life. Under such circumstances, the metaphor WINNING IS OVER comes into play.

All these facts seem to suggest that in the V-*guo*-(NP) construction, not only are the V and NP changing and expanding their domains from the path-related senses to those non-path-related ones, but *guo* also undergoes a semantic extension from <motion> to <result>. That is, the notion of ‘to cross’ suggests a motion verb on the first hand, and through contiguity the verb of ‘to cross’ may come to indicate the result or accomplishment of the action denoted by the head verb. The spatial notion extends to the domain of quality---the result. Therefore, in constructions where *guo* acts as a verbal complement, not only is the path-related sense activated but the result of the action designated by V1 is highlighted.

According to Li and Thompson (1981), there are a few result verbs, V2, whose

<sup>1</sup> 經過 *jing guo* ‘to pass by’ can even be employed to relate to time, as in 經過二年 *jing guo liang nian* ‘two years have passed.’

presence in a resultative verb compound (RVC) indicates that the compound can occur only in the potential form, and *guo* is among them. That is, they are obligatorily in the potential form. A point worthy of note is that the use of *guo*'s in these phrases is closely associated with the interpretation of 'to surpass'. Examples are found in (11), repeated here in (26):

- (26) 比不/得過 *bi bu/de guo* 'to be able/unable to be superior to', 說不/得過 *shuo bu/de guo* 'to be able/unable to outtalk', 瞞不/得過 *man bu/de guo* 'to be able/unable to hide the truth'

A closer examination of the distribution of such compounds points to the direction that these RVCs obligatorily in the potential form are in fact negative polarity items. In other words, they should occur mainly in the negative form. Even in cases where they occur with *-de-* rather than *-bu-*, the negative connotation of the compound is the one generated. Evidence is adduced from frequent occurrences of *V-de-guo*'s in questions, negation (with other polarity items) and the *hai* construction. Seldom are they found in a purely descriptive, affirmative statement:

- (27) 你 說 得 過 他 嗎? 我 說 不 過 他。  
 Ni shuo de guo ta ma? Wo shuo bu guo ta.  
 2SG talk DE GUO 3SG QST 1SG say not GUO 3SG  
 'Can you outtalk him? I cannot outtalk him.'
- (28) 沒 有 人 瞞 得 過 他。  
 Mei you ren man de guo ta.  
 Not have man hide-the-truth DE GUO 3SG  
 'No one can hide the truth from him.'
- (29) 我 還 跑 得 過 約 翰。  
 Wo hai pao de guo yuehan.  
 1SG still run DE GUO John  
 'I can barely outrun John.'

(30) ?你 說 得 過 他 。

Ni shuo de guo ta.

2SG talk DE GUO 3SG

‘You can outtalk him.’

In (27) and (28), *V-de-guo*’s occur in the question and negation respectively, which conforms to the distribution of polarity items such as ‘any’. In (29), the use of 還 *hai* ‘still’ invokes a marginal sense (cf. *barely* in English).<sup>2</sup> In other words, the reading of (29) is that *even though I can outrun John, it is only a borderline case on the scale*. Since it is also related to the sense of ‘to surpass’, a vertical scale similar to the one used in the discussion of 過分 *guo fen* ‘to go beyond the norm’ is employed.

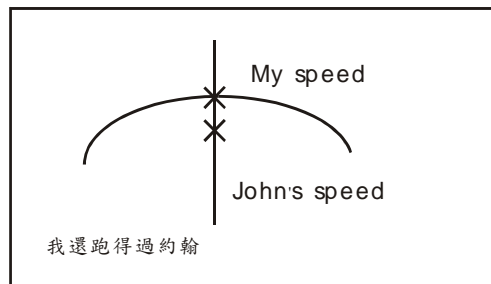


Figure 7. Schematic representation of a marginal sense

In this schema, the trajector is still the agent, but the landmark is transferred to a vertical scale, revealing different degrees of ‘ability’. Bearing this analysis in mind, we can account for the occurrences of *guo* as a verbal complement carrying the sense of ‘surpass’ in V-R compounds obligatorily in the potential form.

In this section, it is demonstrated that for those senses of *guo* related directly or metaphorically to the sense of motion, it is possible for V-*guo*’s such as 經過 *jing guo* ‘to pass by’ and 跳過 *tiao guo* ‘to jump over/across’ to occur in non-potential forms.

<sup>2</sup> As claimed by Michaelis (1993), the use of *still* indicates a borderline case on the scale of being safe in the sentence *Compact cars are still fairly safe; subcompacts start to get dangerous*. 還 *hai* is often used in the same way as *still* is; therefore, I suggest the use of 還 *hai* in (29) also signals a marginal sense.



However, for those obligatorily in the potential form, strongly connected to the sense of ‘to surpass’, a negative connotation is often derived or a borderline case is implicated even when *-de-*, the affirmative form, is employed.

### 3.3 *Guo* as Part of Complex Verbal Complements

In verb compounds, it is not uncommon to find complex complements consisting of directional verbs followed by other directional verbs like *lai* and *qu*. A large number of instances can be found in (12), repeated here in (31):

- (31) 看不過去 *kan bu guoqu* ‘to be unable to overlook’, 說不過去 *shuo bu guoqu* ‘to be unacceptable to one’s sense of propriety or justice’, 昏過去 *hun guoqu* ‘to pass out’, 忙不過來 *mang bu guolai* ‘to be too busy to handle’, 轉不過來 *zhuan bu guolai* ‘to be unable to understand’, 照顧不過來 *zhaogu bu guolai* ‘to be unable to take care of’, 改過來 *gai guolai* ‘to correct one’s mistake; to change’, 醒過來 *xing guolai* ‘to come around’

Since the path-related senses such as 跑過來/去 *pao guolai/qu* ‘to run here/there’ can be easily inferred and understood, in the following I will first discuss the use of *V-guolai* and *V-guoqu* with no insertion of *-bu-* and *-de-* and then elaborate on those cases in the potential form.

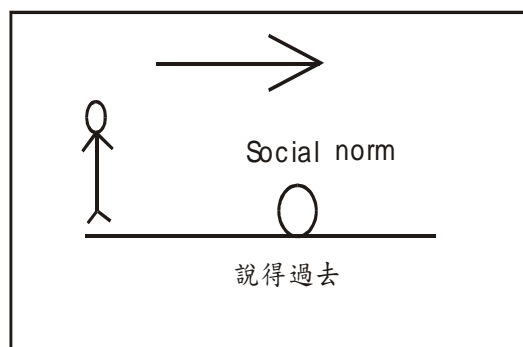
As is discussed in section 3.1.3 about *guolai* and *guoqu*, it is indicated that the use of *lai* can signal the returning to the normal state, while *qu*, the opposite of *lai*, is thereby used to signal the departure from the normal state. Given this, cases such as 昏過去 *hun guoqu* ‘to pass out’, 改過來 *gai guolai* ‘to correct one’s mistake; to change’, and 醒過來 *xing guolai* ‘to come around’ can be explained. As for cases like 看不過去 *kan bu guoqu* ‘to be unable to overlook’, 忙不過來 *mang bu guolai* ‘to be too busy to handle’, etc., we need not only to resort to the conclusion that we have just reached about RVCs obligatorily in the potential form but to rely on the

interpretation of *lai* and *qu* in terms of **subjectivity**.

Let's start with *V-guoqu* first. The *guo* here also possesses the meaning of 'to surpass'; therefore, it is plausible to suggest that a norm should be postulated for the verbal sense of *guo* to pass over. The use of *qu* here indicates that the norm is not set by the speaker, but by the society or by the relevant situation, i.e. a **social norm**. Examples from Lu (1980) strongly demonstrate this:

- (32) 你是個幹部, 不帶個頭, 說得過去嗎?  
 Ni shi ge ganbu, bu daigetou, shuo de guoqu ma?  
 2SG be CL cadre not initiate say DE GUOQU QST  
 'You are a cadre; is it acceptable not to do the initiating?'
- (33) 這麼做還說得過去吧。  
 Zheme zuo hai shuo de guoqu ba.  
 So do still say DE GUOQU QST  
 'Is it acceptable to say so?'

In (32), the norm is how the society expects a cadet to behave; it is true of (33), which implies the common standard regulated by the situation or the society. This may be schematized below, meaning 'barely making it':



**Figure 8.** Mental representation of *V-de-guoqu*

More importantly, these two sentences further support the generalization that we have arrived at—*V-de-guoqu*'s are polarity items. (32) takes the form of a question, and

*V-de-guoqu* in (33) co-occurs with *hai*.

As for cases of *guolai*, what is depicted is a speaker-oriented norm, that is, a **subjective** standard set by the speaker. So within the mind of each speaker, there exists a scale on which the value in question is located, as in Figure 9.

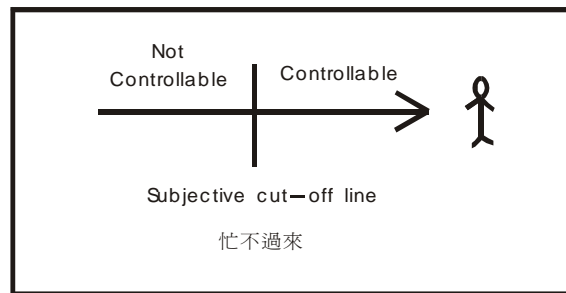


Figure 9. Mental representation of *V-bu-guolai*

As is revealed in this scalar analysis, one of the extreme ends of the scale is the range within which the speaker is capable of handling entities relevant to the situation. Since what can be handled or not should be dependent on the speaker's viewpoint, it therefore should be a subjective norm rather than a social one. And the use of *lai* is attributed to the returning to a subjective, handlable state from what is beyond control:

(34) 人 太多, 我 恐怕 照顧 不過來。

Ren tai duo, wo kongpa zhaogu bu guolai.

Person too many 1SG afraid take-care-of not GUOLAI

'There are too many people; I am afraid of not being able to take care of them all.'

(35) A: 他 都 已經 快 忙 不過 來了, 你 還 煩 他?

B: 不會 啦! 我 還 應 付 得 過 來。

A: Ta dou yijing kuai mang bu guolai le, ni hai fan ta?

3SG DOU already almost busy not GUOLAI LE 2SG still bother 3SG

'He is almost too busy to handle (everything); why still bother him?'

B: Buhui la! Wo hai ingfu de guolai.

Not PTS 1SG still handle DE GUOLAI  
 ‘No (trouble). I can still handle it.’

(34) illustrates that the number of the people is not within the range which the speaker is able to cope with. And (35) demonstrates that *V-de-guolai*'s are speaker-oriented rather than space-oriented, evidenced by the fact that the two speakers both use the complement *-guolai*.

In summary, drawing on the previous discussion and observations, it is claimed that *V-de/bu-guo(lai/qu)*'s are polarity items based on their compatibility with questions, negations, and the *hai* construction, and that the choice of *lai* or *qu* in *V-de/bu-guolai/qu* is not randomly determined. It is the social norm that triggers the use of *qu*, whereas it is owing to the speaker's subjective norm or standard that *lai* is employed.

### 3.4 *Guo* As an Aspectual Marker

In the literature, *guo* following a verb has long been treated either as a marker showing the completion of the action denoted by the main verb or as an EXPERIENTIAL aspect marker, signifying that the event or action described has already been experienced and is over at the speech time. However, few people question the motivation for this grammaticalized element and its diverse functions. As aforementioned, due to the finiteness of the linguistic forms, people tend to extend the use of existing forms for the expression of new concepts. This is the process whereby a lexical content word assumes a grammatical status. Therefore, by adopting the cognitive-semantic approach, we can attribute the grammaticalization to the metaphorical extension of the central schema for GUO and the context-induced interpretation.

In the first place, let's talk about *guo* as a marker signaling the completion of the action. Schematically speaking, *guo*, as a motion verb, denotes the passing of a landmark with boundaries as in 過橋 *guo qiao* 'to cross a bridge'. The landmark, the object of 橋 *qiao* 'a bridge', helps to measure out or delimit the event. So when the

passing is done, the action is completed. In other words, the motion verb ‘to cross’ often implies the completion of the action. Therefore, when *guo* follows another verb, it is plausible and likely for *guo* not to signal the movement but to be extended as a marker signaling the completion of the head verb by applying the metaphor PASSING IS COMPLETING. That’s how we interpret sentences such as (13) repeated here as (36) and (37).

(36) 你 現在 不能 去, 吃 過 飯 再 去。

Ni xianzai buneng qu, chi guo fan zai qu.

2SG now cannot go eat GUO rice then go

‘You cannot go now; go after you have had the meal.’

(37) 你 必須 問 過 我 才 能 離 開。

Ni bixu wen guo wo cai neng likai.

2SG must ask GUO 1SG then can leave

‘You can leave only after you have asked me (for permission).’

In these two sentences, no path-related sense is involved; neither does *guo* stand for the result of the action as in RVC’s. The only reading obtained is the completion of the main verbs 吃 *chi* ‘eat’ and 問 *wen* ‘ask’.

Secondly, *guo* can often act as an EXPERIENTIAL aspect marker. As is noted by Liu (1997), ‘the spatial motion of going through or across an object is compared to the temporal experiencing of an activity.’ In other words, it is due to the inference of the completion of an action which the motion ‘to cross’ often invites along with the mapping from the SPATIAL to TEMPORAL domains that the experiential sense is generated, for if something is over, it must have been experienced. The metaphor EXPERIENCING IS OVER is exploited, and the EXPERIENTIAL *guo* refers to the phenomenon that ‘the state of being associated with the happening is over’ with respect to the speech time.

In short, *guo* in the *V-guo*-(NP) construction doesn’t necessarily function as a resultative complement to denote the result of the main verb, but most of the time

serves as an aspect marker to specify the experience achieved as in 看過 *kan guo* ‘to have seen’, 做過 *zuo guo* ‘to have done’, and 想到過 *xiangdao guo* ‘to have thought about’. And it is due to the temporal usage of *guo* and its contiguity to verbs that enable *guo* to undergo a semantic extension and develop an aspectual sense.

But how can one distinguish the first use of *guo* from the second one? As for this, we have to rely on the contexts for the right interpretation. *Guo*, as an aspectual marker, can only be used to talk about the *realis* rather than the *irrealis*. Therefore, if *guo* can occur in imperatives or sentences of future tenses, it is out of question that *guo* signifies the completion of the action rather than the experience, as in (36) and (37). But for *guo*'s occurring in contexts related to the past, either the sense of completion or that of experiencing can be induced. Given this, it is evident that the context is of significance and key to the correct interpretation of linguistic expressions.

In sum, the analysis of *guo* extended from a lexical item to a grammatical marker is cognitively attractive because it is based on the metaphorical extension of the image schema and contiguity, two key cognitive notions fundamental and essential to human conceptualization of more abstract phenomena.

#### 4. Grammaticalization of *Guo*

The grammaticalization process of *guo* provides an interesting and significant illustration for the cognitive-semantic explanation. As discussed previously, the basic sense of *guo* refers to a spatial motion and the image schematic structure illustrated in Figure 1 provides the conceptual basis for all its meaning shifts in later stages.

The transition from *guo* as a full-fledged verb meaning ‘to cross’ to *guo* as an aspect marker involves the existence of a verbal complement, signaling the result of the action or process conveyed by the first element. When used as a verbal complement, *guo* doesn't function as a full-fledged verb. As suggested by Hopper and Thompson (1984), lexical categoriality such as nouns and verbs should be determined in terms of their prototypical discourse functions. A prototypical verb is to assert the occurrence of an event as if to answer the question ‘what happened?’ Concerning serial verbs, Hopper and Thompson state (1984:734-35):

‘A V form which shares ‘the spotlight’ with another is less like a V in reporting an event than one which reports the event by itself....A single V in a series cannot convey what ‘happened’ in the discourse in which it occurs.’

This also works for the status of a V2---a verbal complement. Its distribution as a verbal complement is more restricted, and it itself doesn’t form a syntactic unit and has to be combined with the head verb. It is syntactically dependent. Semantically speaking, it is not as concrete, kinetic, visible, and effective as the original verb *guo* with the meaning ‘to cross’. In other words, it reveals the resultative state of being rather than the attributes of a directional verb. In this perspective, the verbal complement *guo* is a less prototypical verb than the main verb *guo*. It becomes a more peripheral member of the V category. It is no wonder that a marginal *guo* is more likely to develop into an aspect marker in the construction V-*guo*-(NP). Structurally speaking, *guo* develops from a full-fledged verb via a verbal complement to an aspect marker. The grammaticalization process can be summarized as below:

**(38) A full-fledged verb (*guo malu*) > a verbal complement (*jing guo*) > an aspect marker (*chi guo*)**

This structural divergence corresponds to the ‘cline of grammaticality’, which synchronically refers to a continuum at one hand of which is a fuller lexical form, and at the opposite end, a reduced grammatical form (Hopper & Traugott 1993).

**(39) Content item > grammatical word > inflectional affix**

That is, what begins with a verbal meaning is gradually shifted to the status of a verbal complement, then to an aspect marker, where the semantic content of the verbal meaning becomes weaker and weaker via a series of pragmatic devices involving human cognition. Given this, it can be claimed that the word *guo*, as an aspect marker (inflectional affix), has moved to the stage of being morphological.

Besides, viewed from the perspective of categorial metaphors (Claudi & Heine

1986), the sense extensions of *guo*'s core meaning 'to cross' display a scale of a metaphorical abstraction:

(40) **SPACE** (*guo malu*) > **TIME** (*guo rizi*) > **QUALITY** (*guo fen*).

The need to communicate in a concrete and direct way urges people to draw on a limited set of domains to describe an abstract relation. As is noted by Sapir (1921) and quoted in Heine et al. (1991):

It would be impossible for any language to express every concrete idea by an independent word or radical element. The concreteness of experience is infinite, the resources of the richest language are strictly limited. It must perforce throw countless concepts under the rubric of certain basic ones, using other concrete or semi-concrete ideas as functional mediators.  
(quoted in Heine et al. 1991:27)

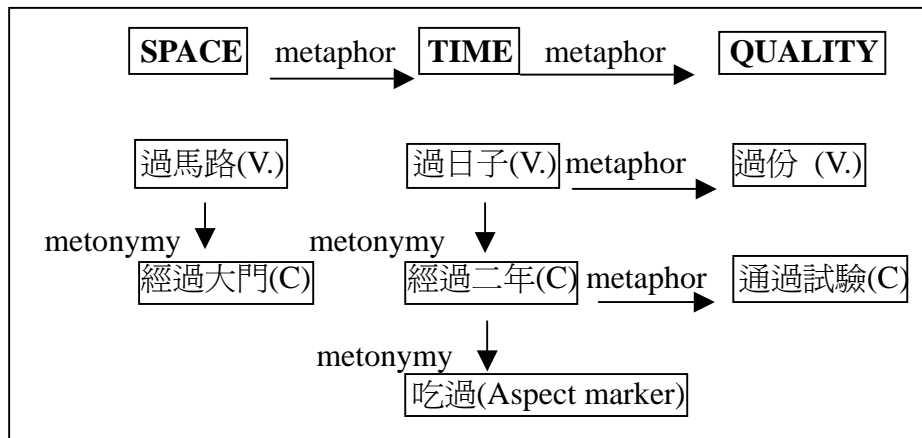
People tend to use a conceptually concrete item to express those more abstract. Abstract concepts are understood and expressed metaphorically in spatial terms, which are believed to be more basic to human perception and conceptualization. As is shown in the scale, the arrangement is unidirectional; a given category may take the category to its left as its source domain, but not vice versa. So *guo* with the spatial meaning of 'to cross' is mapped onto the temporal domain, which is more abstract in a sense that time is invisible and nonphysical, and further transferred into the domain of quality, in which the result is specified.

On the whole, the overall paths of the shift conform to the cline of grammaticality as well as the mappings of the categorial metaphors. Based on the findings and discussion above, the possible grammaticalization paths and meaning extension can be summarized in Table 1.<sup>3</sup> The directions are from concreteness to abstractness and from content to function words, which is in accordance with universal tendencies of grammaticalization.

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<sup>3</sup> The expressions concerning (V)-*guolai* and (V)-*guoqu* are not included in Table 1, owing to the fact that their lexicalization involves morphemes such as *lai* and *qu*. Nevertheless, one thing is for sure: *guo* becomes more grammaticalized when *guolai/guoqu* is turned into V-*guolai*/V-*guoqu*.





**Table 1.** Meaning extension of GUO

## 5. Conclusion

In this paper, we have demonstrated that the various senses of the word *guo* are related to one another by means of conceptual metaphor, which is based on human experiences and therefore offers a metaphorical insight beneficial to our understanding of more abstract categories. An image schema concerning the core meaning of *guo* is proposed. The spatial domain is considered more basic, which subsequently allows being mapped onto other more abstract domains. And it is via metaphorical extension, mappings from **SPACE-TO-TIME** and **TIME-TO-QUALITY**, that the wide range of senses of *guo* is derived. It corresponds to one of the universal tendencies of grammaticalization: from the more concrete to the more abstract, and accords with the cline of grammaticality: from a content word to an affix (morphological inflection). Besides, the uses of (V)-(de/bu)-*guolai/guoqu* are discussed. It is pointed out that the choice of *lai* instead of *qu* in cases such as 轉不過來 *zhuan bu guolai* ‘to be unable to understand’ or 忙不過來 *mang bu guolai* ‘to be too busy to handle’ is directly associated with the **subjectivity** of the speaker rather than randomly determined. Therefore, it is argued that the speaker’s choice of *lai* or *qu* is schematically and conceptually motivated and that image schemas are of great help to people’s understanding and interpretations of lexical expressions. All in all, it is shown that the polysemous nature of a word and its grammaticalization are metaphorically and conceptually driven, which strongly suggests the flexibility of

human cognition.

The present study however is far from complete and perfect in that the diachronic aspect of the development of *guo* is not taken into consideration. Such a limitation prohibits us from providing further support and evidence for our synchronic findings. If more time is devoted to sorting out the diachronic data, we can have a better understanding of the direction of the polysemous chain concerning the word *guo* and can further testify the SPACE-TO-TIME and TIME-TO-QUALITY metaphor in the history of language development.

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## 從行動動詞到時貌標記：國語"過"的探討

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過一直以來被視為多義詞 (polysemy)，其語意表徵包括動詞、名詞、結果補語、及經驗貌標記等。本文試圖以過的中心語意 (core meaning) 為基礎，輔以形象圖式 (image schema)、隱喻延伸 (metaphorical extension)、及縱剖 (profile) 等，來分析過的數個語意間如何轉換和相互連接。文中並將特別討論V-得/不-過來/過去 (如：轉不過來，說得過去) 的語意結構，對過來/過去的選用提出一合理的解釋。此外，也將針對過的語法化 (grammaticalization) 現象進行探討。

關鍵詞：形象圖式，隱喻延伸，縱剖，語法化