Overview: I concentrate on two proposals of the ba construction: object-relatedness (Hashimoto 1971; Li & Thompson 1981), and Aspectual telicity/boundedness (Zou 1993; Tenny 1994; Liu 1997). The former hypothesis suggests that the post ba predicate refers to the direct object, while the latter proposes that the post ba predicate must be telic, e.g., (1a) vs. (1b). The two kinds of proposals, however, are either too weak or strong when empirically examined, and none of the proposal gives a satisfying syntactic solution. Alternatively, I suggest that ba must select an object-related event with boundary. The goals of this paper, then, are to discuss how the event acquires the boundary and to establish a well-formed syntactic account.

The problems: The object-related analysis has little to say about example like (2), which does not show an explicit object-related state but measurement of the event. The telicity analysis, on the other hand, cannot account for examples like (3). In (3a), the object is generic, which is nonspecific. The sentence in (3b) is in habitual Aspect, and therefore the object does not refer to any specific entity. According to Verkuyl (1972, 1993), Krifka (1988), Jackendoff (1991), and Tenny (1994), the telicity of the situation crucially relies on the (semantic) boundary of the direct object, e.g. (4). In the notion of Jackendoff (1991), the DP which is marked as [+b] (boundary) can denote a telic situation. Therefore, we predict that the post ba-DP is definitely [+b] and cannot be nonspecific. Given the examples in (3), this prediction is not empirically attested. Furthermore, sentences like (5) denote imperfective events (the progressive marker –zhe is used), which again pose problems for the telic proposal.

Semantics of ba: Under close scrutiny, I suggest that the post ba predicate denotes an object-related event with boundary (a generalized boundary). The event with boundary includes the target state of the event and the bounded predicate, which can explain examples like (3) and (1), respectively. The target state of the event, in the sense of Parsons (1990) is able to provide a temporal boundary, and hence [+b]. The bounded predicate, in the definition of Depraetere (1995), reaches actual temporal boundary, and is also [+b]. I propose that the direct object is not involved in the ‘boundary calculus’ in Chinese, contrary to the Germanic languages. This claim can be evidenced by the fact that Chinese accomplishment, but not Germanic ones, can be modified by the durative phrases (the corresponding example of 4b in Chinese is grammatical). Another kind of event boundary is shown in object measurement, I propose that the measurement phrases which modify the event must respect the Aspectual role of the direct object (Tenny 1994), e.g., (6), hence object-related. This theory can also derive the measure-out effect of the ba construction (Tenny 1994).

Syntax of ba: I propose the structure in (7). The post-ba VP forms a complex predicate, which is attributed to the object (but not the subject, due to the strict cyclicity of the structure building), which in turn functions as a secondary subject, in the sense of Larson (1988) and Bowers (1993). This explains the object-relatedness of the post-ba predicate. This complex predicate also carries a [+b] feature which is checked by the [+b] feature of ba via Agreement. The [+b] feature of the complex predicate is calculated by the verb along with the secondary predicate, but exclusive of the object (due to the unselectiveness of arguments in Chinese; cf. Huang 1997; Lin 2001). This explains the boundary requirement of the ba construction. I assume that ba denotes a marked active voice, which heads the Voice projection (Kratzer 1996) realized in the form of light verb v (AFFECT) in Chinese (Lin 2001). The v head selects the subject, which must have an Actor or Causer (Force) role.

Consequences: First, the object (as a secondary subject) which remains in situ with respect to the introduction of ba assimilates to the unaccusativity in Chinese. I propose that the two
constructions actually fall into the same condition (by an object-related complex predicate) (cf. van Hout (2004) assumes telicity checking of unaccusative in Dutch). This is empirically attested in (8). Another question involves telicity. Kratzer (2002) argues that object telicity is derived from the Accusative Case. Since Case is implicit in Chinese, and object is severed from the main predicate (Lin 2001), telicity is inert in Chinese. This is again evidenced by the propose theory that the boundary calculus does not include the valence of the object. This argues against Soh and Kuo (2001), and may shed light on the Situation Aspect in Chinese.

Examples:

(1) a. Zhangsan ba men shang-le suo.  
   ZS BA door rise-LE lock  
   ‘ZS locked the door.’

b. Zhangsan ba yu chi-wan le.  
   ZS BA fish eat-finish LE  
   ‘ZS has finished eating the fish.’

(2) Zhangsan ba pinguo chi-le yi-kou.  
   ZS BA apple eat-LE one-bite  
   ‘ZS took one bite from the apple.’

(3) a. Zhangsan ba lu dangcheng m a.  
   ZS BA deer regard horse  
   ‘ZS thinks of deers as horses.’

b. youqian-ren dou ba fangzi gai shan-shang.  
   rich-man all BA house build hill-up  
   ‘The rich always build houses on the hill.’

(4) a. John ate the apple [+b] in one hour.  
   [telic]  
   (5) Zhangsan ba men kai-zhe.  
   ZS BA door open-ZHE  
   ‘ZS left the door open.’

b. *John ate the apple [+b] for one hour.  
   [telic]  
   c. John ate apples [-b] for hours.  
   [atelic]  

(6) a. Zhangsan ba fangzi gai-le jiu-ceng.  
   ZS BA house build-LE nine-floor  
   ‘ZS build a house with nine floors.’

b. Zhangsan ba taibei zou-le san-quan.  
   ZS BA Taipei walk-LE three-round  
   ‘ZS walked Taipei thoroughly for three times.’

(7) The structure of Chinese ba construction

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Selected Bibliography:


