

## COLLOCATION AND SEMANTIC CHANGE – DERIVATION OF EXCESSIVE X-SI\*

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### ABSTRACT

X-si in Chinese has various functions. The study aims to study the excessive X-si construction both diachronically and synchronically. By examining Chinese classical texts, the time that si's collocation with each type of predicate arose would be given to trace the generation of the excessive meaning of X-si. In addition, the generalization of the construction would be studied to see whether it fits in with human cognitive processes and the natural process of language change. Synchronically, the collocation of the emerging excessive complement with each type of predicate would be checked for the purpose of supporting the generalization of X-si.

Keywords: collocation, generalization, X-si construction, excessive complement

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Languages are combinations of series of symbols. The interaction between sounds and pronunciations can lead to phonetic changes. Similarly, changes may also occur when words appear close to one another in the same sentence. *Si* in Chinese is a polysemous word. With many sememes derived from the original meaning 'loss of life', *si* is no longer a taboo word but a commonly used term expressing extent or degree. In Liu's (2006) synchronic study on the various meanings of *si*, it is proposed

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that the extended meanings of *si* are derived through analogy and metaphor. In my opinion, collocations of words might also cause semantic changes. This present paper targets on the excessive X-*si* construction, in which X refers to a predicate (verb or adjective) and *si* is an excessive complement. 'Excessive' is added here to make a distinction between the resultative X-*si* phrases and the excessive ones. Although the two are thought to be historically related, they behave differently. Semantically, *si* in resultative X-*si* refers to a result caused by the verb, but it always amplifies the extent of the predicate in excessive X-*si*. In order to look at the derivation of *si*'s excessive meaning from the perspective of collocation, it is necessary to include the predicate for analysis. Diachronically, the generation of the excessive meaning and the generalization procedures of the structure X-*si* would be looked into from classical literary works on the collocation of *si* and various predicates, so as to observe whether the generalization process is in compliance with human cognitive processes and the natural evolutionary process of language. Synchronically, collocations between new excessive complements and various predicates would be observed to survey whether the new complements follow the generalization process of *si*.

## 2. COLLOCATION AND GENERALIZATION

COLLOCATION is the case when two or more words often go together. Some people define it as a more typical combination of words. It also refers to a sequence of words co-occurring more often than being expected by chance. Basically, collocations can be in a syntactic relation (such as verb-object: 'make' and 'decision'), lexical relation (such as antonymy), or they can be in no linguistically defined relation. The frequency of the occurrence of *si* with a certain predicate is not calculated to see whether the combination is by chance or not. What is calculated here are the total of *si* and that of the excessive complement *si*. However, the focus here is not the frequency of appearance but the predicate type that generates the excessive meaning of *si*.

Collocation might cause semantic change, especially in the case wherein the combination is ambiguous. According to Zhu (2006), *e*

‘starve’ and *xia* ‘scare’ are verbs indicating both actions and psychological feelings. It is reasonable that being collocated with the two predicates, *si* would then become ambiguous.

GENERALIZATION is a mechanism of semantic change. According to Meillet (1958), specific features of meaning would be lost in such a process, which would then bring an associated increase in the context in which the gram may be appropriately used. Bybee, Perkins, and Pagliuca (1994: 289-293) show the generalization process of *can*.

- a) mental ability: *He can read.*
- b) general ability: *He can swim.*
- c) root possibility: *The stadium can hold 10,000 spectators.*

In my opinion, this is also a kind of collocation generalization in that *can* collocates with more types of verbs and the subject is no longer restricted to animates. *Si* shows a similar phenomenon. A certain predicate type started the generation of excessive meaning; after that, the excessive *si* collated with many other predicate types. Basically, meaning generalization and collocation generalization interact with each other. For example, the loss of *qi-si*'s indication of death in a specific context brought about semantic change, and the emergence of excessive meaning caused collocation generalization. Being collocated with nonfatal verbs, *si* then derived new extended meaning such as ‘misery’ and ‘fatigue’.

### 3. THE X-SI CONSTRUCTION

In modern Chinese, X-si has various sememes as follows.

a) CAUSE TO DIE

- (1) 我 命令 你 快 把 蚊子 打死!<sup>1</sup>  
wo mingling ni kuai ba wunzi dasi  
I order you quick BA mosquito hit SI  
'I order you to kill the mosquito quickly!'

b) INFLEXIBLE

- (2) 我們 把 這座 舊 房子 的 窗戶 都 釘死 了。  
women ba zhezuo jiu fangzi de chuangu dou dingsi le  
we BA this old house DE window all nail SI LE  
'We nailed up the windows of the old house.'

c) IMPASSABLE

- (3) 這樣 停車 真是 太 沒 公德心 了，  
zheyang tingche zhenshi tai mei gongdexin le  
this.way park really too no civism LE  
路 都 堵死 了！  
lu dou dusi le  
road all block SI LE  
'Someone parking this way has no civism. The road is totally blocked.'

d) EXTREMELY

- (4) 我 高興死 了。  
wo gaoxingsi le  
I happy SI LE  
'I am very happy.'

The sememe 'cause to die' is prototypical while the other three are extended. Among them, 'extremely' is the most frequently used in colloquial modern Chinese.

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<sup>1</sup> The Chinese examples are presented as follows: the first line shows the Chinese characters, the second is pinyin transcription, the third offers glosses, and the last gives the English translation.

### 3.1 Predicate Types in Excessive X-si

Scholars working on X-si-(le) construction (Wu 1997; Ji 2000; Ho 2005; Zhu 2006) as well as excessive complements (Qiu 2001; Liu 2003) talk about predicate types allowed in the construction. Table 1 summarizes the predicate types proposed by the scholars mentioned.

Being aware that different scholars adopted different terms to name the same type, Liu (2008) condensed the predicate types into four: psychological predicates, physiological predicates, attributive predicates, and action verbs. In Table 1, the columns in the same shade are closely related and could be lumped together. Such a classification leads complexity to simplicity. What is more, in my opinion, the four types stand for the four important components of human beings, which are the core in the discussion about the human cognition process in section 6.2.

Predicate types are influential to the meaning of *si*. According to Wu (1997), the most prominent sememes of the W<sup>2</sup>-si-le construction in colloquial Chinese are ‘die of W’, ‘immobility’ and ‘excessiveness’. Different types of predicates take different sememes of *si*: fatal action verbs take the sememe ‘death’ whereas non-fatal ones take ‘immobility’, and attributive adjectives and psych verbs always take the sememe ‘excessiveness’. In my opinion, predicate type is the key to not only the choice of *si*’s sememe but also the meaning extension of *si*. As for excessiveness, Zhu (2006) stated that the introduction of the verbs related to human psychological feelings (e.g., *e*, *dong*, *xia*) to the construction contributed to the ambiguity of X-si. In Zhu’s opinion, the association with this predicate type is crucial for the generation of the excess sense. In support to Zhu’s conclusion, the present paper aims to sort out the crucial era in which the generation happened as well as the key predicate that brought the change.

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<sup>2</sup> W stands for predicate and corresponds to X in this present paper.

Table 1: Predicate types collated with excessive complement *SI*

	Wu (1997)	Ji (2000)	Qiu (2001)	Liu (2003)	Ho (2005)	Zhu (2006)
verbs related to death & psychological feeling						v
verbs representing psychological feelings	v	v	v	v	v	v
adjectives related to psychological states		v	v		v	
verbs indicating physiological states				v		
adjectives related to the senses of smell, taste and touch		v			v	
adjectives describing properties of humans or things		v			v	
Attributive Adjective	v			v		v
Action Verb					v	

#### 4. METHODOLOGY

Data analysis is the research method adopted in the study. At least one literary work from each era is chosen to observe the usage of the term *si* and its collocations with predicates. The modern Chinese corpus is mainly collected from Google search engine while the corpus of classical works is collected from e-books. A work is chosen simply because it has an electronic file. As for each work, I first search all the sentences containing

*si* and then read them to sort out the ones in which *si* plays the excessive complement. The X-*si* construction is necessary here in that a complement is always bound to the predicate. Basically, X would be monosyllabic or polysyllabic.

## 5. DISCUSSION

The total number of *si* and that of excessive complement *si* in each work is shown in table 2. The total does not include the occurrences of *si* in titles.

### 5.1 Prototypical Meaning

*Si* was originally defined as ‘the loss of life’. In the pre-Qin period, *si* was rarely used in conjunction with other predicates. The only example collected is *zhan-si* with the resultative meaning.

- (5) 不戰 而 反，我 罪 滋 厚；我 戰死，  
 buzhan er fan wo zui zi hou wo zhansi  
 not fight and back my sin grow great I fight SI  
 猶 有 令名 焉。  
 you you lingming yan  
 still have good reputation YAN  
 ‘If I return without fighting, my sin is even greater. If I fight till death,  
 I will have a good and honorable reputation.’ — *Guoyu*

In the West Han Dynasty, *si* could be collocated with action verbs, physiological predicates (e.g., *e* ‘starve’) and psychological predicates (e.g., *you* ‘worry’).

Table 2: Excessive complement *SI* in classical works

Total		<i>SI</i>	Excessive Complement <i>SI</i>
Dynasty & Work			
Chun Qiu (Spring-Autumn)	<i>Art of War</i> 孫子兵法	24	0
Zhan Guo (Warring States)	<i>Guo Yu</i> 國語	172	0
West Han	<i>Lie Nu Zhuan</i> 列女傳	250	0
	<i>Stratagems of the Warring States</i> 戰國策	278	0
	<i>Shuo Yuan</i> 說苑	397	0
East Han	<i>Wu Yue Chun Qiu</i> 吳越春秋	142	0
Wei Jin Nan Bei (Northern and Southern Dynasties)	<i>In Search of Gods</i> 搜神記	267	0
Tang	<i>Biography of Huo Xiaoyu</i> 霍小玉傳	5	0
	<i>You Xian Ku</i> 遊仙窟	16	0
	<i>Jian Xia Zhuan</i> 劍俠傳	17	0
	<i>Chang Hen Ge Zhuan</i> 長恨歌傳	5	0
Song	<i>Nian Yu Guan Yin</i> 碾玉觀音	4	0
	<i>Da Song Xuan He Yi Shi</i> 大宋宣和遺事	93	0
	<i>Romance of Three Kingdoms of Yuan</i> Block-printed Edition 三國志平話	113	0
Yuan	<i>108 Heroes of the Water Margin</i> 水滸傳 <sup>3</sup>	945	4
	<i>Romance of the Three Kingdoms</i> 三國演義	985	0
Ming	<i>Golden Lotus</i> 金瓶梅	663	17
	<i>The Journey to the West</i> 西遊記	567	1
Qing	<i>Dream of the Red Chamber</i> 紅樓夢	866	29
	<i>The Scholars</i> 儒林外史	160	7
	<i>Three Heroes and Five Gallants</i> 三俠五義	376	12

<sup>3</sup> There still exists controversy over the completion time and the authors of *108 Heroes of the Water Margin* and *Romance of the Three Kingdoms*. Most scholars believed that they were finished during the late Yuan Dynasty and the early Ming Dynasty.

- (6) 伯夷 叔齊 餓死 于 首陽 山 而 志  
 boyi shuqi esi yu shouyang shan er zhi  
 Boyi Shuqi starve SI at Shouyang mountain and morality  
 逾 彰， 不 輕 死亡， 安 能 行 此！  
 yu zhang bu qing siwang an neng xing ci  
 exceed obvious not afraid death how can do this  
 ‘Boyi and Shuqi starved to death at the foot of Shouyang mountain,  
 which showed their moral integrity. This could only be done when  
 one is unafraid of death.’ — *Shuo Yuan*
- (7) 三年， 桓公 有疾，使 人 召 茲父，  
 sannian huangong youji shi ren zhao zifu  
 three years Duke Huan sick make people call Zifu  
 若 不來， 是 使 我 以 憂死 也  
 ruo bulai shi shi wo yi you si ye  
 if not come SHI makeme YI depress SI YE  
 ‘Three years later, when Duke Huan was sick, he sent someone to ask  
 Zifu to return. “If not, I shall suffer from depression and die.”’ —  
*Shuo Yuan*

During the Northern and Southern Dynasties, *si* was more commonly used as the resultative complement and collocated with more predicates, including action verbs (e.g., *qian* ‘condemn’, *xuan* ‘hang’, *dou* ‘battle’), physiological predicates (e.g., *bing* ‘sicken’, *zui* ‘be drunk’), and psychological predicates (e.g., *yuan* ‘aggrieve’, *jieqi* ‘be angry’, *bu* ‘be terrified’). However, the usage of X-*si* did not contain an excessive meaning at all.

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- (8) 玉 結氣死，葬 閻門 之外。  
yu jieqisi zang changmen zhiwai  
Ziyu angry SI bury Changmen outside  
'Ziyu died of anger and was buried outside Changmen' — *In Search of Gods*
- (9) 至 家， 醉死。  
zhi jia zuisi  
arrive home drunk SI  
'When he got home, he died of overdrinking.' — *In Search of Gods*

*Tang ChuanQi tales* (also known as *Tang Legends*) was popular in the Tang Dynasty. These tales were short novels, so the total of *si* was relatively fewer. Most of the time, *si* was used as a noun or a verb indicating 'death' or 'to die'. Being a resultative complement, *si* collocated with both physiological and psychological predicates (e.g., *xiu* 'feel bashful').

- (10) 赤手 還國， 欲 與 妻子 餓死 耶？  
chishou huan guo yu yu qizi esi ye  
empty hand return country want with wife starve SI YE  
'You came home with empty pockets. What are you planning to do, have your wife and children starve to death with you?' — *Jian Xia Zhuan*
- (11) 韓娥 宋玉， 見 則 愁 生； 絳樹 青琴，  
hane songyu jian ze chou sheng jiangshu qingqin  
Han'e Songyu see then worry alive Jiangshu Qingqin  
對 之 羞死。  
dui zhi xiusi  
meet her bashful SI  
'When Han'e and Songyu saw her, they would feel depressed; when Jiangshu and Qingqin met her, they would die of shame.' — *You Xian Ku*

In the works of the Song Dynasty, *si* had the same usages as those in the previous dynasties. In resultative X-*si* construction, X was mostly

action verbs and physiological predicates. In the Yuan Dynasty, due to the emergence of long novels/scripts for story-telling, the occurrence of *si* increased, and there were more tokens of X-*si*. Nonetheless, most of the expressions indicated ‘to die of X’. There were still three types of predicates as follows.

**Action predicates:** *she* ‘shoot’, *chuo* ‘poke’, *ci* ‘stab’, *kan* ‘hack’, *pi* ‘chop’, *sha* ‘kill’, *da* ‘beat’, *yao* ‘poison’, *yan* ‘drown’

**Physiological predicates:** *tong* ‘feel pain’, *dong* ‘freeze’, *e* ‘starve’, *bing* ‘be sick’

**Psychological predicates:** *qi* ‘feel angry’, *jing* ‘feel scared’, *qu* ‘feel persecuted’

## 5.2 The Meaning of Excessiveness

In the corpus, the usage of X-*si* as excessive expression started from *108 Heroes of the Water Margin*, and the predicates are all psychological ones.

- (12) 宋江 見 他 惶死， 掠 了 兩遭，  
 songjiang jian ta huangsi lue liao liangzao  
 Songjiang see him anxious SI sweep LE twice  
 沒人 出錢， 便 叫 公人 取出 五兩 銀子 來。  
 meiren chuqian bian jiao gongren quchu wu liang yinzi lai  
 no one give money then ask man take out five taels come  
 ‘Songjiang saw that he was very anxious and swept the plate twice,  
 yet no one gave him money. So he had the man take out five taels.’
- (13) 你 這 廝 苦死 要來，  
 ni zhe si kusi yaolai  
 you this guy desperate want come  
 一路 嘔死 我 也！  
 yilu ousi wo ye  
 all the way annoy SI me YE  
 ‘You have insisted on taking the journey with me, and I was very annoyed all the way.’

- (14) 土人 欲 採取 他， 卻 被 一聲 霹靂，  
turen yu caiqu ta que bei yisheng pili  
native want take him but a thunder stroke  
把 幾個 採石的 驚死， 半晌 方 醒。  
ba jige caishide jingsi banshang fang xing  
BA several quarry scared SI a while just awake  
'The natives wanted to take him, but a thunder stroke scared some of  
the quarries very much and they became awake after quite a while.'

Can psychological predicates be the key to the generation of the excessive meaning? Positive views are held here and historical evidence is found. In the literary works of the same era, two scenarios of a certain X-*si* were observed. *Jing-si* was of the typical meaning 'die of scare' in *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* and it was of the excessive meaning 'very scared' in *108 Heroes of the Water Margin*. The two works were published in the Yuan Dynasty. *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* mainly described war and *si* appears 985 times, yet none is of any excessive meaning. Since *jing-si* used in *108 Heroes of the Water Margin* and in *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* held different meanings, it can be ensured that ambiguity certainly existed in this era.

In the Yuan Dynasty, excessive X-*si* phrase was mostly applied to the description of psychological states. In *Golden Lotus*, the occurrence of predicate non-referral to psychological states became allowed. *Gua* 'noisy', *meiqu* 'uninteresting', *qiong* 'poor', and *jing* 'canny' are all attributive predicates indicating characteristics or features of people.

- (15) 這六姐 成精死 了罷！把俺每哄  
 zhe liujie cheng jingsi le ba ba an meihong  
 this sixth sister must canny SI LE BA BA I every humbug  
 的信 了。  
 de xin le  
 DE believe LE  
 ‘Liu Jie is very gumptious. I am so flattered that I believe what she  
 says every time.’
- (16) 我西門慶 就窮死 了，也不肯虧負了你！  
 wo ximenqing jiu qiongsi le ye buken kuifu le ni  
 I Xi MenQing even poor SI LE YE not let suffer LE you  
 ‘Even if I, Xi Men-Qing, am poor to death, I would never let you  
 suffer.’
- (17) 他要便痰 火發 了，晚夕咳嗽 半夜，  
 ta yao biantan huofa le wansi kesou banye  
 he if phlegm fire break out LE night cough midnight  
 把人 聒死 了。  
 ba ren guasi le  
 BA person noisy SI LE  
 ‘If his phlegm-fire breaks out, he would cough the whole night,  
 which can be very noisy.’
- (18) 我的 二爺，你若去了，就 沒趣死 了。  
 wode erye ni ruo qu le jiu meiqusi le  
 my master you if go LE will feel bored SI LE  
 ‘My dear Master, if you go, I will be awfully bored.’

In the Qing Dynasty, the usage of excessive X-si increased and physiological predicates appeared in the collocations of that time. In *Sanxia Wuyi* (also known as *Three Heroes and Five Gallants*), *si* occurred 376 times, and 12 of them were of the excessive complement. In this work, *si* was mainly collocated with psychological and physiological predicates.

**Psychological:** *xiu* ‘feel bashful’, *ou* ‘feel nauseated’, *kui* ‘feel ashamed’, *qi* ‘feel angry’, *weiqu* ‘feel wronged’, *ku* ‘feel bitter’, *xiang* ‘miss’, *xia* ‘feel scared’

**Physiological:** *teng* ‘feel hurt’, *ku* ‘feel pain’

In *Dream of the Red Chamber*, static verbs (e.g. *deng*<sup>4</sup> ‘to wait’ and *baibu*<sup>5</sup> ‘to manipulate’) were added in addition to psychological, physiological, and attributive predicates.

**Psychological:** *xiu* ‘feel bashful’, *xiaohua* ‘feel funny’, *teng* ‘feel anguished’, *qi* ‘feel angry’, *wei-qu* ‘feel wronged’, *men* ‘feel bored’, *pa* ‘feel afraid’, *xia* ‘feel scared’

**Physiological:** *leng* ‘feel cold’

**Attributive:** *suosui* ‘trifling’, *qiao* ‘coincident’

*Dengsi* was of verb-object structure in all early literary works, meaning ‘waiting for death’. In *Dream of the Red Chamber*, however, it was not of

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<sup>4</sup>賈瑞便 意定是 鳳姐， 不管 皂白， 餓 虎一般， 等  
jiarui bian yiding shi fongjie buguan zaobai e hu yiban deng  
Jiarui then think COP Fongjie despite right and wrong hungry tiger like wait  
那人 剛至 門前， 便 如 貓捕鼠 的 一般，  
na ren gang zhi menqian bian ru maobushu de yiban  
that person just arrive door front thereupon like cat catch mouse DE like  
抱住 叫道：「我的 親 嫂子， 等死 我 了！」  
baozhu jiaodao wode qin saozhi dengsi wo le  
hold shout my dear sister-in-law wait SI me LE

‘Jiarui thought that had to be Wang Xifong, so when she went to the front of the door, he hugged the person as a hungry tiger or as a cat that has caught a rat, shouting, “My dear sister-in-law, I’ve been waiting forever.”’

<sup>5</sup>你是最 肯 濟困扶危 的人， 難道 就 眼睜睜  
ni shi zui ken jikunfuwei deren nandao jiu yanzhengzheng  
you be most will help poor help distress person just eye with open open  
的看 人家 來 擺佈死 了我們 娘兒 兩個 不成？  
de kan renjia lai baibusi le women nianger liangge bucheng  
see look people come manipulate SI LE we mother son two fail

‘You are the most willing to help the poor and the distressed. Can you just see us being awfully manipulated?’

verb-object structure. Since *deng* is not a lethal action, it would make sense that the usage was of the excessive meaning. However, the expression expressed the length of the time someone waits, meaning ‘to wait for a long time’.

### 6. Evolution of SI

Liu (2002) mentioned there were many excessive X-sis in the Song and Yuan Dynasties, but the examples she offered were all collected from the works in the Qing Dynasty. This paper collects examples in works of several dynasties. Table 3 tells the occurrence of each predicate type and the functions of X-si in every era. It is found that the usage of X-si with excessive meaning possibly occurred in the late Yuan Dynasty and early Ming Dynasty.

Table 3: Occurrence of Each Predicate Type and Function of X-si

	Dynasty	Pre-Qin	West Han	Wei-Jin	Tang	Song	Yuan	Ming	Qing
	Predicate Type								
Resultative SI	Action	v	v	v	v	v	v	v	v
	Physiological		v	v	v	v	v	v	v
	Psychological		v	v	v	v	v	v	v
Excessive SI	Action								
	Physiological								v
	Psychological						v	v	v
	Attributive							v	v

The collocation between action verbs and the excessive *si* should be the latest version as it was not found in any of the classical works. However, there are plenty of examples of this collocation in modern Chinese. According to Liu (2008), the combination of action verbs with excessive *si* would further generate other sememes such as ‘misery’ and ‘fatigue’.

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- (19) 發表 印 notes 都 印死 我了  
fabiao yin [L2] dou yinsi wole  
present print notes all print SI me  
'The notes for the presentation are so much that I'm tired of printing them.'
- (20) 每天 堆積 如 山 的 考卷, 都 快  
meitian duiji ru shan de kaojuan dou kuai  
every day pile up like mountain test paper all almost  
改死 我 了!~>\_<~  
gaisi wo le  
correct SI me LE  
'The piles of test papers everyday make me restless in correcting them.'

### 6.1 Predicates That Started Changes

During the Qin and Han Dynasties, despite the few examples of X-*si*, *si* collocated with action verbs, physiological predicates, and psychological predicates. The three kinds of predicates occurred with *si* to indicate 'death' for many years until the Yuan Dynasty when psychological predicates started semantic change, and the excessive meaning of *si* was derived. Why psychological predicates? There are two possible reasons. First, among the three types, psychological predicates are relatively abstract. The more indistinct they are, the easier it is for them to change. In addition, it is very easy to prove death caused by action or physiological reasons, but death caused by psychological reasons cannot be proven by scientific means. Under the circumstance that psychological predicates cannot guarantee the meaning of death, the DEATH sememe of *si* starts to fluctuate.

### 6.2 Semantic Change and the Human Cognitive Process

Humans connect with the world through their five senses and physical actions. These physiological experiences are so concrete that they are the foundations humans rely on to experience the world. Usually,

psychological feelings come from physiological responses. For example, when feeling angry, we breathe rapidly and our body temperature rises. Compared with physiology, psychology is more abstract and can even affect the spiritual level. When this goes to the cognitive stage, it becomes the subjective judgment of external objective things. The degree of abstractness of the three parts could be diagrammed as Figure 1. In the endocentric circles, the closer to human, the more concrete.

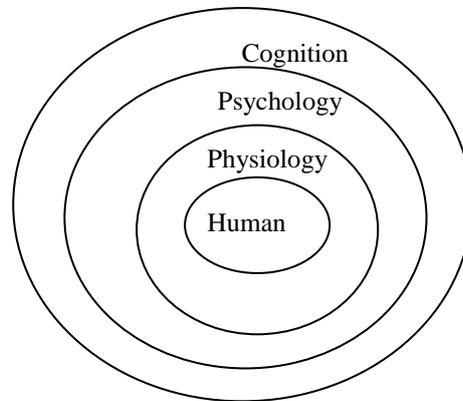


Figure 1: The relation of Physiology, Psychology, and Cognition

The generalization process of *si* can be observed from its collocation with the predicates. In general, it is in the order of action verbs→ physiological predicates→ psychological predicates→ attributive predicates. Such a generalization is quite consistent with the human cognitive process. First, the generalization is from concreteness to abstractness, in that the predicates are expanded from those indicating personal experiences or specific actions to the ones describing abstract nature of external things. Second, the process is from objectiveness to subjectiveness. The function of *si* is changed from the original objective description of death to the expression of subjective emotions. What is more, *si* originally collocated with more objective predicates, but now it occurs with more subjective predicates. Psychological and physiological feelings are basic human experiences, so the standards are more consistent.

However, attributive adjectives such as *beautiful* and *ugly* have a lot to do with personal preference, and they are more subjective. Therefore, the word *annoying* is more objective than *beautiful*.

It is worth mentioning that the generalization of *si* is not linear. The expansion to attributive predicates was not the end. The generalization applied to action verbs and physiological predicates again. But after a cycle when it returned to verbs again, changes had been made. First, the collocation is no longer restricted to lethal predicates, and almost all verbs are allowed to enter into the construction. The other is about semantic change. Instead of the original meaning ‘cause to die’, the phrase *X-si* takes the structural meaning – ‘excessiveness’, as illustrated in Figure 2.

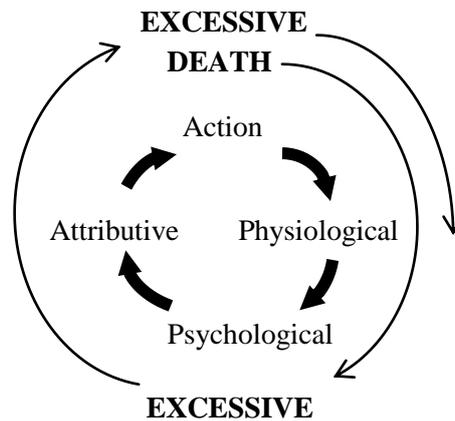


Figure 2: The cycle of predicate types of *X-si*

### 6.3 Evidence of Other Excessive Complements

There are many excessive complements in modern Chinese and the number is still increasing. The corpus gathered from Google includes Taiwanese Chinese and Mainland Chinese. In table 4, two words are selected from each predicate type to collocate with the complements. Actions can be divided into dynamic and static states, and they can occur with many complements with the original intents of the complements being maintained. As a result, the overall collocations are resultative

expressions instead of excessive ones. Although there exists some meaning of extent, the original meaning remains the primary. As for cases like these, I count them as resulative phrases and do not check them in the table.

It can be observed from the synchronous corpus that the complements can be collocated with psychological and physiological predicates, as well as attributive and action predicates, and these collocations are mainly expressions of excessiveness. Among the complements, *si*, *fan*, and *bao* seem to complete the whole process of generalization, so they can be collocated with predicates of any type. However, the generalization of new complements is still incomplete, so they cannot be collocated with all predicates. Based upon the data, the majority of collocations are with psychological predicates, followed by attributive predicates and action verbs.

Table 4: Collocation between 4 types of predicates and excessive complements

	psychological		physiological		attributive		action	
	<i>qi</i> 氣	<i>lei</i> 累	<i>tong</i> 痛	<i>tian</i> 甜	<i>shuai</i> 帥	<i>pang</i> 胖	<i>pao</i> 跑	<i>gao</i> 告
<i>si</i> 死	v	v	v	v	v	v	v	v
<i>bao</i> 爆	v	v	v	v	v	v	v	v
<i>fan</i> 翻	v	v	v	v	v	v	v	v
<i>bi</i> 斃	v	v	v	v	v	v		
<i>huai</i> 壞	v	v	v	v	v	v	v	
<i>gua</i> 掛	v	v	v	v	v	v	v	v
<i>fong</i> 瘋	v	v	v	v	v	v	v	
<i>dai</i> 呆	v	v	v	v	v	v		
<i>can</i> 慘	v	v	v	v	v	v		v
<i>hun</i> 昏	v	v	v		v	v		
<i>sha</i> 傻	v	v		v	v	v		
<i>yun</i> 暈	v	v	v	v	v	v		
<i>dian</i> 癱	v	v	v		v		v	
<i>tan</i> 癱	v	v			v			
<i>can</i> 殘	v	v	v		v	v		v
<i>fei</i> 廢		v	v					

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## **7. CONCLUSION**

Collocation between words can cause semantic change. In this study, the evolvement process of *si* from the resultative complement with the meaning of fatality to the extent complement is observed. Meanwhile, the reliability of the evolvement process is also proved from the synchronic corpus. In addition, the life/law of language is found in this study. The collocation of *X-si* started from fatal action verbs and finally became applicable to other non-fatal action verbs. The cycle gives *X-si* new life and new meanings. Although *si* originally indicates the end of life, it keeps growing continuously and endlessly in linguistic use.

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詞語搭配與語意改變—  
談「X 死」程度義的衍生

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語言是一連串符號的組合。一句話由許多詞彙組成，詞跟詞不但有順序上的限制，兩個詞語的搭配有時也會影響到語意。漢語「X 死」有很豐富的表現，「死」更是從禁忌語變成了表達程度的常用詞。本文章從歷時與共時的角度研究表達程度的「X 死」結構。一方面從歷史文獻研究「死」與各類謂語的搭配先後順序，找出「X 死」程度義的產生與泛化程序，再觀察此泛化程序是否合乎人類的認知過程以及語言演變的自然程序；一方面觀察現代漢語新興程度補語與各類謂語的搭配情形，檢視新興程度補語是否也遵循「X 死」的泛化程序。

關鍵字：詞語搭配、泛化、X-死 結構、程度補語