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Tao Ming (Concordia College, USA)

Contribution

The study of Chinese aspect has been attracting more and more attention from linguists interested in Chinese (Chao 1968; Chang 1986; Li & Thompson 1982; Smith 1991; 1997; Yang 1995). However, there still seems to be a lack of a consensus regarding which linguistic units can function as aspect markers and how many aspect markers there are. For example, in previous studies, the proposed number of aspect markers range from four in Li and Thompson (1982) (perfective, experiential, delimitative, and durative) to eight in Gong (1994) (going-on, on-going, impending, incipient, starting, experiential, perfective, recent perfective). It is no exaggeration to say that more efforts are needed to provide a more satisfactory explanation of Chinese aspect and the publication of *Aspect in Mandarin Chinese: A Corpus-based Study* (AIMC), by Xiao and McEnery, greatly contributes to such efforts by offering a more comprehensive coverage of Chinese aspect. AIMC is based on the first author's dissertation, which is truly a groundbreaking work in Chinese aspect. This book makes several significant contributions for the explanation of Chinese aspect which are summarized in the following paragraphs.

First of all, AIMC is the first book to explore Chinese aspect on the basis of corpus data. As a result, AIMC not only provides sound theories on Chinese aspect, but also tests the proposed theories with authentic data in corpora. The integration of theoretic exploration with empirical studies in the exploration of Chinese aspect is a laudable effort to avoid inherent inadequacies, like those found in previous studies based on intuition and invented sentences. The use of corpora has yielded many interesting findings. For example, the previous studies (Smith 1991, 1997; Yang 1995) claim that the perfective aspect marker *le* is not compatible with state verbs. The investigation of the corpus data in this study, however, shows that the association of *le* with stage-level state verbs is a common pattern. Actually, it is a favored pattern for COS *le,* which accounts for 40.59% of the total data (p. 137). Examination of the corpora also reveals an interesting linkage between aspect use and genres. A relevant example is that actual *le* predominantly outnumbers COS *le* in Chinese narrative texts, showing an important aspectual feature of Chinese narratives.

Second, AIMC further advances the two-component aspect model developed by Smith (1991, 1997), where the aspectual system is said to consist of situation aspect and viewpoint aspect. The authors have made significant contributions to improve the situation aspect model developed by Smith. The lexical aspect in Smith is divided into five categories: achievement, accomplishment, activity, state, and semelfactive. These divisions are made on the basis of three binary features, [±static], [±durative], and [±telic]. Conversely, the lexical aspect in AIMC is characterized by five binary features: [±static], [±durative], [±telic], [±bounded], and [±result], and is divided into six categories: achievement, accomplishment, activity, stage-level state, individual-level state, semelfactive. The more fine-grained distinction of situation aspect enables the authors to explain why the perfective aspect *le* can occur with state verbs. The association of the progressive aspect marker *zai* with semelfactives is also explained. The authors' approach to viewpoint aspect also differs from Smith in significant ways. For example, the viewpoint aspect is further categorized into simplex viewpoint and complex viewpoint.

Third, considering that verbs are not the only factor to determine the situation aspect and other nonverbal elements such as arguments, adjunct phrases may also play a role, the authors propose that situation aspect is a result of the interaction between verbs and their associated arguments, adjunct phrases. In this regard, two important observations can be made. Firstly, the authors formulate twelve rules for the composition of situation aspect at the sentential level in the first attempt to delve into the compositional nature of situation aspect. Secondly, AIMC differs from previous studies in proposing that view point aspect might also play a role in determining situation aspect. For example, resultative verb complements (RVC) and verb reduplication are proposed not only to influence situation aspect but also function as perfective viewpoint aspect markers. As a result, a linkage is established between the two components of the aspectual system, providing further support for the argument that aspect should be further divided into two interdependent components.

Finally, a comparative study between English and Chinese aspect through the use of parallel corpora is the unique contribution of AIMC. The comparison between English aspect and Chinese aspect focuses on the different forms of English aspect and their representation in Chinese aspectual system. It is shown that there is no one-to-one correspondence between English aspect and Chinese aspect. That is, a perfective aspect in English can be expressed with imperfective aspect in Chinese and vice versa. The authors, through careful examination of the parallel corpora, discover important tendencies with reference to the representation of English aspect in Chinese. For example, simple past is expressed with Chinese perfective aspect, whereas simple present is mainly associated with aspectually unmarked Chinese sentences.

Chapter Summary

AIMC is composed of seven chapters that cover four topics: survey of previous studies, proposal of a new two-component aspect model, exploration of Chinese situation aspect and viewpoint aspect, and comparative study of English aspect and Chinese aspect.

Chapter 1 presents a brief discussion of five unanswered research questions in the literature to justify why further study is needed, a detailed introduction of the five corpora used for this study, and an overview of the proposed two-component aspectual is provided.

Chapter 2 surveys various studies on aspect and clarifies confusions associated with the aspectual system. There is also a particular focus on the two-component aspect model formulated by Smith (1991, 1997). The authors have identified seven inadequacies in Smith's study. The first four are related to her definition and handling of situation aspect, while the last three deal with the viewpoint aspect. Although they agree with Smith's two-component aspect model, they believe that more fine-grained distinctions are needed to provide a satisfactory explanation of situation aspect. They also argue that the representation of viewpoint aspect in Smith has inherent discrepancies. For example, they point out that the preliminary imperfective in Smith runs contrary to her definition of imperfective aspect because imperfectives in Smith only focus on the internal temporal structure of a situation. The discussion of inadequacies in Smith is followed by the proposal of the new two-component aspect model, where situation aspect operates at the semantic level and viewpoint aspect functions at the grammatical level. The significant difference between the model in Smith and that in AIMC is that the former believes both situation aspect and viewpoint aspect are universal and not subject to the constraint of specific language, whereas the latter model suggests that situation aspect model is language independent, and viewpoint aspect is language specific.

Chapter 3 provides the authors' solution to the inadequacies in the situation aspect in Smith (1991, 1997). This chapter mainly focuses on five distinguishing features with relation to the categorization of situation aspects and compositional rules. They argue that the existing three distinguishing features in previous studies do not operate well at either a lexical level or a sentential level, and that more distinguishing features are needed to provide a better explanation. After elaborating the five distinguishing features, they proceed to discuss the six situation aspect categories established on the basis of the proposed features. Such distinctions make it possible for them to explain why some states can take a progressive and occur in imperatives, while others cannot. The added features also enable the authors to explain why a semelfactive situation may receive either a single event interpretation or a multiple events reading. Lastly, they formulate twelve rules governing the

composition of aspect at the sentential level. The rules operate at three levels: rules at the nucleus level deal with the contribution of RVCs and reduplication to the shift of situation aspect; rules at the core level composition governs the interaction between verbs and NP arguments; and rules at the clause level concerns the interplay between core-level situations and their associated non-arguments, such as peripheral adjuncts and viewpoint aspect in the determination of their telicity and boundedness values. All the proposed rules in this chapter are tested with authentic data in the corpora and their validity is therefore beyond doubt.

The discussion of situation aspect is followed by the exploration of Chinese perfective aspect in Chapter 4. Four perfective aspects are proposed in this chapter: the actual aspect, *le*; the experiential aspect, *guo*, the delimitative aspect; and the completive aspect, RVC. The interaction between the four perfective aspects and different situations is discussed in detail. As for *le,* a two morpheme approach is advocated in this study; the actual *le* and COS *le.* They argue that both should fall under the umbrella of aspectual analysis. The experiential aspect presented with *guo* is meant to convey a mentally experienced situation and is free from constraint of situation aspect; thus it can occur with any situation type. The delimitative aspect is to present a holistic transitory whole in its totality whereas the completive RVC is to present completion. Among the four perfective aspects, completive RVC is the most favored when conveying perfective aspect in Chinese, accounting for more than half of the total data.

The discussion of imperfective aspect is the focus of Chapter 5. Four imperfective aspects are identified in this study. The priority is given to the discussion of the durative aspect *zhe*. The authors argue that Smith's treatment of *zhe* as a marker of resultative aspect is wrong, and that this aspect marker only serves to signify durativity of a situation. Investigation of its interaction with situations shows that state situation comprises more than 40% of the data, contradicting the claim by Smith that *zhe* is incompatible with states. The interchangeability between *zhe* and *le* is also examined. It is found that the interchangeability is not only related to the situation, but also to the definiteness of the post-verbal NP in the existential locative inversion. The progressive *zai* differs from the durative aspect *zhe* in terms of dynamicity. The former can only occur with non-stative situation, whereas the latter is compatible with both stative and dynamic situations. The inceptive aspect marker *qilai* functions to signal the inception of an event. The continuative aspect marker *xiaqu* indicates the succession of a situation after a certain point. Unlike the durative aspect, the continuative aspect is mainly associated with dynamic situation.

Chapter 6 presents a comparative study of Chinese aspect and English aspect. Using a written English Corpus (FLOB), a written American English Corpus (Brown), and the Lancaster Corpus of Modern Chinese, the authors first examine the aspect deployment in both Chinese and English. They make several significant

findings: (1) the use and distribution of aspect markers in both English and Chinese is closely associated with genres; (2) perfective aspect markers in Chinese are more frequent than those in English in expository texts, whereas the opposite is true in narrative texts; (3) imperfective aspect markers exhibit an opposing pattern, occurring more frequently in Chinese than in English in narrative texts and, in the case of expository texts, such distribution is reversed. Besides the similarities and dissimilarities between English and Chinese aspect, aspect deployment between American English and British English is also discussed. In the second half of the Chapter, the authors devote their attention to the Chinese translation patterns of English aspect markers. It is found that a certain English aspect form may be expressed in a multitude of ways in Chinese, and a shift of viewpoint aspect is also reported. The representation of English aspect in Chinese depends on the translator's choice of viewpoint aspect and situation types.

Chapter 7, the last chapter, provides a concise summary of the main findings. Also, the potential application of the proposed model is explored. Considering the fact that the book has covered a vast range of complicated topics, the summary offers an overview of what is covered, greatly facilitating the reader's understanding of this study.

Critical Review

It is beyond doubt that this book has made a great contribution to the research in aspect, particularly Chinese aspect. Its breadth, originality, and theoretic depth outstrip many studies on the same topic. The seamless integration of theoretic examination with empirical study offers new insights into Chinese aspect and provides more tools to deepen the general understanding. However, it is the reviewer's belief that this book still needs to address the following concerns in order to be most effective.

The first concern is the coding of the data. The proposed five distinguishing features sometimes fail to distinguish two different situation aspects. For example, activities and stage level states share exactly the same features (p. 53, Table 3.5). Another problem is that the authors propose that the values of the feature *boundedness* for semelfactive are both minus and plus, which is not a desirable result. An easy remedy might be to divide semelfactives into two subcategories in accordance with their different distinguishing features and the same observation might apply to states as well. It is worth pointing out that such inadequacies are not detrimental to the validity of the theory in the book.

The theory associated with situation aspect is complicated and abstract, and it is a daunting task for the reader to decipher the many terms and jargons in the

theory. The understanding and application of the five proposed features to the determination of situation aspect are also a herculean task. Unfortunately, the authors do not provide operational rules which readers could apply should they need to replicate the study by themselves. Considering the fact that the five features are crucial for the establishment of the theory in the book, more details are needed to help readers grasp the essence of the proposed features.

The second concern is related to viewpoint aspect. It is proposed that Chinese aspect consists of the simplex aspect as well as the complex aspect. RVCs and verb reduplication are proposed to influence both situation aspect and viewpoint aspect. As a result, the question arises as to why the perfective aspect marker *le* sometimes occurs side-by-side with both. In other words, why is a situation presented with perfective aspect twice? The answer to this question, according to the authors, is that RVCs, verb reduplication, and the perfective aspect marker *le* interact with them to form complex viewpoint aspect. However, some questions still remain unanswered. For example, what is the complex viewpoint aspect? How does it differ from simplex aspect? What motivates the use of one instead of the other? Similar observations also apply to the association of the perfective *le* with the lexical item *qilai,* which is said to be an imperfective aspect marker. In cases where *qilai* occurs with *le*, it is said that the situation is first presented with an imperfective aspect by *qilai* and then with the perfective aspect by *le*. Again, why is a situation presented twice with opposing viewpoint aspects? Considering that the complex viewpoint is the central proposal in this book, more explanation is needed to paint a clearer picture.

The third concern is that influence of discourse on the deployment of aspect is not thoroughly explored, although empirical study is one of the focuses in this book. It is well established that discourse plays a very important role in the explanation of the deployment of Chinese aspect. Discourse concepts, such as foreground and background, are critical for the successful explanation of Chinese aspect. For example, Chang (1986) observes that *le* tends to be associated with the peak event. Chu (1998) argues that *le* is mainly used to advance events and *guo* is mainly used in background. Chu's proposal can easily explain why the perfective aspect marker *le* in general cannot occur in Chinese relative clauses whereas *guo* is perfectly compatible with them. It is reasonable to say that any theory on Chinese aspect may not fully explain the behavior of Chinese aspect markers without integrating the role of discourse. A word of caution is in order: the authors do utilize discourse to explain the use of some aspect markers. For example, the distribution of the imperfective *zhe* is reported to be associated with its discourse function. The point conveyed here is that more study is needed to investigate the impact of discourse on Chinese aspect. Considering the fact that a vast range of topics have been covered in this book, it might be too much to make such a request.

Overall AIMC has done a remarkable job in deepening the understanding of Chinese aspect. It has not only expanded the research scope, but also provided many insights into the nature of Chinese aspect. Most importantly, the seamless integration of theoretic exploration with empirical investigation provides new directions for future exploration. This book is necessary for any one who wants to investigate Chinese aspect further.

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Author's address

Tao Ming
Concordia College
Department of Modern Language and Literature
901 8th St. S.
Moorhead, MN 56562

ming@cord.edu