

Encoding Unexpectedness by Aspect Inflection

The issue This research explores the parallel non-temporal readings of tense and aspect inflections. The perfective aspect suffix *le* (PRF) in Chinese (e.g. Soh 2009) may occur with an individual-level predicate to encode unexpectedness from the viewpoint of a reference world.

- (1) a. Zhe gen shengzi duan-le. b. Lulu renwei zhe ba dao qingqiao-le xuduo.
this CL rope short-PRF Lulu think this CL knife handy-PRF a.lot
'This rope is too short.' 'L thinks this knife is much handier than expected.'

If an adverb of unexpectedness (e.g. *tai* 'too') occurs, *le* need not occur, as in (2).

- (2) Zhe gen shengzi tai duan (le).
this CL rope too short PRF
'This rope is too short.'

Sentences without *le* or the adverb *tai*, as in (3b), do not express unexpectedness.

- (3) a. Zhe ge zhuozi da-le yi-dianr. b. Zhe ge zhuozi da yi-dianr.
this CL table big-PRF a-little This CL table big a-little
'This table is a little bit larger than expected.' 'This table is a little bit larger.'

Previous studies of the non-temporal *le* (e.g. Chang 2009, Liu 2007) did not link the special use of the aspect inflection to the special use of tense inflection.

New analysis Past-tense may have a counterfactual reading in English, encoding a modal of displacement (Iatridou 2000, Lecarme 2008).

- (4) a. I wish you were here. b. I wish I had known that. c. I wish the rain would stop.

I claim that a verbal aspect suffix may express unexpectedness, which is also a modal of displacement. Factuality asserts the existence of a situation in the real world, whereas unexpectedness asserts that a situation is taken for granted in the viewpoint of a reference world. Tense and aspect is a pair of closely related notions. Also, the optionality of *le* in the presence of a relevant adverb, as in (2), follows the properties of verbal aspect markers in the language.

Like other evaluatives, unexpectedness must be anchored to a reference world of a person.

(1a) may not, but (1b) may, be followed by a sentence meaning 'but I don't think so'. The descriptive generalization is that in the absence of an explicit anchor, the speaker is the anchor.

All evaluative sentences have Evaluative Phrase, subcategorized by the head of Speech Act Phrase (Cinque 1999; see Speas & Tenny 2003 for the difference of this theory from Ross's 1970 Performative Hypothesis). Moreover, the reference world is either the Spec of Speech Act Phrase, i.e. Speaker (Speas 2004:265), or the subject of a verb of thought (Speas 2004:267, Speas & Tenny 2003:335) (e.g. *renwei* 'think' in (1b)). Finally, the reason for Speaker as the default reference world is that "a feature for matrix Speaker is globally available" (Tenny & Speas 2004:8), and "if we assume that consistent indexing is the unmarked case, each indexing disjunct from speaker has an additional cost" (Speas 2004:266).

Problems of the previous analyses Liu's (2007) analysis also has four major problems.

① Liu asserts that a measure expression is obligatory for the unexpectedness use of *le*. Data like (1a) are counter-examples to his claim.

② The *pro* in Liu's (2007) analysis may not be replaced by a pronoun, unlike a regular *pro*:

- (5) Zhangsan gao-le (*ta) san gongfen.

Zhangsan tall-PRF it three centimeter

Intended: 'Z. is 3 cms taller than expected.'

③ Liu assumes that there is a silent verb *ex* in the construction, and *pro* must be licensed by a head element, i.e., *le*. Why is the verb *ex* unable to license the *pro*, and thus why is *le* necessary?

④ Liu's (6b) is for (6a) (p.789). But in (6b), *san gongfen* and *pro* are local to *gao*. Thus before the AP merges with *ex*, it encodes that *pro* is 3 cms tall, which is not the meaning of (6a):

- (6) a. Zhangsan gao-le san gongfen
Zhangsan tall-ASP three centimeter

Intended: 'Zhangsan is three centimeters taller than expected.'

- b. [Zhangsan [_{ASP}...[_{EXP} [[_{EX} [[_A gao]_i-*ex*]-*le*][_{AP} *pro* [[_A t_i][_{NP} san gongfen]]]]]]]]

Selected References

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