

Locative Inversion and Temporal Aspect Marker *-guo* in Mandarin

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Abstract

This paper is to examine the relationship between locative inversion and temporal aspect markers *-guo* in Mandarin. *Guo* cannot be ignored or easily be considered the same as the perfective marker *-le* without thinking its experiential features, and such feature can prove the syntactic function of preposed locative phrase.

Keywords: Locative inversion, temporal aspect marker, Mandarin

1. Introduction

Locative inversion (hereafter LI) is a very common phenomenon in world languages. The canonical word order is NP V PP, and the customary understanding of LI is to switch the position of NP and PP. Therefore, the non-canonical word order is PP V NP. LI involves the proposing of a locative phrase before the verb and postposing of the NP after the verb (Levin 1995)^[1]. In English, we have the following sentences,

- 1) a. A lamp was in the corner
- b. In the corner was a lamp.

Similarly, we also have examples in Mandarin:

- 2) a. zhuxituan zuo zai tai-shang
 Presidium sit at stage-up
- b. tai-shang zuo-zhe zhuxituan
 Stage-on sit-DUR presidium

Different from English, temporal aspect marker is obligatory in LI construction in Mandarin. However, previous studies only focus on the perfective aspect marker *-le* and imperfective aspect marker *-zhe*, and ignore another important aspect marker *-guo*.

This paper will discuss the experiential feature of LI construction in Mandarin and its relationship with the temporal aspect marker, *-guo*. In addition, the analysis of *-guo* can also help us to prove the syntactic function of preposed locative phrase

2. Locative Inversion in Mandarin

Early studies on LI tried to determine the types of verbs involved. Bresnan and Kanerva (1989)^[2] indicated that verbs found in LI were intrinsically unaccusative or that they have undergone some morphological operation (passivation) based on the Chichew □a and English data. Levin and Hovav (1995)^[3] pointed out that only a subclass of unaccusative verbs of coherent semantic was represented in LI, and a set of unnegative verbs could occur in LI. However, in Mandarin, transitive and non-passivized verbs, such as *fang*, or *xie* can also occur in LI:

- 3) a. heiban shang xie-zhe zi
 blackboard-on write-DUR character
- b. zhuo zhang fang-zhe yige pingguo
 table-on put-DUR one-CL apple

Therefore, merely considering the verbs involved in the locative construction is not enough. Pan (1996)^[4] proposes the aspect marker, *zhe* operation. He claims that the durative aspect marker *-zhe* triggers the deletion of the agent role in the sentence. In Mandarin, agent phrases cannot appear in *zhe* LI sentence, but it could occur in *le* sentences.

4) zhuoshang Xiaoming fang *-le*/*-*zhe* yibenshu

table-on (people name) put *-PEF*/ *-*DUR* one-CL-book

Pan tries to explain and support Bresnan and Kanerva's (1989) idea that the argument structure of the verb undergoes a change from <agent, theme, location> to < theme, location>. However, he does not explain why it is the imperfective marker and not another marker that leads to such an operation. In addition, he only examines the aspect marker *-zhe* and ignores other aspect markers, such as the perfective marker *-le*, and experiential marker *-guo*, which also frequently occurs in LI sentences.

2.1 Temporal aspect marker: *-le* and *-zhe*

Based on Li and Thompson (1981)^[5], there are three verbal aspect markers: perfective (*-le*), imperfective (*-zhe*), and experiential (*-guo*).

According to Smith's (1991)^[6] Two-Component Theory, temporal aspects are divided into two aspects: the situation aspect and the viewpoint aspect. *Le* and *zhe* denote the viewpoint aspect of how the situation was viewed. Smith claims that *le* denotes the perfective point of view that spans the situation as a whole, including the endpoints of the event; *zhe* denotes the imperfective point of view, which views the situation after the final endpoint of the event excluding the endpoints. Du (1999)^[7] elaborates on the *-le* and *-zhe* in LI based on Smith's (1991) theory.

Since the perfective aspect denotes a schema including endpoints, the agent and/or the theme are visible to the viewpoint. On the contrary, only the theme is visible to the viewpoint for the imperfective aspect, since the temporal schema spans the events excluding the endpoints. In that case, the perfective aspect marker *le* is called an agent-/theme-oriented marker and *zhe* is called a theme-only-oriented marker.

For example:

5) a. zhuozi shang fang-*le* yiben shu
table-on put-*PEF* one-CL book

b. zhuozi shang fang-*zhe* yiben shu
table-on put-*DUR* one-CL book

c. zhuozoi shang Xiaoming fang *-le*/*-*zhe* yibenshu

table-on (people name) put *-PEF*/
*-*DUR* one-CL-book

For sentence 5a, the argument structure is <theme, location>, and for sentence 6b is <agent, theme, location>. Clearly, since there is no agent argument in 5a, both *-le* and *-zhe* work in the sentence; since the agent is compatible with *-le*, while *-zhe* is not compatible with the agent, *-le* is allowable in 5b while *-zhe* is not.

Sentences of which the locative subject functions as more than one argument role (including agent role) cannot be inverted. In other words, a locative phrase functioning as agent cannot be restored to the original sentence position, and such sentences cannot be simply analyzed as locative inversion.

2.2 Temporal aspect marker: *-guo*

Previous studies have all focused on the aspect markers *-le* and *-guo* but ignored another important aspect marker, *-guo*. Smith (1991) defines *guo* as a perfective marker. *-Le* spans the initial and final points of a situation, whereas *-guo* indicates a change of status subsequent to the final point. The major contrast between *-le* and *-guo* is that *-le* gives no in-

formation beyond the final point of a situation; in a *guo* sentence, although the endpoint is included, the final state is no longer obtained. Therefore, although *le* and *guo* have the same verb constellation, they provide different information about the situation to which they refer. Below is a schemata for these three aspect markers with respect to an event (a simplified version of Smith 1991)

Diagram 1: The temporal schema of the perfective viewpoint denoted by *le*

I.....F _____
/ / -> le, perfective viewpoint (endpoints included)

Diagram 2: The temporal schema of the imperfective (resultative) viewpoint denoted by *zhe*

I.....F _____
//////// -> zhe: resultative durative (endpoints excluded)

Diagram 3: The temporal schema of the imperfective (resultative) viewpoint denoted by *guo*

I.....F _____
/ -> guo: perfective viewpoint (endpoints included, final state not obtained)

Taking the following sentences as example,

6) a. zhuozishang wo fangguo yibenshu

table-on I put-GUO one-CL-book

I put a book on the table (& yibenshui is no longer there)

b. zhuozi shang wo fangle yibenshu

table-on I put-LE one-CL-book

I put a book on the table (& it may still be there)

Since the viewpoint for a *guo* sentence is also beyond the final point, agent and theme are both visible to the viewpoint. *Guo* could also be considered as an agent/theme-oriented marker. However, it

is hard to differentiate *-le* and *-guo* merely based on Du's (2009)^[8] agent or theme-oriented marker. The experiential feature of *guo* still needs to be discussed.

As mentioned above, Li and Thompson (1995) classified *-guo* as an experiential aspect. The focus of the sentence 6a is not that the event "put book on the table" has taken place, but that it has taken place at least once, which means that may put a book on the table more than once. The focus of a sentence with *le* is usually on the event being viewed as a whole, while the focus of a sentence with *guo* is on whether or not the event has been experienced. We cannot ignore the experiential feature of *guo*, although it shares a similar temporal schema with perfective aspect marker *le*. Sentences with *guo* and *le* are similar with regards to the agent and theme argument structures, but they are obviously different vis-a-vis the meanings.

Furthermore, the experiential feature of the agent/theme-oriented marker *-guo* can provide the evidence of the syntactic function of preposed locative phrase as subject (Huang and Her 1998, Her 2003, Levin and Rappaport 1995)^{[9][10]} instead of topic (Coopmans 1989, Huang and Her 1998, Her 2003)^[11].

3. Conclusions and Discussion

Temporal aspect markers play an important role in LI sentences. Previous studies trying to solve the problem of LI have only studied its relationship with aspect markers *-le* and *-zhe*, and they only focus on deciding the role of the aspect markers with the agent and theme argument. However, the fact that *guo* is also an important aspect marker in LI sentence cannot be ignored. Both *guo* and *le* are aspect markers with perfective potential, and the agent and theme argument are syntactically similar in a sentence of *guo* and *le*. However, they are still different from the viewpoint that *guo* has a particu-

lar experiential feature, and such distinguished feature can provide the evidence for the approach of generative grammar to decide the syntactic function of preposed locative phrase in LI construction.

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