

Presuppositional Aspects in Mandarin Chinese

I argue that the discontinuous reading and the non-sequential reading of the perfective marker *-guo* are antipresuppositions due to competition with the other perfective *-le*.

The discontinuous reading (Iljic 1990, Smith 1997, Pan and Lee 2003, Lin 2007, etc.) is that *-guo* implies the Target State(TS) of the event doesn't hold at speech time, while *-le* implies the opposite. This inference can be cancelled, (2). It can also be cancelled for *-le* if used in a sequence, (3).

- (1) a. Lisi shuaiduan guo tui.
Lisi break GUO leg
'Lisi has broken his leg before.' (healed)
- b. Lisi shuaiduan le tui.
Lisi break LE leg
'Lisi broke his leg.' (still broken)
- (2) Lisi dangran shuaiduan guo tui. Ta zuotian gang shuaiduan le tui.
Lisi of-course break GUO leg he yesterday just break LE leg
'Of course Lisi has broken his leg before. He broke his leg just yesterday'
- (3) Lisi shuaiduan le tui. Ta xiuxi le yige yue. Xianzai yijing hao le.
Lisi break LE leg he rest LE a month now already heal LE
'Lisi broke his leg. He rested for a month. Now it's healed.'

Another property of *-guo* is the non-sequential reading. Multiple events marked with *-le* are understood as in a sequence, but those marked with *-guo* are not.

- (4) a. Zuotian, Lisi dasao le fangjian, xi le yifu, hai ti le zuqiu.
Yesterday Lisi clean LE room wash LE clothes and kick LE football
'Yesterday, Lisi cleaned his room, did his laundry, and played football.'
(in that order)
- b. Zuotian, Lisi dasao guo fangjian, xi guo yifu, hai ti guo zuqiu.
Yesterday Lisi clean GUO room wash GUO clothes and kick GUO football
'Yesterday, Lisi cleaned his room, did his laundry, and played football.'
(not necessarily in that order)

I propose that sentences with *-le* have two presuppositions: (i) the predicate is quantized (Krifka 1989); (ii) the event marked with *-le* is anaphorically linked to a state or an event in the context, which means this state or event is part of the common knowledge of the participants or is linguistically introduced as a discourse referent. The presupposition in (ii) can be achieved if the context contains its TS (for telics), or that the event is in a sequential relation to another event in the context.

In contrast, *-guo* doesn't presuppose anything. By Maximize Presupposition (Heim 1991, Percus 2006, Sauerland 2003, Singh 2011, etc.), *-guo* is used only when the presuppositions of *-le* are not met. This gives *-guo* the antipresupposition that the event with *-guo* is not sequentially related to another event, and that the context does not contain its TS.

(1b) presupposes that the state of Lisi's leg being broken (the TS of 'Lisi-breaking-a-leg') is known. Maximize Presupposition requires *-le*. Otherwise, *-guo* is used and gets the antipresupposition that either Lisi's leg is healed, (1a), or the TS is not (yet) in the context, (2). These observations are indeed (anti)presuppositions because they survive in question (5) and negative environments (6).

- (5) a. Lisi shuaiduan le tui ma?
Lisi break LE leg MA
'Has Lisi broken his leg? (Is his leg broken now?)'
- b. Lisi shuaiguan guo tui ma?
Lisi break GUO leg MA
'Has Lisi ever broken his leg? (his leg is not assumed to be broken now)'
- (6) (The speaker sees that Lisi is wearing crutches, i.e. the TS is in the context)

Wo bu renwei Lisi shuaiduan le/#guo tui. Yexu zhishi niushang le.
I NEG think Lisi break LE/GUO leg maybe just sprain LE

'I don't think Lisi broke his leg (i.e. the event that gives rise to this current state is not a breaking leg event). Maybe it's just a sprain.'

In (3), the TS doesn't need to be in the context, because *-le* is used in a sequence and is anaphorically linked to other events in the sequence, presupposition (ii) is satisfied. Hence, the 'continuous' reading does not arise.

This analysis also explains the following contrast: *-guo* is infelicitous with verbs like *si* 'to die', and *-le* is required. This is because the TS of 'to die' is (usually) irreversible. Given the current state that someone is dead, the speaker is required (by Maximize Presupposition) to use *-le* to indicate the dying event that gives rise to this TS.

- (7) Ta si le/#guo.
he die LE/GUO
'He died.'

Previous analyses (Iljic 1990, Lin 2007) argue that *-guo* indicates (present/future) repeatability of the event, but they run into problems with the predicates *lao* 'to get old/to be old' and *nianqing* 'to become young/to be young'. Both are irreversible but *-guo* can occur with *nianqing*. Moreover, *-le* with such statives only has the inchoative reading. Previous accounts (Pan and Lee 2003) failed to notice this.

- (8) a. Ta lao le/#guo.
he old LE/GUO
'He became old.'
- b. Ta nianqing le/#guo.
he young LE/GUO
'He became young.'
- c. Ta nianqing guo/#le.
he young GUO/LE
'He used to be young.'

This is not a problem in my analysis. First, note that with *-le*, the lexically ambiguous predicates *lao/nianqing* can only get the inchoative reading because *-le* requires quantized predicates. Since the process of becoming old is usually irreversible, just like 'to die', it is expected that only *-le* can be used. For *nianqing*, note that under the 'he became young' reading, only *-le* can be used. The sentence is used when the person looks rejuvenated (the TS is in the context), hence the 'becoming young' event has to occur with *-le*. Under the 'he used to be young' reading, *nianqing* is stative, so *-le* is unavailable and *-guo* the only choice. On the other hand, *Ta*

lao guo cannot get the ‘he used to be old’ reading, not because of the properties of *-guo* and ‘be old’, but simply because it is a strange thing to say (even in English).

My analysis also explains the observation by Lin (2006) that *-le* with an activity in an isolated sentence sounds incomplete and needs another continuing sentence to be fully grammatical. This is because activities have no TS, so the anaphoric presupposition of *-le* can only be satisfied if used in a sequence. Note that since *-le* requires quantized predicates, activities are coerced into the bounded reading, i.e. ‘Lisi drank some wine’ and ‘Lisi sang for a while’.

- (9) Lisi he le jiu. #(ye chang le ge.)
Lisi drink LE wine also sing LE songs
‘Lisi drank wine...and sang songs.’ (Lin 2006)