

Introduction

Aspect of Mandarin Chinese has attracted much interest and attention in recent years. Mandarin language is regarded as exclusively an aspect language (Gong 1991) for that the language does not grammatically mark tense but grammatically marks aspect. However, in contrast, English grammatically marks both tense and aspect (Xiao and McEnery 2002). In Mandarin Chinese there are four major aspect markers: *guo*, *zai*, *zhe*, and *LE*, in which *guo* is experiential aspect marker, *zai* and *zhe* are progressive aspect markers, whereas *LE* has been the most controversial marker in Mandarin.

It is generally agreed by linguists that there are two homophonous *LE*'s in Mandarin. One immediately follows the verb in a sentence, so it is called verbal *LE*. The other one occurs in the sentence final position, so it is called sentence final *LE*. Moreover, it is also possible for a *LE* simultaneously follows the verb and occurs at the sentence final position. And it will be discussed shortly that when *LE* appears at this position, it functions as both of the two *LE*'s mentioned above. Conventionally, the marker *-le* is used to indicate verbal *LE*, and the marker *le* is used to indicate sentence final *LE*. This paper will adopt the convention and also use *LE* when its syntactic position does not concern or it functions as the combination of the two. As mentioned above, there have been quite a lot works on studying the semantic properties of the marker *LE*, but linguists have not yet reached an agreement. The marker is difficult to grasp for mainly three reasons. First, it can appear syntactically at more than one position in a sentence. Sometimes, two *LE*'s can co-occur in a single sentence. Second, it is used in various contexts. Third, it is one of the most frequently used morphemes in Mandarin Chinese.

And for the same reason, to English learners of Mandarin Chinese, the marker *LE* may be one of the most difficult and confusing items in learning Mandarin. For quite a long time, *LE* has been intensively studied by linguists and grammarians, trying to work out an accurate description of the usage of *LE* thus to benefit teaching of

Mandarin Chinese. This paper will try to do the same. But different from previous works on *LE*, this paper will not only describe the usage of *LE*, but also try to make a little contribution in a specific part of teaching *LE*, which is sentences with *LE* that simultaneously follows the verb and occurs at the sentence final position, which will be presented in chapter three of this paper.

The target readers of this paper are assumed to be teachers of Mandarin Chinese to native English speakers. And the students concerning the pedagogical implication of this paper are adult intermediate level native English learners of Mandarin Chinese in colleges and universities.

This paper is divided into five chapters, excluding introduction and conclusion. Chapter one of this paper will mainly discuss some basic conceptions that concern this paper. All together three conceptions will be discussed in the chapter. They are the concept of Aspect, Perfective and Perfect. Based on Comrie's (1976) theory, the chapter will clarify two different conceptions of Perfective and Perfect, which are misused in recent linguistic studies as well as pedagogical materials.

Chapter two of this paper will mainly discuss the previous studies of both Mandarin makers *-le* and *le*. Although it is generally accepted that there are two distinct *LE*'s in Mandarin, some linguists still hold the belief that there is only one *LE* in Mandarin. So at the beginning of the chapter, evidences from dialects in China and syntactic distribution will be firstly presented to prove the existence of two distinct *LE*'s in Mandarin. After that, the treatments of *LE* by four linguists (Li and Thompson are regarded as one) will be discussed. It will be concluded that verbal *-le* is the marker of Perfective aspect and sentence final *le* is the marker of Perfect aspect.

Following the conclusion from chapter two, chapter three of this paper will analyze in detail the sentences with *LE* simultaneously following the verb and occurring at the sentence final position. Due to *LE*'s special syntactic position in this kind of sentences, it is found that *LE* in the sentences functions as both verbal *-le* and sentence final *le*, i.e. indicates both Perfective and Perfect aspect.

Based on what is discussed in previous chapters, chapter four will evaluate the specific part in one of the popular college course books of Mandarin Chinese that are currently in use, which is called *New Practical Chinese Reader*. Both good and weak points of the treatments in the book will be presented in this chapter.

Finally, chapter five will try to make some suggestions for future course book design in this specific area.

In addition, most of the illustrative sentences in this paper will be presented in three lines. The first line is the original Mandarin sentence in Pinyin (literally “spell sound”), which is the official romanization transcription system of the People’s Republic of China, and also the most widely used system in the media and scholarly writings on Chinese in the West (Li and Thompson 1981: xvi-xvii). Below the Mandarin example are two lines of English. The first line that is immediately below the Mandarin example contains glosses with the most literal English equivalent to each Mandarin element. And the second line of English is the translation of the whole Mandarin sentence. In addition, a * is used in front of each sentence that is ungrammatical in this paper.

Chapter One Conceptions

As stated above, the target readers of this paper are teachers of Mandarin Chinese to native English students, who are supposed to be intermediate level adult students. Accordingly, they are assumed to have some linguistic knowledge. However, it is still necessary to discuss some conceptions given that they are the basis of this paper. The first to be discussed is the conception of Aspect, following which is the discussion on Perfective and Perfect.

1.1. Aspect

The notion of Aspect perhaps, to many people, is less familiar than the notion of Tense. However, it has attracted more and more interest and attention among linguists. Tense, according to Comrie, relates the time of the situation referred to some other

time, usually to the moment of speaking (Comrie 1976: 1-2). From the linguistic point of view, English has two primary tense categories, which are past tense and non-past tense marked by verb inflection (Huddleston and Pullum 2002: 125). As for Aspects, according to Comrie, “are different ways of viewing the internal temporal constituency of a situation (Comrie 1976: 3)”. The term “situation” is used here as a general cover-term, i.e. a situation may be either a state, or an event, or a process¹ (Comrie 1976: 13). This view of Aspect is also maintained by Dahl (1985).

Traditionally, Aspect has been treated as a verbal category (Comrie 1976, Jakobson 1957, Friedrich 1974). However, there are linguists who think that it is too narrow a conception of Aspect (Li, Thompson and Thompson 1982, Huang 1988). As Li, Thompson and Thompson (1982) put it, what determines that a construction or morpheme in a given language might be a manifestation of a given grammatical category is its expression of certain “core” meanings, which are “typical” of that grammatical category. Therefore, there need not be any single set of semantic parameters which is shared by the grammatical manifestations of a given category cross-linguistically. As that will be discussed shortly, in Mandarin Chinese, the sentence final *le* is not associated with verbs, but it performs the functions of the Perfect aspect.

Unlike English, Mandarin Chinese does not have tense system or markers of tense. “The language does not use verb affixes to signal the relation between the time of the occurrence of the situation and the time that situation is brought up in speech (Li & Thompson 1981: 184)”. However, Chinese does have an aspect system as well as aspect markers. In Mandarin Chinese there are four major aspect markers: *guo*, *zai*, *zhe*, and *LE*, in which *guo* is experiential aspect marker, *zai* and *zhe* are progressive

¹ A “state” involves no change, or we could say unless something happens to change that state, then the state will continue, such as verb *know*. With a dynamic situation, on the other hand, the situation involves necessarily change, and the situation will only continue if it is continually subject to a new input of energy, such as verb *run*. Therefore, to remain in a state requires no effort, whereas to remain in a dynamic situation requires effort. Both “event” and “process” refer to dynamic situations. A “process” refers to the internal structure of a dynamic situation, while “event” refers to a dynamic situation as a single complete whole thus the term “process” means a dynamic situation viewed imperfectively, and the term “event” means a dynamic situation viewed perfectly (Comrie 1976: 48 - 51). Also see discussion in Lyons (1963: III - 19) and Vendler (1967: 107 -21).

aspect markers, and *LE*, as we shall see in chapter two, is both Perfective aspect marker and Perfect aspect marker, depending on the positions it may occur in a sentence.

1.2. Perfective and Perfect

1.2.1. Perfective

Before discussing the two terms in detail, let's first see a definition in *Longman Dictionary of Language Teaching and Applied Linguistics* (1992). "Perfective and also Perfect is an aspect which shows a relationship between one state or event and a later state, event, or time". Regardless of the definition itself, obviously, this dictionary treats Perfective and Perfect as the same. It is unfortunate that now there seems to be a tendency of using the two terms in the way that they are interchangeable, like the definition quoted above. But actually, the two terms have different senses from each other. So it is quite necessary to clarify the two terms here for that they are closely related to the description of Chinese marker *LE* later in this paper.

Perfectivity, according to Comrie, is the opposition of Imperfectivity. "...the Perfective looks at the situation from outside, without necessarily distinguishing any of the internal structure of the situation, whereas the Imperfective looks at the situation from inside, and as such is crucially concerned with the internal structure of the situation...(Comrie 1976:4)". To illustrate the two terms, let's just pick up Comrie's (1976) instance: John was reading when I entered. In this sentence, the first verb, here, "was reading", presents the background of the event introduced by the second verb, here, "entered". The second verb, as Comrie notes, "presents the totality of the situation referred to without reference to its internal temporal constituency (Comrie 1976: 3)". In other words, the whole situation of my entry is presented as a single unanalysable whole with beginning, middle, and end rolled into one. This situation cannot be divided into various individual phases that make up the action of entry (Comrie 1976: 3). With regarding to the situation of John's reading, reference is made to the internal temporal constituency of the situation, here, John's reading, while

there is no explicit reference to the beginning or ending of his reading (Comrie 1976: 4). In one word, the Perfective denotes a complete situation with beginning, middle, and end, but all parts are presented as a single whole (Comrie 1976: 4). Chinese is among the languages that have distinction between Perfective and Imperfective forms. However, it is different from English in the sense that Chinese Perfective meaning is realized lexically by using the marker *-le*. For example:

1) Ta du *-le* yi ben shu
 he / she² read *-le* one CL³ book
 He / She read a book.

2) John sha *-le* Bill.
 John kill Bill.
 John killed Bill.

What is interesting here is the Mandarin verb *sha* does not correspond to English verb *kill*. *Sha* actually roughly means “trying to make...dead”. It can even have imperfective meaning when it takes another marker *zai*.

3) John *zai* sha Bill.
 John *zai* kill Bill.
 John is trying to kill Bill.

Obviously, it doesn't make any sense to say an English sentence like “John is killing Bill”. Mandarin verbs have quite different senses from English verbs. But by taking aspect markers, Mandarin verbs may have the same aspectual meaning as English.

1.2.2. Perfect

Aspect, as noted above, is concerned with the internal temporal constituency of a situation. However, Perfect (Comrie 1976), different from other aspects, is not concerned with the situation itself, but relates some state to a preceding situation. In

² Mandarin pronouns make no distinction between masculine and feminine, so *ta* is translated into he / she.

³ A classifier is a word that must occur with a number and / or a demonstrative (i.e. *zhe* “this”, *na* “that”) or a certain quantifiers (such as *zheng* “whole”, *ji* “how many”) before the noun. In this paper, classifier is abbreviated as CL (Li and Thompson 1981: 104).

other words, Perfect indicates the present relevance to a preceding state, event, or a process. Comrie (1976: 56) divides Perfect into four types, namely, Perfect of result, experiential Perfect, Perfect of persistent situation, and Perfect of recent past.

In the Perfect of result, a present state is referred to as being the result of some past situation (ibid.). In English, the Perfect form is constructed by *have* plus past participle. However, English tends to use the Present of a stative verb or adjective to express Perfect implicitly. For instance, the meaning of the sentence “He has got married” can also be expressed by the following sentence “He is married”. More examples follow:

4). He has got tired.

He is tired.

5). He has fallen asleep.

He is asleep.

As Comrie puts it, English overall tends towards the use of the stative Present to a greater extent than do many other languages (Comrie 1976: 57). However in Chinese, it seems that Perfect meaning is always expressed in the Perfect form, i.e. in the sentences with the marker, sentence final *le*. Chinese linguists are still arguing about the semantic property of the sentence final *le*. Many of them do not think the sentence final *le* is an aspect marker. But as we will see shortly in this paper, it indeed functions as indicating Perfect aspect. Consider sentence 4) and 5) again. They will be translated into Chinese as:

4) He has got tired.

Ta lei le

he / she tired le

He is tired.

5) He has fallen asleep.

Ta shuizhao le

he / she fall asleep le

He is asleep.

As we can see it is very natural to indicate a perfect meaning with a non-perfect form in English, whereas in Chinese a perfect situation will always be conveyed in perfect form.

So far the Perfective and Perfect have been discussed. As we can see, they are very different from each other. This paper will just follow Comrie's treatment, using them in different senses.

Chapter Two Previous Studies on Chinese Marker *LE*

2.1. Two Homophonous *LE*'s

In Mandarin Chinese, *LE* is one of the most frequently used morphemes in ordinary conversations. It seems to have a great variety of interpretations, which causes a great difficulty for the learners of Mandarin Chinese. So far linguists have not reached an agreement on the usage of this morpheme. It is generally accepted that there are two homophonous *LE*'s. One immediately follows verbs, namely the verbal *-le*. The other occurs at the sentence final position, namely sentence final *le*. However, some linguists still think there is only one *LE* in Mandarin Chinese. Before examining the previous treatments of *LE*, it is necessary to have a brief discussion on whether there is only one *LE* or two homophonous *LE*'s.

To distinguish the two *LE*'s, Chao (1968: 246-247) states that "This suffix *-le*, which is a weakened form of the verb *liao* 'finish' ...should be distinguished from a homophonous particle *le*, probably a weak form of *lai* 'come', with various meanings such as 'new situation', 'progress in the story', and so on". Chao's evidence for two distinct *LE*'s is quite convincing. Chao (1968: 247) compares some sentences taken from the Mandarin, Cantonese and Wu dialects (one of the local dialects in China):

6) Mandarin:

shang	<i>-le</i>	feng	<i>le</i>
catch	<i>-le</i>	cold	<i>le</i>

(He) has caught a cold.

7) Cantonese:

sheung -cox fong lhoh

catch -cox cold lhoh

(He) has caught a cold.

8) Wu:

sang -z fong ze

catch -z cold ze

(He) has caught a cold.

As can be seen here, the Mandarin *-le* corresponds to *-cox* in Cantonese and *-z* in Wu, whereas *le* corresponds to *lhoh* in Cantonese and *ze* in Wu. Since there are two distinct elements in both Cantonese and Wu, there should also be two distinct *LE*'s instead of only one in Mandarin. Furthermore, it is pointed out by Li, Thompson and Thompson (1982: 42, footnote. 6) the fact that the two *LE*'s can co-occur in one utterance also proves that they are two distinct elements, as shown in sentence 6). The two-*LE* notion is also maintained by Teng (1973), Li and Thompson (1981), Yip & Rimmington (1997, 1998) and most of the recent Chinese linguists. However, problem arises when the verbal *-le* simultaneously occurs at the sentence final position, like the sentence 4) and 5), in which there is only one *LE* instead of two. In this case, one may wonder whether the two-*LE* notion still holds. Again, Chao (1968: 247) finds evidence in dialects in Cantonese, as illustrated in the following sentences:

9) Cantonese:

yixkeng xÖy -cox lhoh

already go -cox lhoh

(He) has already gone.

10) Mandarin:

* yijing qu -le le

already go -le le

(He) has already gone.

In Cantonese the two elements *-cox* and *lhoh* can occur successively, as in 9) while sentence like 10) is unacceptable in Mandarin. Chao's explanation is that "Mandarin always avoids a repetition of the same syllable by way of haplology (Chao 1968: 247)", i.e. the two *LE*'s are combined into one. So, in Mandarin, the right way to say this sentence is:

11) *yijing qu LE*

already go *LE*

(He) has already gone.

And it is due to its special syntactic position that *LE* in Sentences like 4), 5) and 11) functions as both *-le* and *le*. Thus the situations indicated in the sentences are both Perfective and Perfect.

In the rest of this chapter, I will examine and discuss some previous treatments of *LE*, and try to work out a plausible description of the usage of this aspect marker.

2.2. Chao's Treatment

2.2.1. Verbal *-le*

Chao (1968: 246) treats the verbal *-le* as a Perfective Aspect marker and the suffix has the class meaning of "completed action". For instance:

12) *ci -le xing zai dongshen*

take *-le* leave then depart

After having taken leave, (and only then) depart.

Don't depart without having taken leave.

13) *zenme peng -le beizi ye bu he?*

How come pump *-le* glass also not drink?

How come after having touched glasses, you still don't drink?

Here, as stated by Chao, "taking leave" and "touching glasses" are regarded as completed actions. But let's consider the two sentences again. It's right to regard "touching glasses" as a completed action, whereas "taking leave" in sentence 12), as

we can see from the English gloss, is actually not a completed action. “Taking leave” has not been done yet. How could action that is not done be called completed? More examples follow:

14) chi *-le* fan qu shangxue
eat *-le* meal go attend school
Go to school after having meal.

15) wo shua *-le* ya jiu shuijiao
I brush *-le* tooth then sleep
After I brush my teeth, I will go to bed.

As shown above, both “eating” and “brushing teeth” do not seem to be actions that have been completed. Chao is quite right to treat *-le* as Perfective marker. But he seems to have misinterpreted the sense of Perfective. As stated earlier, Perfective looks at a situation from outside, and denotes a complete situation with beginning, middle, and end. Notice that the word used here is “complete”, not “completed”. Comrie points out the important semantic distinction, which is crucial in discussing Aspect.

The Perfective does indeed denote a complete situation, with beginning, middle, and end. The use of “completed”, however, puts too much emphasis on the termination of the situation, whereas the use of the Perfective puts no more emphasis, necessarily, on the end of the situation than on any other part of the situation, rather all parts of the situation are presented as a single whole.

(Comrie 1976: 18)

So, “taking leave” in sentence 12), “having meal” in sentence 14) and “brushing teeth” in sentence 15) should all be regarded as complete situations rather than completed actions. In other words, when stating these sentences, what speakers of Mandarin refer to is the entirety of these situations, not the beginning, the middle, or

the end.

2.2.2. Sentence final *le*

When discussing the functions of sentential *le*, Chao considers that it has the following seven uses (1968: 798-800):

- a) Inchoative *le*
- b) Command in response to a new situation
- c) Progress in story
- d) Isolated event in the past
- e) Completed action as of the present
- f) Consequent clause to indicate situation
- g) Obviousness

Although a rather detailed description, this list of uses of *le* seems to fail to grasp the essence of *le*. Now let's examine Chao's treatment of *le* in detail with his examples.

- a) Inchoative *le*

16) xia yu *le*
 down rain *le*

It's raining. / It has begun to rain.

When this sentence is stated by speakers of Mandarin, it does not necessarily mean that it has just begun to rain. It could be in the middle of raining when speakers realize the fact that it's raining now. So, it seems that the *le* does not necessarily mean inchoative. Li and Thompson (1981) use the same sentence as 16), but their explanation is quite convincing, which is, with *le* at the end, the sentence indicates that some state of affairs holds now which didn't hold before.

- b) Command in response to a new situation

17) chi fan *le*
 eat meal *le*

Let's have dinner now.

c) Progress in story

18) *houlai tian jiu qing le*
after that weather then clear *le*

And then the weather cleared.

d) Isolated event in the past

19) *wo zuotian dao zhang jia chi fan le*
I yeaterday go zhang family eat dinner *le*

I went to Zhang's for dinner yesterday.

17), 18) and 19) are all presented by Chao to illustrate the uses of *le*. He is right that the sentential *le* may appear in the above sentences. However, it seems that the functions stated by Chao are performed by other element than *le*. Take 17) as an example. As we see, this sentence is an imperative sentence. *le* does appear in imperative sentences, but it is not the function of *le* to convey the implication of command, but the function of imperative sentence itself. Without *le*, the sentence still has the meaning of command. But by adding *le*, the sentence indicates that the dinner that was not ready is ready now. Sentence 17) also appears in Lü (1980: 316), and *le* in this sentence is regarded by him as to indicate that a situation has changed.

As for sentence 18), the progress in story is indicated by the word *houlai* “after that”, not *le*. Similar to sentence 17), with *le* at the end, the sentence indicates the weather has changed from unclear to clear. And in sentence 19), it is right that the event is in the past, but again it is nothing to do with *le*, but with the adverb *zuotian* “yesterday”. If the adverb *zuotian* “yesterday” is left out, the sentence is still grammatical in Mandarin.

Now let's examine the rest of the uses of *le* proposed by Chao.

e) Completed action as of the present

20) *wo hui lai le*
I come back *le*

I have come back.

Chao notes that with this *le*, the sentence is usually translated into the Perfect in English, as can be seen from the English gloss. However, the so-called “completed action as of the present” seems to be confusing. Chao does not further explain the implication of this notion. But it seems that this notion is close to the sense of the Perfect. By this notion, Chao may actually refer to the present relevance to a preceding situation, here, the completed action.

f) Consequent clause to indicate situation

21) na wo bu zou *le*

then I not go *le*

In that case, I won't go, then. (I planned to go)

The sentence with this *le*, noted by Chao, is to express a consequence. But, it seems that the meaning of consequence comes from the adverb *na* “then”, not from *le*. Without *le*, the sentence seems to still express the meaning of a consequence.

g) Obviousness

22) ni dangran dong *le*

you of course understand *le*

You understand, of course.

Chao says that *le* here is to signal obviousness. However, it appears that the obviousness is signaled by *dangran* “of course”. Compare sentence 22) with a sentence without *dangran*, “ni dong *le*”, there is no longer meaning of obviousness in the sentence.

As discussed above, the list of uses of *le* given by Chao is actually a list of functions of sentences, which may all contain *le*. In other words, they are not the properties of sentence final *le*.

2.3. Lü's Treatment

Like many other linguists, Lü (1980) thinks that there are two distinct *LE*'s in Mandarin Chinese. One of them, *-le*, is used after the verb, the other is at the sentence final position. *-le* is regarded by Lü as an element to signal the completion of an

action. And *le* is regarded as to indicate that situation has been changed or will be changed (Lü 1980: 314).

2.3.1. Verbal *-le*

The first function of *-le*, according to Lü, is to indicate the completion of an action. Examples follow:

23) wo yijing wen *-le* Laowang
I already ask *-le* Laowang
I already asked Laowang.

24) wo mai *-le* san zhang piao
I buy *-le* three classifier ticket
I bought three tickets.

It is no question that both situations in the two are completed. However, Lü seems to have realized the problem posed in 2.2.1., which is in sentence like 12), 14) and 15), the situation is not completed. So Lü states the second use of *-le*, which is when verbal *-le* is followed by a second verb phrase or clause, it indicates that the event expressed by the second verb phrase happens after the first one completes, or the first is prerequisite for the second one. For example (Lü 1980: 314):

25) ni chi *-le* fan zai qu
you eat *-le* meal then go
Go after having your meal.

26) ni zuowan *-le* gongke, wo cai rang ni qu wan
you finish *-le* homework, I then let you go play
You are only allowed to go out play after you finish doing your homework.

From the sentences presented so far 12), 14), 15), 25) and 26), it can be seen that the use verbal *-le* seems not to be related to whether or not the action indicated by the verb is completed. Therefore, both Chao's notion of "indicating completed action" and Lü's notion of "signaling the completion of an action" are wrong. But as mentioned above, it is right for Chao to treat *-le* as the marker of the Perfective aspect.

So, with *-le*, these sentences indicate the situation signaled by the verb is viewed as a single whole.

2.3.2. Sentence final *le*

When discussing the use of sentence final *le*, Lü's treatment is quite simple and straightforward. According to him, sentence final *le* is used to indicate that situation has been changed (Lü 1980: 316). Examples follow:

27) ta tongyi wo qu *le*

he / she agree I go *le*

He / She has agreed that I could go. (He / She did not agree before.)

28) keyi tongzhi ta lai *le*

may inform he come *le*

Now you may tell him to come. (You may not before.)

Compare the above two sentences with sentences in which *le* are left out.

27) a. ta tongyi wo qu *le*

he / she agree I go *le*

He / She has agreed that I could go. (He did not agree before.)

b. ta tongyi wo qu

he / she agree I go

He / She agrees that I go. (My going is permitted by him.)

28) a. keyi tongzhi ta lai *le*

may inform he / she come *le*

Now you may tell him / her to come. (You may not before.)

b. keyi tongzhi ta lai

may inform he /she come

You may tell him / her to come. (Tell him / her to come if you like.)

As shown here, Lü is quite right to treat sentence final *le* as an element to signal the situation has been changed, as we can see from the above sentences. And this treatment of *le* is also generally agreed by recent Chinese linguists.

2.3.3. Verb + *-le* / *le*

Lü (1980: 317) notices that in Mandarin it is possible that the position of *LE* is simultaneously verbal and sentence final. For example:

29) zhe ben shu jie chuqu *LE*

this CL book lend out *LE*

This book has been lent (to someone).

30) ta yijing lai *LE*, bu yong da dianhua *le*

he / she already come *LE*, no use hit telephone *le*

He / She has already come, so it's no need to call him now.

31) xiuxi *LE*

rest *LE*

(You may) have a rest now. / (You should) have a rest now.

According to Lü, when *LE* appears at this position, it should have the property of both *-le* and *le*, which is, in his words, *LE* signals that an action is completed and situation is changed. It is right for Lü to treat the *LE* in this kind of sentences as to function as both verbal *-le* and sentence final *le*. However, we discussed above that it is problematic to treat *-le* as solely indicating completed action. Although in sentence 29) and 30) “lending out” and “his coming” are completed, sentence 31) does not seem to indicate completed action at all. Here are more examples:

32) Ta ku *LE*

he / she cry *LE*

He / She cries (now).

33) Ta xiao *LE*

he / she smile *LE*

He / She smiles (now).

As shown from above two sentences, it is very possible that the actions, which are “crying” and “smiling” mentioned in the two sentences are still ongoing instead of being completed.

Furthermore, Lü also notices that in Mandarin *LE* can suffix to adjectives, and a sentence like this indicates that a new situation appears. For instance:

34) ren lao *LE*

person old *LE*

The person has become older. / The person is older.

35) zhouwen duo *LE*

wrinkle many *LE*

(I) have got more wrinkles. / (My) wrinkles become more.

Chinese adjectives, according to Li and Thompson (1981: 142), “the vast majority of adjectives may function as verbs.” Therefore, they are called Adjectival Verbs by Li and Thompson. For instance:

36) ta pang

he /she fat

He /She is fat.

37) ni dui

you correct

You are correct.

38) nei wan fan bing liang

that bowl rice ice cold

That bowl of rice is ice-cold.

(Li and Thompson 1981: 143)

As adjectives can function as verbs, stated by Li and Thompson, they may be the nucleus of a verb phrase, as in 39) and 40):

39) Zhangsan pang *LE*

Zhangsan fat *LE*

Zhangsan has gotten fatter.

40) jiu ping kong *LE*

wine bottle empty *LE*

The wine bottle has become empty.

Since Chinese adjectives can function as verbs and they all can take *LE*, as illustrated above, it is probably unnecessary for Lü to treat 34), 35), 39) and 40) as in different category from 31), 32) and 33). And *LE*, taking verbal as well as sentence final position, functions as both verbal *-le* and sentence final *le*.

2.4. Liu's Treatment of Verbal *-le*

Liu is also one of the linguists who think that there are two distinct *LE*'s in Mandarin. In this part we will only examine his treatment of Verbal *-le*.

Liu (1988) considers that it is incorrect for Chao's (1980) to treat *-le* as marker of indicating "completed action". Instead, he regards *-le* as a marker of Realization. He notes that when *-le* suffixes to a verb or adjective, the situation indicated by verbs or adjectives is realized. For example:

41) zhe ben shu wo kan -le san tian
this CL book I look -le three day
I read this book for three days.

42) wo shi zuo -le yi ci
I try do -le one time
I tried to do it once.

According to Liu, sentence 41) indicates that the action of *du* "reading" is done, i.e. the situation, in which the book is read, is realized. And the same is true with sentence 42). The sentence indicates the action of *zuo* "doing" is realized. We can see here that the notion of "Realization" is more plausible than the notion of "completed action". It has been discussed before that the notion of "completed action" cannot explain the sentence like 32)-35) and 39)-40), because it seems that the indicated situations are still ongoing. However, they can be explained by the notion of "realization" for that, as stated by Liu (1988), *-le* signals a situation is realized, but it does not necessarily mean the situation is completed. In other words, a situation may be either completed or ongoing. So in sentence 41) and 42), the situations are realized

and completed, but in 32)-35) and 39)-40), the situations are still ongoing.

So far this notion is very convincing. However, this notion is not unproblematic for that it still cannot explain sentence like 25) and 26), in which the situation indicated by the verb that takes *-le* is not yet realized, but a prerequisite for situation indicated by the second verb, here, *qu* “go” and *qu wan* “go playing”.

2.5. Li and Thompson’s Treatment

Li and Thompson (1981) also think in Mandarin verbal *-le* is distinct from sentence final *le*. According to Li and Thompson, verbal *-le* expresses perfectivity in the sense of boundedness. That is, it indicates that an event is being viewed in its entirety or as a whole (Li and Thompson 1981: 185). Therefore, *-le* is treated by them as a marker of Perfective Aspect. As for sentence final *le*, noted by Li and Thompson, of which the basic communicative function is to signal a “Currently Relevance State” (Li and Thompson 1981: 240).

2.5.1. Verbal *-le*

Li and Thompson regards verbal *-le* as a Perfective Aspect marker in Mandarin. With *-le*, an event is viewed in its entirety or as a whole. And an event is viewed in its entirety if it is *bounded* temporally, spatially, or conceptually. There are essentially four ways in which an event can be bounded (Li and Thompson 1981: 185- 186):

- a. By being a quantified event
- b. By being a definite of specific event
- c. By being inherently bounded because of the meaning of the verb
- d. By being the first event in a sequence

2.5.1.1. A Quantified Event

According to Li and Thompson, if the event signaled by the verb is limited by overt phrases naming the extent to which that event occurred, the amount of time it took, or the number of times it happened, the event is viewed as bounded and the verb which signals the event will occur with *-le*. For example (Li and Thompson 1981: 186 - 189):

43) ta shui -le san ge zhongtou
he / she sleep -le three CL hour

He slept for three hours.

44) wo zai nail zhu -le liang ge yue
I at there live -le two CL month

I lived there for two months.

45) Zhangsan zai bowuguan men kou deng Lisi, deng -le sanshi
fenzhong

Zhangsan at museum door mouth wait Lisi, wait -le thirty
minute

Zhangsan waited for Lisi at the entrance to the museum, and he waited for
thirty minutes.

This is a good illustration given by Li and Thompson to contrast between just naming an event and presenting it as a whole. The first *deng* “wait” is not presented as its entirety, so it cannot take *-le*. The second “*deng*” is bounded by a phrase *sanshi fenzhong* “thirty minutes”, therefore *-le* is required.

Moreover, a verb with a specified quantity of the direct object will also typically occur with *-le* because the quantified direct object serves to bound the event signaled by the verb. For instance (Li and Thompson 1981: 189 - 192):

46) nei ge jingcha dui wo xing -le yi ge li
that CL police to I perform -le one CL salute

That police officer saluted me.

2.5.1.2. Definite or Specific Event

An event will also qualify as bounded if the direct object is understood as a definite noun phrase⁴, and the verb that signals the event will take *-le*. For illustration, see the following sentences (Li and Thompson 1981: 192 - 194):

⁴ According to Li and Thompson, if the classifier phrase of a noun phrase includes a demonstrative, e.g. *na* “that”, *zhe* “this”, or a numeral, e.g. *yi* “one”, *san* “three”, then the noun phrase is necessarily definite. Moreover, people’s names are necessarily definite. See more discussion in Li and Thompson (1981: 126 - 132).

47) wo peng dao -le Lin Hui
I bump arrive -le Lin Hui
I ran into Lin Hui.

48) wo xiang chu lai -le na ge zi
I think exit come -le that CL character
I remembered that character.

2.5.1.3. Verbs with Inherent Bounded Meaning

Some verbs represent specific, bounded events by virtue of their meaning. These verbs have their end point built into their meaning. Such verbs are *si* “die”, *wang* “forget⁵”, etc. (Li and Thompson 1981: 195 – 197)

49) ta qu nian si -le / le
he /she last year die -le / le
He / She died last year.

50) wo wang -le tade dizhi
I forget -le his /her address
I forgot his / her address.

2.5.1.4. First Event in a Sequence

Li and Thompson note that sometimes an event is bounded by being the first event in a sequence, where what is important is that after one event has taken place, another one happens or a new state materializes. In such case, the first event is of interest as an unanalyzed whole. In these instances *-le* is used, and the sentence can often be translated with “after”, “when”, or “now that” in English (Li and Thompson 1981: 198).

51) wo chi wan -le ni chi
I eat finish -le you eat
After I have finished eating, then you eat.

⁵ Li and Thompson (1981: 196) note that the inclusion of the end point in the meaning of such verbs as *si* “die” and *wang* “forget” is an idiosyncrasy of Mandarin Chinese, not a universal feature of all languages of the world. For example, the English verb “die” does not have the end point of dying included in its meaning, and therefore it is possible to use the verb in durative aspect, as shown in “He is dying”.

52) wo kan wan -le bao, jiu shui
I read finish -le paper then sleep

When I finish reading the paper, I will go to sleep.

Here, Li and Thompson uses the same instance with Chao (1968), the sentence 13) above.

13) zen me peng -le beizi ye bu he?
How come pump -le glass also not drink?

How come after having touched glasses, you still don't drink?

As we can see, it seems that Li and Thompson's notion of boundedness has well explained the problem unsolved by the linguists discussed previously. This notion avoids the weakness of the notion of "completed action" (Chao 1968, Lü 1980), at the same time it also avoids the weakness of the Liu's (1988) notion of "Realization". No matter whether the situation is completed or realized, it can be bounded in Li and Thompson's treatment. And notice that so far their treatment of Perfective aspect, which is marked by *-le*, is the only treatment that is in accordance with the real sense of the Perfective discussed in chapter one, which views a situation as an entirety or as a whole.

2.5.2. Li and Thompson / Li, Thompson and Thompson's Treatment of Sentence final *le*

In Li and Thompson (1981), they state that the basic communicative function of *le* is to signal a "Currently Relevant State" (CRS). That is, *le* claims that a state of affairs has special current relevance to some particular Reference Time (Li, Thompson and Thompson 1982). Later in Li, Thompson and Thompson (1982), they further prove that the Mandarin *le* can be seen as an exponent of the Perfect aspect. The following section will discuss their treatment of sentence final *le*.

2.5.2.1. Currently Relevant State

2.5.2.1.1. Currently

We have noted above that *le* claims that a state of affairs has special current

relevance to some particular Reference Time⁶. When no other time is mentioned, the “*current*” time is the speech situation, i.e. the statement signaled by the sentence with the *le* is relevant to *now*, that is, to the situation of the speech context in which the speaker and hearer are engaged. If another Reference Time besides the speech situation is being referred to in the conversation, then by extension the statement signaled by the sentence with *le* is claimed to be relevant to that particular Reference Time (Li and Thompson 1981, Li, Thompson and Thompson 1982).

Compare the following sentences. Suppose a person calls “he” who is out, the person who answers the phone may say:

53) a. ta chu qu mai dongxi le
he exit go buy thing le
He’s gone shopping.

Now suppose two people are discussing whether “he” made a phone call the other day, one can say:

b. nei tian ta chu qu mai dongxi le
that day he exit go buy thing le
That day he went out shopping.

In sentence a, the *le* says that her having gone shopping is current with respect to some time, and since no time is explicitly mentioned, it is assumed that her having gone shopping is relevant to the present, that is, she is out as of the present situation in which the conversation is taking place (Li and Thompson 1981: 240, Li, Thompson and Thompson 1982). As for sentence b, Li and Thompson note it means that the state of her having gone shopping was relevant to the time the conversationalists are discussing, namely “that day” in the past (ibid.).

2.5.2.1.2. Relevance

The notion of relevance is very much a matter of the context in

⁶ In Li and Thompson (1981), they use “particular situation” instead of “particular Reference Time”. In Li, Thompson and Thompson, they change “situation” to “Reference Time” or just “time”.

which the *le* sentence occurs; *le* claims that some state of affairs signaled by the sentence is *relevant* for the speaker and the hearer, and it is assumed that they can infer from the context in just what ways it is relevant.

Li and Thompson (1981: 242)

Consider sentence 53a) again. The state of his having gone shopping is clearly relevant to the caller's desire to talk with his: the caller cannot do so, because she isn't there. And the state of his having gone shopping is relevant in 53b) because it establishes that he couldn't have made the phone call (Li and Thompson 1981: 242).

2.5.2.1.3. State

This means that *le* always treats an event signaled by the sentence as a state of affairs and claims that that state is currently relevant to some situation (Li and Thompson 1981: 243). Let's use sentence 53a) again as an illustration. With *le*, the sentence is talking about the *action* of going shopping, but concerns the *state* of her having gone shopping and its relevance to the present situation (*ibid.*). Jin (1998) states that the sentence final *le* signals that an event or state maintains to the reference time. Take 59) as an example. According to Jin, the event of drinking has been realized, and till the reference time, which is "now" if not explicitly mentioned, the statement of drinking three glasses is true. This notion is somewhat close to Li and Thompson's, but the meaning of "maintains to the reference time" is rather vague. One may ask how an event could maintain? So as discussed previously, it is the state, which is the state of having drinking three glasses in 59), that is concerned by a sentence with *le* instead of the action or event.

According to Li and Thompson, every occurrence of *le* expresses this "Currently Relevant State" function. Here are some minimal pairs (Li and Thompson 245 - 289):

54) a. ta zhidao nei ge xiaoxi
 he / she know that CL news
 He / She knows about that piece of news.

b. ta zhidao nei ge xiaoxi le
he /she know that classifier news le

He /She knows about that piece of news now (he /she didn't before).

55) a. wo yao qu
I will go

I'm going to go (a simple statement of intention).

b. wo yao qu le
I will go le

I'm going after all (I had thought I wouldn't).

56) (Waiter in restaurant after having been asked whether they have any dumplings)

a. mei you
not have

No.

b. mei you le
not have le

Not anymore (i.e., we've run out).

57) (To person serving food)

a. wo bu chi
I not eat

I'm not going to eat.

b. wo bu chi le
I not eat le

I'm not going to eat anymore (either I've had enough food or I've changed my mind as to whether I'll eat, i.e., my not eating is a new situation).

Here are some more examples:

58) wo zuotian dao Zhang jia chi fan le
I yesterday to Zhang family eat food le

(Well,) I (finally) went yesterday to have dinner at the Zhangs.

59) wo he san bei *le*

I drink three glass *le*

I've drunk three glasses.

60) wo lei *le*

I tired *le*

I'm tired (now).

61) wo duzi e *le*

I stomach hungry *le*

I'm hungry (now).

62) ta xing *le*

he awaken *le*

He's awake (now).

63) tian hei *le*

sky black *le*

It's dark (now).

Li, Thompson and Thompson (1982) note if aspect is generally thought of and typically represented grammatically as a verbal category, *le* would be disqualified as an aspect marker. However, they state that the essence of the Perfect is its function of relating events / states to a Reference Time, either to the time of the narrative or to the time of the speech act. So, in the case of Mandarin, Perfect Aspect is understood in terms of its discourse function, which is to relate some state of affairs to the “current” time.

Chapter Three Perfective –*le* versus Perfect *le*

3.1. Weak Point of Li and Thompson's Treatment

So far it seems that Li and Thompson, Li, Thompson and Thompson have given the most plausible interpretation of the Mandarin Chinese marker *LE*. One of them, the

verbal *-le* is Perfective aspect marker of Mandarin, whereas the sentence final *le* is Perfect Aspect marker. However, their treatment is not unproblematic. If considering sentence 60) – 63) again, we may find that these sentences have the same structure as that of sentence 32) – 35), 39) and 40), in which *LE* appears at verbal suffix position as well as sentence final position. As we have discussed before, *LE* at this position has the function of both verbal *-le* and sentential *le*. But, obviously as we can see, *LE* in 60) – 63) is treated only as sentential *le*. Now let us review their notion about verbal *-le*, which has been stated early in this section. With *-le*, an event is viewed in its entirety or as a whole. And an event is viewed in its entirety if it is *bounded* temporally, spatially, or conceptually. Four ways have been given, by which an event can be bounded. Thus *-le* is regarded as the Perfective aspect marker. However, the question here is whether an event can be viewed in its entirety or as a whole without being “bounded” explicitly. Here are some minimal pairs:

64) a. ta pang *-le* yidian
 he /she fat *-le* a little
 He /She has got a little fatter.

b. ta pang *LE*
 he /she fat *LE*
 He /She has got fatter.

65) a. ta si *-le* yi nian
 he /she die *-le* one year
 He /She has been dead for a year.

b. ta si *LE*
 he /she die *LE*
 He She has died. / He / She is dead.

60) a. wo lei *-le* yi tian
 I tired *-le* one day
 I'm tired for the whole day.

b. wo lei LE
 I tired LE
 I'm tired (now).

According to Li and Thompson, all the *-le*'s in above a. sentences are Perfective aspect marker for that the events are viewed as a whole in the sense they are bounded, i.e., Perfective *-le* is used for signaling *bounded* event (Li and Thompson 1981: 298). Since sentence final *le* signals Currently Relevant State, all sentence b's above indicate Perfect aspect. Moreover, they suggest that a sentence final *le*, when it is simultaneously a verb suffix, could be both the Currently Relevant State *le* and the Perfective *-le* only with verbs that have an end point as part of their inherent meaning, such as *si* "die". Therefore the *LE* in 65b) has the function of both *-le* and *le*, whereas the 64b) and 60b) sentences have no Perfective meaning for that they are not bounded in one of the four ways suggested by Li and Thompson. Then, could we draw the conclusion, which is only when an event is bounded so that the sentence which indicates the event can be Perfective? Or a situation cannot be presented as a whole if it is not bounded? Comrie notes, "in many languages that have a distinction between Perfective and Imperfective forms, the Perfective forms of some verbs, in particular of some stative verbs, can in fact be used to indicate the beginning of a situation (ingressive meaning) (Comrie 1976: 19)". He further points out that Mandarin Chinese is just one of the languages mentioned above. "In Mandarin Chinese, a number of predicates, both adjectives and verbs, that normally refer to a state can have ingressive meaning in the Perfective, e.g. *ta gao LE*⁷ He has become tall." Clearly, we cannot say such Perfective forms indicate the completion⁸ of a situation, when in fact they refer to its inception (Comrie 1976: 19 - 20). Comrie indicates that a possible analysis of this ingressive meaning would be to say that such verbs can in

⁷ Comrie 1976 uses *-le* instead of *LE*. However, as have been discussed, every occurrence of sentential *le* will signal Perfect Aspect, so *LE* is used here.

⁸ Comrie 1976: 19 notes that indicating the end of a situation is at best only one of the possible meanings of a Perfective form, certainly not its defining feature. A Perfective form often indicates the completion of a situation when it is explicitly contrasted with an imperfective form...

general be either stative or ingressive, i.e. can in general refer either to the state or entry into that state, like, for instance, English verb *sit*, which can mean either “being sitting” or “adopt a sitting position” (Comrie 1976: 20). In Chinese, words like *gao* “tall”, *kong* “empty”, *ku* “cry” and *xiao* “laugh” all belong to this category. Jin Li Xin (2003) also finds when some Mandarin adjectives (adjectival verbs in Li and Thompson’s term) take *le*, which simultaneously appears at the sentence final position, it can indicate the beginning of a situation. As discussed earlier, this is actually the ingressive meaning of Perfective form.

So according to Comrie, sentences like 64b) and 60b) also have Perfective meaning, i.e., with marker *-le*, the situation is viewed as a whole. But they are different from 65b) in the sense that they have the ingressive meaning in the Perfective whereas 65b) has an end point as part of their inherent meaning.

Based on what has been discussed so far, we can see that a verbal *-le* indicates Perfective aspect, and sentence final *le* indicates Perfect Aspect. When *LE* simultaneously takes both verbal suffix position as well as sentence final position, it has the function of both *-le* and *le*.

3.2. English Stative Present versus Mandarin Sentences with *LE*

Having made clear the use of Mandarin aspect marker verbal *-le*, sentence final *le* and *LE*, let’s have a look at the English Perfect. We have discussed a little about Perfect of result in English in 1.2.2. In the Perfect of result, a present state is referred to as being the result of some past situation. English often uses the Present of a stative verb or adjective to express Perfect of result without any overt mention of how the state came about (Comrie 1976: 57). However, many other languages use Perfect to express Perfect of result, such as Ancient Greek and Swahili. Mandarin Chinese is also one of the kinds of language. For illustration, see the following sentences:

60) b. wo lei *LE*
I tired *LE*
I’m tired. / I have got tired.

Here, English uses a Present of an adjective “I am tired” to express Perfect of result “I have got tired”, whereas Mandarin uses Perfect corresponding to it.

Here are more examples:

66) wo kun *LE*

I sleepy *LE*

I am sleepy.

67) ta zuijin shou *LE*

he / she recently thin *LE*

He / She is thinner. / He / She has got thinner.

68) ta shenti hao *LE*

he / she health good *LE*

He / She is well (now). / His / Her health has become good.

69) dongxi gui *LE*

things expensive *LE*

Things are expensive (now). / Things have become expensive.

70) ta feng *LE*

He / She crazy *LE*

He / She is crazy (now). / He / She has become crazy.

71) zhe duo hua hong *LE*

this CL flower red *LE*

This flower is (now) red. / This flower has turned red.

72) zhe ge difang anjing *LE*

this CL place peaceful *LE*

This place is now peaceful. / This place has become peaceful.

73) wo bing *LE*

I sick *LE*

I am sick (now). / I have got sick.

74) tian qing *LE*

weather clear *LE*

The weather is (now) clear. / The weather has become clear.

The following are sentences that have been used early in this paper. For convenience, they are repeated here:

34) ren lao *LE*

person old *LE*

The person is (now) old. / The person has become old.

35) zhouwen duo *LE*

wrinkle many *LE*

(I) have more wrinkles (now). / (I) have got more wrinkles.

39) Zhangsan pang *LE*

Zhangsan fat *LE*

Zhangsan is (now) fat. / Zhangsan has got fat.

40) jiu ping kong *LE*

wine bottle empty *LE*

The bottle is (now) empty. / The wine bottle has become empty.

61) wo duzi e *LE*

I stomach hungry *LE*

I'm hungry (now). / I have got hungry.

63) tian hei *LE*

sky black *LE*

It's dark (now). / It has got dark.

We can see here it seems that the Mandarin sentences, which correspond to stative Present in English are all sentences with *LE*, i.e. *LE* simultaneously takes verbal suffix position as well as sentence final position. Moreover, it should be pointed out that all the above sentences have ingressive meaning in the Perfective. As we mentioned earlier the verbs in these sentences can in general be either stative or

ingressive, i.e. can in general refer either to the state or entry into that state, such as *e* “hungry” in sentence 61) can mean either “being hungry” or “become hungry”, and *lao* “old” in 34) can mean either “being old” or “getting old”.

Now let’s see more examples. Different from the above sentences, the following sentences seem not to have ingressive meaning in the Perfective for that the verbs in the sentences, in Li and Thompson’s term, have their end points built into their meanings.

75) wo bao *LE*

I full *LE*

I am full. / I have got full.

76) ta xing *LE*

he awaken *LE*

He is awake (now). / He has wake up.

77) yizi huai *LE*

chair break *LE*

The chair is broken. / The chair has been broken.

78) ta si *LE*

he / she die *LE*

He / She is dead. / He / She has died.

So far we have seen sentences either having ingressive meaning in Perfective or not. The sentences, which have no ingressive meaning in Perfective, contain verbs that have end point built into their meanings, namely inherently bounded, in Li and Thompson’s term. However, the sentences that will be presented here seem not to belong to neither of the two categories.

79) ta lihun *LE*

he / she divorce *LE*

He / She is divorced. He / She has got divorced.

80) ta huaiyun LE

she pregnant LE

She is pregnant. / She has got pregnant.

81) ta jiehun LE

he / she marry LE

He / She is married. / He / She has got married.

82) ta shengqi LE

he / she angry LE

He / She is angry. / He / She has got angry.

5). Ta shuizhao LE

he / she fall asleep LE

He / She is asleep. / He / She has fallen asleep.

As presented above, the verbs in these sentences are neither the kind of verbs, which can in general refer either to the state or entry into that state, nor are they the verbs, which have end points built into their meanings. So they are listed here, separated from the other two categories.

It has been made clear so far that stative Present in English corresponds to sentences with *LE* in Mandarin. However, it does not necessarily mean that all sentences with *LE* in Mandarin will correspond to stative Present in English. For illustration, see the following sentences:

83) Zhangsan zou LE

Zhangsan go LE

Zhangsan has left.

84) Zhangsan lai LE

Zhangsan come LE

Zhangsan has come.

85) wo zhidao LE

I know LE

I (now) know. / I have got to know.

86) wo dong *LE*

I understand *LE*

I (now) understand. / I have understood.

These are sentences from earlier sections:

31) xiuxi *LE*

rest *LE*

(You may) have a rest now. / (He) has gone rest.

32) Ta ku *LE*

he / she cry *LE*

He / She cries (now). / He/ She has cried.

33) Ta xiao *LE*

he / she smile *LE*

He / She smiles (now). / He / She has smiled.

All the above sentences have ingressive meaning in Perfective since the verbs in these sentences can refer either to the state or entry into that state. And the following are sentences, in which the verbs are inherently bounded.

87) zhadan bao *LE*

bomb explode *LE*

The bomb has exploded. / The bomb exploded⁹.

88) huo mie *LE*

fire extinguish *LE*

The fire went out. / The fire has gone out.

89) gaizi diao *LE*

lid fall off *LE*

The lid fell off. / The lid has fallen off.

⁹ The interpretation of the sentence may depend on the context. Both Perfective and Perfect interpretations are acceptable in Mandarin.

90) wo wang *LE*
I forget *LE*
I forgot. / I have forgotten.

And the following are sentences, which do not belong to neither of the two categories.

91) wo cizhi *LE*
I quit *LE*
I have quit.

92) ta shuijiao *LE*
he / she sleep *LE*
He / She has gone to bed.

3.3. Brief Summary

Now let's briefly summarize what has been discussed so far.

Firstly, based on the evidence from various dialects in Chinese (Chao 1968) as well as syntactic distribution (Li, Thompson and Thompson 1982), it has been proved in chapter two that there are two distinct but homophonous morphemes *LE*'s, one of which is verbal suffix, called verbal *-le*, the other takes sentence final position, called sentence final *le*.

Secondly, by examining previous studies on Aspect, both English and Mandarin, and particularly some treatments of Mandarin *LE*, we have corrected some wrong assumptions of the use of *LE*. Moreover, it has been concluded that Mandarin verbal *-le* is the marker of Perfective aspect and sentence final *le* is the marker of Perfect aspect. When one *LE* in a sentence simultaneously takes verbal suffix position and sentence final position, *LE* functions as both *-le* and *le*.

Thirdly, as been pointed out earlier, stative Present in English corresponds to sentences with *LE* in Mandarin. However, not all sentences with *LE* correspond to stative Present in English.

Finally, among the Mandarin sentences with *LE* that may correspond to stative

Present in English, there are mainly three categories. The first category contains sentences, which have ingressive meaning in Perfective for that the verbs can refer either to the state or entry into that state, such as *pang* “fat”, *kong* “empty” and *e* “hungry”. The second category contains sentences, in which the verbs have their end point built into their meanings, in other words, are inherently bounded, such as *si* “die” and *huai* “break”. There seems another category, in which the sentences do not have ingressive meaning nor do they contain verbs that are inherently bounded, such as *jiehun* “marry”, *lihun* “divorce” and *huaiyun* “pregnant”.

Based on what has been concluded, the following chapter will evaluate a currently used course book on Mandarin Chinese.

Chapter Four Evaluation of the Treatment of *LE* in a Current Course Book

4.1. Introduction of the Course Book to be Evaluated

The textbook to be evaluated in this chapter is *New Practical Chinese Reader*, which is compiled by Liu Xun *et al.* The *New Practical Chinese Reader* is a series of course books designed for native English speakers to learn Mandarin Chinese. And it is compiled in consultation with the Chinese Proficiency Test (HSK) Guidelines. The course book consists of seventy lessons in six volumes, covering beginning to intermediate levels, for three years of instruction. The objective of this series is to develop the student’s ability to communicate using Mandarin Chinese through the study of language structure, language function, and related cultural knowledge (Liu *et al.* 2002).

The use of *LE* is introduced in Textbook One and Two respectively. The verbal suffix *-le* is introduced in Lesson Thirteen of Textbook One (see appendix one) and the sentence final *le* is introduced in Lesson Fifteen of Textbook Two (see appendix two).

As we pointed out in earlier chapter that *LE* is one of the most frequently used morphemes in Mandarin Chinese. However, this paper only concerns a very small part

of its use. This paper does not consider the use of *LE* in negative sentences, or interrogatives. Nor does this paper consider the use of co-occurrence of two *LE*'s in one sentence. In other words, this paper only deals with the sentences with only one *LE* in declarative sentences. So, the treatment of *LE* in negative sentences, or interrogatives in the course book will not be considered.

4.2. The Treatment of *-le* in the Textbook

We have drawn the conclusion that the verbal *-le* in Mandarin Chinese is the marker of Perfective Aspect. The verbal *-le* in a sentence denotes a complete situation, and the situation is presented as a single whole.

For quite a long time, verbal *-le* is treated as to indicate completed action, which actually is only part of *-le*'s function. In Textbook One, verbal *-le* is treated as to indicate realization or completion of an action. This treatment is quite an improvement from the previous treatment of *-le*, and it avoids the weakness of treating *-le* as indicating “completed action”. Both of the notions of “realization” and “completion” will explain the grammaticality of sentence like the example in the textbook:

93) wo mai *-le* wu ge pingguo

I buy *-le* five CL apple

I bought five apples.

The action of “buying” is both realized and completed as well. And with the notion of “realization”, as we discussed earlier, the grammaticality of the following sentence can be explained:

94) ta gao *-le* san cun

He / She tall *-le* three inch

He / She is three inches taller.

and

32) Ta ku *LE*

he / she cry *LE*

He / She cries (now). / He / She has cried.

It has been discussed earlier that the situation in these sentences could be still ongoing. In other words, it is not implied in the sentences that situation of “growing tall” and “crying” have come to completion, but they are realized.

In addition, this textbook (Liu 2002a, Liu 2002b) has been aware of the fact that verbal *-le* does not indicate the time at which an action occurs, i.e. an action may occur in the past, like sentence 93), present, like sentence 94) and 32) or future, as illustrated in the sentence below (Liu 2002a: 200):

95) mingitna xiawu wo mai -le benzi qu chi fan
tomorrow afternoon I buy -le notebook go eat meal

Tomorrow afternoon I'll have supper after I have bought the notebooks.

So far it seems this treatment has covered every aspects that may concern the use of *-le*. However, let us consider another example (Li and Thompson 1981: 215):

96) qiang shang gua -le yi fu hua
wall on hang -le one CL painting

On the wall hangs a painting.

As it is used in this sentence, the verb *gua* “hang” does not signal an action. Rather it describes a stative event concerning the painting. The English translation accurately depicts the stative usage of the verb *gua* “hang” in this sentence (ibid.). Moreover, there is no sense of completion being conveyed in the sentence. So, it seems that the use of *-le* in this sentence cannot be explained by either of notions mentioned above. However, according to Li and Thompson’s notion of boundedness, *-le* is used here because the event described by the sentence is bounded by the quantifying phrase *yi fu hua* “one painting”.

To sum up, it is quite right for the textbook not to treat *-le* as indicating completed action, and points out *-le* can be used in sentences with past, present and future time reference. But as we see above, treating *-le* as indicating realization or completion of an action cannot, though suitable in some cases, fully describe the use

of *-le*.

4.3. The Treatment of Sentence Final *le* in the Textbook

It has been discussed in the previous chapter that the sentence final *le* in Mandarin Chinese indicates Currently Relevance State, i.e. it is treated as Perfect aspect marker. The following part of this section will examine the treatment of *le* in the textbook (Liu 2002c, 2002d), which is presented in appendix two.

The book (Liu 2002c, 2002d) notes that *le* always appears at the end of a sentence, and it confirms the completion or realization of some event or situation. Based on what have been discussed, this treatment of *le* is really problematic. Firstly, the implication of the word “confirm” is rather vague. If *le* was used to confirm, could we draw the conclusion that the sentence final *le* can only be used in answering questions or confirming a statement made by a preceding speaker? It could be, but not necessarily, as illustrated in sentence 17) and 61):

17) *chi fan le*

eat meal *le*

Let's have dinner now.

61) *wo duzi e le*

I stomach hungry *le*

I'm hungry (now).

Both of the above two sentences can be stated with no sense of confirming at all. They both could be just simple statements. And, if the conclusion is wrong, then where does the sense of confirmation come from?

Secondly, it is wrong to treat *le* as to do with completion or realization of some event or situation. As illustrated in sentence 17), it does not at all indicate the completion or realization of the event *chi* “eat”. Moreover, it is equally wrong for the textbook to treat *le* as always indicates that actions or events have taken place in the past. It has been made clear that the essence of the Perfect is its function of relating events / states to a Reference Time, so it could be, but not necessarily, that the event

or state indicated in the sentence has already taken place in the past, as illustrated in the example given by the textbook:

97) wo mai yifu *le*
I buy clothes *le*

I have bought some clothes. (I don't need to buy clothes any more.)

However, the function of this sentence is not to indicate the completion of “buying” but relating it to the Reference Time, which is present in this sentence.

It is worth pointing out that the book is aware of the phenomenon that *LE* could simultaneously follow the verb and stand at the end of the sentence, then it functions as both *-le* and *le*. However, its treatment of *LE* as expressing the completion and realization of the action and confirm the completion or realization of some event or situation is rather confusing, as have been discussed earlier.

4.4. Summary

It is right for the textbook to consider that there are two distinct *LE*'s in Mandarin Chinese. One is verb suffix and the other appears at the end of a sentence. However, it seems that the treatment here does not differentiate sentence final *le* from verbal *-le* although it treats the two *LE*'s separately. As pointed out earlier, in this book, verbal *-le* is treated as to indicate realization or completion of an action whereas sentence final *le* is treated as to confirm the completion or realization of some event or situation. According to these two descriptions of the use of two *LE*'s, it seems that there are not necessarily semantic distinction between the two. In addition, the treatment of each of them is not unproblematic. So both of them need to be adjusted or corrected. Firstly, although an improvement from the previous treatment of considering *-le* as indicating “completed action”, the notion of “realization” and “completion” still could only explain part of the use of verbal *-le*. However, it is quite right for the textbook to point out the fact that verbal *-le* indicates only the stage of the realization or completion of an action, but not the time at which the action occurs. In other words, the use of *-le* has nothing to do with tense. It could be used with the event that occurs

in the past, the present or the future. But as for sentence 96), it seems that the grammaticality of this sentence cannot be explained by the description of *-le* in the textbook.

As for the sentence final *le*, it seems that the textbook fails to grasp the essence of the use of this morpheme. And it is actually wrong to state that the sentence final *le* always indicated that actions or events have taken place in the past (Liu 2002c: 17). We could say that some events signaled in the sentences with *le* may have taken place in the past, since the meaning of Perfect is to relate some situation to a Reference Time. So, it is possible that a past event is related to the present time. In addition, it is equally possible that an event signaled by the sentence has not yet taken place, but has relevance to the current time.

Moreover, there is one point that needs to be expanded in the description of *LE* in the textbook, which is treatment of sentences with *LE* simultaneously follows the verb and stands at the end of the sentence. It is right to treat *LE* in this case as to function as both verbal *-le* and sentence final *le*. And it can be expanded by further pointing out that sentences of stative Present in English corresponds to sentences with *LE* in Mandarin Chinese. As pointed out earlier, English often uses the Present of a stative verb or adjective to express the Perfect, such as “I’m tired”, whereas many other languages, such as Mandarin Chinese, use Perfect form to correspond to the English stative Present. In other words, when English expresses perfect meaning implicitly by stative Present, the Mandarin equivalent is explicitly in Perfect form.

In this chapter, we have examined one of textbooks in Mandarin designed for native English speakers to learn Mandarin Chinese. It is found that both the treatments of verbal *-le* and sentence final *le* need to be adjusted and improved. Besides, it is also suggested that the treatment of sentences with *LE*, which simultaneously follows the verb and stands at the end of the sentence, should be expanded.

Chapter Five Pedagogical Implication for Future Textbook Design

In previous chapters, we have discussed both the use of verbal *-le* and sentence final *le*. And it has been concluded that the verbal *-le* in Mandarin is the marker of Perfective Aspect, and sentence final *le* is the marker of Perfect Aspect. When *LE* simultaneously follows the verb and stands at the end of the sentence, it has the function of both *-le* and *le*. Moreover, it also found that the stative Present in English is corresponded by sentence with *LE* simultaneously follows the verb and stands at the end of the sentence. However, it does not necessarily mean that all the kind of sentences in Mandarin will be corresponded by stative Present in English. Based on what have been discussed so far, this chapter will try to present some suggestions for future course book design in the specific area on *LE*.

5.1. Introducing the Concept of Aspect in Language Teaching

The first suggestion that will be proposed here is that the concept of Aspect should be introduced in future teaching of Mandarin. In language teaching, the concept of Tense has been introduced to help students grasp the language, but the concept of Aspect is rarely known among common language learners. With more and more interest in the study of Aspect in recent years, it is suggested that not only the concept of Tense, but also the concept of Aspect should be included in language teaching. This may be particularly significant in teaching of Mandarin Chinese for that it is generally accepted that Mandarin grammatically marks Aspect but does not grammatically mark tense because the concept of Tense is indicated by adverbs of time or it is implied by context (Xiao and McEnry 2002). It may be argued that the concept of Aspect might be too abstract for language learners. However, as proposed earlier, the target students of this paper are adult intermediate level students in colleges or universities. So it is assumed that the students will be able to grasp the concept of Aspect although it is somewhat abstract.

5.2. Differentiating Perfective and Perfect

In recent study of linguistics, there seems to be the tendency to use the term

Perfective and Perfect interchangeably. However, it has been discussed in chapter one that two terms actually have different senses from each other. The Perfective (Comrie 1976) denotes a complete situation with beginning, middle, and end, but all parts are presented as a single whole. And it should be emphasized here that the description of Perfective uses “complete situation”, not “completed” for that with the use of “completed”, emphasis is put on the end of the situation, whereas in fact the use of Perfective puts no more emphasis on any part of the situation. The verbal *-le*, as discussed earlier, is the marker of Perfective Aspect. Therefore, with verbal *-le*, any situation signaled by the sentence is presented as a whole, i.e. a complete rather than completed situation, which is traditionally regarded as the function of *-le*. As for the Perfect (Comrie 1976), different from other aspects, is not concerned with the situation itself, but relates some state to a preceding situation. But in the case of Mandarin, Perfect (Li, Thompson and Thompson 1982) is understood in terms of its discourse function, which is to relate events / states to a Reference Time, either to the time of the narrative or to the time of the speech act. Then the sentence final *le* in Mandarin is therefore treated as the marker of Perfect Aspect. Since the two terms have such distinct senses, it is necessary to differentiate them and use them in different senses for the benefit of linguistic study as well as language teaching.

5.3. Differentiating Chinese Translation of “Perfective”, “Perfect” and “Completion”

It is suggested in the previous section that Perfective and Perfect should be used in different senses, whereas this section will suggest that Chinese should use different words in corresponding to the above three terms.

According to *Oxford Advanced Learner’s English-Chinese Dictionary* (1997), Perfect is translated into Chinese as *wancheng shi*¹⁰, and Completion is translated into *wancheng*. The word Perfective cannot be found in this dictionary, but it can be found in other English- Chinese dictionary called *Xiandai Yinghan Zonghe Da Cidian* (1990), “Mordern English- Chinese Comprehensive Dictionary”, in which Perfective

¹⁰ The Chinese word *shi* means *form* in English.

is also translated as *wancheng shi*. It has been made clear that the three terms have distinct senses from each other. Therefore, it causes great problems to use the same term in Mandarin corresponding to them since a large quantity of works on linguistics are originally published in English.

In Chinese, English teaching as well as linguistic study, Perfect has always been called *wancheng shi*. It is assumed that the translation *wancheng shi* might come from understanding Perfect as indicating an event or action has been completed. In addition, Chao (1968: 246) treats the verbal *-le* as a Perfective aspect marker and the suffix has the class meaning of “completed action”, but he does not give a Chinese translation for Perfective. Following this description of *-le*, many Chinese linguists take Perfective as completion. Hence, the three terms are all corresponded by *wancheng* in Chinese. For illustration, some common mistakes in Mandarin grammar books as well as some linguistic works are listed below.

In *Chinese Linguistic Usage 1925-1975: A Contrastive Glossary English and Chinese* (1985: 182-183), both Perfect and Perfective are translated as *wancheng*. Accordingly, both Perfect aspect and Perfective aspect are translated as *wancheng ti*¹¹.

In *Essential Grammar for Modern Chinese* (1984 revised edition: 132), it notes *LE* can occur after a verb, and in this position, *-le* functions as a verb suffix and indicates the Perfect aspect, for example: *ta kan -le yi ben shu* “He read a book.” And the book further states that verb suffix *-le* stresses the completion of an action at a specific time on the past, present, or future. This is a typical mistake made by grammar books on Mandarin. Regardless of the wrong treatment of *-le* as indicating Perfect aspect, it could be judged from the given example that what the author means is actually Perfective aspect. Moreover, its further stating *-le* as stressing completion shows that the three terms are regarded as the same. The same mistake can also be found in Li and Cheng (1988: 451- 452), Li, *et al.* (1999: 119), and Zhao (1999: 84-85).

¹¹ *Ti* means *Aspect* in English.

To avoid confusion caused by misusing the three terms, it is suggested that the three terms should be differentiated and different words should be used corresponding to the English equivalents. Lin Zhang (2004), different from other linguists, has used *wanzheng* “whole” to refer to Perfective. No matter the translation is appropriate or not, it is significant in the sense that the distinction among the terms has been realized, and hopefully they will be differentiated by using different Mandarin terms soon.

5.4. Corresponding Sentences with LE in Mandarin to Sentences of Stative Present in English

Marton (1981) points out that contrastive analysis has great pedagogical value in the classroom teaching for that the native language of the learner is a very powerful factor in second-language acquisition, which cannot be eliminated from the process of learning. Chapter three of this paper has presented that the English Stative Present is corresponded by sentences in Mandarin with LE simultaneously following the verb and appearing at the end of the sentence. So it is suggested that this should be included in language course books on Mandarin. However, it also needs to be pointed out that it is not a two-way relation. The English stative Present is translated into Mandarin as sentences in Mandarin with LE simultaneously following the verb and appearing at the end of the sentence. But not all Mandarin sentences of the kind will be translated into English stative Present.

Conclusion

In Mandarin Chinese there are four major aspect markers: *guo*, *zai*, *zhe*, and *LE*. This paper has tried to present a description of the use of only one of them, which is the marker *LE*. It has been presented in the paper the two *LE*'s, namely verbal *-le* and sentence final *le* have distinct semantic properties from each other. *-le* once was treated as marker of past tense (Brandt 1943, Pettus 1943). Later, linguists found that the use of *-le* is nothing to do with tense. It could be used in sentences with past, present and future time references. Shortly after, more and more linguists began to

treat *-le* as an aspect marker. So far, there are mainly two major notions about *-le*. One of them treats *-le* as marker of Perfective aspect, whereas the other treats it as an aspect marker of Realization. By examining both treatments, it is found that *-le* should be regarded as Perfective aspect, with which a situation is presented as a single whole.

The sentence final *le* has not been widely treated as an aspect marker so far. As Li, Thompson and Thompson (1982) put it, if aspect is generally thought of and represented grammatically as a verbal category, *le* will be disqualified as an aspect marker since it is sentence final, not verbal. But if we thought of aspect from its discourse function, which is relating events or states to a Reference Time, either to the time of the narrative or the time of the speech act, then *le* can be seen as an exponent of the Perfect aspect.

Moreover, it is pointed out that the sentences with *LE* that simultaneously follows the verb and takes sentence final position are significant in Mandarin teaching to native English speakers, for that the so-called English stative Present sentences are corresponded by them in Mandarin. However, not all the sentences of the kind in Mandarin can be translated into the English stative Present sentences. It is not yet clear how to distinguish those sentences that do not correspond to the English stative Present sentences. However, as they all have the same syntactic structure as those do correspond to English stative Present, it may be assumed that the reason lies in the different classification and properties between English and Mandarin verbs, which need to be further studied.

As mentioned earlier, this paper only discusses the use of *LE* in sentences with only one single *LE*. Discussion on the sentences with two co-occurring *LE*'s, like sentence 6), is not included in this paper. Besides, *LE* in negative sentences and interrogatives is not discussed either. So the corresponding between the two sorts of sentences may not apply with negation in the sentence. Mandarin is a language that has variety of negative forms, each of which has its own function. In a recent paper by

Xiao and McEnery (2005), nine negative adverbs have been found in Mandarin including, *bie* “don’t”, *beng* “don’t; needn’t”, *bu* “not”, *fei* “non-; not”, *mei* “no, not”, *mo* “no, not”, *wei* “not yet”, *wu* “no, not, do not”, *xiu* “do not”. So, due to the complication of negation in Mandarin, whether the conclusion drawn in previous chapters applies to negative sentences will need further studying.

In this paper, I have tried to present a description of the use of a Mandarin aspect marker *LE*. Based on the description, a course book is evaluated. In addition, some suggestions have been proposed in designing language course book on Mandarin. In so doing, hopefully, it will benefit the teaching of Mandarin Chinese.

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