

Aspectual Coercion and Imperfectivity in Mandarin Chinese

This study gives a semantic and syntactic analysis to aspectual coercion in Mandarin Chinese with a focus on imperfective viewpoint. It develops the proposals made by de Swart (1998) that the fluidity of situation aspect involves a shift forced by the selectional properties of aspectual modifiers. It also argues that Travis' (in press) aspectual system (i.e., outer and inner aspects) can account for the distributions of the two imperfective particles, the progressive *zai* and the durative *-zhe*. Finally, it argues that in addition to *zai*, Chinese has another imperfective Outer aspect, the continuous \emptyset .

The aspectual system in Mandarin Chinese has attracted a great deal of attention from linguists due to its lack of morphological inflections. Generally speaking, Chinese has two imperfective particles: the progressive *zai* and the durative *-zhe*, both of which are traditionally analyzed as durative markers (Li & Thompson 1982) as demonstrated by the two sentences in (1). However, they differ from one another both syntactically and semantically. The progressive *zai* appears before the predicate it modifies as shown in (1a). Its main function is to indicate the event it interacts with is in progress at the reference time. However, the durative *-zhe* in sentences such as (1b), directly follows the predicate and is mainly used to express a continuous and stable situation resulted from an action (Smith 1997). These two particles have been argued to show some selectional properties. While *zai* selects Activities as its complement (Li & Thompson, 1982), the particle *-zhe* is only compatible with atelic events as argued by Lin (2002).

- (1) a. Ta *zai* chuan dayi. (Activity) b. Qiang shang gua-*zhe* hua (State)
 he ZAI wear coat wall on hang-ZHE painting
 'He is putting on a coat.' 'There is a painting hanging on the wall.'

Syntactically, we argue that *zai* is an overt realization of Outer aspect containing the feature [+progressive] above vP as shown in (2a). On the other hand, the particle *-zhe* is a realization of Inner aspect with the feature [+durative] in (2b). This analysis explains the linear order between these particles and the predicate they modify.

- (2) a. [OutAspP **ZAI** [vP [InAsp [VP]]]] b. [OutAsp [vP [InAspP **-ZHE** [VP]]]]

The second argument made by this study is inspired by Comrie's (1976) typological study that imperfectivity can be expressed by different categories. We argue that Chinese has two imperfective Outer aspectual markers: the progressive *zai* and the continuous \emptyset . Similar to the English Progressive, *zai* selects Activities as its complement. In contrast, the continuous \emptyset selects States as its complements. Based on this argument, the formulas of (1a) and (1b) are represented in (3a) and (3b), respectively.

- (3) a. [**zai** [he put on a coat (Activity)]] b. [\emptyset [a painting hang-**zhe** on the wall (State)]]

To explain the grammaticality of sentences containing *zai* and an event denoting Accomplishment such as (4a), we argue that there is a covert coercion marker (i.e., **Cacc-act**) that shifts an Accomplishment into an Activity to meet the input requirement of the progressive *zai*. Its formula is represented in (4b).

- (4) a. Ta *zai* xie yi feng xin b. [**zai**[**Cacc-act**[he write a letter (Accomplishment)]]]
 he ZAI write one CL letter
 'He is writing a letter.'

As for the durative *-zhe*, different from some previous studies (e.g., Lin 2002), we claim that it is not only compatible with atelic events but also Accomplishments. For example, the study explains the ungrammaticality of sentences containing *-zhe* and an Activity such as (5a)

