Narration and Description in Major Time Frames in Mandarin

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PRIMARY OBJECTIVE

• To address the needs of intermediate learners of Mandarin to develop the skills to:
  – narrate and describe in major time frames in Mandarin.

• Why?
  – narrate and describe in daily life
  – ACTFL’s guidelines:
    At the Intermediate-high level, speakers can narrate and describe in major time frames in paragraphs but may break down linguistically.
Questions: Distinguishing Time Frames in Mandarin

Considering linguistic forms alone: T or F

1. Temporal adverbials (e.g. 今天, 明天) play the most important role in contrasting time frames.

2. The perfective -le (了) plays an important role in past narration and description.

3. The modal verb hui (會) plays an important role in future narration and description.
• **Advanced-low level:**
  – can narrate and describe in major time frames in paragraphs, but
  – may lack control of aspect (時貌).

• **Advanced-mid level:**
  – “narrate and describe in all major time frames (past, present, and future) by providing a full account, with good control of aspect” (*ACTFL Guidelines*, p.15).
Grammatical Aspect (時貌)

• Temporal view of an event or a state:
  – Perfective aspect: in its entirety
  – Imperfective aspect: its internal structure
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Temporal View</th>
<th>Aspect Marker</th>
<th>Mandarin</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>As a whole</td>
<td>Perfective - Completive</td>
<td>VERB -le (了)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(完成貌)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Perfective - Experienced</td>
<td>VERB -guò (過)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(經驗貌)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Internal Structure</td>
<td>Imperfective - Progressive</td>
<td>(在) zài VERB</td>
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<td></td>
<td>(持續貌 - 行動)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Imperfective - Durative</td>
<td>VERB -zhe (著)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(持續貌 - 狀態)</td>
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</table>
Literature Review: Development of Temporality in Mandarin

- **Dominated by studies on the acquisition of aspect**
  - Duff & Li, 2002; Jia & Bayley, 2008; Ma, 2006

- **Common errors by CFL learners:**
  - Equating the perfective marker -le with the English past-tense marker -ed.
  - Examples: *wèn-le “asked” and *shuō-le “said” before direct or indirect speech.

- **Temporal Adverbials**
  - Huang, 2003
Current Study

• **Subjects**: 10 native and 10 non-native speakers

• **Materials**:
  – *Language Background Questionnaire*
  – **4 prompts**: 3 routines (future, present, and past) and 1 unforgettable event

• **Procedure**: Record in response to Prompts

• **Data analyses**: *frequencies of uses*
  – Aspect markers
  – Temporal adverbials
  – The modal verb huì
Major Findings: Two Functions of Temporal Adverbials

1. **Setting the stage:**
   - Native speakers: 3 clauses on average
   - Non-native speakers: 1 clause on average

2. **Connectors:**
   - Native speakers: a larger variety:
     
     | 然後 | 先 | 再 | 跟著 |
     |------|----|----|------|
     | 之後 | 同時 | 後來 | 最後 |
   
   - Non-native speakers: predominantly 然後
Production of Aspect & huì

Natives Speakers

Outliers

Average Frequency

Unforg. Past Present Future

Speech Type

Aspect Modal huì
Major Findings: Aspect & huì - NSs

• **Finding #1: Correlations as stated not confirmed; instead:**
  – The modal huì appears *significantly* more often in routines than in unforgettable events.

• **Finding #2: Past events not created equal**
  – Only 1% chance of –le occurrence in past events

• **Finding #3: Low frequencies overall**
Discussion: Perfective Markers

• **Finding #2: Past events not created equal**
  – Past events that are more like “stories” elicit more –le (Duff and Li, 2002; Jia and Bayley, 2008; Dennig, in progress),
  – Even in stories: below 20% on average

• **Finding #3: Low frequencies**
  – Optionality of aspect and modality markers
  – Right contexts to occur
Comparisons of Perfective Uses

Comparisons of Perfective Uses

Average Frequency

Unforg. Past Present Future

Speech Type

Native Non-native

Example
Comparisons of the Modal huì Uses

Average Frequency

Speech Type

Unforg. Past Present Future

Native Non-native
Major Findings: Future Events

• Finding #4: Expressions of “tentativeness” common in native speakers’ future routine
• 40% chance of occurrence
Distinguishing Time Frames in Mandarin

Considering linguistic forms alone:

1. **True:** Temporal adverbials play the most important role in contrasting time frames.

2. **False:** The perfective -le (了) plays an important role in past narration and description.

3. **False:** The modal verb huì (会) plays an important role in future narration and description.
Implications for ACTFL OPI

• Aspect is not used to distinguish time frames in Mandarin.

• By definition, aspect doesn’t deal with event time.

• ACTFL OPI:
  – Delink aspect from time frames in Guidelines.
  – OPI in Mandarin: To test aspect, ask for a story, e.g. a legend or a fable.
# Teaching Time Contrasts in CFL

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Temporal Adverbials</th>
<th>Time Frame</th>
<th>Elaborate</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Be explicit</td>
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<tr>
<td>Connectors</td>
<td>Diversify; e.g. 然後，跟着，先，同時，再，後來，最後</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Perfective - Completive (了)</td>
<td>Boundedness</td>
<td>e.g. bounded by quantified objects or time periods (Li &amp; Thompson, 1981; 2008)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Anteriority</td>
<td>Event 1 (-le) + Event 2</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Peak event</td>
<td>Event 1… Peak Event (-le)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Imperfective</td>
<td>Progressive (在)</td>
<td>Background event</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Durative (著)</td>
<td>Background state</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Future Events: Expressions of “tentativeness”</td>
<td>Main Verb</td>
<td>e.g. 估计，準備，猜測，計畫，打算，沒有决定，</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Modal Verb</td>
<td>應該，可能</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Other</td>
<td>e.g. 不大清楚，大概，我的想法，要是…的話</td>
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<tr>
<th>Paragraph</th>
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<tr>
<td>Subordination</td>
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<td>Cohesion</td>
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Acknowledgements

• **Participants in the Study**
  – Participation in the study
  – Native-speaker intuition
  – Learners’ experience

• **Stanford Language Center**
  – Support for my certifications in:
    • ILR OPI and
    • ACTFL WPA

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  – Statistical analyses for this study
References


Ma, L. (2006). *Acquisition of the perfective aspect marker Le of Mandarin Chinese in discourse by American college students*. Doctoral dissertation, University of Iowa. (Available at Iowa Research Online: [http://ir.uiowa.edu/etd/68](http://ir.uiowa.edu/etd/68))