CHAPTER FIVE

ASPECT IN CHINESE

In Chapter Four, the status of the markers as tense markers has been determined and the tense system in Chinese established. For the study of aspect in this chapter, the approach is different.

It has long been accepted that aspect is a grammatical category in Chinese. Hence, we will not query the aspectual properties of our selected set of markers, namely, le_1, le_2, guo_1/$guole$, guo_2, zhe and $zài$. We will also follow the conventional practice of treating le and guo as perfective aspect markers and zhe and $zài$ as imperfective aspect markers. In this chapter, our interest lies in the analysis of the syntactic properties of these markers.

Chinese verbs do not carry temporal information on the occurrence of an event. As mentioned earlier, it is not known when the action of 'going to Japan' will happen in the sentence *Tā qù Rìběn* 'lit. He go Japan' unless a tense/aspect marker is added as in *Tā qù Rìběn le* 'He has gone to Japan'. In other words, it is the tense/aspect markers that get the message across.

As has been noted in Chapter Three, Smith (1991, 1994) distinguishes between viewpoint (grammatical) aspect from situation (lexical) aspect. Chung and Kimberlake (1985), on the other hand, classify the levels of semantic structure of aspect. Fan

(1984) confirms that the two *le* in Chinese occur at different levels of syntactic structure. Based on these findings, we have discovered that the aspect markers in Chinese are distributed at two different levels that correspond to their syntactic-semantic properties, that is, the lexical aspect markers at the lexical level, and the grammatical aspect markers at the propositional level. This is similar to the classification of Chung and Kimberlake (1985). Markers at the lexical level include *le$_1$*, *guo$_1$/guole*, *guo$_2$* and *zhe*, while those at propositional level are *le$_2$* and *zài*.

The 'Lexical level' in this study refers to the sentence level where the markers are incorporated into the verb. The sentence can be a simple sentence like *Wǒ qù Zhōngguó* 'I go to China', or a one-clause complex sentence such as *Wǒ qùle Zhōngguó jiù qu Rìběn* 'I will go to Japan after going to China'. A simple sentence is always an event. A complex sentence may also be an event that is made up of a simple sentence and a subordinate clause. In Chinese, the incorporation of an aspect marker into the verb is found not only in the simple sentence, but also in the complex sentence. Being incorporated, the markers at the lexical level occur in the form of bound morphemes.

The 'propositional level' denotes the level where the aspect marker will have its scope over the entire proposition that precedes it. The proposition may be an event that is represented by a sentence (simple or complex) that contains an incorporated aspect marker. As they are not incorporated, aspect markers at the propositional level are free morphemes.

The definitions of the two levels can be stated as follows

Level	Event
Lexical	Verb with incorporated aspect markers
Propositional	Event which has its scope covered by the aspect marker

Figure 5.1

The linear representation of the relationship between the two levels is as follow:

Sentence: [Event at lexical level] at propositional level]

This shows that the event at the lexical level is within the scope of that of the propositonal level. Examples of simple and complex constructions in Chinese are given below:

(1) a. [Wǒ qùguo₂ Rìběn] le₂   (simple sentence)
         'I have been to Japan.'

     b [Wǒ qùle₁ Rìběn jiù qù Zhōngguó] le₂   (complex sentence)
         'I will go to China after going to Japan.'

Guo₂ and *le₁* in the sentences above are aspect markers at the lexical level in sentence in (1), while *le₂* is marker at the propositional level. The brackets show the scope covered by the marker at the propositional level. Therefore, the scope of the sentence final *le₂* covers the whole sentence that precedes it. In comparison, the scope or the domain of the marker at the lexical level is only the verb that the marker is incorporated into.

Examples above support Chappell's (1988) and Tung's (1989) claims that *le₂* has its scope over the whole sentence (event) that precedes it, and *le₁* has only the verb

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as its scope. The distribution of the markers at the two levels is perhaps a peculiar characteristic in Chinese that have long been neglected.

Using the same approach that we have applied to the analysis of tense in Chapter Four, we now propose another schematic representation to demonstrate the characteristics of aspect markers with respect to perfectivity. The opposition perfective/imperfective is the fundamental dichotomy used in the study of aspect since the semantic concept of aspect had been accepted into the tradition of western grammar in the late nineteenth century (Binnick, 1991).

Table 5.2 below is the schema that we have designed for this purpose. At this stage, we have yet to identify the exact location of the individual markers in our schema. Hence, this figure is merely a tentative representation of where we would expect the markers to occur.

Table 5.1

Proposed Distribution of Aspect Markers

	Perfective /Imperfective
Lexical level	le_1, guo_1/$guole$, guo_2, zhe
Propositional level	le_2, $zài$

The purpose of this chapter is to show the validity of the schematic representation proposed above, by investigating the conditions of occurrence of the markers at the designated level on the one hand, and their aspectual property in terms of perfectivity on the other. If the schema holds, the position of the markers in Table

5.2 will be readjusted at the end of this chapter. It is believed that the readjusted schema will reflect some similarities with the schema proposed for tense in Chapter Four. The similarities will be the evidence that aspect integrates with tense to form a well-established grammatical system in Chinese. The verbs and the findings of the subcategorisation in Chapter Three will be used to investigate how syntax correlates with aspect in the language. Nevertheless, it has to be stressed that, since Lexicase emphasises more on syntactic significance than semantic, the analysis will not focus on the semantic part of the aspect markers unless it is necessary.

This chapter is based on four general assumptions: (1) that aspect has a semantic-syntactic function; (2) that aspect in Chinese is a grammatical category; (3) that aspect can be studied in terms of the dichotomy of perfective and imperfective; and (4) that every marker is distinctive in that it is either a lexical marker or a grammatical aspect marker.

The organization of the chapter is scheduled as follows: it begins with description on the general properties of aspect, with emphasis on those relevant to Chinese in Section 5.1. Aspect will be studied at the propositional level (Section 5.2) and at the lexical level (Section 5.3). Discussions on the perfective le_2 and the imperfective *zài* will are given in Section 5.2.1 and 5.2.2 respectively. At the lexical level, the perfective markers will be discussed in Section 5.3.1. This includes le_1, guo_1/*guole* and guo_2. The marker of imperfective aspect, *zhe*, will be dealt with in Section 5.3.2. We also wish to provide some explanations on: (a) the controversial status of the sentence final *le* (Section 5.4); and (c) the interface of tense and aspect (Section 5.5) before giving a closing remark in Section 5.6.

5.1 General Properties of Aspect in Chinese

Aspect is, according to Comrie's (1976:3) definition, "different ways of viewing the internal temporal constituency of a situation'. We have already provided a brief description of the background of aspect in Chapter One. In this chapter, we shall elaborate further on the issue but the focus will be on the syntactic analysis of aspect in Chinese.

As a first step, it is perhaps necessary to reexamine a few definitions that are relevant to our discussion:

> Perfect: The continuing present relevance of a past event. (Comrie, 1976:56)
>
> Perfective: A situation viewed in its entirety, without regard to internal temporal constituency. It contrasts with 'imperfective'. (Comrie, 1976:12)
>
> Imperfective: A situation viewed from within. (Comrie, 1976:24)
>
> Perfective in Lexicase: A present state which results from a past event.
> (Starosta, personal communication, April 1, 2002)

Comrie makes a distinction between 'perfect' (tense) and 'perfective' (aspect). Starosta, however, does not think there is any difference between the two. Moreover, imperfective is not defined in Lexicase, it is assumed to be the opposition of perfective, that is, if it is not perfective, it is imperfective.

There are two crucial points in the definitions provided above: (a) the notion of 'time' that is implied in the definitions. Both linguists stress the 'relevance' of the outcome of a past event until 'now', which is the speech time. Hence, the concept of aspect is inseparable from tense. (b) The difference between 'perfective' and 'completion'. As pointed out in Chapter One, Comrie thinks that perfectivity denotes a complete or whole situation, not a 'completed' action (1976:18). Hence, a completed action does not necessarily entail perfectivity.

Li and Thompson (1981:185), in their the often-cited work in functional grammar, develop further Comrie's definition of perfectivity by claiming that "An event is viewed in its entirety if it is *bounded* temporally, spatially or conceptually". 'Bound' is a central concept in theories of aspect. Li and Thompson mention four ways in which an event can be bounded, with le_1 as the marker (Words underlined are constituents stressed in the definitions).

(A) By being a quantified event. For example, *Tā shuìle sānge zhōngtou* 'He slept for three hours.'

(B) By being a definite or specific event. For example, *Wǒ pèngdaole Lín Huì* 'I ran into Lin Hui.'

(C) By being inherently bounded because of the meaning of the verb. For example, *Tā qùnián sǐle* 'He died last year.'

(D) By being the first event in a sequence. For example, *Wǒ chīwánle nǐ chī* 'After I have finished eating, you will eat.'

Li and Thompson (1981:244) regard le_2 as the marker that conveys a 'current relevant state' (CRS) of the event it represents:

(A) Is a changed state
(B) Corrects a wrong assumption
(C) Reports progress so far
(D) Determines what will happen next
(E) Is the speaker's total contribution to the conversation at the point

Current Relevance is one of the major theories in the study of the perfect (Binnick, 1991). The CRS, as well as the concept of boundedness defined by Li and Thompson, is still widely accepted today. Nonetheless, the point is that CRS also

entails the involvement of the event at speech time as emphasised in Comrie's and Starosta's theories.

To investigate the perfectivity and the current relevance of an event, we will conduct tests similar to those in Chapter Four. The adverbs used for the tests include *yǐjing* 'already', *céngjīng* 'formerly', *hái...ne* 'still' and *zhèng/zhèngzài* 'just' (Cheng 1985-1985).

Yǐjing 'already' is often used for an event that is completed or for time that is past. A recent study proves that the fundamental grammatical meaning of the adverb is "to stress that a designated event or state has happened before speech time, or some specific action, or some definite time" (Ma, 2003). It fits precisely with the concept of perfectivity which applies to an action that is no longer going on at speech time or reference time, but the result of the action is still relevant. Ma (2003) also claims that *yǐjing* 'already' is an adverb that can be used in sentences in the past, the present as well as the future. By comparison, *céngjīng* 'formerly' can only be used as an adverb for a definite event in the past.

Hence, if an event represented by a sentence is perfective, it will be compatible with *yǐjing* 'already' without losing its meaning. Similarly, an event that is experiential will be compatible with the adverb *céngjīng* 'formerly'. Experiential aspect applies to an event that has been experienced with respect to some reference time, (Li and Thompson, 1981). For an event that is imperfective, adverbs *hái...ne* 'still' and *zhèng/zhèngzài* 'just', and the particle *ne* will be used as operators to test an

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ongoing or progressive or durative event. *Ne* usually implies current relevance. (Yang, 1995).

In sum, it has been pointed out that perfectivity, by Comrie's and Starosta's definitions, does not only mean the completion of the event as a whole, but also the relevance of the result up to the current moment. It indicates that aspect and tense should be closely related to each other. How is this significance manifested in Chinese? In the following sections, we shall examine the syntactic properties and the perfectivity of the aspect markers at the two specified levels, the propositional and the lexical levels, in order to see whether the aspect markers behave in the same way as tense markers.

5.2 Propositional level

The propositional level defined in Chung and Kimberlake (1985) is the level that specifies the predicates in relation to the event frame. The event frame can be represented by a simple sentence as well as a complex sentence. Markers that appear at the 'propositional level' will be termed as sentential markers in this study. In Chinese, there are only two sentential markers, namely, the perfective *le₂* and the imperfective *zài*.

5.2.1 Perfective *Le₂*

Le₂ is syntactically clause final or sentence final. Its status as an aspect marker is yet to be unanimously accepted by linguists. In traditional Chinese linguistics, it is often regarded as a particle or mood particle (Chao, 1968; X. Liu, 1988). Chao

(1968:798-800) distinguishes seven different meanings of the particle; the major ones include 'inchoative', 'change of state' and 'completed action as of the present'. Basically, it is the same as what contemporary linguists define as "current relevance" for the aspect marker. As Li and Thompson (1981) claim, the key communicative function of le_2 is to signal the current relevance of a new state of affairs.

As has been noted in Chapter Four, Lü (1983) has identified six environments in which le occur in a sentence. Except for the one that is obviously applicable to le_1, there are five other possible occurrences of le_2:

(A) V + le_1 + NP + le_2 (B) V + NP + le_2

(C) NP + le (D) V + le

(E) Adj + le

The identity of le in (C) to (E) is linguistically ambiguous as it could be le_1 or le_2. This is precisely the point that Smith (1991:343) makes with regard to Chinese: "The line between lexical and grammatical categories is not always clear, especially for morphemes that indicate the perfective." The morphemes refer to the markers le_1 and le_2 in our study.

Problems related to the identity of le in (C) to (E) will be discussed separately in Section 5.4. In this section, our focus is on whether the sentence final le_2 in (A) and (B) is: (i) complementary and (ii) located at the propositional level.

(A): V + le_1 + NP + le_2

This construction is mostly derived from the common VO structure in which the verb occurs in the form V-le_1, and the structure takes an additional le_2 as the clause

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final or sentential final marker. The verbs are basically the simple transitive verbs in the Type E2.2 construction subcategorized in Chapter Three. Here are some examples:

(1) a. Wǒ chīle$_1$ fàn le$_2$
          I   eat-mrk rice mrk
          'I have eaten (rice).'

      b. Wǒ yǐjing chīle$_1$ fàn le$_2$
          I   already eat-mrk rice mrk
          'I have already eaten (rice).'

      c. *Wǒ chīle$_1$ fàn

(2) a. Wǒ mǎile$_1$ shū le$_2$
          I   buy-mrk book mrk
          'I bought a/the book.'

      b. Wǒ yǐjing mǎile$_1$ shū le$_2$
          I   already buy-mrk book mrk
          'I have already bought a/the book.'

      c. *Wǒ mǎile$_1$ shū

Sentences (b) in (1) and (2) above are grammatical, suggesting that the adverb *yǐjing* 'already' is compatible with the entire verb phrase of *chīle$_1$ fàn* 'have eaten' and *mǎile$_1$ shū* 'bought a/the book' respectively. This is also evidence to show that the events are perfective according to Comrie's and Starosta's definitions mentioned earlier. The ungrammaticality of the (c) sentences above shows that the sentence final *le$_2$* is mandatory.

The Lexicase stemma notations below explain why *le$_2$* is propositional. Note that the tree for (2c) is ungrammatical because the perfective head *mǎile$_1$* expect a bounded PAT. According to Li and Thompson, perfectivity implies boundedness, and

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for an event to be bounded, the complement of the verb needs to be quantified or specific. However, *shū* in the sentence is generic. The dilemma is solved when the sentence final *le₂* is added to the sentence. As shown in the stemma for (2a), the head allows its PAT to be generic because the perfectivity of *le₁* is demonstrated by the presence of its new dependent *le₂* which is also perfective. It has been proven in Chapter Four that *le₂* marks an open boundary (obnd).

2(c)

```
                        *
          _____/ | _____
         |          mǎile₁           |
        wǒ          buy-mrk          shū
         I          ┌ Index ┐        book
    ┌ 2ndex ┐       │ V     │      ┌ 3ndex ┐
    │ N     │       │ +trns │      │ N     │
    └       ┘       │ +past │      │       │
                    │ +prfc │      │ gnrc  │
                    │ +cbnd │      └       ┘
                    │ 2([N])│
                    │ 3([N])│
                    │ 2[AGT]│
                    │ 3[PAT]│
                    │       │
                    │ ? ┌ PAT  ┐ │
                    │   │ +bndd │ │
                    │   │ -gnrc │ │
                    └   └       ┘ ┘
```

2(a)

```
              mǎile₁                    le₂
   wǒ         buy-mrk         shū       mrk
    I                         book
```

$$
\begin{bmatrix} \text{2ndex} \\ \text{N} \end{bmatrix}
\qquad
\begin{bmatrix}
\text{Index} \\
\text{V} \\
\text{+tms} \\
\text{+past} \\
\text{+prfc} \\
\text{+cbnd} \\
\text{2([N]} \\
\text{3([N])} \\
\text{2[AGT]} \\
\text{3[PAT]} \\
\text{3} \begin{bmatrix} \text{PAT} \\ \text{-bndd} \\ \text{+gnrc} \end{bmatrix} \\
\text{4} \begin{bmatrix} \text{Sprb} \\ \text{obnd} \end{bmatrix}
\end{bmatrix}
\qquad
\begin{bmatrix} \text{3ndex} \\ \text{N} \\ \text{gnrc} \end{bmatrix}
\qquad
\begin{bmatrix} \text{4ndex} \\ \text{Sprb} \\ \text{obnd} \end{bmatrix}
$$
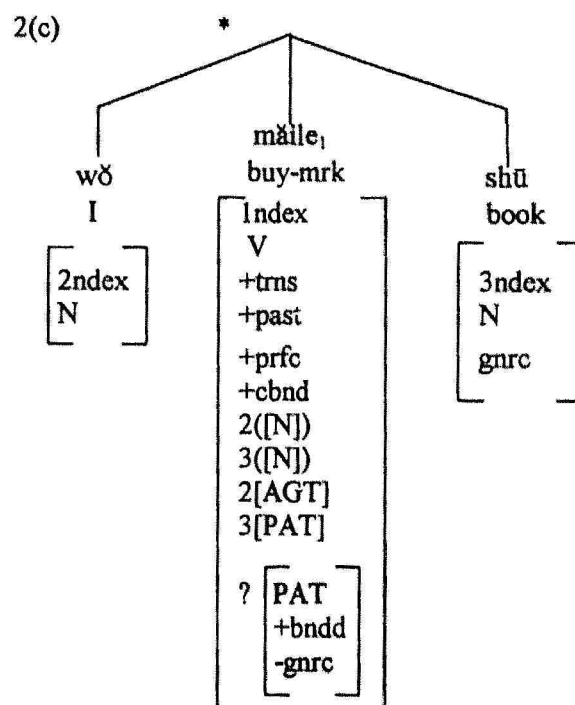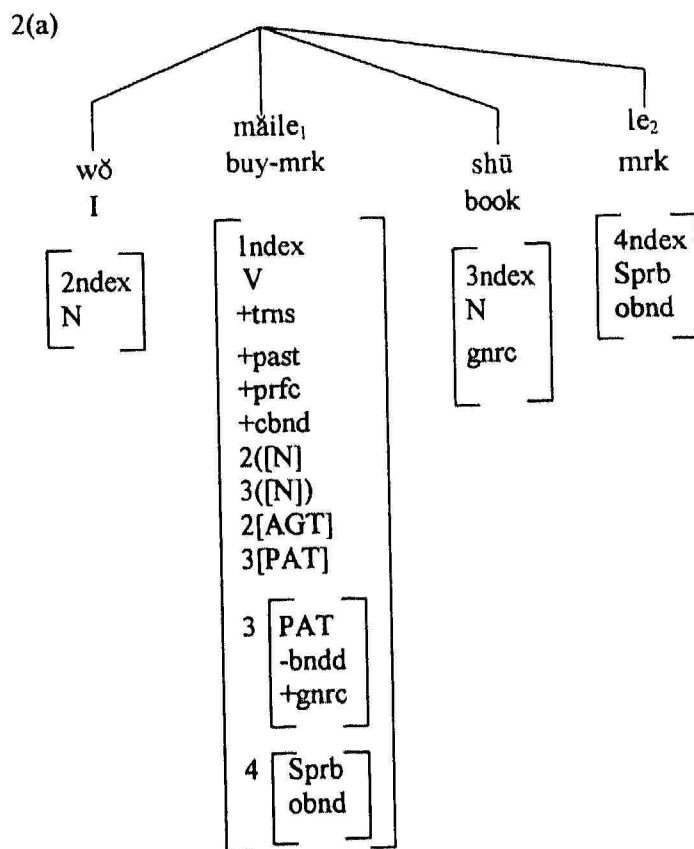
If *le₂* was a complement of *shū* 'book' instead of *mǎile* 'bought', the link between *le₁* and *le₂* would be blocked by *shū* 'book' and consequently, the contextual feature of [Sprb, obnd] in the stemma above would not be indexed. Hence, *le₂* should occur at a higher level of structure, namely, the propositional level.

```
              mǎile₁
   wǒ                     shū
                                le₂
```
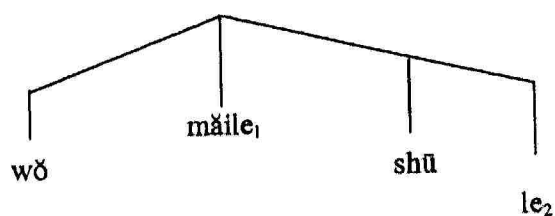
Type (B): V + NP + *le₂*

Sentences of this pattern include the following constructions which were subcategorised in Chapter Three:

i. Type D1: *Tā hĕn ài tā le₂* 'He loves her now.'

ii. Type D2: *Wŏ zhīdao nàjiān shì le₂* 'I knew about that matter.'

iii. Type E1.1: *Tā dăgŭ le₂* 'He is beating the drum.'

iv. Type E2.1: *Wŏ zhăodao nàfēng xìn le₂* 'I found that letter.'

v. Type E2.2: *Wŏ chī fàn le₂* 'I am eating rice / I am going to eat.'

The constructions above include almost all the transitive constructions classified in Chapter Three. Types E1.1 and E2.2 are common VO constructions while Types D1 and D2 are sentences with verbs that denote the emotive and mental state of a person. These verbs represent a stative state that cannot be compatible with any perferctive marker. However, sentences in these groups are grammatical. Logically, this is possible only if the marker *le₂* does not occur at the same level as the basic sentence. As such, *le₂* is again proven to be propositional and may appear as a sentence final marker in all basic sentences because it has a scope that covers the phrase or sentence that precedes it.

This can be further confirmed in the topicalised sentence below:

(3) Rìbĕn wŏ qùguo₂ le₂
     Japan I   go-mrk mrk
     'Japan, I have been there (before).'

We have shown in earlier chapters that, in Chinese, no markers of tense or aspect should be adjacent to each other. However, the experiential aspect marker *guo₂*

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in sentence (3) and the perfective *le₂* appear next to each other without jeopardizing the grammaticality of the sentence. This is because the two markers belong to two different levels of syntactic structures.
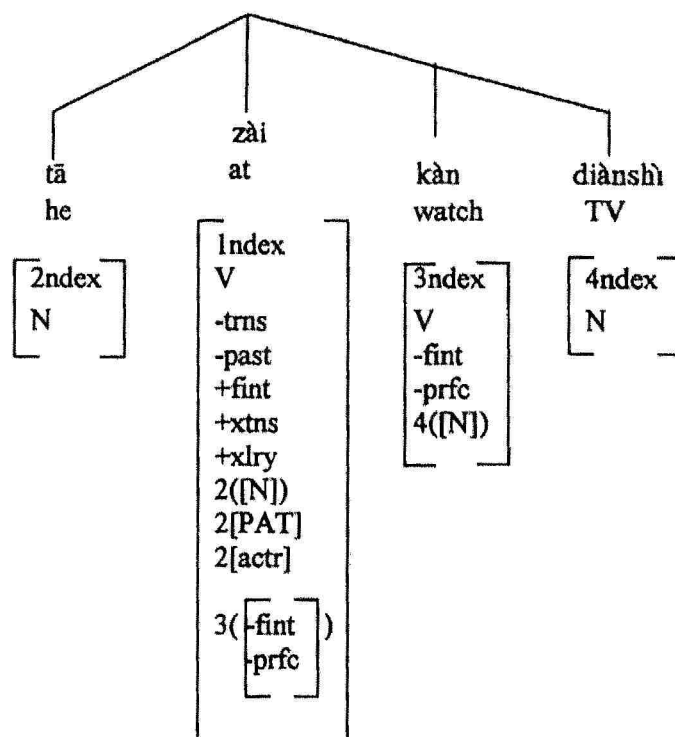
5.2.2 Imperfective Marker *Zài*

Zài has not generally been regarded as an aspect marker until the 1970s (Huang, 1988). It often functions as a simple verb with the meaning 'to exist' in sentences, like *Tā zài jiā* 'He is at home', or as a preposition in the sentence *Bìngrén zài chuángshang tǎngzhe* 'The patient is lying on the bed'. Chao (1968) treats it as an adverb.

It has been shown in Section 3.3.6 that *zài* is another marker that occurs at the propositional or sentential level like *le₂*. In Lexicase, it is an extension verb that has a verbal complement like *kàn diànshì* 'to watch TV' in *Tā zài jiā kàn diànshì* 'He is watching TV at home.' Hsu (1999) also agrees that the marker is introduced at the sentence level.

As an aspect marker, *zài* is generally regarded as the imperfective progressive marker that indicates an action that is 'actually in progress', 'progressive', 'continuative', 'durative' or 'what one is engaged in doing momentarily' (Li and Thompson, 1981; Huang, 1988; Smith, 1991; Egerold, 1994). The terms may vary, but it has been unanimously agreed upon that the marker can only co-occur with activity verbs, verbs of posture, iterative punctual verbs, and even emotive and mental verbs that have a progressive or durative interpretation, such as the verbs in (i) – (iv) below:

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(i)　Activity verbs: *kàn* 'to read, to watch (TV)', *chī* 'to eat', *kū* 'to cry'

(ii)　Verbs of Posture: *zuò* 'to sit', *zhàn* 'to stand'

(iii)　Iterative Punctual Verbs: *dǎ* 'to beat (drum)', *qiāo* 'to knock'

(iv)　Emotive and mental verbs: *xiǎng* 'thinking of', *xīnshǎng* 'to appreciate'

These verbs may co-occur with the marker *zài* because, being verbs of durative activity or state, they are also imperfective like the marker. This can be seen in the stemma above. In the tree, the verb *kàn* 'to watch (TV)' in the sentence *Tā zài kàn diànshì* 'He is watching TV' is imperfective. It therefore satisfies the contextual feature [-fint, -prfc] required in the matrix of the head, *zài*.

Sentences in (4) below explain why the marker cannot co-occur with punctual and instantaneous verbs or any verb with the perfective markers *le* or *guo*. As the

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verbs are either telic or perfective, the contextual feature ?[-fint, -prfc] required by the head *zài* cannot be satisfied.

(4)

a. Tā	zài	sĭ		'He is dying.'
b. Wŏmen	zài	yíng	nàchăng bĭsài	'We are winning that game.'
c. Wŏ	zài	zhăodào	nàfēng xìn	'I (at the moment) found that letter.'
d. Tā	zài	kànle	diànshĭ	'He is (at the moment) finished watching TV.'

[-prfc]　　　　[+prfc]
　　　　　　　　[-fint]
?($\begin{bmatrix} \text{-fint} \\ \text{-prfc} \end{bmatrix}$)

In sum, there are two aspect markers at the propositional or sentential level in Chinese, namely, the perfective *le₂* and the imperfective *zài*. They are alike in the sense that both of them are free morphemes, unlike markers *le₁*, *guo₁/guole* and *zhe* which are bounded and suffix-like. However, they differ in distribution. *Le₂* is clause or sentence final, but *zài* precedes the verb.

In the following section, we will verify the syntactic properties of the remaining markers and prove that they are markers at the lexical level.

5.3 Lexical Level

Aspect markers at the lexical level can be divided into perfective and imperfective markers. The perfective markers are *le₁*, *guo₂*; the imperfective one is *zhe*. It is only the status of *guo₁/guole* as aspect markers that are still controversial.

5.3.1 Perfective Aspect Markers

5.3.1.1 le_1

The status of le_1 as a perfective marker is never challenged, but controversies regarding the various meanings of this marker are still on-going. Ever since Chao (1968) defined le_1 to mean 'completed action', linguists have accepted this definition without objection until the definition is found to be inadequate. Linguists continue to explore its functions or focus on the semantic meaning of the complements that the V-le_1 construction can take. We are not concerned with semantics in this study. Our interest lies in the aspectual properties found in the markers and matters related to the 'boundary' they represent. In Chapter Four, we have proven that le_1 is a relative past tense marker and it represents a close boundary as opposed to the open boundary represented by sentence final le_2. In this section, we will examine the identity of le_1 as a perfective aspect marker.

Lü (1980) provides six syntactic environments for the two le to occur. Two of the environments for le_2 have been discussed in Section 5.2.1 and three environments concerned with the controversial sentence final le will be examined later in Section 5.4. There is one environment which is the most productive construction in which le_1 is found. This is the 'V + le_1 + NP' construction. The noun phrase in this construction can be the direct object of a transitive verb, or the complement of an intransitive verb. The complements can be complements of duration, frequency, quantity and so on.

If we refer to the table containing subcategories in Chapter Three, it will be seen that the 'V + le_1 + NP' construction is found in practically all types of constructions except Type F and Type H which are V-*zhe* constructions that strictly

forbid the occurrence of *le₁*. As discussed in Chapter Three, most of the intransitive verbs and even some transitive verbs, have a derived form, that is, V-*le₁*, that can take a complement as found in the Type J construction in the table.

Lü (1980) listed nine criteria that the 'V + *le₁* + NP' construction may or may not occur. Those related to our studies are given below. We will first examine the case in which the NP is a simple noun, followed by the case in which it is a nominal phrase, and finally, the case in which 'V + *le₁* + NP' behaves as the subordinate clause in a complex sentence.

<u>(i) NP as A Simple Noun</u>

(5) a. Wǒ yǐjīng wènle₁ Xiǎo Wáng   (Lü, 1980:314)
       I   already ask-mrk Xiao Wang
       'I have already asked Xiao Wang.'

    b. Wǒ mǎile₁   shū
       I   buy-mrk book
       'I bought a/the book.'

    c. Wǒ mǎile₁ shū le₂
       'I have bought a/the book.'

Lü (1980:314) says that *le₁* 'expresses an action that is completed' and provides sentence (5a) above an example. The sentence is identical to sentence (5b) in distribution. Therefore, is *le₁* in (5a) perfective?

In the discussion on (5b) in section 5.2.1, it is shown that the sentence is not perfective because *shū* is non-specific, it needs *le₂* to make the result of the event of 'I buy a/the book' relevant to speech time (5c). According to Li and Thompon's

definition, the event in (5a) should be bounded because the object is a definite NP that refers to a particular person. However, oddity still persists. In November and December 2002, I conducted a simple survey among some local Chinese about the acceptability of the sentence. It was generally felt that the sentence sounded incomplete as the listener may expect the utterance to be continued. It would be much better if le_2 was added, or if another NP, such as *nàjian shì* 'that matter' was indicated.[1]

(6) a. Wǒ yǐjing wènle₁ Xiǎo Wáng le
'I have already asked Xiao Wang.'

      b. ?Wǒ yǐjing wènle₁ Xiǎo Wáng nàjiàn shì
'I have already asked Xiao Wang about that matter.'

      b' Nàjiàn shì wǒ yǐjing wènle₁ Xiǎo Wáng
'I have already asked Xiao Wang about that matter.'

      c. Wǒ yǐjing xiěle₁ huíxìn le₂   (Lü, 1980:316)
I already write-mrk reply mrk
'I have already written a reply (to the letter).'

Sentence (6a) is now a perfective event like (6c), another example given by Lü. (6b) is grammatical even though it does not contain the sentence final le_2. This is because the NP, *nàjiàn shì* 'that matter' has made the event a bounded event. According to Li and Thompson, boundedness entails 'perfectivity', that is, the event becomes perfective. However, (6b) is a marginal sentence that sounds grammatical but unnatural to native speakers because normally, the NP will be topicalised as in (6b').

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[1] The informants were mainly students of the Department of Chinese Studies, University of Malaya. They were picked randomly. The survey was conducted in Nov and Dec 2002.

(ii) NP as a Nominal Phrase

In the 'V + *le₁* + NP' construction, the NP is the complement of the verb. As shown in similar constructions in Chapter Three, the NP will be assigned the COR (Correspondent) case relation in Lexicase theory. The NP is normally a complement of duration, frequency or quantity as shown below:

(7) a. Tā zài chuángshang tǎngle wǔge xiǎoshí   (duration)
          he at bed-on   lie-mrk five-CL hour
          'He has been lying on the bed for five hours.'

    b. Wǒ kànshū   kànle yīge xiǎoshí
          I   read-book read-mrk one-CL hour
          'I have been reading for an hour.'

    c. Zhōngguó wǒ qùle   sāncì   (frequency)
          China   I go-CL three times
          'I have been to China three times.'

    d. Wǒ mǎile yīběn shū   (quantity)
          I   buy-mrk one-CL book
          'I bought a book.'

    e. Wǒ mǎile nàběn shū
          I   buy-mrk that-CL book
          'I bought that book.'

Li and Thompson (1981:186) says,

> An event can be viewed as bounded when temporal, spatial, or conceptual limits are placed on it. What this means grammatically is that a verb typically will occur with *–le* 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.

However, as native speakers, we still feel the sentences sound odd without the sentence final *le₂*, even if the adverb *yǐjing* 'already' is added to the sentence. How

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should this be explained? The sentences below might be able to solve the ambiguity. (8b) is the classic sentence in Tai (1984) that led to many hot debates over the issue of aspect in Chinese linguistics.

(8) a. Wǒ zuótiáň xiěle yīfēng xìn
I yesterday write-mrk one-CL letter
'I wrote a letter yesterday.'

b. Wǒ zuótiáň xiěle yīfēng xìn, kěshi hái mei xiěwán
I yesterday write-mrk one-CL letter, but still not write-finish
'I wrote a letter yesterday, but I didn't finish writing.'

c. *Wǒ zuótián xiewǎnle yīfēng xìn, kěshi háimei xiěwán
'I have finished writing a letter yesterday, but I didn't finish writing.'

d. Wǒmen yíngle nàchǎng bǐsài
we win-CL that-CL game
'We won that game.'

e *Wǒmen yíngle nàchǎng/yīchǎng bǐsài, kěshi háimei yíng
'We won that/one game, but we still haven't won.'

By Li and Thompson's definition, (8a) is bounded and perfective. However, (8b) shows that the action of 'writing the letter' does not really mean that the event of 'writing the letter' is completed. Hence, (8b) is imperfective.

The argument for (8b) may be true. However, as (8b) is compared with (8c) and (8d), another interesting observation can be made because (8d) is absolutely perfective. Regardless of whether the complementary NP is definite (nàchǎng bǐsài 'that game') or not (yīchǎng bǐsài 'a game'), (8e) is still ungrammatical.

Hence, this is a striking observation. First of all, let's compare the difference between the term 'perfectivity' as defined by Comrie on the one hand, and by Li and Thompson on the other. Comrie's definition refers to the completion of an event as a whole and the stress is on the fact that the result must be relevant till speech time; but Li and Thompson's criterion is that an event is perfective as long as the event is bounded. But in the real world, a bounded event may not have a result that may last after the incident. This reminds us of Comrie's argument over the difference between 'I lost (non-perfect) my penknife' versus 'I have lost (perfect) my penknife' mentioned in Chapter One. As such, Li and Thompson's definition seems to be the 'I lost my penknife' kind of perfectivity and the effect of losing the penknife does not last any longer than the moment that it was missing.

Hence, *le₁* only signals 'perfectivity' of the event that it covers, and it signals the perfectivity of the whole event only if the verb is telic. Like (8d) above, the verb 'to win' is telic. Once you have won, you would not lose. Consequently, the effect of 'winning a game' remains unchanged till you lose in another game. Similarly, (8c) is ungrammatical because *xiěwán* 'finish writing' is a telic event, the result certainly cannot be 'but we didn't finish writing'. In this sense, the event in (8b) then satisfies Comrie's definition of perfectivity. This is the reason why Yang (1995) claims that the feature [+result] for verb is a necessary condition for perfectivity in Chinese.

At this juncture, one may ask whether the sentences below are perfective. Native speakers, however, may feel uncomfortable as the sentence final *le₂* is missing.

(9) a. ? Wǒ xiěwanle   nàfēng xìn
         I finish-write-mrk that-CL letter
         'I have finished writing that letter.'

   b. ?Wǒmen yíngle   nàchǎng bǐsài
         we   win-mrk that-CL game
         'We won that game.'

   c. Wǒ xiěwan nàfēng xìn le₂

   d. *Wǒmen yíng nàchǎng bǐsài le₂

   e. Nàfēng xìn wǒ xiěwanle
         'That letter, I have finished writing.'

   f. Nàchǎng bǐsài wǒmen yíngle
         'That game, we have won.'

There are two strategies that the Chinese will employ to solve the problem.
Firstly, by keeping *le₂* and omitting *le₁* as in (9c). But this strategy cannot be applied
to monosyllabic verbs such as *yíng* 'to win' as in (9d). Due to phonological
constraints, monosyllabic verbs take the post verbal *le* (*le₁* as well as *le₂*) obligatorily.
The second approach is to topicalise the postverbal NP. As can be seen in (9c) and (9d)
above, *le₁* becomes sentence final, and behaves like *le₂* that signals perfectivity (to go
by Comrie's and Starosta's sdefinitions) after the complementary NP is moved to the
subject position as in (9e) and (9f).

Topicalisation is a powerful tool in Chinese. We have shown that sentence (2c),
Wǒ mǎile shū 'I bought a/the book' in Section 5.2.1 is not perfective because *shū*
'book' is not specific. However, the sentence will turn out to be perfective by means
of topicalisation. *Shū wǒ mǎile* 'The book, I have bought it'. Although semantically,

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the topic *book* is now used to refer to a particular book that is known to the speaker and the hearer, syntactically, the sentence becomes *le* final and can be interpreted as having current relevance.

Topicalisation is a very common linguistic phenomenon in Chinese to the extent that Chinese is classified as a topic-oriented language (Li and Thompson, 1981). The peculiar use of topicalisation aroused our curiosity: Is perfectivity one of the reasons for the movement? Or is it the strategy of the Chinese speakers to solve the problem of perfectivity? This will be an interesting topic for future study.

(iii) 'V + le_1 + NP' as Subordinate Clause

After proving that le_1 actually only signals 'perfectivity' of the event that it covers, namely the verb, we shall now examine the aspectual significance of le_1 in a subordinate clause.

(10)   Wǒ mǎile₁ shū jiù huí jiā
          I   buy-mrk book then return home
          'I will go home after I bought the book.'
          'I went home after I bought the book.'

In this sentence, *mǎile₁ shū* 'bought the book' is the subordinate clause of the main verb *huíjiā* 'to go home'. There are two small events in this sentence, that is, 'to buy the book' and 'to go home', and the two make up a bigger event (the proposition) of 'going home after buying the book'. As can be seen in the stemma, the verb in the first event, *mǎile₁*, marks the imperfect aspect because *shū* 'book' is generic. The proposition is also imperfective as the head lacks the Sperrbaum (Sprb) that is the

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closed boundary (*le₂*) of the proposition. The Sprb signals that the event is viewed as a whole or as perfective. Since the proposition is not perfective, we do not see the current relevance of the result of the activities. As such, the sentence can have more than one interpretation as in the English translations given in (10) above.

But there is one thing that is unambiguous about the sentence. The event of 'buying the book' is completed before the event of 'going home'. This shows that it is the aspect marker *le₁* that makes this clear. Let us recall our discussion on tense for the same sentence in Chapter Four where *le₁* is proven to be the marker of relative tense. Hence, we can claim that <u>the perfective marker at the lexical level, the *le₁*, is a relative tense marker as well as an aspect marker</u> [emphasis mine].


```
                                                        huíjiā
                                                        go home

            mǎile                                       ┌ Index          ┐
            buy-mrk          shū          jiù           │ V              │
   wǒ                        book         then          │ -trns          │
   I       ┌ 2ndex ┐         ┌ 4ndex ┐    ┌ 5ndex ┐     │ +fint          │
   ┌ 3ndex ┐│ V     │        │ N     │    │ Adv   │     │ 2([V])         │
   │ N     ││ +trns │        │ gnrc  │    └       ┘     │ 5[Adv]         │
   └       ┘│ +past │        └       ┘                  │                │
            │ +bndd │                                   │    ┌ V     ┐   │
            │ -prfc │                                   │ 2  │ +bndd │   │
            │ +cbnd │                                   │    └       ┘   │
            │ 3([N])│                                   │                │
            │ 4([N])│                                   │    ┌ N     ┐   │
            │ 3[AGT]│                                   │ 3  │ PAT   │   │
            │ 3[actr]│                                  │    └       ┘   │
            │ 4[PAT]│                                   │    ┌ Sprb  ┐   │
            └       ┘                                   │ ?  │ Cbnd  │   │
                                                        │    │ +prfc │   │
                                                        │    └       ┘   │
                                                        └                ┘
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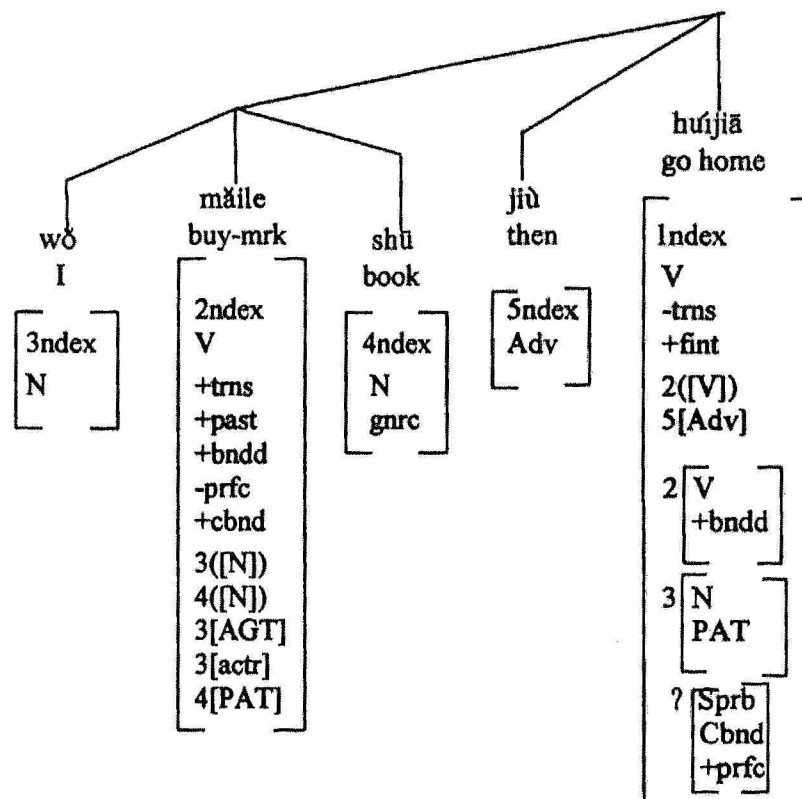
(11) a. Wǒ mǎile₁ shū jiù huí jiā le₂
         I   buy-mrk book then return home mrk
         'I went home after buying the book.'
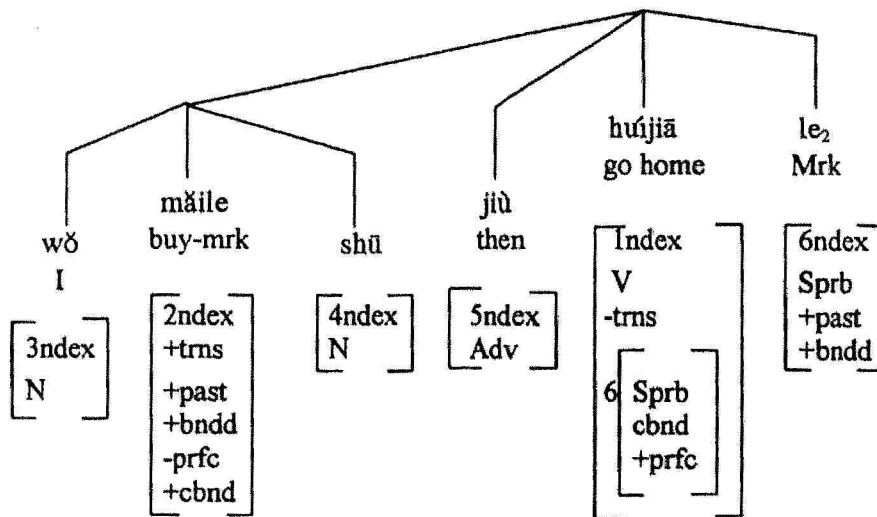
The stemma for sentence (11) demonstrates how sentence (10) becomes perfective syntactically. The perfectivity of the proposition changed after adding the Sprb *le₂* to the sentence. In other words, it is *le₂* that determine the perfectivity of the sentence as it brings the result of the event to speech time. In terms of tense, *le₂* signals +past. Hence, we agree with Li et al. (1982) that *le₂* has the function of relating an event to a reference time.

At this juncture, it is necessary to recall that we have already proven in Chapter Four that in Chinese, it is *le₂* that determines the +past property of a sentence. Therefore, we can also claim that the perfective marker at the propositional level, that is, *le₂*, is a tense marker as well as an aspect marker [emphasis mine].

In this section, we have pointed out the ambiguity which exists in the meaning of perfectivity as defined in the theories of Comrie and Li and Thompson amd also

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explained the syntactic behaviour of *le₁* in aspect. Our discussion also led to a significant finding that *le₁* and *le₂* mark tense as well as aspect, at the semantic as well as syntactic levels.

In the next section, the perfectivity of the two *guo* in Chinese will be discussed. As the status of *guo₂* is more transparent, we will first deal with this marker before looking at the identity of *guo₁/guole* as an aspect marker.

5.3.1.2 *Guo₂*

Guo₂ is the marker of experiential aspect in Chinese. Fundamentally, it signals that an event has been experienced with respect to some reference time (Li and Thompson, 1981) or a previous condition that no longer holds (Ma, 1977; Lü, 1981). Chao (1968) defines it as a suffix for the indefinite past. It is 'indefinite' because it indicates that the activity represented by the verb took place at some indefinite time in the past. The time of occurrence of the event is usually not specified (Lü, 1980). As such, it is also treated as a marker of the remote past (Ma, 1977; Huang, 1988), and it indicates 'completion-discontinuity' between the action and the point of reference (Jing, 1985; Iljic, 1990). Consequently, *guo₂* can only co-occur with adverbs such as *gāng* 'just, only a short while ago', *céngjīng* 'formerly'.

> (12) a. Wǒ qùguo₂ Rìběn
> I   go-mrk Japan
> 'I have been to Japan.'
>
> b. *Wǒ qù Rìběn guo
>
> b. Rìběn wǒ qùguo le₂

d. *Wǒ yǐjīng qùguo₂ Rìběn
   I   already go-mrk Japan
   'I have already been to Japan.'

e. Wǒ yǐjīng qùguo₂ Rìběn le₂

The ungrammaticality of sentence (12b) indicates that *guo₂* cannot be a marker at the propositional level because it does not possess a scope that can cover the whole event of *Wǒ qù Rìběn* 'I go to Japan' like *le₂* and *zài*. This is further confirmed in (12c) because the marker lies adjacent to *le₂*. In Chinese, no marker can occur next to another unless they belong to different syntactic levels.

Since *guo₂* is a marker at the lexical level, it does not indicate current relevance of the whole event. (12d) indicates that the activity of 'going to Japan' is bounded. Therefore, it is perfective according to Li and Thompson's definition. However, the whole event of *I go to Japan* is imperfective according to Comrie's and Starosta's theories. The event is perfective only if the prepositional marker *le₂* is added to sentence (12e). Hence, it is similar to *le₁* in behaviour.

The experiential property of *guo₂* may be tested with the adverb *céngjīng* 'formerly, once' (13a), or by adding a sentence that is semantically contradictory to the result caused by the former predicate. If the addition of the adverb 'once' does not change the grammaticality of the sentence or if the two clauses do not contradict each other (13b), the event is experiential.

(13) a. Wǒ céngjīng qùguo Rìběn
        I   formerly go-mrk Japan
        'I have been to Japan (before).'

b. Tā qùguo Rìběn, xiànzài bú zài nà'er le$_2$
    he go-mrk Japan now   not at there mrk
    'He has been to Japan and he is not there now.'

c. *Tā qùguo Rìběn, tā hái zài nà'er
    he go-mrk Japan he still at there
    'He has been to Japan and he is still there.'

The stemma for sentence (13a) below shows that the sentence is well-formed with all the features filled. Sentence (13c) above is unacceptable because the first part of the sentence says that the event of going to Japan has happened once sometime in the past, but the fact is contradicted by the second part of the sentence which says that the person is still present in Japan.
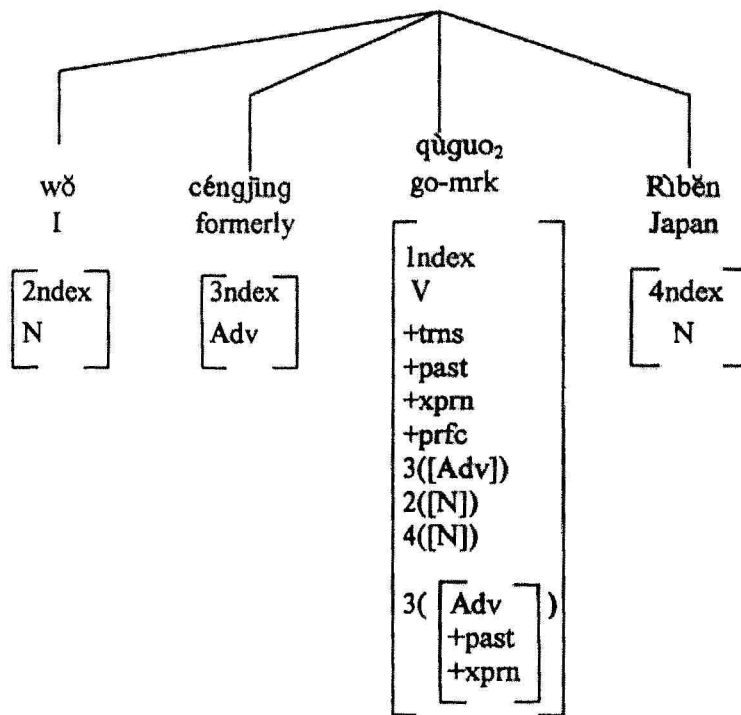
Since *guo$_2$* refers to an experience, it is natural that it only co-occurs with activities that can recur, such as the verbs in Type A, B1, B2.2, C1, D1.1, D2.2, G, I, J

and K1 constructions in our subcategorisation in Chapter Three. Irreversible or non-recurrent events such as *sǐ* 'to die' and *lǎo* 'be old' are, on the other hand, incompatible with *guo₂*. **Tā sǐguo* 'He died before (and he is still living)' is unacceptable unless it is in medical terms, or as an exaggeration as we have mentioned in sentence (31) in Chapter Four.

(14) a. Tā qùguo₁/qùguole Rìběn jiù   qù Zhōngguó
         he go-mrk   Japan then go China
         'He goes to China after going to Japan.

b. * Tā qùguo₂ Rìběn jiù qù Zhōngguó

(14) above shows the difference between *guo₂* and *guo₁/guole*. The (a) sentence narrates the sequential order of two activities and it has nothing to do with experience. Sentence (b) that contains the experiential *guo₂* is therefore unacceptable.

5.3.1.3 *Guo₁/guole*

Sentence (14a) above indicates that the marker *guo₁/guole* is non-experiential. In Chapter Four, we have pointed out that the marker indicates 'stage', that is, it focuses on the occurrence of an activity out of a list or a series of things or habitual activities to be done. Is *guo₁/guole* an aspect marker? If it is, is it propositional or lexical?

Many linguists notice that there are two *guo* in Chinese. Other than the experiential *guo₂* mentioned above, there is *guo₁/guole*. Chao (1968:251 & 450) regards *guo₂* as the verbal suffix of 'the indefinite past aspect' and *guo₁/guole* as a

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phase complement. Since then, the debate goes on. While others do not pay much attention to the marker, some linguists consider it to be an aspect marker:

> There is also a suffix –*guo*, usually with the fourth tone, indicating completion of an action; apart from the potential tone difference, –*guo* of completed action, but not experiential –*guo*, may be followed by other aspectual markers, e.g. –*le*. (Comrie, 1976:59)

> *Guo* is the other perfective marker. It has two major usages. The first is to denote the termination of some situation prior to another situation. And the second is to indicate a past experience...When *guo* is used to denote the termination of some situation, it always conveys a current relevance meaning. (Yang, 1995:134)

> <*guo le*> is a semiverbal expression, grammaticalised in the sense of anterior (mostly recent) accomplishment, anterior (mostly recent) punctual event, done and over with. (Egerod, 1994:295)

> while present relevance does not necessarily imply recentness, recentness may be a sufficient condition for present relevance. Comrie (1976:60)

Hence, it is believable that *guo₁/guole* is an aspect marker. Moreover, it fits into the category of 'perfect of recent past' defined by Comrie (ibid.). The perfect of recent past indicates that the past situation is very recent. Being 'perfect' it entails current relevance, and the marker in sentence (15a) is therefore compatible with the adverb *yǐjīng* 'already' (15b), but not *céngjīng* 'formerly, once' as in (15c).

(15) a. Wǒ chīguo₁/chīguole zǎofàn   le₂
           I eat-mkr   breakfast mrk
        'I have taken my breakfast.'

     b. Wǒ yǐjīng chīguo₁/chīguole zǎofàn le₂
        'I have already had my breakfast.'

c. *Wǒ céngjīng chīguo$_1$/chīguole zǎofàn le$_2$
'I have had the experience of taking breakfast.'

d. *Wǒ chīguo$_1$/chīguole zǎofàn

Nevertheless, the marker is not propositional. (15d) shows that the sentence is incomplete without the sentence final le$_2$. As such, we claim that it can only occur at the lexical level, and (15d) can only be the subordinate clause in a sentence because it needs another clause, the main clause, to complete a message. This peculiar behaviour of *guo$_1$/guole* is fully reflected in the subcategorisation obtained in Chapter Three (see Appendix I).
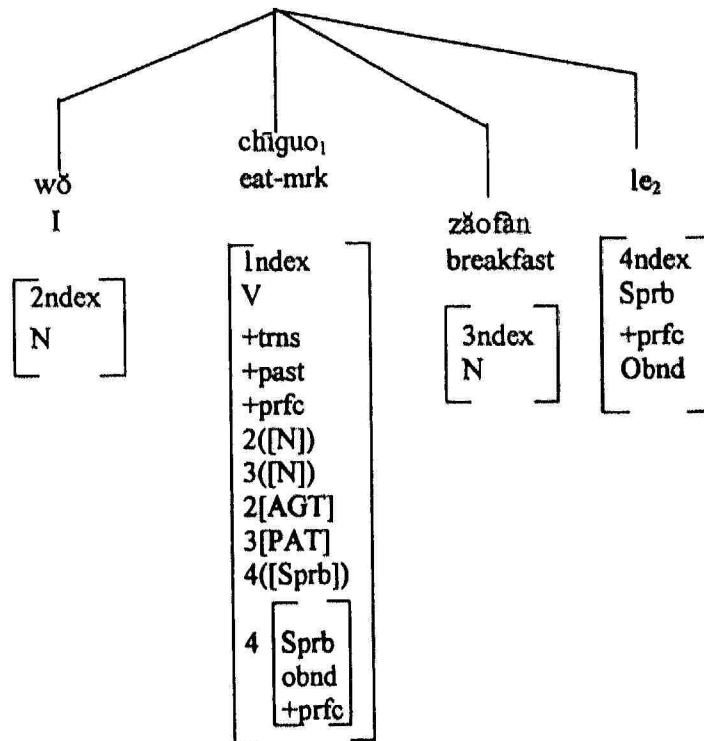
Sentences in (16) are examples of *chīguo$_1$/guole* functioning as a subordinate clause. The Lexicase tree below explains the perfectivity of (16a).

(16) a. Wǒ chīguo₁/guole zǎofàn   jiù   qù shàngkè
          I   eat-mrk   breakfast then go class
          'I will go to class after taking breakfast.'

      b. Wǒ wènguo₁/wènguole lǎoshī zài gàosù nǐ
          'I will let you know after asking (our) teacher.'

      c. Wǒ qùguo₁/qùguole Rìběn jiù qù Zhōngguó
          'I will go to China after going to Japan.'

qù
go

wǒ
I

chīguo₁
eat-mrk

jiù
then

shàngkè
attend-class

$$[3ndex \quad N]$$

$$\begin{bmatrix} 2ndex \\ V \\ +trns \\ +past \\ +prfc \\ +cbnd \\ 2([N]) \\ 3([N]) \\ 2[AGT] \\ 3[PAT] \end{bmatrix}$$

zǎofàn
breakfast

$$[4ndex \quad N]$$

$$[5ndex \quad Adv]$$

$$\begin{bmatrix} 1ndex \\ V \\ +fint \\ +trns \\ -prfc \\ 3([N]) \\ 6([N]) \\ 3[AGT] \\ 6[PAT] \\ 5([Adv]) \\ 2([V]) \end{bmatrix}$$

$$[6ndex \quad N]$$
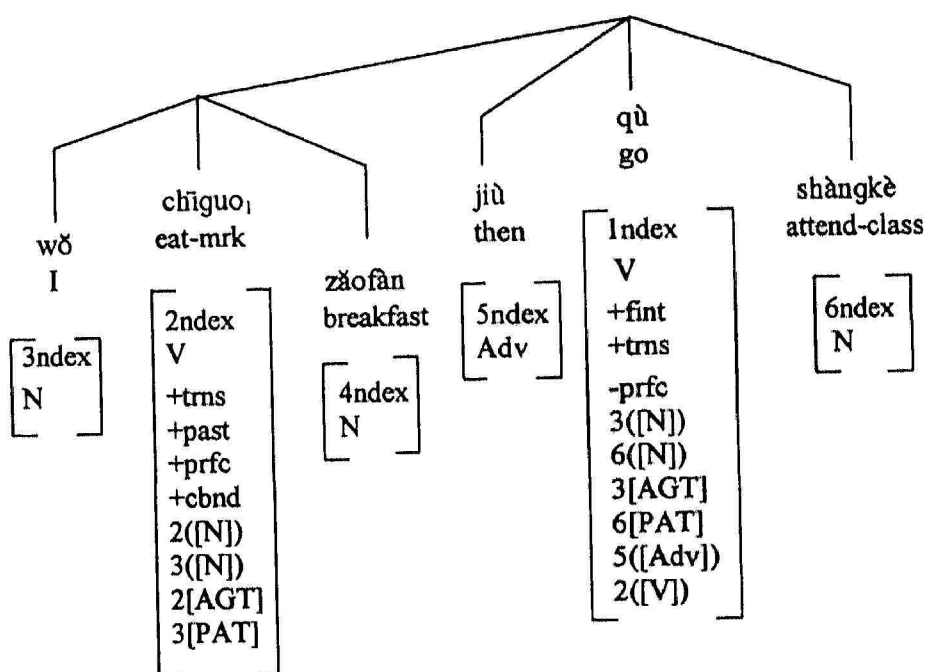
The stemma above is well-structured, proving that the sentence is fully grammatical. Note that the subordinate clause of the sentence is perfective, as *chīguo₁/guole* is +prfc at the lexical level. It is perfective relative to *qù shàngkè*. However, the head *qù* 'to go' is –prfc. Therefore, the whole event of 'I will go to class after having breakfast' is imperfective and we cannot tell whether the event has

happened or is going to happen because, without *le₂*, it does not indicate current relevance.

But, we are sure that the event of *having breakfast* must occur just before *going to class* Hence, we may conclude that *guo₁/guole* is also a perfective marker at the lexical level that functions as a relative tense marker as well as an aspect marker [emphasis mine], as in the case of *le₁* discussed in section 5.3.1.1.

Since *le₁* and *guo₁/guole* carry the same function, we believe that, besides tense, aspect may also be a reason for *guo₁/guole* to be replaced by *le*. We have shown how the markers are interchanged in terms of tense in Chapter Four.

(17) a. Wǒ chīle zǎofàn jiù qù shàngkè
 'I go to class after having breakfast.'

 b. Wǒ wènle lǎoshī zài gàosù nǐ
 'I will let you know after asking (our) teacher.'

 c. Wǒ qùle Rìběn jiù qù Zhōngguó
 'I will go to China after going to Japan.'

However, there may be a slight difference between sentences (16) and (17). One of the functions of *guo₁/guole* is that it indicates 'recentness'. Therefore, the temporal distance between the events represented by the main clause should take place not long after the occurrence of the action represented by the subordinate clause. Hence, time emphasis in (17) is different from that in (16) due to the change of the markers. Sentences in (18) are ungrammatical because the time separation between the two activities is too far apart.

(18) a. *Wǒ zǎoshang chīguo₁/guole zǎofàn xiàwǔ jiù qù shàngkè
'I have my breakfast in the morning and then go for classes in the afternoon.'

b. *Wǒ qùguo₁/guole Rìběn yīgeyuè jiù qù Zhōngguó
'I went to China one month after I went to Japan recently.'

5.3.2 Imperfective Marker *Zhe*

Zhe, the marker that is often studied together with *zài*, is unanimously regarded

as an imperfective marker. *Zài* has been identified as the imperfective marker at the

propositional level in Chapter Three, but what about *zhe*? It may be necessary for us to

first look at the distribution of *zhe* with respect to *zài*.

It is not common that two markers co-occur in one single sentence. Ma (1985)

says the markers may co-occur only when one is responding to the question "What is

he doing?" as shown in (19a). Chen (1990) found an example in a language text which

he feels is a direct translation from the continuous tense in English (19b).

(19) a. Q: Tā zài zuò shénme?
   he at do what
   'What is he doing?'

   Ans: Tā zài zhēngzhe yǎn
   he at open-mrk eye
   'He has his eyes opened.'

b. Tā zài chàngzhe <Wǒ ài Běijīng Tiān'ān Mén>
   she at singing   I love Beijing Tian'an Men
   'She is singing I Love Tian'an Men.'

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We agree with Chen (1990) that sentence (19b) is an example of interference of English grammar because, in Malaysia and Singapore where English is widely spoken, similar structures are found in local Mandarin.[2]

(20)   a.   ?Wǒ zài láizhe
            I   at   come-mrk
            'I am coming.'

       b.   ?Wǒ zài kànzhe   zhèběn shū
            I   at   read-mrk this-CL book
            'I am reading this book.'

       c.   ?Wǒ zài xiězhe   bǐyè   lùnwén
            I   at   write-mrk graduate thesis
            'I am writing my graduation exercise.'

       c'   Wǒ hái zài xiě bǐyè lùnwěn ne
            'I am still writing my graduation exercise.'

Note that when the speakers utter the sentences, they assume that *zài* indicates the action is occurring at the present moment and V-*zhe* shows that the action is in progress. Hence, a sentence like (20b) means that the speaker still hasn't finished reading the book and not that he is in the act of reading the book. Such expressions show that the speakers are applying English sentence structures to Chinese. The correct sentence of (20c) in Chinese is (20c').

In our syntactic analysis using Lexicase, we have claimed in sectin 4.3.4 that *zài* is the finite extension verb that is the head of the sentence with V-*zhe* as its

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[2] Sentences in (20) are collected from casual conversations among some students of the Department of Chinese Studies, University of Malaya. Over 20 students were asked to check the acceptability of the sentences. About 30% of them felt comfortable with the sentences while others considered the sentences as ungrammatical.

dependent. Hence, based on the stemma below, we can see that *zhe* cannot occur at the
lexical level.

```
              ┌──────┬──────────┐
              │      │          │
          ┌───┘      │      ┌───┘
          │         zài     │
         tā             chàngzhe  │
                                  └───┐
                                      gē
```

```
              ┌──────┬──────────┐
              │      │          │
          ┌───┘      │      ┌───┘
          │         zài     │
         tā             zhèngzhe  │
                                  └───┐
                                     yǎn
```
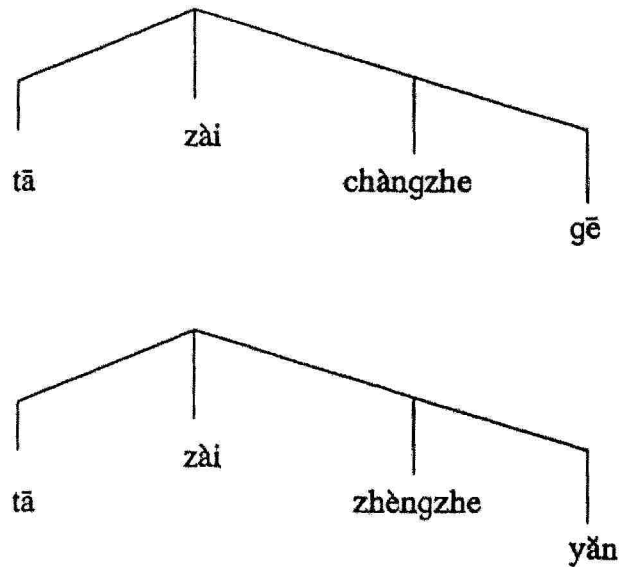
The aspectual property of *zhe* is disputable. Unlike *zài* that clearly denotes an
action in progress, it is difficult to find a proper term that can capture the actual
functions of the marker because it differs from the common imperfective. Hence,
linguists have been providing different terms for the functions of the marker (Ma,
1985; Chu, 1987; Huang, 1988; Chen, 1992; Yeh, 1993). At present, it is generally
accepted that *zhe* conveys (i) a continuous state resulting from an action, and (ii) an
action that is an accompaniment to another action. In terms of aspect, it has been
called 'progressive' or 'durative' and so on. However, it is termed 'sustaining aspect'
in Lexicase.[3]

Being an imperfective aspect marker, *zhe* often co-occurs with *ne*, the
attitudinal particle implying current relevance that wraps up an utterance (Yang,

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[3] The term is adopted from Fan (1984). It is agreed upon after discussion with Stanley Starosta on
10.5.2001 in Hawai'i.

1995). It does not occur with another current relevance marker *le₂*. With *le₂*, the meaning of the sentence will be changed.

(21) a. Tā dǎzhe   diànhuà ne   (Chao, 1968:248)
          he talk-mrk telephone p
          'He is talking on the telephone.'

     b. Tā dǎzhe   diànhuà le
          'He is talking on he telephone now (as compared to an earlier time
          when he was not on the phone)

Sentences in (22) below show *zhe* conveying the state resulting from an action. The Lexicase stemma proves that the marker is imperfective.

(22) a. Qiángshang guàzhe   yīfú   huà
          wall-on   hang-Asp one-CL painting
          'There is a painting hanging on the wall.'

     a' ?Qiángshang guàzhe nàfú huà

     b. Tā chuānzhe yījiàn   xīn yīfu
          he wear-zhe one-CL new clothing
          'He is wearing new clothes.'

     b' ?Tā chuānzhe nàjiàn xīn yīfu....

     c. Mén guānzhe
          door close-mrk
          'The door is closed.'

     c' *Nàdào mén guānzhe
          'That door is closed.'

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qiángshang   guàzhe   yīfú   huà
wall-on   hang-mrk   one-CL   painting

```
              ┌──────────┐
qiángshang    │ Index    │
wall-on       │ V        │
              │ +trns    │
┌────────┐    │ +lctn    │        ┌────────┐    ┌──────────┐
│ 2ndex  │    │ -prfc    │        │ 4ndex  │    │ 3ndex    │
│ N      │    │   ┌────┐ │        │ Det    │    │ N        │
│ +lctn  │    │ 2 │ N  │ │        └────────┘    │ 4([N])   │
└────────┘    │   │+lctn│ │                     │ gnrc     │
              │ 3 │([N])│ │                     └──────────┘
              │   └────┘ │
              │   ┌──────┐
              │ 3 │-bndd │ │
              │   │+gnrc │ │
              │   │-prfc │ │
              │   └──────┘ │
              └──────────┘
```
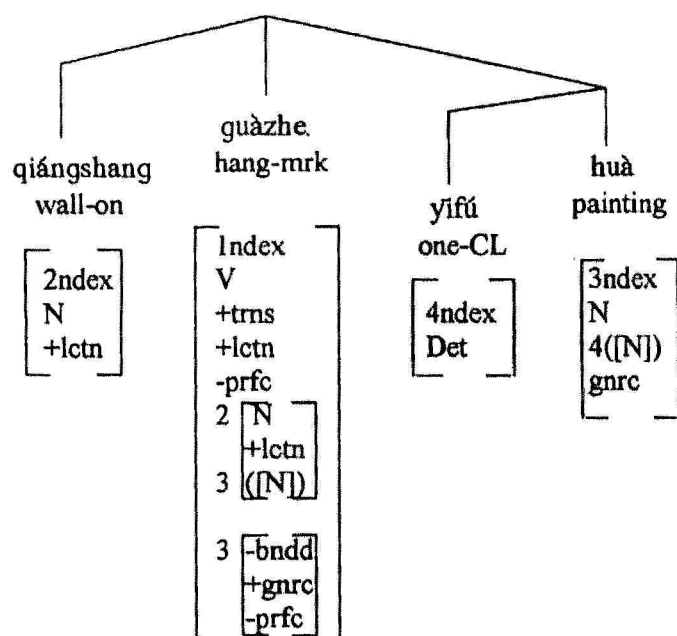
Being imperfective, the V-*zhe* construction in (22) can only co-occur with complements that are also imperfective, that is –bndd (unbounded) and gnrc (generic). The complement in (22a') and (22c') are specific, thus making the sentences sound odd. In (22b'), the V-*zhe* has become a subordinate constituent when the complement *yījiàn yīfú* 'a piece of clothing' becomes *nàjiàn yīfú* 'that clothes' because the sentence *Tā chuānzhe nàjiàn xīn yīfú* indicates an unfinished utterance and therefore entails another action occurring at the same time. In this case, V-*zhe* turns out to be a verb of manner, as can be seen in the stemma for sentence (23a').
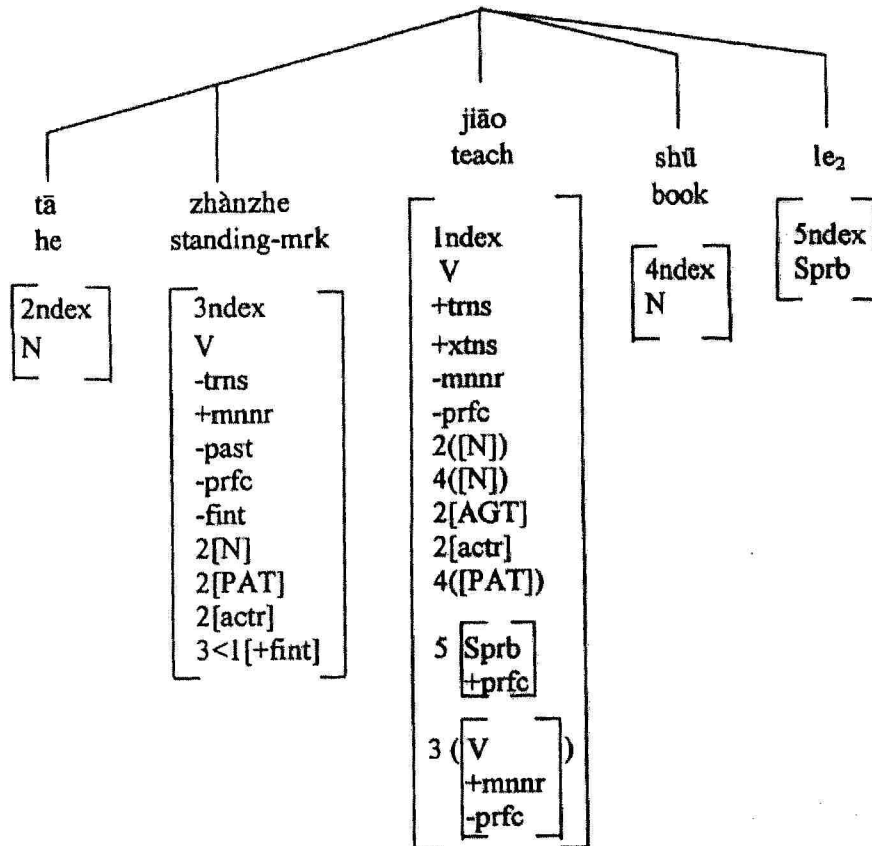
Consider the following sentences:

(23)   a.   Tā zhànzhe   jiāoshu   (Ma, 1985:42)
              he stand-mrk teach
              'He teaches while standing up.'

        a'   Tā zhànzhe jiāoshu le$_2$

b. Tā chuānzhe gāogēnxié   tiàowǔ   (Ma, 1985:43)
   he wear-mrk high-heel shoes dance
   'She wears high-heeled shoes to dance.'


```
                                    jiāo        shū        le₂
                                    teach       book

        tā          zhànzhe     ┌─────────┐
        he          standing-mrk │ Index   │   ┌──────┐   ┌──────┐
                                 │ V       │   │ 4ndex│   │ 5ndex│
      ┌───────┐   ┌──────────┐  │ +trns   │   │ N    │   │ Sprb │
      │ 2ndex │   │ 3ndex    │  │ +xtns   │   └──────┘   └──────┘
      │ N     │   │ V        │  │ -mnnr   │
      └───────┘   │ -trns    │  │ -prfc   │
                  │ +mnnr    │  │ 2([N])  │
                  │ -past    │  │ 4([N])  │
                  │ -prfc    │  │ 2[AGT]  │
                  │ -fint    │  │ 2[actr] │
                  │ 2[N]     │  │ 4([PAT])│
                  │ 2[PAT]   │  │       ┌──────┐
                  │ 2[actr]  │  │ 5     │ Sprb │
                  │ 3<1[+fint]│  │       │ +prfc│
                  └──────────┘  │       └──────┘
                                │       ┌──────┐
                                │ 3 (   │ V    │  )
                                │       │ +mnnr│
                                │       │ -prfc│
                                │       └──────┘
                                └─────────┘
```

The stemma above shows that, with the existence of *le₂*, the event has a perfective reading. The contextual features of 3[V, +mnnr, -prfc] and 5[Sprb, +prfc] in the matrix of the head differ in perfectivity. But they are not in conflict with each other. This is due to the fact that the verb of mannar *zhànzhe* 'standing' is not the head of the sentence, and not governed by the sentence final *le₂*. It is imperfective with respect to the verb *jiāo* 'to teach'.

As such, it is possible that the imperfective marker *zhe* functions as a <u>relative</u> <u>marker</u> [emphasis mine] as it does for tense.

Sentence (23a) will be ungrammatical if *le* (that is, *le₁*) is placed next to *zhe* (24a). It is because of the conflict between the sustaining notion of *zhe* and the completive notion of *le₁* in the same action. However, in some cases, *zhe* can be replaced by *le₁*. This happens when *zhe* is a 'resultative stative' that presents a continuous and stable situation without regard to endpoints (Smith, 1991).

(24)   a.   *Tā zhànzhele₁   jiāoshu
                he stand-mprf-prfc teach

        b.   Chuángshang tǎngzhe yīge   bìngrén
                bed-on   lie-mrk one-CL patient
                'There is a patient lying on the bed.'

        c.   Chuángshang tǎngle₁ yīge bìngrén
                'There is a patient lying on the bed.'

Sentences (24b) and (24c) denote two different types of aspect. The former is a sustaining aspect but the latter is perfective. But pragmatically, they describe the same situation that the patient is lying on the bed now, and it is up to the speaker to choose to narrate it in terms of the present (24b) or the past (24c) tense. The pair of sentences shows how tense and aspect interact with each other.

In summary, it has been seen in this section that *zhe* is an imperfective aspect marker at the lexical level. It is a relative marker when it functions as a manner verb and it is mutually interchangeable with *le₁* when it functions as a result state of an action.

5.4 Sentence Final *le*

The sentence final *le* is a long-standing problem in morphemic identification in Chinese. Syntactically, it occurs in the following environments:

(A) NP + *le*   such as *Shí diǎnzhōng le*   'It's 10 o'clock now.'

(B) V + *le*   such as *Tā lái le*   'He has come /He is coming.'

(C) Adj + *le*   such as *Huā hóng le*
   'The flower has truned red in colour/ The flower is going to turn red.'

(D) VP + *le*   such as C*hī fàn le*
   'It's time for eating / (He's) eating now.'

The reading in (A) is clear. When preceded by a NP, *le* is always the *le₂* that marks inchoative or current relevance state. Remember that *le₁* is by definition postverbal. Constructions (B) – (D), however, are ambiguous in meaning. Like the examples given in (B) above, it is not clear whether the sentence means *Tā láile₁* 'He has came' or *Tā lái le₂* 'He is coming'. The former is perfective indicating that the action of *coming* has taken place, but the latter is indicative of current relevance with inchoative reading. Construction (D) poses another problem. As mentioned before, it is not clear whether the VO combination *chī fàn* functions as an intransitive verb or as a NP. Its interpretation can only be obtained in discourse.

Chao (1968) says that in Chinese, the two *le* are not allowed to co-occur in a sentence. Hence, he assumes that the two *le* are reduced into one through the process of haplology. Many linguists, the semanticians in particular, hold the same opinion,

because semantically, the sentence final *le* may accommodate both the perfective and the inchoative interpretations.

It is often believed that, syntactically, verbs (including the adjective which is regarded as a stative verb in Chinese) that occur in such constructions are intransitive, and they are either stative (verbs in Type K constructions in our subcategorisation chart in Chapter Three) or punctual (Type L) or telic (Type M). However, as we have discussed in section 5.3.1.1, the verb can be a transitive verb after topicalisation, such as *Shū wǒ (yǐjing) mǎi le* 'The book, I have (already) bought it'.

In terms of tense, we have proven in Chapter Four that both *le₁* and *le₂* are past tense markers. In terms of aspect, we have also proven in this chapter that both of them indicate the perfective aspect. Syntactically, the sentence final *le* is obligatory if the verb that precedes it is intransitive. For example, the verbs *lái* 'come' and *xǐgānjing* 'wash-cleaned' in (25a) and (25b) are intransitive. Hence, the sentences become unnatural in (26a) and (26b) when their *le* is omitted respectively. Sentence (26c) is marginal because the meaning of the sentence changes after the omission of *le*. This sentence implies a comparison; 'The book, I will buy, (but not the pen)'.

(25)	a.	Tā lái le	'He has come / He is coming.'
	b.	Yīfu xǐgānjing le	'The clothes has been washed.'
	c.	Shū wǒ mǎi le	'The book, I have bought it.'

(26)	a.	*Tā lái
	b.	*Yīfu xǐgānjing
	c.	?Shū wǒ mǎi

One may argue at this juncture that this *le* should be the perfective *le₁*. However, it would be irrational to conclude that *le₂* is not involved in these sentences because, as we have argued earlier, it is the perfectivity of *le₂* that makes the event perfective or complete.

It appears that the identity of the sentence final *le₂* cannot be explained syntactically. Therefore, the syntactic analysis should be supplemented by a semantic analysis. We do not totally agree with the belief that haplology is the only acceptable explanation. Based on what we have discussed so far, we believe that *le₁* omission has occurred in these *le*-final sentences.

We have learnt that, in general, a perfective sentence has two *le*, that is, *le₁* at the lexical level and *le₂* at the propositional level. In Mandarin Chinese, the two *le* are homophones, but in some dialects in China, they are distinguishable from each other. Chao (1968) cites the Cantonese and the Wu dialects as examples. He compares the phrase 'has caught cold' in (Mandarin) Chinese with Cantonese:

(27) a. Shāngle₁ fēng le₂   (Mandarin Chinese)

      b. Sheung-cox fong lhoh   (Cantonese)

      c. Yikeng xoy-cox lhoh   (Cantonese)
         already gone-mrk mrk

(27b) shows that the *le₁* is *cox* and the *le₂* is *lhoh* in Cantonese, and (27c) shows that the dialect allows the two markers to occur adjacent to each other.

Since Cantonese is one of the dialects that still maintain a lot of linguistic data from archaic Chinese, we believe that the two *le* in Mandarin Chinese could have occurred next to each other at some stage in the past. The haplology of the two in

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contemporary Chinese could be due to phonological constraints because "Mandarin always avoids a repetition of the same syllable" (Chao, 1968:247). In our opinion, this could also be explained on syntactic grounds. When the two *le* are adjacent to each other in the '[V + *le₁*] + *le₂*' construction, *le₁* becomes redundant and is dropped. The rationale is that the scope of *le₂* has already covered the scope of V-*le₁* that precedes it. Moreover, as both *le₁* and *le₂* are perfective, it will become a duplication of information if *le₁* is retained. We have seen in Chapter Four that the *le₁* can be omitted if the verb is a verb of accomplishment or is telic in nature as in sentence (28b) below:

(28) a.   Wǒ zhǎodàole₁ nàfēng xìn   le
          I   found-mrk   that-CL letter mrk
          'I found that letter.'

      b.   Wǒ zhǎodào nàfēng xìn le

The verb *zhǎodào* is telic. Being telic, it entails the 'completion' of the action and therefore, it can function by itself without the co-occurrence of *le₁*, the marker that also marks completion of the action denoted by the verb. Since *le₁* is vulnerable to omission, we are convinced that the same process of omission applies to *le₁* which theoretically should occur before *le₂* in a *le*-final construction.

5.5 Interface of Tense and Aspect

Chinese is a language that is very rich in aspect. The study of aspect is a complicated one. Traditionally, studies focus predominantly on the semantic notions of the verbs and the markers. Linguists have been disputing for years over the meanings of terms used in aspect. In fact, according to Chung and Kimberlake's

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semantic structure, it is possible to identify the functions of the aspect markers using a syntactico-semantic approach.

We have proposed in Table 5.1 our prediction regarding the distribution of the aspect markers. Based on the syntactico-semantic analysis used in this chapter, we have provided evidence for our prediction.

At this juncture, the Table can be further improved because the markers in the figure have yet to be distinguished in terms of perfectivity. In this chapter, we have found that le_1, guo_1/$guole$ and guo_2 are perfective markers while $zài$ and zhe are imperfective aspect markers. Hence, we can split the column into two based on the criterion of perfectvity.

Table 5.2

Distribution of Aspect Markers

	Perfective	Imperfective
Lexical level	le_1, guo_1/$guole$, guo_2	zhe
Propositional level	le_2	$zài$

Is Table 5.2 related to tense? It certainly is. Remember that the perfective marker le_2 signals current relevance in that it brings the result of a past event to the present. The proposition marked by le_2 is an event that has happened before the speech time. Perfective aspect is therefore always +past. We have also proven in sections

5.2.1.1 and 5.3.1.3 that, in addition to being aspect markers, *le₁* and *guo₁/guole* also mark relative tense.

Comrie (1976:72) describes the correlations between tense and aspect as follows:

> the most typical usage of verbs in the present tense are those denoting actions in progress or states (i.e. with continuous, or continuous and habitual meaning), whereas in the past the most typical usages of verbs, especially nonstative verbs, are those with perfective meaning.

Now, we will add the past/non-past feature to Table 5.2 and propose the final schematic representation of aspect with respect to tense in Chinese.

Table 5.3

Proposed Schematic Representation of Tense and Aspect

	Perfective/ Past	Imperfective/ Non-past
Lexical level	*le₁, guo₁/guole, guo₂*	*zhe*
Propositional level	*le₂*	*zài*

If we compare the Table above with the schematic representation of tense that we have proposed in Chapter Four (Figure 4.5 reproduced as Figure 5.2 below), we will notice a striking resemblance between the two.

```
┌─────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────┐
│                                                                       │
│  Vector E   ◄─────────────────S_E──────────────────────►             │
│  +past           guo₂  le₁  guo₁ │        zhe              -past       │
│                                                                       │
│  Vector R   ◄─────────────────S_R──────────────────────►             │
│  +past                    le₂  zài │                       -past       │
│                                                                       │
│  Vector S   ◄─────────────────S──────────────────────►               │
│                                                                       │
└─────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────┘
```
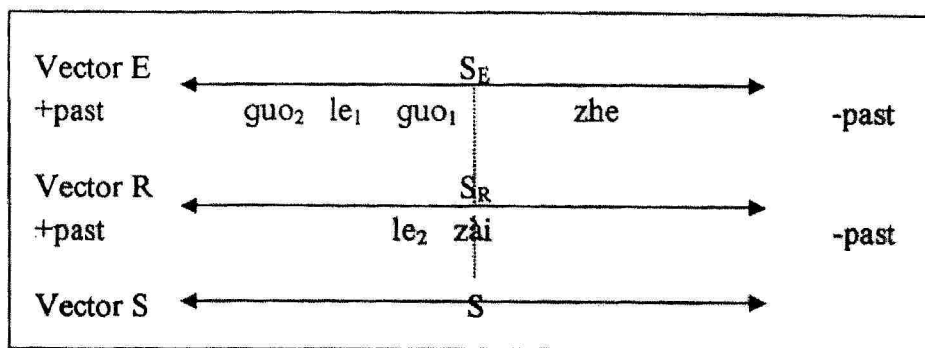
Figure 5.2

It is true that Table 5.3 does not reflect the 'distance' and the linear order of *guo₂*, *le₁* and *guo₁* (including *guole*) from the dotted line for S (speech time), and it does not tell where *zài* should lie. However, from our discussion in this chapter, it is clear that *zài* signals 'what one is engaged in doing momentarily' (Egerod, 1994:301), *guo₂* marks the remote or indefinite past (Chao, 1968; Huang, 1988), as compare to *guo₁* which signifies an event that is 'mostly recent' (Egerod, 1994:295). It is, therefore, not irrational for one to believe that the linear order of the three perfective markers in Table 5.3 should be identical to that shown in Figure 5.2.

We can also see clearly the one-to-one correspondence between the 'lexical level' in Figure 5.4 and 'Vector E' in Figure 5.5. The same correspondence exists between the 'propositional level' and 'Vector R' in the two figures. Vector E is where the lexical aspect marker occurs; Vector R is where the sentential aspect marker or the propositional aspect marker *le₂* lies. In other words, the two figures represent the same thing.

We should not forget that aspect at the propositional level, is in fact Comrie's grammatical aspect (or Smith's viewpoint aspect); and aspect at the lexical level, is in

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fact Vandler's and Dowty's lexical aspect (or Smith's situation aspect). This information can therefore be added to the following figure.

Table 5.4

Interface between Tense and Aspect Markers in Chinese

	Perfective / past	Imperfective/ Non-past
Lexical Level/ Lexical Aspect	guo_2 le_1 guo_1/guole	zhe
Propositional Level/ Grammatical Aspect	le_2 zài	
	S	

Table 5.4 above shows clearly how tense and aspect form an integral system that is both syntactic and semantic in nature. The markers are distinctive with regard to distribution and function. This will suffice to prove that Chinese has a coherent system of tense and aspect.

Our findings are not ungrounded. Comrie (1976:58) has pointed out that, "In Mandarin Chinese, the verbal particle -le indicates perfective aspect and relative past time reference", and claimed that Chinese has a combined tense/aspect opposition (ibid, p.81). Chappell (1988) also notices that the sentence final particle le has a combination of temporal marking (tense) with inchoativity or a change of state (aspect). In this chapter, it has been established that Chinese has the combined tense/aspect opposition that Comrie has discovered. The markers le_1, and the

guo₁/guole as well, are not pure aspect markers but also function as markers of relative tense.

5.6 Concluding Remarks

In this chapter, we have identified and analysed the aspectual properties of the aspect markers in Chinese by using several established theories. The study is two-fold. First, using theories advocated by Comrie, Starosta and Li and Thompson, we have analysed the perfectivity of the aspect markers. Secondly, using Chung and Kimberlake's (1985) two levels of semantic structure, we have investigated the syntactic-semantic distribution of the markers.

It is found that the definition of 'perfectivity' given by Comrie and Starosta differs slightly from that of Li and Thompson. While Comrie and Starosta stress on grammatical aspect which is particular about the current relevance of a past event, Li and Thompson claim that perfectivity implies boundedness and vice versa. This clearly highlights this ambiguity that has so far been neglected in the study of aspect. In Chinese, the understanding of the difference is important because, as we have shown in this chapter, different aspect markers are used to express the two 'types' of perfectivity.

We have also discovered that the aspect markers are strategically distributed in the two axes: Vertically, the markers are identifiable in terms of lexical and propositional levels defined by Chung and Kimberlake (1985), that is, the *le₁*, *guo₁/guyole* and *zhe* at lexical level while *le₂* and *zài* at the propositonal level. Horizontally, they differ from each other in terms of perfectivity. The two *le* and the

two *guo* are perfective while zài and *zhe* are imperfective. Chung and Kimberlake's levels are in fact an interaction of syntax and semantics, rather than purely semantic.

The significant distribution of the aspect markers in Chinese indicates the interface between tense and aspect in Chinese. When compared with the schematic representation of the Extended Absolute-Relative Tense proposed in Chapter Four, it was found that the schematic representations for tense and aspect overlap. In other words, all markers are markers of tense as well as aspect, proving that tense and aspect form an integral and coherent system in Chinese. We have also proved that the le_2 is the decisive marker of both the past tense and the perfective aspect.