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# EPISODE-BOUNDING IN THE MANDARIN NARRATIVE GENRE: THE DISCOURSE FUNCTION OF SENTENCE-FINAL *LE*

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## 1. INTRODUCTION<sup>1</sup>

As for all the Sinitic languages and the majority of the languages in the Sino-Tibetan language family (Norman 1987:163), standard Chinese<sup>2</sup> is a tenseless language. These languages possess however elaborate systems of aspect and modality<sup>3</sup>, not to mention verbal complementation.

In standard Chinese, time reference is indicated largely by lexical means, that is, through the use of temporal adverbs and phrases - which indicate the time setting, for example, in the initial stages of a segment of discourse. This serves as the temporal reference point until a new one is indicated by the speaker. In (1) and (2), examples from the beginning of two narratives involving personal histories are presented to illustrate this point: The use of a noun phrase indicating time in (1) and an adverbial clause of time in (2) establish the temporal reference for the given segment of discourse:

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<sup>1</sup> An earlier version of this paper was first read at a research seminar of the Linguistics Department, La Trobe University in May 1988. A revised version was then published in working paper form in *La Trobe Working Papers in Linguistics* 1 (1988):109-134 and presented at the Melbourne Discourse Group, University of Melbourne in 1988. I would like to thank Felix Ameka, Susanna Cumming and Sandra A. Thompson for their detailed comments and critiques.

<sup>2</sup> The term 'standard Chinese' refers here to the official language of People's Republic of China , *putonghua* , literally 'the common language' and the closely related official language of Republic of China (Taiwan) where it is called *guoyu* , literally 'the national language'. Both varieties of standard Chinese are known as Mandarin' outside of Chinese speaking communities.

<sup>3</sup> See, for example, Hope (1974) on Lisu.

- (1) *Shang libai, zan guojia san-shi-wu nian da-qing*<sup>4</sup>.  
 last week 1pl inc country thirty-five year celebration  
 'Last week, it was our country's thirty-fifth anniversary.' (*Beijing Ren* 1986:37)<sup>5</sup>
- (2) *Shi-san sui shi wo dao dizhu jia dang-yatou*.  
 thirteen year time I go landowner house serve:as maid  
 'When I was 13 years old, I went to work as a maid at the landowner's house.'  
 (*Beijing Ren* 1986:52)

In standard Chinese, the category of aspect is marked in most cases by means of enclitics to the main verb. Aspect marking in Chinese is not however obligatorily marked on main or auxiliary verbs, unlike the case for tense in English, which must be marked on all finite verbs.

Following Comrie (1976:26), aspect can be broadly classified into perfective and imperfective categories, subsuming, for example, markers of habitual, continuous and progressive aspect under the latter.

In Mandarin, there are three aspect markers which act as enclitics to the verb:

- V *le* Perfective/anterior aspect
- V *guo* Experiential
- V *zhe* Continuative

The set of aspect markers does not however form a clear-cut paradigm, as we find a verbal proclitic *zai* encoding the durative aspect and verbal reduplication being used to indicate the tentative aspect.

- zai* -V Durative aspect
- V-(*yi*) -V Tentative aspect

The aspect markers *-le* and *-guo* can be considered to belong to the perfective category, indicating realis and completed events or situations. In contrast to this, *-zhe*, *zai* and the use of verbal reduplication belong to the imperfective category.

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<sup>4</sup> The abbreviations used in the interlinear glossing are listed below:

ADV = marker of adverbial complement: *de*;  
 BA = exponent of causative or 'disposal' construction in which grammatical objects are positioned preverbally; CL = classifier; CONT = continuative aspect marker :*-zhe*; GEN = exponent of genitive nominal construction : *de*; INC = marker of inceptive aspect (inception of a new state of affairs); L = linker: *de*; LE = grammatical particle occurring as a verb enclitic or in sentence-final position (The label LE is used from section 5.1 onwards where a unified treatment of this particle is presented. In the sections prior to this, where the two structurally differentiated uses of *le* are treated, the labels PFV and INC are used respectively.); N = noun; NEG = negative marker; NP = noun phrase; O = object; PASS = exponent of the passive construction: *bei*; PFV = perfective aspect marker; Q = quantifier; RP = rhetorical particle; V = verb; 1pl.inc. = first person plural inclusive pronoun; 1pl.exc. = first person plural exclusive pronoun; and 3sg = third person singular pronoun.

<sup>5</sup> For the details of this source of data, see appendix.

Complementary to the set of aspect markers is another paradigm of modal or rhetorical particles which all occur in sentence-final position of declarative statements. Semantically, however, they overlap with these aspect markers in that the characterisation of an event as, for example, possible, necessary, contrary to expectations, completed or continuing is a matter of speakers' subjective viewpoint: One of these sentence-final particles is an atonal *le*, which can be described as both a homophone and a homograph to the perfective aspect marker *le* in modern Mandarin for the purposes of this initial overview of the aspect and modal system:

Clause + <i>le</i>	Marker of inception of a new state of affairs; currently relevant state (cf. Li, Thompson & Thompson 1982)
<i>ba</i>	Optative, marker of suggestions
<i>ma</i>	Interrogative (Yes/No questions)
<i>ou</i>	Warning particle
<i>me</i>	Marker of obviousness
( <i>y</i> ) <i>a</i>	Hortative
<i>ne</i>	Marker of a situation contrary to expectations <sup>6</sup>

That the sentence- or clause-final particle *le* indicates inception of a new state of affairs contrasts with the perfective meaning of the verbal enclitic *-le*, indicating 'completion'. One group of analyses of the two *le*'s has either claimed or implied accidental homonymy<sup>7</sup> or homophony showing the lexical meaning or grammatical function to be different (such as Chao 1968, Lin 1981) while a second group has argued for polysemy (Dow 1978, Chan 1980). A third group of analyses treats the two particles as an identical morpheme (*inter alia* Fenn & Tewksbury 1967; Rohsenow 1976; Chen 1979). I address the issue of homonymy, polysemy or identical morpheme in the following examination of the two *le*'s, arguing for the latter view, using, however, discourse-based data.

## 2. THE TWO *LE*'S

A contemporary problem in the aspectual system of Mandarin is, then, how to analyse these two homophonous and homonymous aspectual particles *le*.

In addition to the verbal enclitic *le*, a phonetically identical and homographic particle *le* exists in standard Chinese which is found in sentence-final position.

- (3) *Zheng qiao wo fuqin tuixiu, wo jiu dingjin xiyifang dang*  
 coincidentally I father retire I then replace:enter laundry serve

<sup>6</sup> For more detailed descriptions of the modality system in standard Chinese, see Liu (1964), Chao (1968) and Li & Thompson (1981).

<sup>7</sup> Homonymy with reference to the written form of standard Chinese, means that the same ideograph is used for both the verb enclitic and the clause-final particle, i.e. they are homographs.

*ranbugong le.*  
dye-worker LE

'Quite by coincidence, my father retired so I took over his job as a dyeworker in the laundry.' (*Beijing Ren* 1986:121)

The *le* occurring in sentence-final position has been variously labelled as perfect *le* (Li, Thompson & Thompson 1982), a marker of inception (Lu 1975:54), an inchoative marker (Teng 1973:14), the 'change of state' *le* (Teng 1974:89), marker of 'currently relevant state' (Li & Thompson 1981) or sentence-final *le* (Chen 1979).

There have been many studies of the two *le*'s in the past 20 years, both in the descriptive or functional mode (Chao 1968, Lu 1985-86, Cheng 1985-86), generative (Wang 1965) and from a discourse oriented angle (Andreasen 1981, Matsumura 1985-1986). Most of these studies either distinguish the two *le*'s semantically or functionally with a minority of cases, disregarding the differences in syntactic position.

The present study sets out to evaluate data from Chinese narrative discourse<sup>8</sup> to ascertain whether the two *le*'s are semantically distinct (accidental homonymy) or represent

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<sup>8</sup> The outline of the Pear Story is reproduced here from Chafe (1980:xiii-xiv) for the convenience of the reader.

The film begins with a man picking pears on a ladder in a tree. He descends the ladder, kneels, and dumps the pears from the pocket of an apron he is wearing into one of three baskets below the tree. He removes a bandana from around his neck and wipes off one of the pears. Then he returns to the ladder and climbs back into the tree.

Toward the end of this sequence we hear the sound of a goat, and when the picker is back in the tree a man approaches with a goat on a leash. As they pass by the baskets of pears, the goat strains toward them, but is pulled past by the man and the two of them disappear in the distance.

We see another closeup of the picker at this work, and then we see a boy approaching on a bicycle. He coasts in toward the baskets, stops, gets off his bike, looks up at the picker, puts down his bike, walks toward the baskets, again looking at the picker, picks up a pear, puts it back down, looks once more at the picker, and lifts up a basket full of pears. He puts the basket down near his bike, lifts up the bike and straddles it, picks up the basket and places it on the rack in front of his handle bars, and rides off. We again see the man continuing to pick pears.

The boy is now riding down the road, and we see a pear fall from the basket on his bike. Then we see a girl on a bicycle approaching from the other direction. As they pass, the boy turns to look at the girl, his hat flies off, and the front wheel of his bike hits a rock. The bike falls over, the basket falls off, and the pears spill out onto the ground. The boy extricates himself from under the bike, and brushes off his leg.

In the meantime we hear what turns out to be the sound of a paddleball, and then we see three boys standing there, looking at the bike boy on the ground.

The three pick up the scattered pears and put them back in the basket. The bike boy sets his bike upright, and two of the other boys lift the basket of pears back onto it. The bike boy begins walking his bike in the direction he was going, while the three other boys begin walking off in the other direction.

As they walk by the bike boy's hat on the road, the boy with the paddle ball sees it, picks it up, turns around, and we hear a loud whistle as he signals to the bike boy. The bike boy stops, takes three pears out of the basket, and holds them out as the other boy approaches with the hat. They exchange the pears and the hat, and the bike boy keeps going while the boy

two contextually-determined and related uses of the one morpheme (polysemy). The conclusion reached however, is not one that favours either analytical viewpoint of homonymy or polysemy, but presents a third and alternative analysis: I will argue that synchronically the meaning of the two *le*'s is identical. In other words there is only one morpheme *le*, but that in different syntactic positions, *le* can fulfil different discourse functions. As a verbal enclitic, functioning sentence-internally, *-le* bounds events. In clause-final position, it bounds episodes in discourse.

This standpoint will be argued for in the main body of the paper with data assembled mainly from colloquial narratives. This problem in Chinese bears relevance to cross linguistic studies of aspect and mood in that the overlapping in meaning and use of perfect and perfective markers is found in other unrelated languages. Data from Tamil (Dravidian), Aalsea (Amerindian) and Ewe (Tano-Congo) will be treated in this section.

Finally, I will suggest that perfective *-le* (the verbal enclitic) is moving along the path to becoming a marker of past tense in its use as a marker of anteriority (cf. Bybee 1987).

### 3. PERFECTIVE -LE, A VERB ENCLITIC

Perfective *le* can only be clearly syntactically distinguished from inceptive *le* when, for example, a postverbal constituent such as a noun phrase intervenes between the verb and the end of the clause:

V *-le*NP

- (4) *Ta ji -le yi -gen ziji de toufa, xiwang huan yi -gen*  
 3sg send -PFV one -CL own GEN hair hope exchange one -CL  
*wo de toufa*  
 I GEN hair

'She sent one strand of her own hair, hoping to exchange it for one of mine.' (*Beijing Ren* 1986:485)

Li & Thompson (1981:1:85) describes *le* as expressing temporal, spatial or conceptual boundedness as a consequence of its perfectivity.

Verbal aspect *le* expresses perfectivity, that is, it indicates that an event is being viewed in its entirety or as a whole. An event is being viewed in its entirety if it is bounded temporally, spatially or conceptually.

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with the paddleball runs back to his two companions, to each of whom he hands a pear. They continue on, eating their pears.

The scene now changes back to the tree, where we see the picker again descending the ladder. He looks at the two baskets, where earlier there were three, points at them, backs up against the ladder, shakes his head, and tips up his hat. The three boys are now seen approaching, eating their pears. The picker watches them pass by, and they walk off into the distance.'

In this analysis, the term 'boundedness' is used to refer to the semantic nature of the particle *-le*, in encoding the limits or boundary of events, actions, states of affairs and episodes.

### 3.1 Historical notes on perfective *-le*

The perfective aspect marker *le* is claimed by Chao (1968:246) to be historically related to the fully tonal verb *liao* 'finish'. Such a diachronic development of the grammaticalization of a verb meaning 'finish' or 'end' is well-attested cross-linguistically (cf. Bybee 1985, Comrie 1976, Foley & Van Valin 1984).<sup>9</sup>

In modern Chinese, *liao* is found as a complement of potential verb compounds:

- |                         |                          |
|-------------------------|--------------------------|
| (5) <i>chi-liao</i>     | <i>zuo-bu-liao</i>       |
| eat-finish              | do-NEG-finish            |
| 'able to finish eating' | 'unable to finish doing' |

Here the full lexical meaning of 'finish' is clearly retained.

### 3.2 Use of *-le* in independent clauses

I propose to test out claims made on the basis of elicited data with respect to perfective *-le* and see if they are upheld by data from extended stretches of discourse. This is relevant to the main claim being made in this paper with respect to the identity of the two *le*'s.

Using Li & Thompson's definition of perfective *-le* as a starting point (1981:185), the syntactic reflexes of an event being "bounded temporally, spatially or conceptually" are that a postverbal complement which is referential and not generic) is required. This constraint is typically fulfilled by noun phrases which contain :

- (i) classifier constructions **Q + CL + N** as in (6),
- (ii) attributive or adjectival modification as in (7),
- (iii) anaphoric pronouns or proper nouns as in (8).

(6) **Type (i):** Classifier construction in postverbal NP - **Q + Cl + N**

*Ruguo zhei -ge dongxi cheng -le yi -zhong yali*  
 if this -CL thing become -PFV one -CL pressure  
 'If this thing became a kind of pressure ...' (Women:78)<sup>10</sup>

<sup>9</sup> A few examples of perfective aspect markers, some in unrelated languages, which have developed from homophonous verbs meaning 'finish, end' are Fijian (Austronesian) *oti* <'finish', q.v. Foley & Van Valin (1984); Ewe (Tano-Congo) *v∅* <'finish', q.v. Ameka to appear), Zhuang (Tai) *liw* <'finish', Hmong (Miao-Yao) *lawm* <'finish', Indonesian (Austronesian) *sudah* <'finish' q.v. Majewicz(1985)

<sup>10</sup> 'Women' refers here to an unpublished transcription on the status of women in China (see appendix for details)

(7) **Type (ii):** Attributive or adjectival modification in postverbal NP:

*Gei ta jiu shi mai -le yi -ge ba sui de xiao nühai*  
 for 3sg then be buy -PFV one -CL eight year L small girl  
 'Then (they) bought a little eight year old girl for him.' (Women:52)

(8) **Type (iii):** Anaphoric pronoun in postverbal NP:

*Keshi ta wang -le ta de maozi* (Pear I 3:12)  
 but 3sg forget -PFV 3sg GEN hat  
 'But he forgot his hat.'

As we have pointed out already, aspect marking is not marked on every verb where it would otherwise be possible. This is certainly true of the perfective aspect marker *-le*.

### 3.2.1 Verb classes and perfective *-le*

Firstly, perfective *-le* cannot freely co-occur with all verb categories. Verbs which are semantically stative are excluded from the following syntactic environment including *-le*.

- (9) *\*renshi*  
 know, be acquainted with  
*\*zhidao*  
 know  
*\*xiang* LE NP  
 resemble  
*\*ai*  
 love  
*\*xihuan*  
 like

Note that co-occurrence with verb categories is semantically defined not syntactically as this restriction cuts across transitive and intransitive verb types. Intransitive verbs which signify a change of state may therefore be modified by *-le*: The postverbal NP in this case is typically a durational or quantity phrase.

- (10) *(Wo) zai Riben zhu -le yi nian duo*  
 I at Japan live -PFV one year more  
 '(I) lived in Japan for more than one year'. (Foris II:139)<sup>11</sup>

Secondly, some native speakers, for example, will find the following minimal pair of sentences to contain a difference of meaning, attributable to the presence or absence of *-le*.

<sup>11</sup> The label 'Foris II' refers also to one of the transcriptions used as a source of data, in this case, a set of four personal history narratives by speakers from Taiwan. See appendix for further details.

(11) *Without perfective aspect marking:*

*Wo zuotian kan yi -ben shu*  
 I yesterday read one -CL book  
 'Yesterday I read a book.'

(12) *With perfective aspect marking:*

*Wo zuotian kan -le yi -ben shu*  
 I yesterday read -PFV one -CL book  
 'Yesterday I read a book (and finished reading all I wanted to read of the book).'

In (11), the subject's activity of the preceding day is merely recorded — that of doing some reading whereas in (12), the use of the perfective aspect marker modifies the sense of the expression to convey that the subject completed the reading of the book or as much of it as was intended.

Thirdly, we find certain syntactic environments where perfective *-le* is either obligatorily required for most speakers of Mandarin and other cases where it is not permitted to co-occur with certain categories of verbs.

In many studies of perfective *-le*, it is pointed out that *-le* must be used for clauses embedded into a context of past time reference where the postverbal NP is referential (amongst others, Liu 1964:74; Chao 1968:248, 799, Rygaloff 1973:105, Spanos 1979, I:50, Li & Thompson 1981:200-201, Lin 1981:134). For example, Chao states (1968:248) that 'the perfective suffix is obligatory after a verb for past action if it has a quantified object'. This is confirmed by both data from the elicited corpus (1985-1986) given in examples (13) to (15) and from the Pear Stories data (discussed below in 3.3 with respect to this issue).

(13) *Wo zuotian fuxi gongke*  
 I yesterday revise lessons  
 'Yesterday I revised lessons.'

(14) *Wo zuotian fuxi -le san -ke*  
 I yesterday revise -PFV 3 -lessons  
 'Yesterday I revised three lessons.'

(15) \**Wo zuotian fuxi san -ke*  
 I yesterday revise 3 -lesson

In (13), with the generic term *gongke* 'lessons', no perfective marking is required. However, from the contrast in acceptability between (14) and (15) we see that *-le* is required when the postverbal object is referential and specific, encoded here by means of a classifier construction.

### 3.3 Use of perfective *-le* in complex clauses

In support of this elicited data, note that *-le* may not be used in independent clauses to intervene between a verb and its related object in V-O compounds, since such 'objects' are indefinite by nature (q.v. Chao 1968:308-315; Li & Thompson 1981:73-79). This is shown by the contrast in acceptability of (16) containing the V-O compound *he-jiu* 'drink' with (17), where the grammatical object is referential, being part of a classifier construction:

(16) ?*Yeye he -le jiu*  
 grandad drink -PFV alcohol

(17) *Yeye he -le liang -bei jiu*  
 grandad drink -PFV two -CL alcohol  
 'Grandad drank two glasses of wine.'

Example (16) would only be permissible as first clause in a complex sentence as shown by (18):

(18) *Yeye he -le jiu jiu shuijiao*  
 grandad drink -PFV wine then sleep  
 'Grandad drank some wine, then fell asleep.'

This illustrates the second usage of *-le* to mark anteriority in non-main clauses. In this case, which corresponds to category D in Li & Thompson (1981:198-202), that of 'first event in a sequence', the following clause bounds the first temporally.

### 3.4 Perfective *-le* in the Chinese Pear Stories

The use of the perfective aspect marker *-le* was structurally identified as all those instances of *-le* occurring in the syntactic slot V — NP in the Chinese Pear Stories. The methodological problems associated with this will be discussed below in section 5.1.

In the data, there were 96 instances of perfective *-le* in main clause usage. 94 of these clauses contained a specific referential postverbal NP which supports the elicited data and studies based thereon. Two instances could be considered as possible counter examples, and will be discussed under section 3.4.1 where it will be shown not to be the case.

The 96 clauses could be classified into 3 main types:

#### Type (i) (S = 76).

Quantified postverbal constituents formed the majority of examples of postverbal complements in the Chinese Pear Stories, being found in 76/96 clauses (79%). These were either of the form: (i) Q + CL + N or (ii) Q + Verbal Classifier, exemplified by (19) and (20) respectively.<sup>12</sup>

##### (19) *Quantifier + Classifier + Noun*

*Name ta zhai -le san lou guozi*  
 well 3sg pick -PFV 3 CL fruit  
 'Well, he picked three baskets of fruit.' (Pear I.4:4)

##### (20) *Quantifier + Verbal classifier*

*Zheng -ge zhei -ge shuiguo jiu sa -le yi di*  
 whole -CL this -CL fruit then scatter -PFV one CL  
 'All the fruit scattered everywhere.' (Pear II.5:42)

#### Type (ii) (S = 17)

A second group was constituted by definite NPs referring to established discourse entities ('old' or 'given' information, cf. Chafe 1976), mainly anaphoric pronouns or noun phrases with demonstrative-form determiners (Dem + Cl + N).

##### (21) *Demonstrative + Classifier + Noun*

*Zhei -ge shihou zhei -ge xiao haizi*  
 this -CL time this -CL small child  
*you kan -le nei -ge nü haizi*  
 again look -PFV that -CL girl child  
*kan -le yi -yan*  
 look -PFV one -eye (Pear II.1.54-55)  
 'At this moment, the little boy looked at the girl again, gave her a glance.'

<sup>12</sup> See Chao (1968:584-620) for a comprehensive classification and description of nominal and verbal classifiers in Mandarin Chinese

(Note that the last clause in example (21) also contains a postverbal quantifier and verbal classifier following a verb marked by perfective *-le*.)

Amongst these 96 instantiations of perfective *-le*, there were both syntactically transitive and intransitive verbs to be found. The examples from (19) to (21) are of transitive verbs.<sup>13</sup>

Two examples with intransitive verbs follow, with (22) containing a stative verb *sh\_ao* 'few, less' and (23) an intransitive verb *lai* 'come' with a postposed subject. Here the presentative verb introduces a new participant into the discourse:

(22) *Stative verb + Q + CL*

*Xia lai yihou ta yi shu*  
down come after 3sg one count

*faxian ta de louzi shao -le yi -ge*  
discover 3sg GEN basket be: less -PFV one CL

'After he came down, as soon as he'd counted, he discovered that one of his baskets was missing.' (Pear I.4:83-84)

(23) *Intransitive verb + Q + CL + N*

*Yingmian lai -le lingwai yi -ge nu haizi*  
head: on come -PFV another one -CL girl child

'From the opposite direction, came another child, a girl.' (Pear II.5:37)

**Type (iii) (S = 1)**

There was example of a clause containing two events in series, with the first event being bounded by *-le* indicating precedence. This corresponds to Li & Thompson's 'temporal' bounding of an event (1981:198).

(24) *Events in series*

*Bingqie you yi -ge ba ta fu -le qilai..*  
moreover there:be one -CL BA 3sg support -PFV get:up

'Moreover, one of them helped him to get up.' (Pear III.1\_29)

**3.4.1 Two apparent counter examples**

There are only two cases where the postverbal nouns following a verb marked by *-le* might appear to be non-referential. One contains *dongxi* 'thing' as transitive object, as in (25).

(25) *Ta tou -le dongxi*

3sg steal -PFV thing

'He'd stolen things.' (Pear I.13:6)

<sup>13</sup> Note however that the grammatical object slot is not filled in (19). *Sa* 'scatter, sprinkle' can take a grammatical object such as *shui* 'water'

However this turns out to be anaphoric, despite the fact it is not overtly marked for definiteness such as through the use of *nei-ge dongxi* 'this-CL-thing', since from the context it clearly refers back to the basket of pears.

The second apparent counterexample involves a V-O compound, *qi-tanxin* 'become greedy' (lit. 'rise greed') and the perfective marker *-le* intervenes between the two.

- (26) *Dagai shi qi -le tanxin*  
 probably be rise -PFV greed  
 'Probably he'd got greedy.' (Pear I.13:6)

As object nouns in V-O compounds typically do not refer to specific, individuated entities, having generic reference, the postverbal noun in (26) can be accounted for in this way.

#### 4. PERFECT *-LE* IN SENTENCE FINAL POSITION

##### 4.1 Historical notes on perfect *-le*

The homonym of perfective *-le*, occurring in sentence-final position, may have evolved out of the verb *lai* 'come'. Chao (1968:246) states that it is 'probably a weak form of *lai* 'comes' and adduces some historical evidence in favour of this view (see Chao 1968:246, footnote 31). As a sentence-final particle it encodes the inception of a new state of affairs at some point prior to or simultaneous with the time reference of speech.

Further corroboration in support of two different *-le*'s comes from the examination of aspect in other languages of the Sinitic family such as Wu and Yue where the cognate forms of verbal and sentential *-le* have remained distinct morphemes, for example, Shanghainese (Wu) *z* versus *ze* and Cantonese (Yue) *cox* versus *lloh* respectively (Chao 1968:247).

Thirdly, verbs meaning 'come' are found in other unrelated languages with grammaticalized uses as markers of inception. The following Yoruba (Niger-Congo) example is taken from Bamgbose (1966) where *wu* indicates 'abrupt inception', being related to a homophonous verb meaning 'come':

- (27) *omo naa ke wa*  
 child the cry come  
 'The child cried suddenly.'

At this point we could also mention the English inchoative verb *become* containing the morpheme 'come' and Chinese inchoative verb complement V-*qilai* 'begin to V' also containing the morpheme *lai* 'come'. Both verbs are used in constructions signalling the inception of a new state of affairs.

#### 4.2 Semantic characterization of inceptive *-le*

Whereas verbal *-le* signifies that an event has come to an end before the moment of speech or at the internal time reference of the discourse, sentence-final *-le* encodes a result state in effect at the given point of time.

Unlike verbal *-le*, it does not seem to have any restrictions on its occurrence, for example, with respect to clause or verb type. It is found with clauses containing modal verbs (see [28] with *keyi* 'may') and semantically stative verbs where verbal *-le* is not to be seen.

- (28) *Ta xiang .... zheng lou dou keyi (\*-le) na qu le*  
 3sg think whole basket all may (\*-PFV) take go INC  
 'He thought .... "I could take the whole basket away".' (Pear I.13:41-43)

Unlike verbal *-le*, sentential *-le* co-occurs with negative markers.

- (29) *Zhei bala zenmo bu jian -le?*  
 this guava how NEG see -INC  
 'How was it that (he) could no longer see those guavas?' (Pear II.2:47)
- (30) *Ránhòu t<sub>u</sub> bù xiǎoxīn -le, zhuàng -dao shítou*  
 after:that 3sg NEG careful -INC, bump -arrive rock  
 'Then he wasn't very careful and bumped into a rock.' (Pear II.2:5)

Note that verbal *-le*, unlike sentence-final inceptive *-le*, is suppressed in negated clauses (cf. Chao 1968:782; Teng 1974:86, Li & Thompson 1981:423). The following example is from the elicited corpus:

- (31) *T<sub>a</sub> zuotian mei zuo (\*-le) Yinducai*  
 3sg yesterday NEG make (\*-PFV) Indian food  
 'He didn't make any Indian food yesterday.'

The difference in meaning between verbal *-le* and sentential *-le* can be illustrated by the following examples from the elicited corpus.<sup>14</sup>

- (32) Sentence-final *-le*  
*Xiao Mei chou san -bao yan -le*  
 " " smoke 3 -CL cigarette -INC  
 'Xiao Mei has (now) smoked three packets of cigarettes.'

<sup>14</sup> The reader is referred to the appendix once more for details of the elicited corpus of data assembled by the author.

(33) Verbal *-le*

*Xiao Mei chou -le san bao yan*  
 " " smoke -PFV 3 CL cigarette  
 'Xiao Mei smoked three packets of cigarettes.'

Sentence (32) encodes that the 'current' state of affairs is one where Xiao Mei has smoked her way through three packets of cigarettes. A particular context could be one where she does not, as a result, intend to smoke any more for a while and is declining, for example, a friend's offer.

In contrast, sentence (33) encodes simply completion of an event. Without context, it would, as a consequence of the feature of completion, be interpreted as a past event that has no resulting state impinging on the given time reference.

Sentential *-le* also occurs with semantically stative verbs such as *xihu\_an* 'like' in (34) which follows. Again, verbal *-le* is not permitted with such non change-of-state verbs.

(34) *Ta xihu\_an (\*-le) Yifeng le*  
 3sg like (\*-PFV) " INC  
 'He likes Yifeng (now).' (= Inception of a new situation, implying that the subject did not like Yifeng at some earlier stage)

Finally, sentential *-le* can occur with non-actualized events such as future, irrealis and conditional where verbal *-le* is excluded.

(35) *Douger ... huran shuo-lou zui le Zhei -ge*  
 main:actor suddenly speak-slip mouth INC this -CL  
*pengger jiu jiedezhu Ni yao jiebuzhu, na*  
 secondary:actor then respond:able you if respond:able then  
*chu (\*-le) yangxiang le*  
 appear (\*-PFV) fool:imageINC  
 'The main performer suddenly makes a slip of the tongue. The 'stooge' can then keep it going. If you can 't make the right response, then you'll make a fool of yourself.' (Foris I:16)

It would seem that the only clause-type which *-le* can't be used with is one with a nominal predicate: *\*N + -le*.

In children's speech, however, the combination of *N + -le* can be found with the same interpretation of a newly arisen situation.

(36) *Fangzi le!*  
 house INC  
 '(Now I've built) a house!' (context of children playing with building blocks)  
 (Erbaugh: 1978:35).

Liu (1964:248) also points out that *-le* may also be used with nouns in listing constructions ('Aufzählung mehrerer Dinge'):

- (37) *Yishang le, xie le, maozi le, shenmo dou you*  
 clothes INC, shoe INC hat INC everything all have  
 'Clothes, shoes, hats — we've got everything.' (Original translation: '*Kleider, Schuhe, Hütte, alles ist Vorhanden*')

In conclusion to this section, it is clear that the scope of sentence-final *-le* is different to that of verbal enclitic *-le*. Sentence-final *-le*, the marker of inception, has the whole clause in its scope of modification (q.v. Foley & Van Valin 1984:208-223), a typical feature of grammatical morphemes belonging to a modal paradigm (corresponding to 'status' in Foley & Van Valin 1984), whereas the verbal enclitic, perfective-*le* has only the verb in its scope and is subject to semantically-based restrictions such as the verb class it co-occurs with and the predicate type. This is typical feature of aspectual modification which is marked close to the verb stem and is constrained by the inherent aspectual meaning of the verb it modifies (cf. Foley & Van Valin 1984:210). As (31) shows, perfective *-le* must occur in non-negated predicates which signify a change of state and are followed by a referential postverbal constituent in simplex independent clauses.

### 4.3 Inceptive *-le* in the Chinese Pear Stories

For the purposes of this preliminary examination of data, we will identify sentence-final inceptive *-le* (INC) on a purely structural basis as any *-le* found occurring in the slot : V (NP) —. (Again, see section 5.1 below for a discussion on methodology).

When a NP intervenes between V and *-le*, we have a clear case of inceptive *-le* as in (38), (39) and (40) below.

- (38) *Huala, nei-ge maozi chui-dao di-shang le*  
 whooo., that-CL hat blow-arrive ground-on INC  
 'Whooo! The hat was blown onto the ground.' (Pear I.1:23).
- (39) *Ta shuai-dao di-shang le*  
 3sg fall-arrive ground-on INC  
 'He's fallen on the ground.' (Pear II.7.8:49)
- (40) *Mei you shenmo biyao le*  
 NEG have what need INC  
 'There was no longer any need.' (Pear I.0:130)

In the Pear Stories, there are a total of 117 examples of inceptive *-le*.

## 5. SYNTHESIS OF THE TWO *-LE*'S

Of the 117 examples of inceptive *-le*, only in four does one find an intervening NP (three of which are given in (38), (39) and (40)). This leads us to the crux of the problem. For Modern Chinese, there are seven major syntactic constructions which are verb-final, evidence in the

view of several recent studies of a drift of Modern Chinese from S-V-O to S-O-V (q.v. Li & Thompson 1975; *contra* Sun & Givon 1985))

In verb-final structures, it is not possible to distinguish between perfective and perfect *-le*. Consider the following example from the Pear Stories:

- (41) *Chezi zheng-ge jiu dao-le*  
 bike whole-CL then fall-?  
*Bala ye fan le*  
 guava also topple ? (Pear I.6:9)

This example could have two translations, depending on how we interpreted the particle *-le*. In terms of Hopper (1979) on the use of aspect to signal foregrounded and backgrounded events, the aspect marking should be identified as perfective here as these represent foregrounded events of the main story line. The predicates concerned denote single and sequentially ordered events which constitute the backbone of the narrative (Hopper & Thompson 1980), functioning to advance the story-line (Du Bois 1980).

- (i) *Interpretation with perfective -le*  
 'The bike fell over and the guavas toppled over too.'
- (ii) *Interpretation with inceptive -le*  
 'The bike has fallen over and the guavas have toppled over too. The bike falls over now and the guavas topple over too.'

In the first translation into English, the perfective aspect is rendered by the preterite or simple past while in the second, the inceptive aspect is rendered by either present perfect or present tense combined with the use of the adverb 'now'.

This is not to confuse the issue however with the problem of translating from one language to the other but rather to point out that a neutralization of the semantic distinction appears to have taken place. The possible translations into English are really a question of the time context of the narrative. Typically the speakers do not indicate the time frame in the 21 narratives, which means that any of the 3 tense translations are available for most of the stories.

The structures which are verb final in Chinese are the following:

- I. *Intransitive predicates with no postverbal complements.*  
 Subject NP -intransitive verb -LE<sup>15</sup>
- II. *Object - Preposing*  
 Object NP -(Subject NP) -Transitive verb -LE
- III. *Topic Comment*  
 Topic NP -NP -Verb -LE

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<sup>15</sup> Note that the particle *-le* is not an obligatory component of these seven syntactic constructions. When it is present, the problem of identification as either perfective or inceptive *-le* arises.

(N.B. Topic argument need not have any grammatical relations to the main verb.)

IV. *Causative or disposal BA construction*

Subject NP -BA -Object NP -Verb -LE

V. *Passive constructions where there are no postverbal complement nouns*

NP -BEI -NP -Transitive -LE

(Undergoer) (Agent) Verb

VI. *Causative constructions with intransitive main verbs*

NP -JIAO -NP -Intransitive Verb -LE

Note also that in connected discourse, it is typical for established discourse entities to undergo 'zero anaphora', leading to many predicate-only clauses (cf Tai 1978)

### 5.1 Methodological considerations

I have attempted in the first part of this article to keep the two *-le*'s distinct, using structural criteria to disambiguate the two uses. This is possible, for perfective *-le*, by only considering those instances where it is followed by a postverbal noun, that is, where we find: V -LE -NP. It was seen that the postverbal NP in independent clauses had to be referential and specific, upholding studies based on elicited corpora. That is, there were no instances of generic nouns following verbs aspectually marked in this way. This still does not resolve the problem, however, of *-le* appended to verb-final structures.

Some studies account for indeterminate cases of *-le* in verb-final structures by calling upon context to decide which aspectual meaning is present (cf. Li & Thompson 1981:296-300, Chan 1980:59; Chao 1968:247).

As I have shown above by means of example (41), disambiguation by context is not possible in the case of the Pear Stories. I would suggest instead that perfective *-le*, the verb enclitic and inceptive *-le* found in sentence-final position are one and the same morpheme, identical in semantic content. What disambiguates their use is discourse function. "Both" *-le*'s encode boundedness but at different discourse levels. This has been shown to have repercussions in terms of their differing scope of modification in section 4.2.

Perfective *-le* used clause internally to directly aspectually modify the verb encodes the boundedness of the event designated by the verb. Inceptive *-le* encodes boundedness at discourse level and is used as a strategy by speakers in discourse organization, specifically in the case of the Chinese Pear Stories to draw the boundary of episodes in these narratives. We will argue for this synthesis with data from the Pear Stories narratives:

A second piece of evidence in favour of treating the two *-le*'s as one morpheme is the use of perfective *-le* as a marker of anteriority. Here it has the discourse function of backtracking in the narrative, that is, for events out of chronological sequence. This meaning is constant regardless of whether a postverbal noun is present or not. The use of *-le* to mark anteriority is rendered by past perfect in the English translations, which fulfills a

similar function. The meaning of anteriority is particularly clear in the case where the adverb *yijing* 'already' is also used as in (42).

- (42) *Ta yijing zhai -le liang lou man-man de bala*  
 3sg already pick -PFV two CL full-full ADV guava  
 'He'd already picked two very full baskets of guava'.(Pear I.10:13)
- (43) *Tamen jiu kandao ta die-dao le, ba ta fu-qilai*  
 they then see 3sg fall-over INC BA 3sg help-up:come  
 'They saw that he had fallen over, so helped him up'.(Pear II.5:51-52)

In clause combining we could say, that the first event is being temporally bounded through the use of *-le*. This is clear from (44) which contains what would be called an adverbial clause of time in traditional grammar:

- (44) *Zou le yihou, ... jiu shi nei - ge ren gangcai mei you dong*  
 leave INC after then be that-CL person just:then NEG have move  
 'After they had left, ... then that person who just before hadn't done anything'.(Pear I.O:138-140)
- (45) *Zou-dao le yi ge lushang de shihou, cong duimian guo-*  
 leave-arrive PFV one CL road:on REL time from opposite pass  
*...lai yi - ge nu haizi*  
 ...come one-CL girl child  
 'When he had ridden onto the road, a girl came from the opposite direction'.(Pear I.O:91-2)

Examples (44) and (45) contrast what have been identified purely on structural grounds as perfective and inceptive *-le* respectively. Both modify a predicate which contains *zou* 'leave'. Aspectually, there is however no contrast in meaning and this is reflected in the English translation using the past perfect *had left* and *had ridden* respectively. This constitutes a second clear case of where we can ascertain that there is a case of neutralization of aspectual meaning for those who take the view that there are two *le*'s.

## 5.2 Discourse properties of *-le*

In maintaining that there is only one morpheme *-le*, I aim to show how the concept of boundedness can be extended to include the use of sentence-final inceptive *-le*.

Here *-le* indicates episode boundaries in sentence-final position of independent clauses<sup>16</sup>. That is, it has a higher-level discourse function in organizing the flow of the narrative. What I have labelled earlier in the paper as 'inceptive' *le*, typically occurs at the

<sup>16</sup> As pointed out above 'inceptive *le*' is also found in clause-combining in clause-final position of the embedded clause. Here *le* signals backtracking in the narrative sequence.

end of a scene in the narrative before a change of setting or a new participant or topic is introduced.

In this section, I show that this unified treatment of *le* allows a simple and elegant solution to the problem on the basis of the Pear Stories data. It is the discourse level rather than the grammatical meaning which accounts for the different uses noted in many other studies of *le*.

Clause-internal perfective *-le* bounds and foregrounds the main events in a narrative, thus assisting in its progression (q.v. Hopper 1979). Sentence-final inceptive *le* which can be regarded as clause-external in terms of its scope (or 'peripheral' cf Foley & Van Valin 1984) bounds episodes and in this way contributes to advancing the story-line. Hence, the use of *le* at the level of discourse organisation coincides structurally with sentence-final *le*. Its main function is to bound segments or chunks of discourse within the narrative which correspond to the end of a particular scene.

The use of *le* here signals —

- (i) change of topic,
- (ii) the introduction of a new or different person as central character,
- (iii) move to a new setting,
- (iv) a new event is about to take place (cf. Tomlin 1987:461).

This proved to be the case in 85 of 90 examples of main clause *le* in the Pear Stories. (The possible counter examples will be discussed separately.) In addition to these 90 examples, there were 27 cases of clause-final *le* being used to mark anteriority, some of which are exemplified in section 5.1 (see examples (43) & (44) above).

Furthermore, an unexpected result of the analysis was that the discourse boundary signalled by sentence-final *le* tallies to a significant level with the use of verbs of motion, specifically verbs of movement away from the scene which has just ended.

The following example with a motion verb complement occurs at the end of the theft scene in the Pear Stories (see footnote 3):

- (46) *Fang-dao ta de jiaotache-sheng dai-zou le*  
 put-arrive 3sg BEN bicycle-on carry-go LE  
 '(He) put (them) on the bicycle and carried them off' (Pear III.1:3)

Both these results are discussed in the following section.

## 6. THE CHINESE GUAVA (PEAR) STORIES ANALYSIS <sup>17</sup>

In terms of the 21 Chinese narratives based on this film, the plot can be divided into 9 main episodes

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<sup>17</sup> Note that only one interviewee identifies the fruit seen in the film as pears. Most of the subjects identify them as guavas (*bala*, *fanshiliu*) or refer to the 'pears' non-committally as 'fruit' (*shuiguo*).

1. Fruit picking
2. Goatherd
3. Boy 'bikie'
4. Theft of fruit
5. Girl 'bikie'
6. Crash
7. Three boys to the aid
8. Hat return
9. Discovery of theft & puzzlement

Not all the 20 narrators however, included each of these film scenes in their retelling.<sup>18</sup>

In this section, I discuss —

- (i) the method of determining episode boundaries in the narrative;
- (ii) the semantic class of verbs marked by *le* at episodic boundaries.

### 6.1 *Le* as a marker of episodic boundaries

Other discourse studies have shown that episodic boundaries tend to coincide with change in either setting, topic or characters. Tomlin (1987:458) makes the following observation about how to define 'episode', which will be applied in this analysis:

Episodes in narrative discourse probably average some five to eight propositions in length, but such an average, at best representing only a structural definition of episode, does not define the episode, it merely characterizes its typical realization. Episodes are defined ultimately by the sustaining of attention on a particular paragraph level theme, a pragmatic instantiation of a rhetorical act.

For each of the 21 narratives, it was noted in which episode each instance of sentence-final *le* was to be found, and the content of the preceding and following text was examined to check for any change in these three parameters. One narrative was used as a test case (I.4) to maintain independent determination of episode boundaries.

There were a total of 117 instances of *le* in sentence-final position. Twenty-seven of these can be excluded from the present discussion on the grounds that they were used to mark events that were either out of chronological sequence - backtracking to fill in details on earlier events - or represented digressions from the main storyline.

Both uses of sentence-final *le* to mark events, other than those signalling the end of an episode, are exemplified and discussed here briefly.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Note that for the purposes of this analysis, the introductory sections of each narrative transcription were not counted. This is where the interviewer explains the task to each of the participants and can be regarded as external to the storytelling as, after this point, the interviewer remains silent until the interviewee has finished talking

<sup>19</sup> Anteriority' and 'backtracking' are discussed in section 5.1 which precedes.

- (47) (Ta) jiu shang -le me Ta shou shang le. Jiu mei you  
 (3sg) then wound -LE RP 3sg receive wound LE then NEG have  
 qi le. Jiu .... tuo-zhe nei-ge jiaotache zou  
 ride LE then .... drag-CONT that-CL bicycle go (Pear I.13:58-63)  
 'He'd been hurt after all. He'd got hurt, so he didn't ride any more. (He) pulled the  
 bicycle along as he walked.'

In (45) the narrator is referring back to earlier events to explain why the little boy is no longer riding his bicycle. The particle *le* marks this backtracking

- (48) jiu shi mei you shenmo biyao le  
 then be NEG have what need LE  
 'There was simply no need to (do that).' (Pear I.0:130)

In (48) the narrator is digressing from her main storyline to explain why one of the three boys had remained idle and up to that point had not helped pick up the spilled guavas.

Apart from these 27 instances of backtracking or digression from the main storyline, the majority of examples of *le* in sentence-final position, the remaining 90 examples, were found to cluster at the end of episodes in the story.<sup>20</sup>

At this point, recall that the use of aspect marking is facultative in Chinese and that the placement of *le* within a narrative is made variably by speakers. In other words, not every episode boundary is marked by this use of *le* in sentence-final position. Whenever speakers use *le* however, it appears to hold true, on the basis of the Pear Stories data, that it will be found to coincide with the end of a particular film scene.

With 9 major scenes in the film, if speakers marked the episode boundaries for all these, a maximum of 9 instances of *le* in a given narrative could be expected. However, noting that extra scenes which were interpolated by speakers were typically digressions (for example, lengthy descriptions of the orchard setting and of the appearance of the little boy in narrative I.0 or psychological explanations of the little boy's state of mind after the theft in narratives I.7 & I.13) and *le*, in sentence-final position would be used here to mark out-of-sequence events, it is interesting to note that some narratives had as many as 11 *le*'s marking episode boundaries, whereas others had as few as one

The two narratives with 11 such examples of *le*, I.11 and II.I, both contained 4 episodes where there were two final clauses containing *le*, clustered together at the end. In fact, sometimes this involved a repetition of the verb. None of the narratives had an even spread of the marker *le* occurring at the end of each of the episodes.

Take narrative I.12 as an example, with 4 instances of *le* marking the episode boundary.

<sup>20</sup> These were two of the most skimpily retold stories (II.3 and II.4)

- (49) *Nei -ge ren jiu bu gei ta chi ba ta la-guo qu le*  
 that -CL person then NEG give 3sg eat BA 3sg pull-pass go LE  
 'That person wouldn't give it (=the goat) anything to eat, but dragged it away'. (Pear I.12:29)

Example (49) signals the end of the goatherd scene in this particular narrative. The text in extract in (50) likewise signals the end of the theft scene where the little boy carries off a basket of fruit.

- (50) *Ta jiu ba ta fang-zai chezi-shang, jiu ... na-zou le*  
 3sg then BA 3sg put-at bike-on then take-go LE  
 'Then he put it (=the basket) on the bike and took it away'. (Pear I.12:44-46)

The sentence in (51), which follows, marks the end of the scene where the boy passes a girl riding on a bike.

- (51) *Ta maozi bei ... bei chui-diao le*  
 3sg hat PASSPASS blow-away LE  
 'His hat was blown away'. (Pear I.12:53)

Finally, at the end of the scene where the three boys have come to his aid, sentence (52) is found.

- (52) *Ta jiu zai qi chezi zai zou le*  
 3sg then again ride bike again go LE  
 'He got on his bike again and left once more'. (Pear I.12:68)

In narrative (I.2), we find in one scene, that there are three examples of *le* being used in sentence-final position clustering at the end of this episode.

One instance involves a repair.

- (53) *Ta qi-zou le*  
 3sg ride-go LE  
 'He rides away'. (Pear I.2:50)

- (54) *Ta dou ... mei you qi -zou, jiu shi yique yique*  
 3sg all NEG have ride-away, then be one:limp one:limp  
*de zou-diao*  
 ADV walk-off  
 'He doesn't actually, doesn't ride off but walks away limping'. (Pear I.2:51-53)

The departure of the little boy is accompanied by that of the three boys and so the episode ends with the following statement:

- (55) *Nei-ge san-ge xiao haizi ye zou-diao le.*  
 that -CL three-CL small child also go-off LE  
 'Then those three boys walk away too'. (Pear I.2:54)

This explanation can be equally applied to the other cases found amongst 21 narratives where more than one clause modified by *le* is found at the end of an episode.

### Counterexamples

There appear to be 5 problem examples amongst the 90 *le* with episode-bounding function. Two can be accounted for but three remain problematical. Two examples involve stative verbs which form predicates with *tai-SV-le* and did not occur at an episode boundary. The structure *tai-SV-le* encodes excess of a particular attribute (*tai* means 'too [much]'), and can be treated as a different use of *le*. Dow (1978:154:) labels this use of *le* as one of expressing 'degree', 'extremity' or an 'emphatic mood'.

(56) *gongzuo de tai zhuanxin le*  
 work ADV too concentrated LE  
 'Was working with great concentration.' (Pear I.7: 27)

(57) *jiaotache haoxiang you ta tai da le*  
 bike seem have 3sg too big LE  
 'The bike seemed too big for him.' (Pear I.7:39)

The other three examples, however, contain *le* but are not found at episode boundaries, nor do they appear to mark events out of sequence. In fact (58) marks the beginning of an episode, which points to the possibility of *le* marking both beginnings and endings of episodes, this is not incompatible with the notion of bounding. A much larger database would be needed to verify this. Consequently, these examples remain unaccounted for at present.

(58) *shi yi ge nu haizi chuxian le*  
 be one CL girl child appear INC  
 'A girl appeared.' (Pear I.7:43)

(59) *Ranhou shuiguo yi ge ren me na yi ge jiu ken-qilai le*  
 then fruit one CL person RP take one CL then chew-begin INC  
 'Then the fruit, each person took one piece and began chewing it.' (Pear II.1:99)

(60) *Ranhou nei ge nu haizi ba ta de maozi peng-diao le*  
 then that CL girl child BA he GEN hat knock-down INC  
 'Then that girl knocked his hat off.' (Pear I. 10:38)

### 6.2 Verbs of motion and *le*

It was found that of the 90 verbs in predicates modified by *le* in its episode-bounding function, 59 or nearly two-thirds were verbs of motion, or contained a motion verb as a resultative verb complement.

Resultative verbs in Chinese have the form V1, V2 where V1 is typically a transitive action verb and V2 an intransitive or stative verb indicating the result state of the action encoded by V2 (see Thompson 1974 for a detailed analysis).

Hence the verb *zou* 'go, leave' indicates the result state of an object being away from the deictic centre of reference as a verb complement, as in

- (61) *ban-zou*  
 move-go  
 'move away'

The 59 tokens or instances of verbs of motion in the 21 narratives belonged to only 25 different verbs, many being compounds formed with *zou* 'leave', *qu* 'go', *lai* 'come', *guo* 'pass (by)' and *dizo* 'fall (down)'.

(i) Motion verbs: 25 types, 59 tokens —

- |      |    |                 |  |   |                 |             |
|------|----|-----------------|--|---|-----------------|-------------|
| (62) | 21 | <i>zou</i>      | 'leave'                                    | 3 | <i>na-zou</i>   | 'take away' |
|      | 4  | <i>ban-zou</i>  | 'move away'                                | 2 | <i>zou-diao</i> | 'walk away' |
|      | 4  | <i>dai-zou</i>  | 'carry away'                               | 2 | <i>guo-lai</i>  | 'come over' |
|      | 3  | <i>qu-zou</i>   | 'ride-away'                                | 2 | <i>chuxian</i>  | 'appear'    |
|      | 2  | <i>chui-dao</i> | 'blow onto (ground)'<br>( <i>dishang</i> ) |   |                 |             |

(One instantiation each) *qu* 'go'; *tui-zou* 'push-go'; *la-zou* 'pull-go'; *la-guoqu* 'pull by'; *qi* 'ride'; *shang lu* 'go up on road'; *shang-qu* 'go up'; *jing-guo* 'pass through'; *hui-qu* 'return'; *na-qu* 'take away'; *chui-zou* 'blow away'; *chui-diao* 'blow down'; *nong-diao* 'make come down'; *gei dai-xialai* 'carried down'; *zhuang-diao* 'knock down'; *peng-diao* 'bump down'.

A second related category of verbs which we could label as verbs of accidental motion comprised 17 instances of 8 verbs of falling. Many of these were compounds formed with *dao* 'fall'.

(ii) Verbs of falling: 8 types, 17 tokens —

- |      |   |                  |             |   |                     |                 |
|------|---|------------------|-------------|---|---------------------|-----------------|
| (63) | 5 | <i>dao</i>       | 'fall'      | 1 | <i>shuai-xialai</i> | 'fall down'     |
|      | 4 | <i>shuai-dao</i> | 'fall over' | 1 | <i>die-jiao</i>     | 'stumble, trip' |
|      | 2 | <i>die-dao</i>   | 'trip over' | 1 | <i>fan</i>          | 'topple'        |
|      | 2 | <i>diao</i>      | 'fall/drop' | 1 | <i>diao-xialai</i>  | 'fall down'     |

If we combine these two groups together, we obtain a ratio of 76/90 verbs being motion verbs (agentive in the first group or non-agentive as in the second). As a percentage in this translation 84% of the verbs whose predicates were marked by *le* in its episode-bounding function were motion verbs. This is clearly more than a chance association and seems to be used here as a strategy for finishing off an episode in terms of content, that is, with the participant(s) physically leaving the location of the given scene.

Apart from these 76 motion verbs, there was a remaining set of 14 miscellaneous verbs with only one instantiation each.

(iii) 'Remainder' group; 14 types/14 tokens

(64) *nong* 'do'; *shou-hao* 'tidy up'; *nong-shang* 'cause to be wounded'; *nong-teng* 'cause to be hurt'; *shang* 'wounded'; *mei you biyao* 'be no need'; *ken-qilai* 'start munching'; *cai-qilai* 'start picking'; *shuo zaijian* 'say goodbye'; *kong* 'be empty'; *chengshu* 'be ripe'; *fangdao* 'put down'; *tai da* 'too big'; *tai zhuanxin* 'too concentrated'

### 6.3 Clause-internal *le* (Perfective *le*) and the semantic class of the verb

A question which might be asked at this stage is that might it not be the motion verbs then which are being used to signal the end of an episode and not *le* in sentence-final position?

However, clause-internal (or perfective) *le* is also used to aspectually modify motion verbs.

There are 30 examples of this, representing 13 different motion verbs found marked by *le* in the Chinese Pear Stories.

Verb classes with perfective *-le*:

(i) Motion verbs: 13 types/30 tokens

(65) 6 *lai* 'come' 1 *t\_ou-zou* 'steal away'  
 6 *pengdào* 'bump into' 1 *na-zou* 'take away'  
 4 *qian* 'lead' 1 *ban* 'move'  
 3 *zou* 'leave' 1 *fang* 'put'  
 3 *jing-guo* 'pass through'  
*shàng* 'go up'; *zou-diao* 'go away'; *qi* 'ride'; *qi-shang* 'ride upon'.

In general, however, clause-internal *-le* modifies a much larger semantic range of verbs than does episode-bounding *le*. We saw that 84% of verbs marked by episode-bounding *le* were motion verbs (either agentive or inadvertent). Verbs modified by *le* clause-internally (V-*le*-NP) belong to 4 main semantic groups

- (i) motion (exemplified above),
- (ii) intransitive verbs of giving and taking,
- (iii) verbs of scattering, and
- (iv) verbs of picking.

Again there is a group of miscellaneous verbs (v). The four groups (ii) - (v) are exemplified below.

(ii) Verbs of giving and taking: 7 types/20 tokens

(66) 5 *t\_ou* 'steal' *jioao-gei* 'hand over'  
 6 *na* 'take' *huan-gei* 'return'  
 4 *gei* 'give' *foen* 'share'  
 2 *song* 'give as present'

(iii) Verbs of scattering: 3 types/5 tokens

- (67) 2 *soan le (yi di)* 'spread everywhere'  
 2 *sa-(man)* 'scatter (full)'  
 1 *gun* 'roll'

(iv) Verbs of picking: 2 types/6 tokens

- (68) 4 *zh\_ai* 'pick/pluck'  
 2 *cai* 'pick'

(v) Miscellaneous: 13 types/35 tokens

- (69) 10 *shao* 'be short of/missing'  
 10 *kan(dao)* 'look/see'  
 4 *chui* 'whistle'  
 2 *wang(ji)* 'forget'

and nine other verbs with one instantiation each: *diu* 'lose'; *diao* 'lose'; *faxian* 'discover'; *fajue* 'notice'; *xiyin* 'attract'; *mo* 'rub'; *shou-shang* 'be wounded'; *qi tanxin* 'become greedy'; *fu* 'support'.

The overview of the semantic groups of verbs modified by *le* clause-internally shows that these represent the main events in the film: a 'peasant' picking guavas and the little boy stealing them, the guavas being scattered on the ground after the bike accident and the little boy giving three of them as a gift to the boys who helped pick them up. In the final scene, the peasant discovers he is missing one basket of guavas at the same time he sees the three boys eating them. These are the foregrounded events which carry the storyline, for which the aspect marking is commonly labelled 'perfective'.

In contrast to this, the events marked aspectually by *le* as being at the boundary of an episode indicate in general results and effects, what we might expect at the end of a particular segment or chunk of discourse. In the Pear Stories, this concerns participants having moved away from the location of the scene or the boy having tumbled off his bike. This interpretation of the function of *le* in discourse organization, has in its turn commonly been labelled 'perfect' (cf. Givon 1977, Li, Thompson & Thompson 1982).

## 7. CONCLUSION

What I have attempted to clarify in this analysis, is that in standard Chinese, both 'perfective' and 'perfect' aspects are designated by an identical grammatical particle *le*. Synchronically, there is no basis, however, for analyzing this phenomenon as a case of homonymy by treating the two *le*'s as distinct morphemes. Neither can the case for polysemy be argued as it is purely on the level of discourse organization that there is a need to differentiate their function according to structural position.

On the semantic level, *le* encodes boundedness, or, more specifically that the speaker has nothing more to say about a particular theme or topic. This is *le* in its episode-bounding

function. Aspectual boundedness at clause-level is also encoded by *le*, directly modifying the verb to express that an event or situation has reached its terminal point. In this syntactic context, it was seen that the application of *le* was subject to a number of restrictions such as those of modifying only punctual, quantifiable, realis events that semantically entailed a change of state. In this function, *le* could not modify negated predicates or verbs designating states of affairs, regardless of syntactic class as transitive or intransitive.

Diachronically, it appears that the use of *le* as an enclitic to the verb developed out of the use of 'sentence-final *le*' < *liao* 'finish'. *Contra* Chao 1968, outlined in section 4.1 above, Norman (1988:123) outlines the evolution of the perfective marker from the structure V-O - *liao* in the period of the Tang dynasty (ca. 6th to 9th centuries) which gave rise to V *liao* where the object was optional and finally to the structure V-*liao* - O which became well-established in the vernacular literature of the Song dynasty (ca. 10th to 13th century AD).

The development of perfect aspects into perfectives is well-documented cross-linguistically (see Bybee 1985, 1987) also for Indo-European languages (Comrie 1976) The fact that *-le* in its function as a verb enclitic cannot modify future or irrealis events (see section 4.2 above) allows the speculation to be made that *-le* could progress one step further and develop into a tense marker for past events in its 'clause-internal' function. This is reinforced by its use as a marker of anteriority in complex clauses to bound the first event in a series, signalling completion. This would again conform to the observed regular pattern of semantic change from perfect > perfective > past tense marker.

In other completely unrelated languages such as Tamil (Dravidian, S. India), Ewe (Tano-Congo, Africa) and Alsea (Amerindian, Oregon), markers carrying both aspectual meanings of perfective and perfect have also been described:

In Tamil, independent confirmation of the results obtained in this study of Chinese narrative discourse can be found: The aspectual auxiliary *vitu* which derives from a verb meaning 'leave, let' can be described as a completive or perfective marker in one of its uses (Herring 1988:4)

(70) *Kumar palliyai konru (vi)ttan*  
 K. lizard-acc kill-AvP *vitu*-P3ms

'Kumar killed the lizard (and finished killing it).' [Herring (1988), example (10a)]

A second use of *vitu* which bears a striking similarity to the use of *le* in Chinese is in discourse to signify closure of a topic preparatory to introducing a new one (Herring 1988:6). Herring carries out an analysis of a sample of oral narrative discourse in Tamil to show that the core function of *vitu* is one of 'narrative perfectivity', of foregrounding main storyline events. Moreover, she observes that *vitu* can also be used to mark events out of chronological sequence, which again parallels the situation in Chinese described in this analysis.

It is noteworthy, however, that of the 16 *vitu* clauses in my sample which are *not* on the narrative time line (that is, not in strict chronological sequence), 12 of them (75%)

relate previously completed events and must be translated by the English past perfect. This suggests that the notion of 'perfect; as expressed by Tamil *vitu* is not incompatible with narrative, although it clearly takes second place to the perfective, sequencing function.

Ameka (to appear) shows in his semantic analysis of perfective markers in Ewe that *vo* from a homophonous verb 'finish' expresses 'total completion' with processes but 'imminent or prospective completion' with events (Ameka To appear:14). Here we have a case of polysemy of the one morpheme, carrying both perfective and inchoative senses, the interpretation being determined by the inherent aspect or AKTIONSART of the verb it modifies. Similarly, in Alosea, the completive aspect marker *-x* marks 'the terminal boundary to the action or process' (Buckley 1988:4). It appears to also have a second use as a marker of the perfect, of events already completed but 'relevant to the narrative':

(71) *temuhu mis=axa-wi.l -x*  
and:then RLS.COMP=back come-CMPL  
'And then after she came back

(72) *tem=lta ailiki kaxke - s -t - ex = slo*  
and=but already together?-STAT-CMPL=all  
'the people had already assembled' (154.10) [Buckley' 1988: Examples (15) & (16)]

These two examples form one sentence and the use of the completive aspect marker encodes that on arriving, 'the "protagonist" finds that the gathering has already taken place' with the focus being on the current situation, that 'the people are there now' (Buckley 1988:5). Once more, this resembles to a high degree the two functions of the particle *le* in Chinese of perfective and perfect markers. It appears that cross-linguistically there is a close semantic and discourse relation between the aspectual meanings encoded by perfective markers (foregrounding of events in the narrative) and markers of the perfect (end of episodes (topic change), anteriority, events out of chronological sequence) which can be explained by the concept of boundedness.

## 8. APPENDIX

### *The Texts*

#### 1. Chinese Pear Stories:

A transcription in Chinese of two and a half hours of taping (Unpublished transcription ms.), Francisco Y-w Huang, University of Oregon, labelled 'Pear' above.

The database for this study consists of a set of 21 narratives, known as the Chinese Pear Stories, which were collected by Mary Erbaugh, University of Oregon, in March 1976 at National Taiwan University (NTU) in Taipeh, ROC.

The 20 participants in the interviews consisted mainly of women college students or graduates at NTU but also included 5 teachers. Following the protocol set out in Chafe (1980), all the young women were shown the film and interviewed within an hour of seeing it. They were requested not to discuss the film in the intervening period.

Two of the narratives are made by the interviewer herself, before and after seeing the film. All but one of the interviewees are native speakers of Mandarin (known as *guóyǔ* in Taiwan, ROC), being raised in monolingual Mandarin families. The 'exception' was a fully bilingual Taiwanese-born speaker, whose proficiency enabled her to become a teacher of Mandarin to foreigners at the Stanford Center, NTU.<sup>21</sup>

I would like to thank Mary Erbaugh for making these transcriptions available. Additional data used in the discussion was taken from the following three sources.

## 2. Foris transcriptions:

- (a) Liang, J. et al (1982). Varieties of Standard Spoken Chinese, Vol. I. *A Speaker from Tianjin*. Dordrecht: Foris (Transcription of ca 60 minutes of taping), labelled 'Foris I'
- (b) Kubler, C.& George T-C Ho (eds.) (1984). Varieties of Standard Spoken Chinese, Vol. II. *A Speaker from Taipei*. Dordrecht:L Foris. (Transcription of ca 60 minutes of taping), labelled'Foris II'.

Both these transcriptions are of interview-style conversations.

The speaker interviewed in the first volume is a native speaker of the Tianjin dialect of Northern Chinese (Mandarin). The discussion concerns the history of a vernacular art form, known as *xi\_angsh\_eng* 'comic dialogue'.

The four speakers interviewed in Volume II from Taiwan, ROC, are bilingual in standard Chinese (*guóyǔ*) and Southern Min (Hokkien). Each is asked to relate their personal history

## 3. The status of women in China (Unpublished transcription ms.)1976. UCLA.

This transcription of roughly one hour of taping was made of a discussion between two emigres to the USA from Beijing, labelled 'Women' I thank Sandra A. Thompson for making this available

4. . A collection of 100 personal narratives recently published in China and compiled by Zhang Xinxin and Sang Ye:*Beijing Ren: Yi-bai ge putong ren de zishu*. (1986), labelled 'Beijing Ren'.

[See reference list for bibliographical details of (1) - (4)]

## 5 Elicited corpora

These transcriptions were supplemented by two sets of elicited data.

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<sup>21</sup> Information provided by Mary Erbaugh, pers.comm.

(i) Initial work on the aspect system of standard Chinese was begun at the University of Cologne in 1985-86 as part of project funded by the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation. See Chappell (1986) & Chappell (in prep. a and b). Language consultant: Wang Weiguo (m.) b.1951 Changchun, P.R.China. Graduate of Peking University and Universitat zu Koln.

(ii) Supplementary work was carried out in Melbourne in 1987-1988 with the assistance of Liu Mingchen (m.) b.1941 Beijing, PRC, lecturer in English, Beijing No. 2 Foreign Languages Institute. Graduate of La Trobe University, Melbourne and the Beijing No.1 Foreign Languages Institute.

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Liang, J. et al. 1982. *Varieties of Standard Spoken Chinese. Vol I. A Speaker from Tianjin*. Dordrecht:Foris.

Zhang, Xinxin & Sang Ye.1986. *Beijing Ren : Yi-bai ge putong ren de zishu* [Beijing person: One hundred personal narratives from ordinary people] Shanghai: Shanghai Wenyi publications.

\*Due to the prevailing political climate in China in the early 70s, the person interviewed and recorded for the purposes of making this transcription chose to remain anonymous.in order to protect friends and colleaages.

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