

Original Paper

Semantic, Aspectual Category and Evidential Category of -guo

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Abstract

The semantics of -guo indicates a non-empty set of a type of eventuality in a certain time frame, while the properties of term inability, discontinuity and repeatability are only pragmatic implicatures. From the viewpoint of event structure, -guo is better considered as an imperfective marker than an experiential marker which asserting the activity description and leaving the state description as a standard implicative. Forwardly, from event structure to information structure, “-guo” is developed into an indirect evidential marker. Based on social needs of reliability and extended intersubjectivity, “-guo” emphasizes the truth of events and gains the specific meaning as an interpersonal evidential.

Keywords

semantic property, pragmatic implicature, aspectual category, evidential category

1. Introduction

It is generally stated that the semantics of -guo in Mandarin Chinese has been divided into two sub-classes: perfective aspect marker -guo1 and experiential aspect marker -guo2. The semantics of experiential aspect marker -guo2 is generally defined with properties of term inability and repeatability. However, a lot of cases cannot be explained by the term inability property hypothesis and repeatability property hypothesis. I assert that from the viewpoint of event structure, -guo is better considered as an imperfective marker. Forwardly, from event structure to information structure, -guo is developed into an indirect evidential marker. I demonstrate that this proposal has explainable advantage than the term inability property hypothesis and the repeatability property hypothesis. The next section discusses the semantics and pragmatic implicatures of -guo. Section 3 and section 4 investigate aspect categories of -guo from the viewpoint of event structure and evidential categories of -guo from the viewpoint of information structure. Finally, I conclude this proposal.

2. The Semantics and Pragmatic Implicatures of -guo

2.1 The Term inability Property Hypothesis

The semantics of experiential aspect marker -guo² is generally defined with properties of terminability and repeatability. The term inability property hypothesis of “-guo” means that the event must be terminated at some moment (Liu, 1988). However, some verbs denoting terminable events cannot co-occur with -guo, for example:

- (1) * ben ci huiyi kaimu/bimu guo (Chen & Li, 2013).

the CL conference open/close EXP

The conference has been opened/closed.

Some other sentences with -guo do not seem to denote terminable events. Let us consider the following example:

- (2) wo yisheng zhi ai-guo yi ge ren…… (Chen & Li, 2013).

I lifetime only love.EXP one CL person

I have loved only one person in my whole lifetime……

Previous studies propose that the term inability property of -guo in different contexts is similar, but a lot of similar sentences show contradictory property, such as the examples in Xu (2019):

- (3) ta qu-guo Beijing.

he go.EXP Beijing

He has been to Beijing.

- (4) wo zhongyu lai-guo Beijing le.

I finally come.EXP Beijing LE

I finally have been to Beijing.

The example (3) usually means the speaker has experience in Beijing before and not in Beijing at the speech time. However, the example (4) can be used as the case that the speaker accomplishes his dream of going to Beijing, and he is in Beijing at the speech time.

Even though the same sentence might have diverse interpretations in different contexts, for example:

- (5) A: ta qu-guo Beijing ma?

he go.EXP Beijing MA?

Has he been to Beijing?

B: ta qu-guo Beijing. shishishang ta xianzai jiu zai Beijing. (Xu, 2019)

he go.EXP Beijing in_fact he now right at Beijing

He has been to Beijing. In fact, he is in Beijing right now.

The term inability property can be cancelled in the context of example (5). I agree with Xu (2019) that cancellable interpretations are pragmatic effects, and the term inability property of -guo is merely a pragmatic effect rather than semantic property.

In addition, the discontinuity property is related to term inability property, as the result of event state has been discontinued. The semantics of -guo is often compared with perfective aspect marker -le such

as example (6):

(6) a. ta qu-guo Beijing. (It implies he is not in Beijing)

he go.EXP Beijing

He has been to Beijing.

b. ta qu-le Beijing. (It implies he is still in Beijing)

he go. PERF Beijing

He has been to Beijing.

But the discontinuity property in some sentences is vague, such as in the following example (7). It is compatible with different possibilities, that is, he is married again or not.

(7) Ta li-guo-hun.

He divorce.EXP

He once divorced.

2.2 The Repeatability Property Hypothesis

The repeatability property hypothesis proposes that the event should have the property of repeatability, so the verbs denote a non-repeatable event, such as *si* “die” and *shasi* “kill” cannot co-occur with *-guo* (liu, 1988; Yeh, 1996). However, not all verbs denoting non-repeatable events can co-occur with *-guo* (Lin, 2006; Pan & Lee, 2004). Yeh (1996) points out the contrast between definiteness and indefiniteness of objects in *-guo* sentences. When the definite objects cannot co-occur with *-guo*, the replace of indefinite objects might make the sentence acceptable. So, Yeh proposes that the repeatability property hypothesis is more powerful than the terminability property hypothesis.

However, still a lot of cases cannot be explained by the repeatability property hypothesis, such as the example (8) from Xu (2019), which permits the co-occurrence of definite object and no-repeatable verb in a certain context.

(8) yin dangnian qinshihuang shasi-guo ta de zufu Dongfei, yinci xin Zhong huai hen (Xu, 2019).

because that_year Qin_Shihuang kill-guo his grmandpa Dongfei therefore heart inside bear hatred

Because Qin Shihuang once killed his grandpa Dongfei, he still bears hatred to him in his mind.

Moreover, Chen and Li (2013) consider it is difficult to explain the sentences licensed by negation or interrogation with repeatability property hypothesis. If the term inability property and the repeatability property are semantic components of *-guo*, negation and interrogation will be outside of the logic scope of *-guo*. This idea suggests that the properties of *-guo* are more likely to be determined by contexts and pragmatic factors. The previous many theories cannot explain all the cases of *-guo*, and I believe the main reason is neglecting the contextual factors which should be accounted for in pragmatics.

Although the terminability property hypothesis and the repeatability property hypothesis are valuable, they fail to explain the usages of *-guo* in all situations (Dai, 1997; Chen & Li, 2013). I follow Xu (2019) and propose that, the properties of term inability, discontinuity and repeatability are only pragmatic implicatures, and *-guo* should be accounted for in pragmatics.

I adopt the semantic frame proposal of Xu (2019), that is, for a certain eventuality and a time frame

which is before the reference time, there exists at least one eventuality of type and the negation of -guo denotes the empty set of events. It suggests that -guo is not connected with the event structure and the truth of the sentence merely denotes existing of eventuality type described by the predicates. Because the existing of at least one eventuality, in corresponding contexts, the properties of term inability, discontinuity and repeatability might be derived as pragmatic implicatures easily.

It is worth noting that, although the reference time is the speech time generally, the time frame of -guo sentences is before the referent time rather than the speech time. Therefore, if a proper reference time is set, it is possible to use -guo in the events of future.

(9) dao 2020-niandi, ta yinggai yijing qu-guo san ci Beijing le (Xu, 2019).

to Year-2020 end he should already go-EXP three CL Beijing LE

By the end of Year 2020, he will have been to Beijing three times.

The presupposition of time frame of -guo in example (9) is before the reference time, so -guo is used to describe the event before some proper reference time in future.

According to the viewpoint of Smith (1997), -guo can be divided between an experiential -guo2 and a perfective -guo1. The perfective -guo1 refers to a specific event while the experiential -guo2 denotes an event happened in the indefinite past. For instance, -guo in the sentence (10a) is the so-called perfective marker. However, the truth condition of this sentence should be evaluated in the certain period of dinner time, denoting the non-empty set of the eventual type of eating and has the similar expressing effects with the perfective aspect marker of (10b). Therefore, the so so-called perfective -guo1 can be explained in the same semantic framework above, and the dividing between an experiential -guo2 and a perfective -guo1 is not indispensable.

(10) a. ta chi-guo wanfan le.

he eat.EXP dinner LE

He has eaten his dinner already.

b. ta chi-le wanfan le.

he eat.PERF dinner LE

He has eaten his dinner already.

To sum up, the semantics of “-guo” indicates a non-empty set of a type of eventuality in a certain time frame, while the properties of terminability, discontinuity and repeatability are only pragmatic implicatures.

3. Event Structure and Aspectual Category of -guo

3.1 Aspectual Types

It is mentioned above that, the dividing between an experiential -guo2 and a perfective -guo1 is not indispensable. But it is often assumed that -guo2 is an experiential aspect marker or a mixture of past tense and experiential aspect (Li, 1999). I propose that, the experiential -guo2 and the perfective -guo1 can be explained in the same framework, and verb classes and aspect classes need to be differentiated

firstly when investigating aspect categories of -guo.

Four verb classes are often distinguished as state verbs, activity verbs, achievement verbs and accomplishment verbs (Vendler, 1957). While aspect classes are related with communicative direction (Durst-Andersn, 2018). Verbs aspectual categories are connected to verb classes directly, but shaped by the aspectual forms at the same time. Durst-Andersn (2018) proposes that, communicative direction is relevant to the aspectual forms of a particular language. English, Russian, and French are exemplified the three different communicative directions: indirectly through the speaker's experience, directly through the situation itself, and indirectly through the hearer as information.

For instance, the distinction between progressive and non-progressive verbs in English is not exist in Russian. Durst-Andersn (2018) demonstrates the distinction between progressive and non-progressive verbs in English is originated from the distinction between action and state.

(11) a. He is always smoking.

b. He always smokes.

Example (11a) refers to a smoking activity situation, and (11b) refers to a smoking state. This distinction is linked to the visualization effect. That is, the progressive form gives a picture description grounded on the speaker's visual experience. Example (11a) involves a visualization effect that he holds a cigarette. In example (11b), the speaker only presents his opinion or knowledge. Therefore, it is ungrammatical to use progressive form in the situation which cannot be visualized. For instance, we can acknowledge the difference between “*She is knowing it”. and “She is knowing more and more”. Based on the speaker's visual experience, the communicative direction of English aspectual type is through the speaker and first-person oriented with indirect reference to the external world.

Durst-Andersn (2018) then argues that the perfective and imperfective aspects are counterparts of events and processes grounded on the cognition of event structure. The Russian perfective aspect denotes an action as an event by asserting the state description. That is to say, the state is foregrounded, and the activity is back grounded. So, the Russian perfective form “Otkry!” (I opened it!) asserts the state description and presuppose the activity. It means “the door is open and I opened it”. In Russian, a certain state is related to a certain activity in the past, so the perfective aspect starts from the state to go back to the relevant activity. However, the perfective aspect does not assert the state obtains at the moment of speech time but at the moment of reference time. The Russian perfective aspect focusses on the state, while English past tense “I opened it!”, focuses on the whole action. That means, both the state and the caused activity are placed in the past in English.

The Russian type of imperfective aspect is the negation of the perfective aspect. In other words, it focusses on the activity description and leaves the state description as an implicature decided by the hearer. The imperfective is unmarked and may be used to denote an ongoing process, a cancelled event, a habitual action, an intended action, a characterization, etc. (Sonnerhauser, 2004; Durst-Andersn, 2018). In short, the communicative direction of Russian aspectual form is through the speaker and third-person oriented with direct reference to the external reality.

3.2 Aspectual Category of -guo

I adopt the distinction between English aspectual type and Russian aspectual type, and agree with Klein et al. (2000), Chinese aspectual system is a mixture of English aspectual type and Russian aspectual type. It consists of the perfective aspect form -le and imperfective aspect form -guo like Russia. Moreover, it consists of the progressive aspect form zai like English. I argue that, the cases of -guo mentioned in section1 will be explained better if -guo is treated as an imperfective aspect form of Russian aspectual type. Due to only asserting activity description before the moment of reference and the truth of state description is an implicature decided by the hearer, the state caused by the activity will be a pragmatic implicature triggered by contexts in -guo sentences. In short, the properties of terminability, discontinuity and repeatability are not constant semantic attributes but only pragmatic implicatures decided by the hearer in different contexts.

Xu (2015) assumes that, the VO constructions in Chinese show different patterns from English and the object can be interpreted as intentional goal or result. But I suggest that the main reason till lies in the different aspectual types between Chinese and English.

(12) a. *He wrote a novel, but the novel is not finished.

b. ta xie-le xiaoshuo, keshi mei xie wan.

he write.PERF one CL novel, but not write finish

He has written a novel, but did not finished.

c. ta xie-guo yi bu xiaoshuo, keshi mei xie wan.

he write.EXP one CL novel, but not write finish

He has written a novel, but did not finished.

The perfective aspect form -le asserts the finish state obtains at a moment of reference time but rather speech time and the finishing state is related to a certain activity in the past. The imperfective aspect form -guo focuses on the activity of writing and leaves the finishing state description as an implicature decided by the hearer. This is to say, the finishing state may not be obtained at the speech time in perfective and imperfective aspectual sentences. Thus, the negation of finishing state is acceptable in Chinese perfective aspect and imperfective aspect. While the English past tense sentence focusses on the whole action, so, both the finishing state and the caused activity of writing are placed in the past world before the speech time. Therefore, the negation of finishing state is unacceptable in the past tense in English.

Additionally, because both English and Chinese consist of the progressive aspect form based on the speaker's visual experience, the following progressive sentences are accepted.

(13) a. He is writing a novel now.

b. ta zhengzai xie yi bu xiaoshuo.

he PROG write one CL novel

He is writing a novel.

In a nutshell, from the viewpoint of event structure, -guo is better considered as the imperfective

marker of Russian type than the so-called experiential marker, which asserts the activity description and leaves the state description as a standard implicature. Therefore, -guo 1 and -guo 2 can be unified in this way.

4. Information Structure and Evidential Category of -guo

Chen and Li (2013) talk about a kind of -guo sentences cannot be explained by the property of repeatability and indicate the special meaning to highlight the truth value of predicate events. The following example (14) is this kind of sentence from Chen and Li (2013).

(14) zhenxing! ding shi Yanan Kangda bi guo ye de. (Chen & Li, 2013)

Awesome! certainly BE Yanan Kang University graduate.EXP DE

Awesome! He has certainly been graduated from Yanan Kang University.

Chappell (2001) proposes that -guo in this kind of example is not an aspectual marker, but an evidential marker. Chen and Li (2013) argue that the modality meaning is more important than time meaning in this type of -guo sentences. I suggest that, from event structure to information structure, -guo might be treated as a modality operator and then developed into an indirect evidential marker. Based on social needs of reliability and extended intersubjectivity, -guo emphasizes the truth of events and gains a specific meaning as an evidentiality.

Evidential category is a functional category subdivided as the direct evidentiality and the indirect evidentiality. It is generally acknowledged that evidentially is the category encoding the source of information which is directly seen, heard, or indirectly reported, conjectured, etc. The dichotomic definition leads to some semantic contradiction in many evidential systems. Consider the following example from Turkic (Slobin & Aksu, 1982):

(15) Kemal gel-miş

Kemal come-MIR

Kemal came!

The Turkic evidential -miş conveys a sense of surprise to something unexpected and is generally called mirativity. In addition to an indirect evidential reading, it can also include potential direct evidential meaning. Sentence (15) above may be used in contexts that the speaker was informed of Kemal's arrive or made an inference based on some clues. Besides, it might be used in the context that the speaker opens the door and sees an unexpected friend, Kemal. The closely connection between indirect evidentiality and mirativity is not by accident, but triggered by some common cognitive and pragmatic patterns typologically (Delancey, 1997). There are a lot of similarities between -guo in Chinese and -miş in Turkic that they both can be interpreted as direct or indirect evidentials.

Chappell (2001) analyzes that the experiential perfect is developed into a marker of evidentiality in some Sinitic languages. Tantucci (2013) suggests V-guo constructions in Chinese make a reference to an experiential reading encoding the experience, and then is developed into an evidential meaning

implying the speaker's attitude and stance. Chen and Li (2013) explain this kind of evidential usage with the repeatability property, but I consent to Tantucci (2013) and interpret it as an evidential.

Tantucci (2013) introduces a new notion of Interpersonal Evidentiality (IE) and explores the semantic and pragmatic features of V-guo as an IE construction. The notion of interpersonal evidential is an evidential dimension marking the speaker's statement as a form of intersubjective knowledge shared with other people. Language is based on intersubjectivity, and intersubjectivity is an important concept of evidential category (Nuyts; 2001, 2012). Nuyts considers subjectivity and intersubjectivity as two opposite poles in his intersubjectivity framework different from Traugott (2003). Related to Nuyts's approach, the intersubjectivity might involve a third party sharing the same knowledge of the speaker. By taking a third party into account, a group sharing the same information with the speaker but not participating the speech directly, this approach opens a debate between intersubjectivity and evidentiality. In short, evidential reasoning is motivated by a social necessity of reliability and involving a third party can achieve this social necessity.

The semantic incompatibility in the above Turkic example can be resolved if -miş is seen as an IE category. The speaker expresses his/her surprise to the presence of Kermal which is shared by the hearer or other people interested in Kermal's arrival in sentence (15) which can be regarded as an IE construction. The evidential interpretation of -guo in Chinese also can be treated as an IE construction. The speaker intends to express his/her attitude or stance with a form of a shared knowledge which can be confirmed by a third party in sentence (14). As Tantucci (2013) suggests, the absence of visual results conveyed by -guo might be one of the factors prompting the interpersonal facet of the evidential meaning. If the speaker has not seen the result, s/he knows it because s/he shares the information with others. Due to the IE construction based on social necessity of reliability and extended intersubjectivity, -guo might gain the special meaning of emphasizing the truth of shared information. As demonstrated above, this proposal has the explainable advantage than the repeatability property hypothesis, and is consistent with the typological similarities between Chinese and Turkic.

5. Conclusion

In summary, I agree with Xu (2019) and suggest the semantics of -guo indicates a non-empty set of a type of eventuality in a certain time frame, while the properties of terminability, discontinuity and repeatability are only pragmatic implicatures. From the viewpoint of event structure, I accept the distinction between English aspectual type and Russian aspectual type, and treat Chinese aspectual system as a mixture of English aspectual type and Russian aspectual type. I argue that, -guo is better considered as the imperfective marker of Russian type than the so-called experiential marker, which asserts the activity description and leaves the state description as a standard implicature. I further show, from event structure to information structure, -guo is developed into an indirect evidential marker. Based on social needs of reliability and extended intersubjectivity, -guo emphasizes the truth of events and gains the specific meaning as an interpersonal evidential.

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