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The morpho-syntax of aspect in Xiāng Chinese

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Summary

This thesis investigates the morpho-syntax of the aspectual system in one variety of Xiāng (namely: Chángshā), which is one of the ten sub-families of Chinese (which are Mandarin, Xiāng, Gàn, Wú, Yuè, Hakka, Mǐn, Pínghuà, Jīn, and Huī). In this context, I provide a comprehensive description and analysis of the aspect system of the Xiāng variety of Chángshā. I conduct the analysis from the perspective of general theories on Inner and Outer aspect, and the interaction between them, with the intention to contribute to the development of these more general ideas.

Most of the previous works on aspect in Xiāng are concerned with the comparison of the differences between Mandarin and Xiāng, rather than recognizing the idiosyncratic properties in a more general sense or in their own right. Take the expression of aspectual meaning as an example. That one aspect marker is used to express more than one meaning or that more than one element is sometimes needed to express an aspect type has aroused very little attention. It is our purpose to provide an analytical account of the aspectual system in Chángshā (and Xiāng more generally).

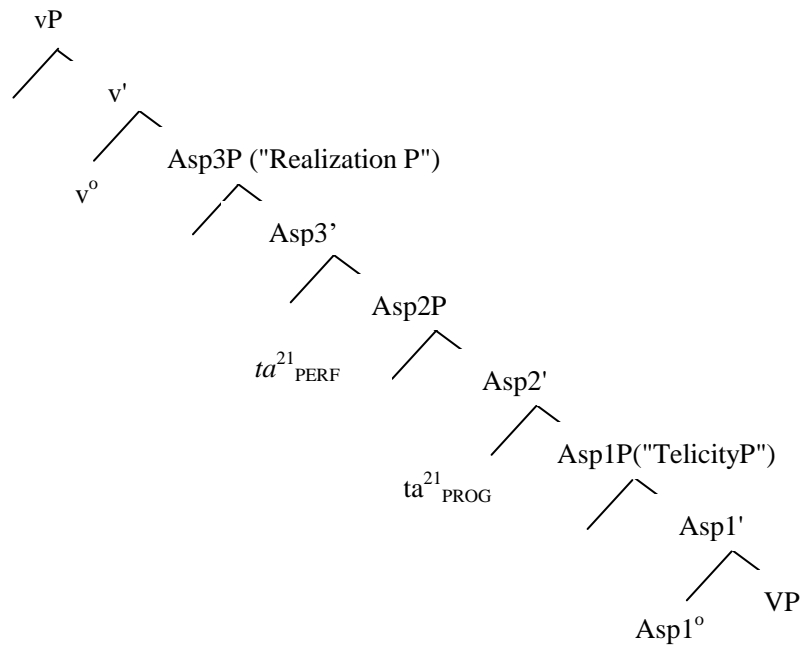
In this thesis, I focus my investigating on two aspect particles, ta^{21} and ka^{41} . The former, ta^{21} , is involved in the expression of two types of aspect, which are normally thought of as quite different, imperfective (or even progressive), and perfective; the latter, ka^{41} , is a particle that is often characterized as a perfective particle, but most of the time it is accompanied by ta^{21} .

In view of these observations, I formulate the following questions to be dealt with in this thesis:

- a) What is the interpretation and distribution of ta^{21} ?
- b) How can we account for the observation that in Xiāng, or in any case in the Chángshā variety of it, that the same particle can be involved in the expression of different aspectual meanings?
- c) What is the interpretation and distribution of ka^{41} ?

I first provide an analysis of the interpretation and distribution of ta^{21} . I point out that there are two particles which share the same morphological form: ta^{21}_{PERF} and ta^{21}_{PROG} , the former is a perfective and the latter is a progressive marker. I then provide an analysis to disambiguate ta^{21}_{PERF} from ta^{21}_{PROG} by pointing out that the difference between ta^{21}_{PERF} and ta^{21}_{PROG} lies in the fact that ta^{21}_{PERF} is syntactically higher than ta^{21}_{PROG} . ta^{21}_{PERF} is located in an Inner aspect position but interpreted in Outer aspect; ta^{21}_{PROG} is also located in Inner aspect position, lower than ta^{21}_{PERF} (I adopt Sybesma's (2017) structure that involves three layers in Inner aspect, as in (1)).

(1)



In my analysis, I follow Tsai (2008), in assuming that i) an event variable needs to be syntactically licensed; ii) syntactic tense anchoring is a way of licensing the event variable; in English, tense (hence T) being overt, is strong enough to license the event variable, while in Mandarin, it is too weak to do so; to be an effective licenser, T needs to be supported one way or another.

In the spirit of Tsai's work, I propose that ta^{21}_{PERF} , though not physically in Outer aspect itself, is in a relation with Outer aspect such that it can strengthen T so that the latter can license the event variable. This explains why ta^{21}_{PERF} can stand alone in the sense that it need not be accompanied by other material. This is different for ta^{21}_{PROG} . ta^{21}_{PROG} is located lower than ta^{21}_{PERF} . Since it is too far away from Outer aspect, blocked by the perfective aspect, it cannot strengthen T as a result of which the event argument is not licensed ("brought out" in Tsai's terms). Note that even if the head position of the highest AspP in inner aspect is not filled, the position/projection is still there. To salvage the sentence, other elements need to be present to help T to do its

licensing job. That explains why ta^{21}_{PROG} is always accompanied by other material, unlike ta^{21}_{PERF} . Other material, like modals/negation, certain aspectual markers, event coordination, event subordination, counterfactuals mentioned by Tsai also work with the use of ta^{21}_{PROG} in Chángshā. This is illustrated in (2).

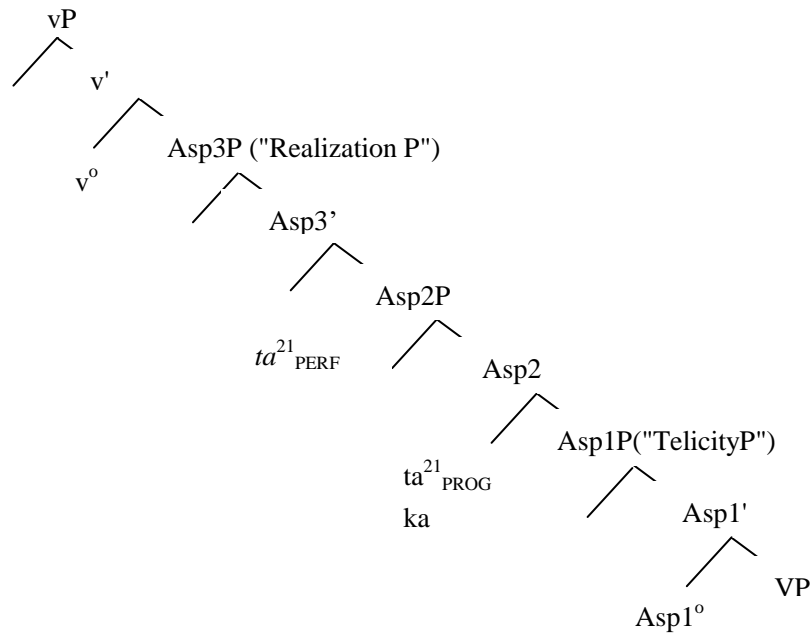
- (2) a. t^ha³³ mau²¹ k^han⁴⁵ ta²¹ tiən⁴⁵si⁴¹.
 3SG NEG watch PROG TV
 'He is not watching TV.'
 b. t^ha³³ k^han⁴⁵ ta²¹ tiən⁴⁵si⁴¹.
 3SG watch PERF TV
 'He watched TV.'

ta^{21} in (2a) can only have a progressive reading, while in (2b), without the negative marker, the progressive reading is not available. As we noted, if ta^{21} is exclusively treated as a perfective marker, the interpretation of (2a) is not easy to explain: it is not clear why in a negative construction the perfective marker must produce the progressive meaning (and in the greater context of Chinese linguistics it is not clear why the perfective marker would still be there at all, since it is generally in complementary distribution with the negative marker). Now that we have distinguished ta^{21}_{PROG} from ta^{21}_{PERF} , the observation in (2a) can be nicely accounted for. That is, in (2a), ta^{21} is used as a progressive marker. The negative marker *mau*²¹ 'not have' can license the event argument (Tsai 2008:681).

Aside from arguing that ta^{21}_{PROG} is a progressive marker occupying one of the Inner aspect positions, I point out that there is another progressive marker, in Outer aspect position. That is, we have two progressive markers in Xiāng. One is ta^{21}_{PROG} , the other is the preverbal *tsai*²¹*ko*²⁴. What differentiates ta^{21}_{PROG} from *tsai*²¹*ko*²⁴ is that the latter is located in Outer aspect, while ta^{21}_{PROG} is in an Inner aspect position. *tsai*²¹*ko*²⁴ focuses on the meaning of ongoingness, while ta^{21}_{PROG} focuses on the meaning of both ongoingness and continuation. Another difference is that, unlike *tsai*²¹*ko*²⁴, ta^{21}_{PROG} must always be accompanied by other material.

As mentioned, ka^{41} was treated as a perfective marker in the previous literature. In the present thesis however, it is argued that ka^{41} should not be treated as a perfective marker. The main reason is that its distribution is much more restricted: it only appears in telic events, to give one example. I suggest that descriptively, ka^{41} doubles the already existing endpoint and that it does so to make the endpoint definitive. Given the function of ka^{41} , instead of treating ka^{41} as a perfective marker, I explore the possibility of locating it in the position labeled as $Asp2^0$ in the tree structure (the “phase complement” position) using the frame work from Sybesma (2017), as in (1), repeated in (3), where there are three aspect layers: $Asp1P$, indicating telicity; $Asp3P$, indicating whether an event is realized or not. The function of $Asp2P$, if filled, is to make sure that the process that precedes the endpoint in the head of $Asp1$ is not available for further syntactic operations. Note, however, that I also point out that the function of $Asp2P$ in Chángshā relies not on whether it is filled (or not), but (also) by what it is filled with. It can be an element that is used to block the event from being syntactically accessible, but it can also be an element which is, on the contrary, used to indicate that an action presented is ongoing. It happens that two such elements are observed in Chángshā. ka^{41} is used to block further access to the activity preceding the lexical endpoint (for example, such event cannot be present in the progressive), while ta^{21}_{PROG} in contrast focuses on the activity in question and indicates that the action presented is ongoing. ka^{41} occupies the same position as ta^{21}_{PROG} . These two markers never co-occur, see (3). What is different is that ka^{41} is added to (3).

(3)



That *ka*⁴¹ is used to double an end point and make sure that the process that precedes the endpoint in the head of Asp1 is not available for further syntactic operations is illustrated in (4).

- (4) a. t^ha³³ tɕia²⁴ (ka⁴¹) ta²¹ san³³ tsa²⁴ pin¹³ ko⁴¹ .
 3SG eat KA PERF three CL apple
 'He ate three apples.'
- b. t^ha³³ pa⁴¹ san³³ tsa²⁴ pin¹³ko⁴¹ tɕia²⁴ *(ka⁴¹) ta²¹ .
 3SG BA three CL apple eat KA PERF
 'He ate three apples.'
- c. Tsansan xy³³ {ka⁴¹ ta²¹ / *(ka⁴¹) ta²¹ } .
 lose KA PERF KA PERF
 'Tsansan lost (the game).'

ka^{41} in (4a) is optional, while in (4b) and (4c), ka^{41} is obligatory. We have to explain the difference between (4a) and (4b)-(4c) in terms of the use of ka^{41} , where ka^{41} is obligatory in the *BA*-construction (4b) and achievements (4c), but not in accomplishments with a bounded object (4a).

The answer is related to the properties of constructions in these cases. Note that in accomplishments with a bounded object and resultatives, the endpoint is compositional, while in achievements it is inherent. Note that, in many languages, including Mandarin and Chángshā, it is possible to present accomplishments with bounded objects or resultative constructions in the progressive (as illustrated in (5)), but it is impossible to present achievements in the progressive. These endpoints cannot be stripped off. When it is impossible to have the predicate without the endpoint, ka^{41} is obligatory.

- (5) a. t^ha³³ tsai²¹ko²⁴ t^han⁴⁵ tɕ^hən³³ i³³fu.
 3SG PROG iron flat clothes
 'He is ironing the clothes flat.'
- b. t^hā tsai²¹ko²⁴ fā²⁴ tən²¹ t^hā ti tɕi⁴⁵tɕ^hə³³.
 3SG PROG start move 3SG SUB car
 'He is starting his car.'

The *BA*-construction is telling here. Although the endpoint is not inherent in the sense it is in achievements, in this case the presence is required structurally: without an endpoint, there is no *BA*-construction. And just like achievements, but unlike their non-*BA*-counterparts, *BA*-sentences are incompatible with the progressive. The endpoint cannot be lifted and ka^{41} is obligatory. In all other cases the endpoint, although it is there, can be lifted and ka^{41} is not obligatory.

In the end, I point out that in Chángshā and Xiāng in general, all three Inner aspect positions can be lexically realized. ta^{21}_{PERF} occupies Asp3^o; ka^{41} and ta^{21}_{PROG} occupies Asp2^o; and a lexical result predicate may be located in Asp1^o position.

The significance of this thesis is meant to lie in the description and analysis of aspect in Xiāng, but also more generally in that it will support the analyses in which Inner aspect plays a role. Furthermore, the thesis underscores the claim that Chinese languages are not all the same. Although the basic structure is the

same, the way the different positions in the structure are realized is different. For instance, although Mandarin has “phase complements” to fill Asp2⁰, it does not have an element like Xiāng *ka*⁴¹. Also, whereas this language has one element that can express both perfective and progressive/durative aspect, *ta*²¹, Mandarin uses two different elements for these purposes, *le* and *zhe* respectively.