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The Directional Prefixes in Qiang As Telic Marker

Chen Yunwen

Abstract

In Qiang, the addition of a directional prefixes causes the action to shift from an ongoing to a completed state, and thus it is considered a marker of perfectivity (Lapolla & Huang, 2003; Huang, 2021). Zhou & Huang (2006) refer to actions with the directional prefixes as “already-performed actions,” indicating that the actions have already taken place. However, upon further analysis, it was found that the directional prefixes can: (i) lead to a telic interpretation, and (ii) appear in contexts where perfective aspect would not normally occur. This paper evaluates the directional prefixes in Qiang based on Borer’s (2005) theory of boundedness defined through quantification and concludes that the directional prefixes also functions as a boundedness marker, as its presence imparts a telic interpretation to the predicate.

Keywords

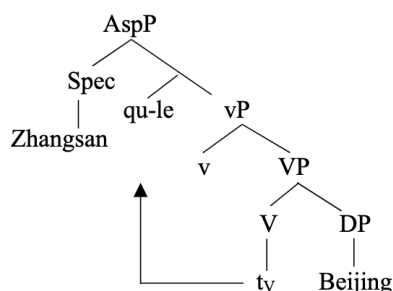
Inner Aspect, Telicity, Quantity, Direction Prefixes, Qiang language.

1.Introduction

This paper primarily investigates whether the directional prefixes in Qiang can be fully regarded as a marker of perfectivity. This issue can be compared with the study of the Chinese particle “LE” In Chinese, “LE” is widely considered a marker of perfectivity. Researchers such as Smith (1997), Soh & Gao (2006), and Huang et al. (2009) argue that sentences with “v-LE” typically describe events that occur from the perspective of perfectivity. They thus propose that “le” occupies the head of AspP. The verb must move from the domain of vP to merge with LE in the head position of AspP.

- (1) Zhangsan qu-LE Beijing.
 Zhangsang go-LE Beijing.
 ‘Zhangsan went to Beijing.’

(2)



However, Cheng & Li (1991), through their observation of sentences with manner verbs shown in(3)-(4), pointed out that “LE” cannot occupy the head position of AspP.

- (3) a. Z hangsan zai dasheng-de chang ge
 Zhangsan ASP loud-DE sing song
 *b. Zhangsan dasheng-de zai chang ge
 Zhangsan loud-DE ASP sing song
 ‘Zhangsan is singing loudly.’

- (4) a. Zhangsan qiaoqiao-de hui le jia.
 Zhangsan quietly-DE return LE home
 *b. Zhangsan hui le jia qiaoqiao-de
 Zhangsan return LE home quietly-DE
 ‘Zhangsan returned to home quietly.’

Example(3) shows that manner adverb “dasheng-de(loudly) cannot precede the imperfective marker ‘zai’, indicating taht it can only adjoin to vP not AspP. If ‘LE’ in (4b) were a perfective marker occupying in AspP, it should correctly precede the vP adverb ‘qiaoqiao-de (quietly)’. However, the ungrammatical (4b) explains suggests otherwise. This indicates that “LE’ cannot be regard as perfective marker.

Furthermore, Wang (2018) also argues that “LE” should not be analyzed as a perfective marker though the observation in (5) and (6).

- (5) wo yao sha le na ge ren.
 I will kill LE that CL person
 ‘I will kill that person.’
 (6) wo du le baozhi jiu shui.
 I read LE newspaper then sleep
 ‘I will sleep after reading newspapers.’

(5) and (6) demonstrate that “LE” can appear in sentences describing events that have not yet occurred at the time of speaking, whereas perfectivity describes events that have already taken place. Therefore, analyzing ‘LE’ as a perfective marker in these examples would conflict with the empirical data. Observations in(3)-(6) provide concrete evidence against treating ‘LE’ as perfective marker located in AspP, instead, they support the analysis that ‘LE’ is syntactically positioned inside the vP domain.

2. Previous review on direction prefixes in Qiang

The directional prefixes in Qiang originally indicated the direction of the action, but it later evolved to signal the completion of the event (Zhou & Huang, 2006). Regarding the nature of the directional prefixes in Qiang, researchers such as LaPolla & Huang (2001), Huang (2021), and Zhou & Huang (2006) argue that the directional prefixes can transform the verb from an ongoing action to a completed one, thus categorizing it as a perfective marker. Zhou & Huang (2006) further coined the term “already-performed aspect” to describe actions that have already been carried out.

- (7) a. qupu stuaɣa tʰə.
 3SG meal/rice eat
 ‘He is having a meal.’
- b. qupu stuaɣa sə-tʰə.
 3SG meal/rice DIR-eat
 ‘He had a meal.’
- (8) a. qupu nəjmæɣa ɕi tʰə.
 3SG last.night alcohol drink
 ‘He was drinking alcohol last night.’
- b. qupu nəjmæɣa ɕi sə-tʰə.
 3SG last.night alcohol DIR-drink
 ‘He drank alcohol last night’

However, similar to the phenomenon mentioned by Wang (2018) , the directional prefixes in Qiang can also appear in sentences describing events that have not yet occurred.

- (9) Wong dzuku tʰe: da-ta tɕʰi.
 Wong key DEM DIR-find must
 ‘Wong must find that key.’
- (10) qa stuaɣa sə-tʰə ɲi tiænjin tse ka: (<kə+a)
 1SG meal/rice DIR-eat CONJ movie watch go:FUT
 ‘I will go to watch movie after having meal.’(Huang&Zhou 2006)

Considering the above, the directional prefixes in Qiang, like the Chinese particle “LE” cannot be fully regarded as a perfective marker. However, previous studies have not provided specific explanations or analyses to clarify this point. So, how can we account for the phenomena described above?

3.Borer’s (2005) definition of Quantity and relationship with telicity and it’s exo-skeletal framework.

Borer (2005) proposed a definition of Quantity suggesting that quantity is related to telicity. She argued that the telic event involves the quantification over event divisions, while atelic event is homogeneous. The definitions are as follows:

- (11) a. P is homogeneous iff P is cumulative and divisive.
 i. P is divisive iff $\forall x, y [P(x) \wedge (y < x) \rightarrow P(y)]$
 ii. P is cumulative iff $\forall x, y [P(x) \wedge P(y) \rightarrow P(x \cup y)]$
 b. P is quantity iff P is not homogeneous.

A concise summary of the two conditions in (a) is that “the whole is composed of parts, and parts are composed into the whole.” Taking water as an example, each individual portion of water is equivalent to water itself, and the combination of any portion of water still results in water. In contrast, (b) explains quantification as “a part does not represent the whole, and the whole is distinct from its parts.” For instance, when three apples are divided, the resulting portions no longer represent the original quantity of three apples, and each divided apple does not equal the total quantity of three apples. In short, quantification occurs when the relationship between the part and the whole becomes unequal.

When there is a discrepancy between the parts of an event and the whole, such that the event’s part cannot derive the entire event, it indicates a telic interpretation. Conversely, if such a relationship does not exist, the event is interpreted as atelic. Consider the following examples:

- (12) a. John ate apples.
 b. John ate three apples.

In (a), the apples are not quantified; it represents an indefinite quantity and number. Regardless of how many apples George eats, it still falls under the category of “eating apples.” In this case, (a) is a homogeneous event, with an atelic interpretation. In contrast, (b) introduces a quantity, which precisely indicates that the apples have a clear goal and endpoint. Thus, (b) is a quantity event, with a telic interpretation. The same applies in Chinese:

- (13)a. Zhangsan chi-le pingguo.
 Zhangsan eat-LE apple.
 ‘Zhangsan ate apples.’
- b. Zhangsan chi-le san-ge pingguo
 Zhangsan eat-LE three-CL apple
 ‘Zhangsan ate three apples.’

(13a) should be regarded as a homogeneous event just like (12a). However, (13a) exhibits an ambiguity between definite and indefinite readings of the bare noun, as noted by Cheng & Sybesma (1999). This ambiguity is explained by Longobardi’s (1994) analysis, where the bare noun occupies a DP with an empty D head and gains a definite interpretation via N-to-D movement. Adapting this to Chinese, Sybesma (1999) proposes that bare nouns are generated in a CLP with an empty CL head, acquiring definiteness through N-to-CL movement. Thus, the bare noun’s ambiguous interpretation arises structurally.

Furthermore, Sybesma (1992, 1999) argues that telic predicates—marked by aspectual particles like *le*—require bounded objects. This semantic requirement forces a definite or specific interpretation on bare nouns in object position. For instance, [CL+N] phrases, typically indefinite (e.g., *Zhangsan chi ge-pingguo*), receive a definite reading in telic contexts (*Zhangsan chi-le ge-pingguo*), as shown in (14).

- (14) a. Zhangsan chi ge-pingguo.
 Zhangsan eat CL-pingguo
 ‘Zhangsan ate some apples’
- b.. Zhangsan chi-le ge-pingguo.
 Zhangsan eat-LE CL-pingguo
 Lit:Zhang ate one apple./*Zhangsan ate some apples.

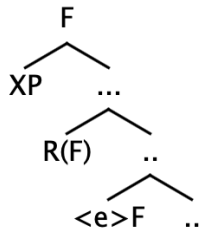
By analogy, in (13a) repeated in (15), although lacking explicit quantification, the telic predicate enforces a bounded event interpretation. This triggers N-to-CL movement, yielding a definite reading of *pingguo*, implying Zhangsan knows how many apples he ate.

- (15) Zhangsan chi-le pingguo.
 Zhangsan eat-LE apple
 ‘Zhangsan ate apples.’ (and he knows how many he ate)

Borer (2005a, b) proposed the exo-skeletal framework, which argues that syntactic structure generation does not depend on the features of lexical items. The relationship between lexicon and syntax is a matter of post-hoc assignment, rather than feature projection. In the exo-skeletal framework, functional heads (such as AspP and *v*) are responsible for determining the functional

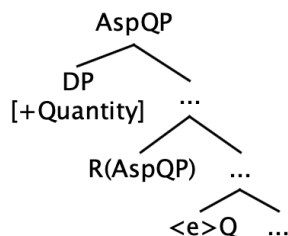
features of the syntactic structure. Each head consists of two parts: the obligatory part, which includes R(F) providing the category label and the open value to which R(F) assigns a value ; and the optional part, which is XP, responsible for the range to be assigned.

(16)

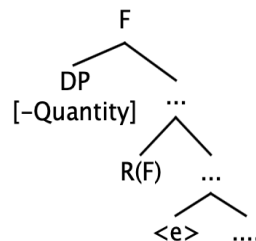


According to Borer’s suggestion that quantity related to telicity, in the exo-skeletal framework, the functional head that brings about the bounded interpretation is the Aspect of Quantity (AspQP). XP in the Spec position represents the measurement of quantity. Because the Specifier and the quantity head have a head-spec configuration, when XP contains quantity DP, the functional head also carries the range of quantity, leading the range assigner R(F) assigns the range to the open value <e>Q .In the following examples, the presence of a quantifying object causes “LE” to have a telic interpretation, thus “LE” functions as a telic marker.

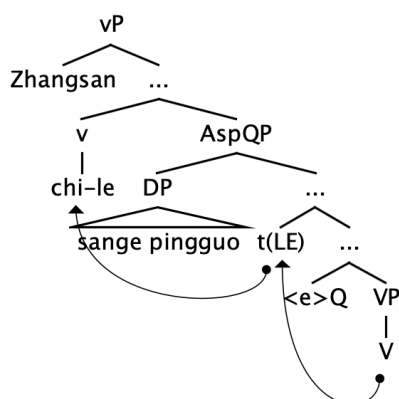
(17)



(18)



(19)



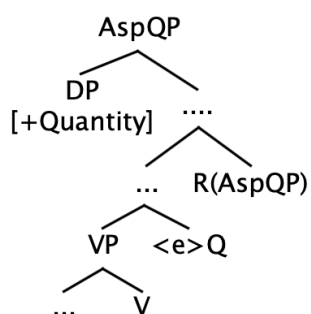
Thus, a question arises: Can the directional prefixes in Qiang be considered as markers of telicity?

3.data

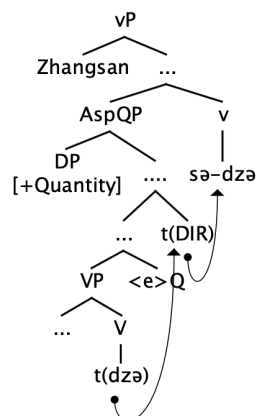
The relationship between the directional prefixes and the quantified object is equally integral. When a quantified object is present, the directional prefixes adopts quantificational features, thereby imparting a telic interpretation to the event.

- (20) a. Zhangsan p^hinku sə-dzə
 Zhangsan Apple DIR-eat
 ‘Zhangsan ate apples.’
- b. Zhangsan p^hinku xsize sə-dzə
 Zhangsan Apple three DIR-eat
 ‘Zhangsan ate three apples.’

(21)



(22)



However, this is insufficient to demonstrate that the directional prefixes represent telic; additional tests of telicity are required.

4. Telicity test

Firstly, in the conjunction test proposed by Kamp (1979) and Partee (1984), it is noted that when two verbal predicates are conjoined, if the predicates are atelic, the combined action is interpreted as a coherent event occurring simultaneously. However, if it is telic, the combined actions occur sequentially

(23) a. The vase broke and fell.

b. The vase fell and broke.

(24) a. The apple dropped and reddened,

b. The apple reddened and dropped.

(25) a. Kim ran and sang,

b. Kim sang and ran. (Borer 2005b: 51)

This test is validated in the following examples of Qiang. In the sentences below, where conjoined predicates with directional prefixes are present, the actions occur sequentially.

(26)

a.	qupu	lænzi-le	tsi	ŋi	mugu-le	jua
	3SG	basket-DEF:CL	hold	CONJ	lantern-DEF:CL	carry

“He is holding the basket and carrying the lantern(simultaneously).”

b.	qupu	lænzi-le	te-tsi	ŋi	mugu-le	tæe-jua
	3SG	basket-DEF:CL	DIR-hold	CONJ	lantern-DEF:CL	DIR-carry

“He hold the basket (first) and carried the lantern.”

Secondly, the temporal adverbial test proposed by Vendler (1967) has been widely used to test whether a structure is telic or atelic. In other words, the structures are considered telic when it can co-occur with “in x time”, while those that match with “for x time” are considered atelic.

(27) a. John ate three apples.

b. John ate three apples in ten minutes

c. *John ate three apples for ten minutes.

(28) a. John ate apples.

b.*John ate apples in ten minutes.

c. John ate apples for ten minutes.

In Qiang, the time interval is expressed by “teiku,” which is equivalent to “in/within the time.” Furthermore, when temporal adverbials denoting an internal time interval are present, only telic structures are allowed.

(29)

- | | | | | | |
|---|-----------------|-----------|--------------------|----------|----------------------------|
| a. Zhangsan | e-dzi- teiku | suku-pies | q ^h utu | xsi-tʂa | *(sə) /sə-t ^h ə |
| Zhangsan | one-hour-within | beef-meat | noodles | three-CL | *(DIR)/DIR-eat |
| ‘Zhangsan ate three beef noodles in an hour.’ | | | | | |
| b. Zhangsan | e-dzi- teiku | ləvʒ | æ-pən | | *(he)/ he-zæ |
| Zhangsan | one-hour-within | book | one-book | | *(DIR)/DIR-read |
| ‘Zhangsan read a book in an hour.’ | | | | | |

As shown in (29), structures without DIR become ungrammatical when temporal adverbials denoting internal time intervals are present. This proves that DIR functions as a telic marker, in a way similar to the Chinese LE discussed above.

Finally, the “almost” test proposed by Dowty (1979) can also be used to detect the telicity of a sentence. According to Dowty (1979), telic structures can have two interpretations, whereas atelic structures have only one.

(30) John almost reached the top.

(31) John almost walked.

(30) has two interpretations: one suggests that George, who is climbing the mountain, will soon reach the top, while the other implies that George intended to reach the top but gave up before he even started. In contrast, (31) has only one interpretation, which is that George intended to leave but did not.

In Qiang, ‘dojæjy’ is represented as ‘almost. And then, in the ‘almost’ sentence in Qiang, if the structure is telic, two interpretations arise: one is that he is about to finish reading the book, and the other is that he intended to read it but did not succeed. However, if the structure is atelic two outcomes occur: first, the sentence sounds unnatural, and second, if forced to interpret, it can only have interpretation that he almost reading books in the whole day.

- | | | | |
|----------------------------|--------|------|----------|
| (30) a. qupu | dojæjy | ləvʒ | he-zæ |
| 3SG | almost | book | DIR-read |
| ‘He almost read books.’ | | | |
| b. ??qupu | dojæjy | ləvʒ | zæ |
| 3SG | almost | book | read |
| ‘He almost reading books.’ | | | |

5. Conclusion

In conclusion, the directional prefixes in Qiang, as a marker of telicity, is closely related to the presence of a quantified object. According to the exo-skeletal framework proposed by Borer (2005), when a quantified object appears, the functional head carries the range of quantity, leading the range assigner R(F) assigns the range to the open value $\langle e \rangle Q$.

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