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從兒童的口語言談中探討中文「了」的主語性用法

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中文摘要

研究學者指出中文“了”有完成式或完成貌的用法，Chang (2003)以成人口語言談為主的研究報告發現“了”的主語性用法。本研究的主旨是探討中文主語性“了”在兒童自然言談中的功能，並進一步比較中文“了”在兒童自然言談中與在成人口語言談中(Chang 2003)的使用情況之相同性與差異性。本研究指出兒童使用中文主語性“了”與兒童社會活動或兒童在對話互動方式皆有關聯，使用中文“了”預測目前說話者暫時結束，而由另一個說話者繼續對話的進行或使用中文“了”能預測進一步的意念表達。

中文“了”在兒童自然言談中與在成人口語言談中(Chang 2003)的使用情況之相同性是 S-le 使用次數比 C-le 頻繁的多，但是，明顯的差異乃是 C-le 在兒童自然言談中只出現過一次，理由為 C-le 是中文主語性“了”的新用法。還有兒童與成人對話方式並不相同，兒童大多在言談中都是談論事實並非意見。因此，中文主語性“了”在兒童自然言談中就較少出現。本研究結果有助於了解語言結構即是反應說話者在言談中的需要(Du Bois 2003, Hopper and Thompson 1980, 2001)。藉由探討中文主語性“了”在兒童自然言談中的功能，本研究已強調出說話者觀點在文法結構所扮演的重要角色，並也提供針對主語性“了”語言習得的認識。

Keywords: Chinese particle LE; Subjectivity; Interactional Linguistics; child conversational discourse; Speaker viewpoint

Title: How the Subjective function of LE is used in Child Conversational Discourse?

ABSTRACT

This study investigates the Mandarin particle LE based on children naturally occurring conversation. Previous studies have identified the use of LE in Mandarin as a marker of perfect (S-le), perfective (V-le), and comment-LE (C-le). C-le has recently proposed in Chang's study (2003). This work is primarily devoted to the functions of S-le and C-le in child speech and further to compare their differences with adult speech as in Chang's study. The use of Chinese LE expression in child conversational discourse is relevant to ongoing activities. Actions have decisive consequences in shaping the trajectory of talk's development in real time. Also, the use of LE utterance in child conversational discourse is highly correlated with speakers' social action. The use of Chinese LE in child conversational discourse also signals a projected completion point (e.g., turn projection and turn extension).

One distinctive similarity between the use of LE utterance in adult and child conversation is that S-le utterance appears a lot more frequently than C-le utterance. However, there is a striking difference of C-le occurrence in child and adult conversation; children barely use C-le utterance in their speech. This is because C-le is a new usage of LE utterances and seldom appears in adult speech, it is also expected to be less frequent or not to be nearly seen in child speech. Younger children's talks are more likely to be factually related to the prior turn rather than to respond to the feelings or attributes expressed by the prior turn like adults do. Accordingly, it is plausible to expect to have less C-le than S-le occurrences in child conversation.

Results of this work contribute to the position that linguistic structure is a reflection of discourse needs (Du Bois 2003, Hopper and Thompson 1980, 2001). In analyzing the use of the Mandarin LE in child interactional conversation, this study emphasizes the importance of understanding the significant effects of the role of speaker point of view on grammar. In addition, this study helps gain a significant insight into the acquisition of the Mandarin LE.

I. Introduction

The purpose of this research project is to provide an understanding of relationship of grammar and interaction by looking at a particular linguistic element (i.e. subjective LE in Mandarin Chinese) in child conversational discourse. This work is based upon the belief that grammar can be viewed as ‘sets of practices adapted to social interaction’ (Ford, et al. 2003:119). Thus, in the study of grammar, looking at language use from an interactional point of view becomes crucial. This study will investigate child rather than adult interactional point of view in conversational discourse by examining the subjective use of LE in Mandarin Chinese. This is because previous research supporting an interaction-based approach to linguistic structures has mainly focused on adult conversational data. Data taking from children’s naturally occurring conversation can highlight the significant importance of this study:

1. Looking at children’s discourse, which has been neglected in literature, can contribute to the position that linguistic structure emerges from everyday language use (i.e. through social interaction).
2. Looking at children’s conversation can better understand the significant effects of the role of child point of view on the use of the Mandarin LE in discourse.
3. The findings of how children’s use of the subjective LE in conversation can contribute to the understanding of children’s acquisition of this morpheme.

II. Theoretical Background

A. Social interaction and subjectivity

In the study of interaction and grammar, previous researchers have focused on what the relationship is among discourse analysis, functional linguistics, and sociology (Duranti and Goodwin 1992, Hopper 1995, 1997, Hopper and Thompson 1980, Ono and Thompson 1995, Scheibman 2001, 2002, Thompson and Hopper 2001 and many others). Ono and Thompson (1995) stress the importance of examining conversational interactions in understanding syntax. They argue that the syntax of conversation is derived from ‘constructional schemas’ which consist of abstract, template-like entities. These schemas are greatly influenced by cognitive constraints and interactional factors. That is to say, structural patterns are associated with interactional actions in which the participants are involved. Structural patterns

are also based on the participants' cognitive abilities regarding the division of clauses into smaller, intonationally coherent chunks (i.e. intonation units).

In their work on transitivity, Thompson and Hopper (1980, 2001) also stress the importance of looking at conversation and the role of participant interaction in the emergence of grammar. In early work, they indicated that the notion of transitivity is a central characteristic of language use and the prominence of transitivity is emergent from discourse; that is, high transitivity is associated with foregrounding and low transitivity with backgrounding (Hopper and Thompson 1980: 251). After further investigation, Thompson and Hopper (2001: 1) claim that 'conversation yields important insights into the discourse correlates of the grammar of transitivity.' This is consistent with Scheibman's (2000) claim that 'conversation is the frequent type of linguistic activity that people engage in, and as such, is considered to be the site from which conventionalized structure emerges.' Data from Thompson and Hopper (2001) show that everyday face-to-face conversation demonstrate that transitive clauses are rare in interaction and that 'clearly what speakers know about the clauses of their language has everything to do with the kinds of language they have participated in and been exposed to during their lifetimes' (Thompson and Hopper 2001: 25). From Thompson and Hopper's point of view, language is basically used to display our identities, to convey who we are to others, to express our attitudes and feelings, and to exchange our views of the world with others. This underscores their conclusion that speakers' interaction in conversation also plays a vital role in shaping grammar. Without exception, this study examines the relation between interaction in discourse and the expression of speaker point of view.

B. Chang's (2003) study of the Subjective Use of the Mandarin LE in Adult Discourse

Based on data taken from adult natural discourse, Chang's (2003) research has demonstrated the close association with the use of LE and subjective meaning in everyday conversation, which is in contrast with previous studies of LE, where the subjective use of LE has been neglected. This probably because the data used by previous studies are primarily made-up or isolated sentences.

LE constructions are summarized as in (1) and their instances presented in are listed in (2).

- (1) S-le
 (a) [verbs + LE]

 (b) [conjunction *jiù* ‘then + lexical items + LE]

C-le
 (a) [adjective + LE]

- (2) S-le
 (a) *wo wang le.*
 1S forget LE
 ‘I forget.’

 (b) *tā guo yizhenzi jiu hao le a.*
 3S pass short:period then good LE RF
 ‘He will be fine after a while.’

C-le
 (c) *sidixia zai zhao ta hao le.*
 in:private again find 3S good LE
 ‘(It’s) all right that (I’ll find him in person.’

S-le utterances are structured as fixed sequences of both first person singular, verbs of cognition, and LE (e.g., *wo wang le* ‘I forget’), and conjunction *jiu* ‘then’, lexical item plus LE. C-le utterances, which serve as a topic-comment function, are structured as a sequence of adjective plus LE.

Instances exhibited in (2) are formulaic use of LE constructions found in Chang’s (2003) study. These subjective structures that are instantiated in LE utterances are consistent with the argument of other research that grammatical and/or lexical categories, such as first person singular with verbs of cognition (Thompson and Mulac 1991), predicate adjective with non-entity unexpressed subjects (Scheibman 2001, 2002), and conjunctions that appear around the verb (Tao 2001), are used to express speaker’s stance or viewpoint in discourse.

Chang’s (2003) study, taking a usage-based approach to languages, also demonstrates that subjective structures displayed in conversation are highly associated with the social interaction that discourse participants are engaged in. The

findings show that LE in conversational discourse, including both formulaic and non-formulaic expressions, is a stance marker that indexes epistemic or evaluative meaning. The stance use of LE can be characterized as a TCU, appearing in adjacency pairs, or in a turn-final position. And finally, the stance use of LE is associated with social activities of assessment, agreement or suggestion that discourse co-participants are engaged in.

III. Methodology

Conversation is the most typical form of language use and its nature is a combination of spontaneous language use, social interaction, and contextualization. If the study of linguistic structure is highly associated with language use (Bybee 1998, 2001, Hopper 1987) and/or social organization (Ford, et al. 2003), then examining conversation as language data becomes crucial. Conversational data reflects what people actually do when they talk and therefore provides clues about the regularity of local patterns in usage.

Data used in this study consists of two and half hours informal child face-to-face conversations in Mandarin Chinese. Each conversation had two participants averagely aged 10 years old in third grade who are all native speakers of Mandarin enrolled in elementary school. They were asked to carry on half-hour natural conversation on any topics they wished. The conversations were audio-recorded and transcribed using a system based on that developed by Du Bois et al (1993).

IV. Results and Discussion

Table 1 shows the overall distribution of LE utterances in child's conversation. Of the total 105 utterances of the Mandarin morpheme LE is approximately 2.5 hours. S-le appears to be the most frequently occurring LE in conversation. That is, there are 94 tokens of S-le; 76 token of S-le appearing in the construction of verbs plus LE, and 28 token of S-le in the fixed expression of conjunction *jiù* 'then' followed by lexical items plus LE. C-le appears only 1 token in the database. Instances of LE utterances are presented in (3), respectively.

Table 1: Distribution of LE utterances in child's conversation

	<u>Total</u> N(%)
S-le: verbs + LE	76 (72.38%)
S-le: conjunction <i>jiù</i> 'then' + lexical items + LE	28 (26.67%)
C-le: adjective + LE	1 (0.95%)
Total	105 (100.00%)
*	

- (3) (a) *ni dou zhiya le.*
you all decay LE
'You have mouthful tooth decay.'
- (b) *zhiyao xiao yi xia jiu zidao le.*
only think one time then know LE
'(I would) know about it if (I) think it over.'
- (c) *ni you zhuang shenyin le. hao le.*
you again make:up voice LE good LE
'You make up a voice again. Stop it.'

There are several interesting findings in the use of Chinese LE in child conversational discourse. Children use of LE utterance is relevant to interactional sequences. That is to say, the use of Chinese LE expression in child conversational discourse is relevant to ongoing activities. Actions have decisive consequences in shaping the trajectory of talk's development in real time. Also, the use of LE utterance in child conversational discourse is highly correlated with speakers' social action. For instance, occurrence of LE utterance as shown in 3c above signals speakers' point of views in discourse. The speaker's evaluation is uttered by the use of fixed expression *hao le* 'good LE' on the preceding clause *ni you zhuang shenyin le* 'You make up a voice again'. The use of Chinese LE in child conversational discourse also signals a projected completion point; it is used as a turn projection as shown in 3a or 3b, and turn extension as in 3c. These findings are in line with the previous study on LE utterance in adult's conversation (Chang 2003) that subjective use of LE must be taken into account in the grammar of the Mandarin LE.

When it comes to the comparison of distribution of LE utterances in child

conversation, as already tabulated in Table 1, and adult conversation shown in Table 2 below, there is a particularly interesting finding in the database. As noted earlier, percentages of three types of LE utterance in the child database are 72%, 27%, and 1%, respectively, as shown in Table 1. These roughly decrease percentages are also found in adult's conversation, 70%, 20%, and 10%, as indicated in Table 2. However, there is a striking difference of C-le occurrence in child and adult conversation; there are 10 % of occurrence in adult's speech and only 1% of C-le utterance appearing in child conversation. That is to say, of the total of 105 LE utterances, only one C-le occurs in child speech. Children seem to barely use C-le utterance in their speech.

Table 2: Distribution of LE utterances in adult's conversation

	<u>Total</u> N(%)
S-le: verbs + LE	313 (70.34%)
S-le: conjunction <i>jiù</i> 'then' + lexical items + LE	89 (20.00%)
C-le: adjective + LE	43 (9.66%)
Total	445 (100.00%)
* Of the total 445 LE utterances is approximately 7 hours.	

One question can be raised: are there any plausible explanations for this difference? Or what causes this difference? One possibility to answer this question has to do with grammaticization of LE usage. As found in Chang (2003), C-le is viewed as more grammaticized or subjective than S-le. The evidence supporting this premise are: (1) clauses in C-le utterances display a higher degree of dependency than that in S-le utterances; (2) the fixed expression *hǎo le* 'good LE' appears more often with a preceding proposition that signals the intention of discourse participants in C-le than in S-le; and (3) C-le has the preceding proposition in its scope, which is not necessarily the case in S-le. Since C-le is a new usage of LE utterance and seldom appears in adult speech, it is reasonable to be less frequent or not to be nearly seen in child speech.

Another possible answer to this question is related to the way of children interacting in conversation that differs from adults. Like adults, children are considered social or intentional agents (Tomasello 2003) in conversation. They are not expected to behave the same way in conversation as adults do. Bruce Doval and Carol Eckerman (1984) studied peer conversations and found that twelfth-graders and adults were more likely to respond to the feelings or attributes expressed by the prior turn but younger children's turns like second-graders or fifth-graders were more frequently to be factually related to the prior turn. This argument is also

supported in this study. Since the use of C-le, more subjective than C-le, expresses the speaker's point of view in discourse, it is expected to be much less frequent in third-graders' conversation from the database of the present study.

This study suggests future research direction for the study of relationship between linguistic structure and turn organization. It requires a more precise specification of how linguistic structure organizes constructional turn in interactional conversation and equally important, of how projection of turn is related to linguistic structures. This work supports the position that linguistic structure is a reflection of discourse needs, and linguistic structure emerges from everyday language use (i.e., through social interaction). This work betters our understanding the significant effects of the role of child point of view on the use of the Mandarin LE in discourse, and it also help us understand how children acquire this particular marker.

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