

Chinese and Japanese Progressive Aspectual Markers in Comparison with English

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Abstract—The present study is devoted to interpreting Chinese and Japanese progressive markers, their meanings and usage in comparison with English, while reasoning ungrammaticality from the perspective of Aktionsart.

Keywords—Chinese progressive markers; Japanese progressive markers; aktionsart; telic; multilingual comparison

I. INTRODUCTION

Talking about universal grammar, the term aspect, according to Quirk, et al. (1985:90), refers to the manner in which the verb action is regarded or experienced. The choice of aspect is a comment on or a particular view of the action. Lyons (1977:707) mainly introduced the term aspectual feature which consists of speakers' conception of the constituency of an actual situation referred to by the corresponding semantic properties of verbs. Smith (1983) first discerned grammatical aspects, morphologically

understood as the use of auxiliary structure be+ verb + -ing in English from lexical aspects.

When we refer to the lexical aspect (or AKTIONSART), we need to mention firstly Vendler (1967:97) who made the classical classifications as it is showed in "Table I".

TABLE I. VENDLER'S CLASSIFICATION OF LEXICAL ASPECT (1967)

Classifications	Examples
Statives	desire, want, love, hate, know, believe.
Activities	run, walk, swim,
Accomplishments	run a mile, draw a circle,
Achievements	recognize, find, stop, start

Vendler's classification was focused on whether it has a natural ending. Later scholars dealing with the categorization of aspectual situations often refer to the so-called Vendler's categorization. Later in Smith's (1997:28) articles, a new type named *semelfactive* was added to distinguish it from achievement as showed in "Table II".

TABLE II. A SMITH'S CLASSIFICATION OF LEXICAL ASPECT (1997)

Situations	Telic (+) Atelic (-)	Dynamic(+) Static (-)	Durative(+) Punctual (-)	Example
Stative	-	-	+	She hated ice cream.
Activity	-	+	+	Your cat watched those birds
Accomplishment	+	+	+	Her boss learned Chinese.
Achievement	+	+	-	The cease-fire began at noon yesterday.
Semelfactive	+	+	-	The gate banged.

According to Smith, telic refers to those processes which are deemed as having a natural completion, e.g.: *Harry was building a raft*. Static verbs, like *be*, *know* and *love*, allow the speaker to view a situation as a steady state with no internal phases or changes. Durative is applied to verbs which describe a situation or a process which lasts for a period of time, while punctual describes an event that seems so instantaneous that involves virtually no time, e.g.: *John coughed*.

The *progressive aspect*, conventionally defined as a grammatical means of describing 'a happening in progress at a given time' (Quirk et al., 1985), is conceived of as a subset of the imperfective aspect. In regards to cognitive linguistics, Langacker (1990:91) puts forward that the progressive is an imperfectivizing construction, that is to say, for example in English, be + Verb + -ing is an imperfectivizer. On this point of view, he equates the perfective/imperfective

contrast with the active/stative contrast (Langacker, 1990: 86). Therefore the structure be + Verb + -ing can be understood as a stativizer as we have mentioned in the first part of this research paper. Here we can observe that according to Langacker, the meaning of the essence of the progressive is to represent an active or dynamic action as a state; that is to say, the predicate in the progressive is a state, not an event. Others researchers such as Vlach (1981) held the same idea that progressive should be seen as a stativizer, which serves to transform a non-stative sentence into a stative one.

Langacker and Vlach's point of view about progressive construction be a stativizer seems contradictory to the dynamic nature of the progressive, in fact, they just describe the progressive construction from different angles. Langacker's reflection is derived from the grammatical aspect perspective (viewpoint aspect), while others from the

lexical aspect (situation aspect) perspective. In this case, on the basis of Langacker, the input lexical should have the property of an activity. If other lexical aspects were put into the progressive construction, as we have mentioned above, extra pragmatic meanings would be added.

II. CHINESE AND JAPANESE VERBS

In China, J. Tai (1984) was the first Chinese researcher who introduced Vendler's classification of lexical aspect into Chinese studies. Stative verbs in Chinese can be interpreted as two subcategories. Some of them can be used as linking verbs to express syntactic relations such as *shi* 'be', *you* 'have', *zai* 'be in'; others are used to indicate mental states such as *xihuan* 'love', *dong* 'know', *renwei* 'think'. Activity verbs contain those who have natural final endpoints like *dengdai* 'wait' and *fendou* 'fight' or don't have such endpoints like *paobu* 'run' and *dushu* 'read'. Chinese accomplishments verbs can be manifested themselves in two patterns: verb+ object like *du pian xiaoshuo* 'read a novel' and verb +complement of result like *zhanggao* 'grow up'. Achievements and semelfactives verbs are quite similar to the Smith's division of English verbs.

Also based on the Smith's model of pair features, Japanese researcher Kindaichi (1976) divided Japanese verbs into five categories. The author intended to interpret two types of activity: the continuative and the instantaneous. The former kind is featured by durative, dynamic which coincides with the 'classical' activity and accomplishment aspects in Vendler and Smith's category while the instantaneous aspect in Japanese can be considered as achievement according to the classical one. This categorization without doubts leads problems in the presentations of progressive markers as in "Table III".

TABLE III. CLASSIFICATION OF LEXICAL ASPECT

Stative	aru (ある) 'have', dekiru (できる) 'can do', mieru (見える) 'be visible'
Continuative	Yomu (読む) 'read', kaku (書く) 'write', narau (習う) 'learn'
Instantaneous	Sinu (死ぬ) 'die', kieru (消える) 'turn off', kimaru (決まる) 'decide'
Type 4	Sobieru (聳える) 'emerge', sugureru (優れる) 'be outstanding'

III. COMPARISONS AND ANALYSIS

To show Japanese and Chinese examples, we use Liu & Zhao's (2015:155) four-line framework. The first line shows the original Japanese characters in *Kanji/Kana* formation and Chinese characters in *Hanzi* formation. The second line gives the pronunciation of each word or phrase. In the third line, the literal translation into English of each word or group has been added. And the last underlined phrase shows a grammatical English sentence which is faithful to the literal meaning of the translation.

A. Stative Verbs

Stative verbs are the most problematic category when we compare the examples of different languages. First of all,

it is not common that stative verbs combine with the progressive aspect. In English, a large set of English stative verbs do not normally accept progressive markers, including psychological and cognitive verbs such as *love*, *believe*, *know*, *etc.* The incompatibility seems to be that since progressive aspect presents a situation as ongoing, it requires that situation have successive phases which is inherently dynamic, whereas the stative verbs indicate only homogenous situations. This is why the sentence such as "*He is loving her deeply.*" is completely unacceptable.

In regards to the statives in Chinese progressive construction, Smith (1997) pointed out that the Chinese aspectual marker *-zhe* can be added to stage-level stative sentences to denote transitory properties, while their English counterparts, if progressivized, sound unnatural, as in "Table IV and "Table V".

TABLE IV. CHINESE STATIVE VERB: AI 'LOVE'

他	深	爱	着	她
Ta	Shen	Ai	Zhe	ta
He	Deep	Love	Progressive aspectual Marker	her
He loves her deeply. *He is loving her deeply.				

TABLE V. CHINESE STATIVE VERB: CUNZAI 'EXIST'

这家	公司	存在	着	问题
Zhejia	Gongsi	Cunzai	Zhe	Wenti
This	Company	exist	Progressive aspectual marker	Problem
There exist problems in this company. *There are existing problems in this company. This company has problems. *This company is having problems.				

There is a very limited number of stative verbs in Japanese, according to Kindaichi (1976:10), incompatible with the progressive markers *-teiru*, such as the existential verb *aru* 'exist' in the example of "Table VI". Apart from these limited verbs, the majority of stative verbs can be added the progressive marker as it is showed in the example of "Table VII" though they cannot be translated parallelly in English.

TABLE VI. JAPANESE STATIVE VERB: AU 'LOVE'

かれは	彼女を	深く	あいし	ている
Kare-wa	Kanojyo-wo	Fukaku	aishi	Teiru
He -theme marker	She -object marker	Deeply	Love	Progressive aspectual marker
He loves her deeply. *He is loving her deeply.				

TABLE VII. JAPANESE STATIVE VERB: ARU 'EXIST'

*この	会社に	問題が	あつ	ている
*Kono	Kaisya-ni	Mondai-ga	A-(t)	Teiru
This	Company - locative marker	Problem - subject marker	Exist	Progressive aspectual marker
There exist problems in this company. *There are existing problems in this company. This company has problems. *This company is having problems.				

Though the marker *-zhe* in Chinese co-occurs with the stage-level stative, that is not to say, any statives can combine with the progressive marker. For those with the individual-level, as the linking verbs: *shi* 'be', *shuyu* 'belong to', etc, and others to express the emotional activity, as *pa* 'fear', *yuanyi* 'would like', *mingbai* 'understand' cannot combine with the progressive marker either as it is illustrated in the examples of "Table VIII" and "Table IX".

TABLE VIII. CHINESE STATIVE VERB: SHI 'BE'

*他	是	着	老师
*Ta	Shi	Zhe	Laoshi
He	Be	Progressive aspectual marker	Teacher
He has been a teacher.			

TABLE IX. CHINESE STATIVE VERB: MINGBAI 'UNDERSTAND'

*他	明白	着	这个	事情
*Ta	Mingbai	Zhe	Zhege	Shiqing
He	understand	Progressive aspectual marker	This	Thing
He understands this (thing).				
*He is understanding this (thing).				

TABLE X. JAPANESE STATIVE VERB: DA 'BE'

かれわ	先生	だっ	ている
Kare-wa	Sensei	Da -(t)	Teiru
He -theme marker	Teacher	be	Progressive aspectual marker
He has been a teacher (for a certain period) .			

Different from the existential verb *aru* 'exist', the copulative verb *da* 'be' is commonly employed with the progressive markers. Compared to the unnatural case in Chinese, in the Japanese example in "Table X", the sentence not only manifests a grammatical acceptance but also a pragmatic meaning that indicates a large duration of being a teacher, including some habitual aspectual meanings.

In the last Japanese example in "Table XI", the pragmatic meaning is obvious. When someone repeats something that you have known well and have been experienced at, the sentence is used for insisting that you have already understood and to stop him repeating that.

TABLE XI. JAPANESE STATIVE VERB: WAKARU 'UNDERSTAND'

私は	そんな	ことを	分っ	ている
Watashi-wa	Sonna	Koto-wo	Waka-(t)	Teiru
He -theme marker	such	Thing - object marker	Understand	Progressive aspectual marker
He understands such things.				
*He is understanding such things.				

Activity Verbs

As for the Chinese and Japanese activity verbs, the temporal properties of the activities are congruent with the 'action in progressive' essence of the progressive construction as in the examples in "Table XII" and "Table XIII".

TABLE XII. CHINESE ACTIVITY VERB: ZOU 'WALK'

他	走	着
Ta	Zou	Zhe
He	walk	Progressive aspectual marker
He is walking.		

TABLE XIII. JAPANESE ACTIVITY VERB: ARUKU 'WALK'

かれが	歩い	ている
Kare-ga	Arui(t)	Teiru
He -subject marker	Walk	Progressive aspectual marker
He is walking.		

The two examples above express the meaning of the on-going of the state of walking where the progressive construction as a *stativizer* has successfully converted the activities into the states. Here we can observe that the progressives, whether in Chinese or in Japanese, can prototypically coincide with activities. There exist similarities in the use of progressive markers in these two languages and in English when they are added to the activity verbs due to the prototypical feature of such verbs, that is to say, they can be stativized easily by the progressive markers.

Accomplishments Verbs

Compared with the activity verbs, we can see that the accomplishment can also exist compatibly with progressive construction in Chinese. As we know, this accomplishment phrase *xie yipian wenzhang* 'write an article' is derived directly from the activity verb *xie* 'write' with an object added. The meaning of accomplishments occurs in the progressive construction is to denote a state which holds during the time that a particular activity goes on. Therefore the example of "Table XIV" is to indicate that the preparatory activity (write) is going on at some point, whether or not the preparatory activity led to its logical goal (a finished article) has been neglected.

TABLE XIV. CHINESE ACCOMPLISHMENTS VERB: XIE-WENZHANG 'WRITE AN ARTICLE'

他	正在	写	文章
Ta	Zhengzai	Xie	Wenzhang
He	Progressive aspectual marker	Write	Article
He is writing an article.			

However, in spite of the grammatical correction of the Japanese example in "Table XV", it leads us two directions to do the interpretation. Normally, as a prototypical progressive marker, *-teiru* is used for indicating the continuity of the activity as the most common meaning 'he is writing an article'. But when the verb *kaku* 'write' has been added an object *bunshyou* 'article' to form an accomplishments verb, the progressive marker *-teiru* can be considered as a pursuit of the aim of making an accomplishment aspect a real finished or accomplished event. In this sense, we obtain the second interpretation. That is 'the article has been written and finished'.

TABLE XV. JAPANESE ACCOMPLISHMENT VERB: BUNSYOU-WO KAKU 'WRITE AN ARTICLE'

かれが	文章を	書いて	いる
Kare-wa	Bunsyou-wo	Kai	Teiru
He	Article	Write	Progressive aspectual marker
Two interpretations: He is writing an article. Or he has written an article.			

Achievements Verbs

As we know that achievements are different from activities and accomplishments in that they don't involve a process phase that leads to a completion point in the case of an accomplishment, but denote a sudden transition from one stage to another with no duration. Therefore the inherently punctual and instantaneous nature of achievements constitutes not compatible with the durative, incomplete nature of progressive construction.

Normally in English the achievements predication "*win the game*" seems incompatible with the progressive construction, because it lacks the requisite durability. However, according to Rothstein (2004:37), this English sentence is also highly interpretable, which yield a 'slow-motion' or 'film-strip' reading, and the normally instantaneous event is perceived as being 'stretched' over time.

TABLE XVI. CHINESE ACHIEVEMENTS VERB: YING 'WIN'

*他	正	赢	着	比赛
*Ta	Zheng	Ying	Zhe	Bisai
He	Progressive aspectual Marker	Win	Progressive aspectual marker	The game
He is winning the game.				

When we come to the Chinese example in "Table XVI", we tried to form a progressive sentence with the achievements verb *ying* 'win'. But the outcome of the sentence is conceptually anomalous. It may be due to the fact that the progressive marker *zai-* and *-zhe*, which denotes an interval without an endpoint, is incompatible with achievements, and the incompatibility cannot be interpreted as the same 'film-strip' as in English.

In Japanese, due to the strong nature of achievements verb, which focus on the endpoint and takes less importance about the whole process, the continuous aspectual effect of the marker *-teiru* has lost gradually while the resultative interpretation tends to be more prototypical in this special context. For this reason, compared to the Chinese sentence, it is grammatically acceptable in Japanese the combination of progressive markers and the achievements verbs. But the original 'progressive' meaning gets lost.

TABLE XVII. JAPANESE ACHIEVEMENTS VERB: KATSU 'WIN'

かれが	この	ゲームを	勝つ	ている
Kare-ga	Kono	Geimu-wo	Ka-(t)	Teiru
He -subject marker	This	Game -object marker	Win	Progressive aspectual marker
He won the game				

The study of Kindaichi (1954) reported that Japanese punctual verbs get a "resultative state" interpretation when

used in the *Verb+ -teiru* form. For example *shinu* 'die' is a typical punctual verb as it is showed in the example of "Table XVII". But in the Chinese example in "Table XVIII", we also failed to give an interpretation to fill the gap of the incompatibility between the progressive marker *-zhe* and the verb *si* 'die'.

TABLE XVIII. CHINESE ACHIEVEMENTS VERB: SI 'DIE'

*他	死	着
*Ta	Si	Zhe
He	Die	Progressive aspectual marker
He is dying. He is dead.		

TABLE XIX. JAPANESE ACHIEVEMENTS VERB: SHINU 'DIE'

かれが	死ん	でいる。
kare-wa	Shin	Deiru (voiced form of teiru).
He	Die	Progressive aspectual marker
He is dying. He is dead.		

Okuda (1979) criticized the foregoing studies and maintained that there is a general lexical meaning for those verbs which receive a resultative interpretation. The author denominated those verbs "subject-change" verbs, as it has been found that the subjects of those verbs undergo a certain change as a result of the action of those verbs, and when they are employed with *Verb-teiru* form, they receive a resultative state interpretation. In the example "Table XVII" and "Table XVIII", verbs like *katsu* 'win' and *shinu* 'die' all suggest physical changes.

IV. CONCLUSION

Peoples' cognitive differences and different viewpoint towards time give rise to the differences in different languages. Both Chinese and Japanese emphasize the uses of progressive aspectual markers as one of the highlighted linguistic feature in oriental languages, though the differences are also obvious. By means of analyzing progressive marker *zai-* and *-zhe* in Chinese and *-deiru* in Japanese from a cognitive perspective, we find that they share the same or similar cognitive abilities to the world as a result of the same or similar body structures and perspective organs, although this is also leading to the differences.

The mainly differences between the use of progressive markers in these two languages that we have observed are as followings:

- For stative verbs, Chinese progressive marker *-zhe* can be added to stage-level stative sentences but cannot be used with individual-level verbs while Japanese has few limitations to add the marker *-teiru*. Furthermore, it could produce pragmatic meanings with the combination of some Japanese stative verbs and aspectual markers.
- For activity verbs, there are more shared features that appear either in the use or in their interpretation.
- For accomplishments verbs, Japanese progressive markers *-teiru* can have two different interpretations

in particular contexts. They can be understood as 'original progressive' and also resultative.

- For achievements verbs, the incompatibility of Chinese progressive markers cannot be interpreted as the same 'film-strip' as in English while in Japanese, the resultative interpretation seems to be more prototypical.

Limited corpus in the present study may lead to over-generalized results. Since linguistic aspect is a universal phenomenon in various languages that has aroused great interest world widely, a more detailed comparative study on the basis of a relatively large corpus seems to be plausible.

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