

Frontiers in Chinese Linguistics

Volume 5

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Barbara Meisterernst
Editor

New Perspectives on Aspect and Modality in Chinese Historical Linguistics



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Preface

The selection of articles in this volume is partly based on results of the *International Workshop on Aspect and Modality in Chinese*, Berlin, August 1, 2016, supported by the German Research Council (Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft, DFG). The objective of the volume is to present new perspectives on the study of aspect and modality in Chinese Historical Linguistics; it includes most recent research results in these fields from scholars from China and the West. Although numerous studies on the development of the source structures of the aspectual system of Modern Chinese and some studies on the grammaticalization paths of modal verbs in Chinese exist, no comprehensive studies covering both aspects of the universally related systems of aspect and modality have been conducted so far. Studies particularly of the Germanic languages, which have an articulate system of poly-functional modal markers, show that the semantic interpretation of modal auxiliaries to a great extent depends on the aspectual features of the matrix verb (e.g., by Abraham and Leiss, cited in Meisterernst this volume). Despite the typological differences between the Chinese and the Germanic languages, the modal system of Modern Chinese also displays a high degree of poly-functionality, and the constraints proposed for the Germanic languages seem to account for Chinese, too, despite its lack of any inflectional morphology comparable to the morphology of the Germanic languages. Syntactic analyses of the modal system of Modern Mandarin and its poly-functionality additionally show that the different semantics that modal predicates can display are related to different syntactic positions (e.g., Tsai 2015, cited in Xiong and Meisterernst, this volume). In recent years, studies on the diachronic development of the semantics of modal auxiliary verbs have become more numerous, but these studies usually do not account for the close relation between aspectual features of the matrix verb and the semantic poly-functionality of modal auxiliaries. They also do not generally provide syntactic analyses accounting for the differences in the semantics of modal auxiliaries and modal adverbs. This book intends to cover this gap in approaching the issues of aspect and modality from different perspectives and theoretical frameworks.

The volume is divided into two parts. The first part is devoted to the aspectual structure of predicative verb phrases and on the relevance of prepositional phrases for their temporal and aspectual interpretations. Additionally, it includes studies on the diachronic development of the aspectual and modal functions of those adverbs in Late Archaic and Middle Chinese, which are most relevant in displaying the close relation between temporal, aspectual, and modal readings. The second part concentrates on the diachronic development of modal verbs and other expressions of modality, starting with an article on the history of studies on modality in China. Additionally, the possible relation between modal verbs and the morphological marking of their complements in Archaic Chinese, the grammaticalization of the main deontic modal verbs in Early Middle Chinese from a syntactic and a semantic perspective, and the modal functions of rhetorical questions in the Buddhist Chinese literature are discussed. The objective of this volume is to make the results of this research available not only to specialists in Classical and Buddhist Chinese, but also to researchers and students of general linguistics and of the universals of language.

Part I: The Composition of Tense, Aspect, and Modality in Chinese

In the first section of Part I, aspectual features of the predicate of Chinese are discussed in two articles by Alain Peyraube and Song Na, and by Wang Cheng. The first article by Peyraube and Song ‘On a temporal preposition in the Baoding dialect—Synchronic and diachronic perspectives’ presents a detailed study of the marker 投 $t^h o^{22}$ in the Baoding dialect, which expresses the temporal relation of two sequential events. The authors analyze this marker as a preposition, which precedes its nominal objects corresponding to the postposition 之前/以前 *zhīqián/yǐqián* ‘before’ in Standard Mandarin. The paper concentrates on the analyses of both the aspectual features of $t^h o^{22}$ and on the semantic features of the elements following 投 $t^h o^{22}$ and the conditions constraining the 投 $t^h o^{22}$ phrase. The authors propose the verb ‘to throw’ as the diachronic source of 投 $t^h o^{22}$, and they discuss its evolutionary development from Ancient Chinese to Modern Chinese (Baoding) ‘before’ [preposition] through Medieval Chinese.

The second article by Wang Cheng ‘Preliminary Investigation of the Temporal Features of Classical Chinese Verbs’ continues Wang’s research on the temporal and aspectual features of Classical Chinese verbs. Wang claims that although Classical Chinese does not possess the grammatical category of aspect, it does not follow that ancient Chinese people had no awareness of aspectual distinctions. He follows previous research in proposing the category of lexical aspect for Chinese, and in his contribution, he argues that verbs in Classical Chinese contain semantic components related to aspectual meaning. Wang’s study is based on motion verbs, because they contain a more distinct event structure than other verbs. Wang

discusses verbs of ascend–descend, transfer, and passing. He divides the event structures of motion verbs into two types: (1) The first type expresses the complete motion event with its initial point, its duration, and its final point. (2) The second type expresses an incomplete motion event, recording only a certain part or segment of the whole process. Based on the analysis of event structure, the relations between event structure and situation types are discussed within a cognitive framework.

The second section of Part I contains three articles discussing among others the three adverbs 將 *jiāng*, 且 *qiě*, and 其 *qí* of Archaic (tenth–third c. BCE) and Early Middle Chinese (second c. BCE–sixth c. CE); these adverbs have all been connected to temporal and modal readings in the scholarly literature.

Hu Chirui in his article on ‘Future, Alternatives and Volition: The origin of markers of future tense and alternative questions in Archaic Chinese’ discusses the future markers 將 *jiāng*, 且 *qiě*, and 其 *qí* in Archaic Chinese within the framework of semantic grammaticalization. Hu suggests that the future uses of these adverbs may have been derived from verbs of volition based on previously proposed universal paths of grammaticalization in typological studies. He supports his proposal by an analysis of the use of *jiāng*, *qiě*, and *qí* in alternative questions, which reveals that the origin of this function is also related to volitionality. In addition, the markers of alternative questions in Archaic Chinese 寧 *níng*, 意 *yì*, and 抑 *yì* are being examined in Hu’s article. In this context, Hu discusses the different categorizations of the adverbs at issue in the literature and convincingly reduces their number in showing that the adverb 抑 *yì* actually merely functions as a loan for 意 *yì*, and not as an independent adverb, as had previously been claimed. This leads Hu to emphasizing the relevance of systematic linguistic studies based on the comprehensive study of all sources, including the philological sources provided by early dictionaries and commentaries in order to obtain reliable results for proposed paths of grammaticalization.

Gu Feng in his article concentrates on a detailed study of the adverb 其 *qí*. In earlier work, three different functions of the graph 其 *qí* in Archaic Chinese were proposed: (i) a pronominal use, (ii) a conjunctive use, and (iii) a temporal-modal use. These earlier approaches are comprehensively discussed in Gu’s article. In contrast to earlier work, he employs a number of tests in order to provide syntactic evidence for a distinction of the different functions of *qí* proposed in the earlier scholarly literature. Due to the syntactic tests he employed, Gu is able to provide a clear distinction between pronominal and adverbial *qí*. With regard to the adverbial functions, he argues for a separate syntactic layer hosting future *qí*, beside the adverb *qí* marking epistemic or deontic modality. Arguments come from the relative order of *qí* with respect to the modal adverbs 亦 *yì* and 殆 *dài*. He shows that future *qí* always appears following *yì* and *dài*, whereas the epistemic *qí* always precedes them. Additionally, Gu demonstrates that a sentence involving the future *qí* usually expresses stronger commitment to the truth of a proposition, while epistemic *qí* indicates the speaker’s uncertainty; this is additionally supported by the selection of sentence final particles.

The last article in this part by Mu Yezi focusses on the diachronic development of the future marker and modal adverb 且 *qiě* as a polite imperative marker. Yezi

Mu shows how a new function of QIE as a marker of polite imperative started to appear in Middle Chinese, with its use gradually increasing in frequency until the late Old Mandarin era. Her paper proposes a possible path for the development of this function of QIE in Middle Chinese and suggests that it might have evolved from its use for transient situations with hortative modality in early Chinese Buddhist texts. The contact with Indic languages via translation also seems to have facilitated the development of QIE from temporal adverb to marker of polite imperative.

Part II: The Modal System in Chinese and Its Interplay with Aspect

The first article in this part by Carlotta Sparvoli introduces the topic of modality in Chinese by presenting an overview on the general linguistic investigations of this issue in China before 1949. The article focusses on the work of some of the most important and influential linguistics of the twentieth century in China, Li Jinxi (1924), Lü Shuxiang (1942), Wang Li (1943, 1944), and Gao Mingkai (1948). Sparvoli sheds light on the notable anticipations of contemporary theories on modality by the Chinese linguists mentioned. She shows that the works of these linguists were not confined to a language-specific discourse but had the depth and vastness of the best general linguistics traditions. The article first introduces the relevant seminal tenets on modality; subsequently, it presents five sections respectively focussing on a different critical issue as analyzed in the literature. These issues are as follows: the attitudinal theme and the relation between sentential and verbal mood; the illocutionary and propositional levels of modality; the notion of modals as a semantic category; the distinction between modalities of moral duty and mere necessity; and modal interdefinability and negation scope. With its comprehensive overview on theoretical issues of modality, the article serves as a perfect background for the ensuing discussion in this section.

This article is followed by an article by Barbara Meisterernst on one of the basic possibility modals of Archaic Chinese 可 可. 可 is probably the most relevant representative of the category of ‘first modals’, i.e., pre-modal verbs of possibility, which cross-linguistically are frequently the first or the only modals in a language. Based on a comparison with the development of Germanic modals, the article focusses particularly on the aspectual features of the complement of 可, thus emphasizing the close relation between the aspectual and the modal systems in Archaic Chinese. The investigation attempts to apply some of the hypotheses proposed with regard to a reconstructed verbal morphology in Archaic Chinese (Old Chinese) to the analysis of modal predication. The complement of modal 可 is characterized by particular syntactic constraints, which involve a change of the argument and aspectual structure of the verb. Argument and aspectual structures belong to the features that are supposedly reflected in the derivational morphology

of the verb in Archaic Chinese. The objective of the study is to shed some light on the relation between modality and aspect and its possible reflection in the morphology of the complement of 𠄎 during a time when the derivational morphology of Chinese was possibly still transparent for the speaker, even though it may not have been productive anymore.

In the following article, Jiajuan Xiong and Barbara Meisterernst discuss the syntax and the semantics of the deontic modals 應 *yīng* and 當 *dāng* in Early Buddhist Chinese. The first part of the paper is devoted to a syntactic analysis of the two modals, while the second part concentrates on a discussion of their occurrence in an early and highly prescriptive Buddhist text. All modal verbs in Chinese are clear instantiations of grammaticalization, to a certain extent comparable to the Germanic modals. They all derive from lexical verbs and grammaticalize into markers of deontic and/or epistemic modality, and/or into future markers. The modals 當 *dāng* and 應 *yīng* ‘should’ at issue in this discussion first emerge as modal verbs at the end of the Late Archaic (fifth–third c. BCE) and the beginning of the Middle Chinese periods. They are the first modal verbs, which express deontic modality without any syntactic triggers such as negation or the polarity of rhetorical questions. The paper traces their development from lexical verbs to deontic and epistemic modals. In the first part, the syntactic changes in the position of 𠄎 and 應 are revealed in order to argue for their diachronic development from modal verbs into auxiliaries, i.e., into functional categories. The distribution of the two modals in the *Dharmagupta-Vinaya*, discussed in the second part of the article, reveals the subtle differences in the syntax and the semantics of the two modals. Additionally, the analysis of this text provides some evidence and some arguments for the development of 𠄎 into an epistemic modal and a marker of future tense.

The part is concluded by Christoph Anderl’s article on the use and the distribution of interrogative pronouns in Medieval Chinese texts: The topic of this article is the analysis of the modal functions of different interrogative pronouns and phrases in Medieval Chinese, mainly Buddhist texts. Anderl’s investigation provides an overview of the use of interrogative pronouns in rhetorical questions in the very early layers of *báihuà* literature. He discusses the general and dramatic increase of synonymous pronouns throughout the medieval period and proposes that it is based on developments in the varieties of the spoken language and on translation processes from Indic languages. These resulted in the emergence of a large array of interrogatives and a specialization of their corresponding functional realms. Rather than abolishing older items, the numerous pronouns were often integrated into a ‘mixed system,’ and sometimes markers with originally identical functions assumed specialized usages. In addition, they were used for stylistic variation and were playfully employed for rhetorical purposes. Anderl highlights some specific features of the use of interrogatives of the early vernacular genre of the encounter dialogue/transmission text genre, characteristics, which show significant differences to texts written in Literary Chinese, Buddhist Hybrid Chinese, and also contemporary vernacular literature such as the transformation texts. He exemplifies this by a semantic and pragmatic analysis of the use of *hé* and

its compounds, as compared to the recent innovation *shímó* in the contemporary colloquial language.

Rhetorical questions with their reverse polarity features are frequently employed in order to express deontic modality. They were one of the triggers, which induced the employment of possibility modals as deontic markers in Late Archaic Chinese, and they are of particular relevance pragmatically in educational and advisory texts, a genre to which many Buddhist texts belong. Thus, their discussion as a means to express modal values should not be neglected in research on modality cross-linguistically.

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Barbara Meisterernst

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