



# On Mandarin Chinese Aspect and Teaching

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## Abstract

Mandarin Chinese aspect has two features: first, Chinese aspect markers are optional; second, they have semantic aspectual property constraints and generally cannot be used alone. The said features have given rise to difficulties in teaching Chinese. For example, although many textbooks have defined *-zhe* as activity-durative rather than activity-progressive, students still found it difficult to understand the differentiation between durative and progressive. In this paper we introduce the preceding studies of Chinese verbal aspect, focused on *-le* & *-zhe*, and discuss how to apply the studies to Chinese classroom teaching. Due to the complex features of Chinese aspect, we should not only teach students the semantic meaning of aspect markers, but also teach them how to use the aspect markers combined with adverbs, resultatives, numeral-classifier compounds and modality particles.

**Key terms:** Mandarin Chinese, Aspect, Suffix, *-le*, *-zhe*

## 1. Introduction

Aspect is different from Tense. Comrie (1976) generalized that “aspects are different ways of viewing the internal temporal constituency of a situation” (p.3), while “tense relates the time of the situation referred to... to the moment of speaking” (p.2). The most common tenses that we know are past (prior to the moment of speaking), present (simultaneous with the moment of speaking) and future (subsequent to the moment of speaking). In Chinese, tense is represented by using time nouns, such as “昨天” [yesterday], “今天” [today], “明天” [tomorrow], “一小时前” [an hour ago], or adverbs, such as “刚” [just], “已经” [already]. Chinese aspect is different from both Japanese and English aspect because it has no grammatical tense.

Chinese has the following system of verbal aspect (Li & Thompson 1981, p.185):

- i. Perfectivity: *-le* and perfectivizing expressions
- ii. Imperfectivity(durative): *zai*, *-zhe*
- iii. Experiential aspect: *-guo*
- iv. Delimitative: reduplication of verb

In this paper, we focus on the first two verbal aspects, introduce the preceding studies of *le* & *-zhe*, and discuss how to apply the studies to Chinese classroom teaching.

## 2. The Features of Chinese Aspect

Chinese aspect has the following two features, which also give rise to certain difficulties in teaching Chinese:

- i. Chinese aspect markers are optional.

In Chinese, bare-verbs can represent various English and Japanese aspects. This is illustrated by the following examples (Sanui, 2000, p.54):

- (1) 你 (平时) 喝 什么 酒?  
 you usually drink what wine?

What do you drink?

いつもは何を飲んでるの?

- (2) 你 (要) 喝 什么 酒?  
 you want drink what wine

What will you have?

何を飲む？

- (3) 你 (在) 喝 什么 酒？  
you *zai* drink what wine?

What are you drinking?

何を飲んでいるの？

- (4) 你 喝(了) 什么 酒？  
you drink-*le* what wine?

What did you drink?

何を飲んだの？

ii. Chinese aspect markers generally cannot be used alone, and they are constrained by semantic aspectual properties.

The verb in the predicate with perfective marker *-le* must be telic, for example, (5), while (6) sounds unfinished because the verb is “吃”[eat], which is an atelic verb. In this case, the perfective marker *-le* cannot be used alone. But if the verb is followed by a resultative *wan* (7), or numeral-classifier compounds (8), then the sentence is acceptable.

- (5) 小 李 关了 窗。  
Xiao Li close-*le* window  
Xiao Li closed the window.
- (6) <sup>?</sup>小李 吃了 饭。  
Xiao Li eat-*le* meal
- (7) 小李 吃 完 了 饭。  
Xiao Li eat finish (resultative *wan*) -*le* meal  
Xiao Li finished his meal.
- (8) 小李 吃了 一碗 饭。  
Xiao Li eat-*le* one-CL meal  
Xiao Li ate a bowl of rice.

The semantic aspectual property constraints are also applicable to *-zhe*, which is an imperfective aspect suffix. *-zhe* cannot be used in the main predicate of (9). It must be used in the subordinate clause (10), or the sentence with modality particle “呢” (11).

- (9) ?我们 说着 话。  
we say-*zhe* word
- (10) 我们 说着 话, 他 来 了。  
we say-*zhe* word he come *le*  
He came while we were talking.
- (11) 我们 说着 话 呢。  
we say-*zhe* word Mod.  
We were talking.

### 3. Preceding studies

#### 3.1 *le*

In Chinese, *le* can be placed after the verb or at the end of the sentence. Chao (1968) and Zhu (1982) advocated treating *le* placed in two different syntactic positions as two types of *le*, while Shi (2000) argued that there is just one *le*.

We agree with the former's point of view. No matter what the historical relationship between two *le* is, the grammatical functions and meanings that they represent are apparently different. For example, *-le*, placed after the verb, may occur with the verb (12a), but it cannot occur with the noun or the negative word“没”[not] (12b), while the sentence-final *le* may occur with both the noun and the negative word (13).

- (12) a. 我 没 去 学校。  
 I not go school  
 I did not go to school.
- b. <sup>ii</sup>\*我 没 去了 学校。  
 I not go-*le* school
- (13) 我 没 去 学校 了。  
 I not go school *le*  
 I do not go to school (now).

In addition, by arguing that *le* has only one meaning or function, it is not possible to explain why two *le* are needed in sentences like the following example (14). The utterance sounds semantically unacceptable if the verbal suffix *-le* is missed, and the meaning of the sentence will be different with or without the sentence-final *le*, which explains they are two different types of *le*.

- (14) 我 吃了 一 碗 饭 了。  
 I eat-*le* one bowl meal *le*  
 I have eaten one bowl of rice.

As for *le* in (15), Chao (1968) argued this *le* should be regarded as the combination of two *le*, namely the verbal suffix *-le* and the sentence-final *le* (p.247). We agree with his view on this point.

- (15) 我 吃 了。  
 I eat *le*  
 I have eaten.

### 3.1.1 Verbal suffix *-le*

Regarding the definition of *-le*, “realization aspect” and “perfective aspect” are the most influential. The advocates of the “realization aspect” definition argued the concept of “complete” should be represented by the resultative, *wan*. The meaning delivered by *wan* is different from *-le*; that is,  $V-le \neq V wan$ . This is illustrated by the following sentences cited from Liu (1988, p.6-7):

- (16) a. 吃了 才 觉着 有点儿 香味  
 eat-*le* just feel a little bit fragrance  
 ate and then found it tasted good
- b. 吃 完 才 觉着 有点儿 香味  
 eat finish (resultative *wan*) just feel a little bit fragrance  
 finished eating and then found it tasted good
- (17) a. 好 容易 当了 兵  
 very easy become-*le* soldier  
 very difficult to join the army
- b. 好 容易 当 完 兵  
 very easy become finish (resultative *wan*) soldier  
 finish serving in the army with great difficulty
- (18) a. 有 什么 问题 去了 再 说

have what problem go-*le* again say

Put the matter aside after you have been there.

b. 有 什么 问题 去 完 再 说

have what problem go finish (resultative *wan*) again say

Put the matter aside until you come back.

(19) a. 忙了 我 就 来 找 你

busy-*le* I soon come visit you

I will call on you for your help if I am busy.

b. 忙 完 我 就 来 找 你

busy finish (resultative *wan*) I soon come visit you

I will call on you after I finish.

Advocates of the “realization aspect” definition produced two pieces of evidence to prove their point of view:

i. *-le* represents an actual state, for example, face blushed, head lowered, agreed, burnt and red in (20)~(24).

(20) 红了 脸 说

red-*le* face say

blushed and said

(21) 低了 头 走

low-*le* head walk

lowered the head and walked

(22) 同意了 我的 看法

agree-*le* my viewpoint

has agreed with my viewpoint

(23) 糊了 好 大 一块

burn-*le* very large a block

a large area has been burnt

(24) 哭 红了 眼睛

cry red-*le* eyes

eyes were red from crying

ii. The negative form of (25) is (26), which means the state “prepared” does not exist. Therefore, *-le* expresses the opposite of “没(有)”[not have] and it is a marker indicating an actual state.

(25) 做了 准备

do-*le* preparation

prepared

(26) 没 (有) 做 准备

not have do preparation

did not prepare

Kimura (1997) held the opposite viewpoint against “realization aspect” definition. From the first evidence that “realization aspect” definition raised, he argued that the so-called “actual state” was not its primary meaning, but an extended meaning. “Actual state” cannot explain the difference between (27a) and (28a). However, he suggested if an adverb, for example, *suddenly*, is respectively added to these two sentences, the difference can be easily reflected. (28b) sounds odd if the adverb *suddenly* and *-zhe* are used together. In addition, Kimura also disproved the second piece of evidence. He argued (26) was not only the negative form of (25),

but also the negative form of (29) and (30). So the conclusion can be inevitably drawn that (29) and (30) also represent “state of fact” and the differentiation among *-le*, *-zhe* and *-guo* becomes vague, which cannot be explained clearly in terms of “realization aspect” definition.

- (27) a. 红了 脸  
 red-*le* face  
 turned red  
 b. 突然 红了 脸  
 suddenly red-*le* face  
 suddenly turned red
- (28) a. 红着 脸  
 red-*zhe* face  
 has turned red  
 b. ?突然 红着 脸  
 suddenly red-*zhe* face
- (29) 做着 准备  
 do-*zhe* preparation  
 has been preparing
- (30) 做过 准备  
 do-*guo* preparation  
 has prepared

### 3.1.2 Sentence-final *le*

The sentence-final *le* is also a modality particle. Li & Thompson (1981) argued *le* represents “Currently Relevant State” and has a communicative function:

The basic communicative function of *le* is to signal a ‘Currently Relevant State’ (abbreviated as CRS). What this means is that *le* claims that a state of affairs has special current relevance with respect to some particular situation (p. 240).

Meanwhile, Li & Thompson (1981) also pointed out CRS represented by *le* can be divided into five categories with the examples as follows (p.244-289):

#### A. Is a changed state

- (31) a. (in response to being asked whether one knows about a meeting)  
 我 知道  
 I know  
 Yes, I know.  
 b. (The speaker, who went to the wrong room once before, has been reminded which room the meeting will be held in.)  
 我 知道 了  
 I know -*le*  
 Now I know (i.e., I have learned.)

#### B. Corrects a wrong assumption

- (32) (protesting to someone who doesn’t believe that the speaker has had enough to drink)  
 我 喝了 三 杯 了  
 I drink-*le* three glass *le*

(Look—I tell you) I’ve drunk three glasses!

C. Reports “progress so far”

(33) (Talking about the “project” of my living arrangements)

我 在 那里 住了 两个 月 了  
I at there live-*le* two-CL month *le*  
I’ve lived there for two months (now) .

D. Determines what will happen next

(34) 我 洗好了 衣服 了  
I wash-finish-*le* clothes *le*

I’ve finished washing the clothes (so now: we can go to the movies/you can do your yoga in the laundry room/I’m free to play

E. Is the speaker’s total contribution to the conversation at that point

(35) a. 我 在 那里 住了 两个 月 了。  
I at there live-*le* two-CL month *le*  
I’ve lived there for two months.

b. 我 在 那里 住了 两个 月, 可是 还 不 太 习惯。  
I at there live-*le* two-CL month but still not too used to  
I have lived there for two months, but I’m still not very used to it.

Liu (2001) also pointed out the communicative function of sentence-final *le* is conveying a new piece of information and the change of state. For example, *le* in (36), not only conveys the fact that today is Friday, but also reveals the speaker feels time goes too fast. In (37), B just tells A the fact that today is Friday.

(36) 今天 都 星期五 了, 时间 过 得 真 快。  
today all Friday *le* time pass DE really fast  
Today is Friday! How time flies!

(37) A: 今天 是 星期 几?  
today be week how many  
What day is today?

B: 今天 (是) 星期五。  
today be Friday  
Today is Friday.

### 3.2 -zhe

Wang (1948) and Lü (1980) argued -zhe represents activity-progressive. Lü (1980) pointed out -zhe has the following four meanings and usages:

i. activity-progressive

(38) 雪 正 下着 呢。  
snow PROG fall-*zhe* MOD  
It is snowing.

(39) 他们 正 看着 节目 呢。  
they PROG watch-*zhe* program MOD  
They are watching the programs.

ii. state-durative

(40) 门 正 开着 呢。

door PROG open-*zhe* MOD

The door is opening.

(41) 他 穿着 一身 新 衣服。

he wear-*zhe* one-CL new coat

He is wearing a new coat.

iii. the existential sentences

(42) 门 口 围着 一群 人。

door mouth surround-*zhe* one-CL people

There is a throng of people around the door.

(43) 手 上 拿着 一本 汉语 词典。

hand on take-*zhe* one-CL Chinese dictionary

There is a Chinese dictionary in his/her hand.

iv. the sentence pattern “V1 + *-zhe* + V2”

(44) 坐着 讲

sit-*zhe* say

talk while sitting

(45) 笑着 闹着 跳 进 游泳池

laugh-*zhe* shout-*zhe* jump into pool

jump into the pool laughing and shouting

Chen (1980) argued *-zhe* is different with activity-progressive represented by “-*ing*” of English. He pointed out (46a), (47a), (48a) and (49a) sound unfinished, as *-zhe* cannot be used in the main predicate, due to its subordinating function.

(46) a.?他们 开着 会。

they open-*zhe* meeting

b.他们 开着 会, 外头 下 起 雪 来 了。

they open-*zhe* meeting outside fall rise snow come *le*

It began to snow when they were having the meeting.

(47) a.?外头 下着 雪。

outside fall-*zhe* snow

b.外头 下着 雪, 可 一点 也 不 冷。

outside fall-*zhe* snow but a little also not cold

It is snowing, but not cold at all.

(48) a.?一场 热闹的 讨论 进行着。

a classifier busy discussion go on-*zhe*

b.一场 热闹的 讨论 进行着, 到 深夜 还 没 结束。

a classifier busy discussion go on-*zhe* until deep into the night yet not finish

A busy discussion goes on and hasn't finished until deep into the night.

(49) a.?他 唱着 《我爱北京天安门》。

he sing-*zhe* I love Beijing Tian'an men

b. 他 唱着 《我爱北京天安门》 走 上 台 去。

He sing-*zhe* I love Beijing Tian'an men Square walk up stage go

He walked on the stage while singing “I love Beijing Tian’an men Square”

Qian (2000) pointed out adverb *zai* has the function of expressing “新闻性”[new information], which is not possessed by *-zhe*. This function makes *zai* become an activity-progressive marker. Although *-zhe* can occur with “正”[adverb], “在”[adverb], “正在”[adverb] and “呢”[modality particle], representing activity-progressive, *-zhe* by itself does not express this progressive meaning. *-Zhe* only functions to explicate and describe the durative state of the event. For example, we can say (50)~(53) as follows, but (54) sounds unfinished. Neither “跳舞”[dance] itself has “新闻性”[new information], nor *-zhe* expresses “新闻性”[new information]. Only when it occurs with the words representing activity-progressive, such as “正”[adverb] or “呢” [modality particle], can it make the sentence express “新闻性”[new information] (p.2).

(50) 他们 正 跳着 舞。  
they PROG jump-*zhe* dance  
They are dancing.

(51) 他们 跳着 舞 呢。  
they jump-*zhe* dance MOD  
They are dancing.

(52) 他们 跳 舞 呢。  
they jump dance MOD  
They are dancing.

(53) 他们 快乐地 跳着 舞。  
they joyfully jump-*zhe* dance  
They are dancing joyfully.

(54) ?他们 跳着 舞。  
they jump-*zhe* dance

Toudou and Aihara (1985) argued that *-zhe* represents the speaker’s modality of recognition and decision. The meaning and function of *-zhe* and *zai* are different. *Zai* expresses the speaker’s recognition and decision regarding different kinds of activity; for example, playing baseball, playing football, or reading the newspaper, etc. The question “What is he doing?” is actually asking what kind of activity. So V-*zhe* is unacceptable as the answer. V-*zhe* is the representation of aspect describing appearance of the activity. The difference is illustrated by the following example.

(55) A:小明 做 什么 呢?  
Xiao Ming do what MOD  
What is Xiao Ming doing?

B:a.小明 在 打 篮球。  
Xiao Ming PROG play basketball  
Xiao Ming is playing basketball.

b.小明 打 篮球 呢。  
Xiao Ming play basketball MOD  
Xiao Ming is playing basketball.

c.?小明 打 着 篮球。  
Xiao Ming play -*zhe* basketball

In Chinese, the element, corresponding to *-ing* in English and *-teiru* in Japanese, is not *-zhe*, but *zai*. Currently, many textbooks have defined *-zhe* as activity-durative, rather than activity-progressive. But students still found it difficult to understand the differences between durative and progressive. As *-zhe* must occur with *zai* and *ne*, many textbooks often introduce *zai* and *ne* when

teaching *-zhe*. However, the usage and function of *zai* and *ne* are not explained at all, which more easily leads to students' misunderstanding of *-zhe* as having the same meaning as *-ing*.

#### 4. How to teach *le* and *-zhe*

##### 4.1 Verbal suffix *-le*

As we mentioned above, Chinese has no grammatical tense. Verbal suffix *-le* does not represent past tense. It is a perfective aspect marker. Many Japanese students misunderstand *-le* also representing past because *-sita* in Japanese represents both perfective aspect and past tense. In teaching, we should emphasize the fact that the verbal suffix *-le* is different from *-sita* of Japanese.

i. The verbal suffix *-le* is used optionally to represent things that happened in the past, but particularly, *-le* cannot be used in the negative sentence (56b) and (57b), or the sentence with repetitive activity (58b) and (59b).

(56) a. 我 昨天 没 有 吃 午饭。  
I yesterday not have eat lunch

I did not have lunch yesterday.

b. \*我 昨天 没 有 吃了 午饭。  
I yesterday not have eat-*le* lunch

(57) a. 我 明天 不 吃 饭 就 去 学校。  
I tomorrow not eat meal soon go school

I go to school without eating meal tomorrow.

b. \*我 明天 不 吃了 饭 就 去 学校。  
I tomorrow not eat-*le* meal soon go school

I go to school without eating meal tomorrow.

(58) a. 以前 我 常 去 那个 商店 买 东西。  
before I often go that shop buy things

I often went to that shop to buy things before.

b. \*以前 我 常 去 那个 商店 买了 东西。  
before I often go that shop buy-*le* things

I often went to that shop to buy things before.

(59) a. 上 学期 他 天天 迟到。  
last semester he day-day late

Last semester, he was late everyday.

b. \*上 学期 他 天天 迟到了。  
last semester he day-day late-*le*

Last semester, he was late everyday.

ii. The verbal suffix *-le* is frequently used if the object bears the numeral-classifier compounds or time classifier, and meanwhile expresses the event in the past. Chao (1979) declared "this perfective suffix is obligatory after a verb for past action if it has a quantified object, as (60)" (p.248)

(60) 我 昨儿 碰见了 一个 老 朋友, 他 请 我 吃了 一 顿 饭。  
I yesterday meet-*le* one old friend, he invite I eat-*le* one-CL meal

Yesterday I met an old friend and he invited me to a dinner.

(61) 我 昨天 看了 一个 小时 电视。  
I yesterday watch-*le* one-CL hour TV

I watched TV for one hour yesterday.

iii. In the sentence pattern V + numeral-classifier compounds + O, if there is not a complement after the verb, *-le* must be used, such as (62a). Although the complement is different with *-le* in meaning, the complement sometimes can substitute *-le* to make the sentence acceptable, such as in (63). The complement more frequently tends to describe the change of the object, while *-le* primarily

describes the completion of an activity and it does not matter about the change of the object (Kimura, 1982).

- (62) a. 我 昨天 看了 一本 书  
 I yesterday read-*le* one-CL book  
 I read a book yesterday.
- b. \*我 昨天 看 一本 书  
 I yesterday read one-CL book
- (63) 我 昨天 看 完 一本 书  
 I yesterday read finish (resultative *wan*) one-CL book  
 I finished a book yesterday.

iv: The verbal suffix *-le* is often used in the sentence expressing a couple of things happened in succession.

- (64) 我 吃了 饭 去 学校。  
 I eat-*le* meal go school  
 I ate my meal and then went to school.
- (65) 他 看了 书 散步。  
 He read-*le* book walk  
 He read the book and then went for a walk.

#### 4.2 Sentence-final *le*

The sentence-final *le* indicates the concept of “past”, “change” and “the new information”. See the following example cited from the textbook currently used in APU (*Jia You! Zhong Guo Yu*, p.132)

- (66) 我 父母 来 北京 看 我 了。  
 I parents come Beijing see I *le*  
 My parents have come to Beijing to see me.

This *le* is obligatory. Without this *le*, the utterance sounds unfinished, and can only be completed by adding one more sentence. For example:

- (67) 我 父母 来 北京 看 我, 我 得 陪 他们。  
 I parents come Beijing see I I have to accompany they  
 My parents came to Beijing to see me and I have to accompany them.

This sentence-final *le* also cannot be changed to the verbal suffix *-le*:

- (68) 我 父母 来 北京 看 我 了。 ≠ 我 父母 来 北京 看了 我。  
 I parents come Beijing see I *le* ≠ I parents come Beijing see-*le* I  
 My parents have come to Beijing to see me. ≠ My parents came to Beijing to see me.

It might be difficult to explain the meaning of this sentence-final *le* only by looking at one sentence. However, the context might help our understanding.

- (69) 阳子: 这 两 天 你 怎么 没 来 上课?  
 Youko this two day you how not come go to class  
 Youko: Why haven't you come to class these past two days?
- 理惠: 我 父母 来 北京 看 我 了。  
 Li Hui I parents come Beijing see I *le*  
 Li Hui: My parents have come to Beijing to see me.

We may say that the function of sentence-final *le* is to tell the listener some new information. Li Hui tells Youko the new information that her parents have come to Beijing to see her. For another example (70), it is difficult to explain the differentiation

between sentence-final *le* and the verbal suffix *-le* only by looking at one sentence alone. However, if we apply this sentence to a conversation, the differentiation of two *le* can be easily explained.

- (70) A: 吃 饭 去 吧。  
 eat meal go MOD  
 Let's go for lunch.
- B: a. 不好意思, 我 吃 午饭 了。  
 sorry I eat lunch *le*  
 I am sorry, I have eaten my lunch.
- b. ? 我 吃了 饭。  
 I eat-*le* meal
- c. ? 我 吃了 两 碗 饭。  
 I eat-*le* two bowls meal

In this conversational situation, Li Hui does not know Li Hong has already had her lunch. Li Long thinks it is necessary to tell Li Hui this new information that she has already eaten. So the sentence-final particle *le* is used here. Although Li Hong also wants to tell Li Hui the activity of eating has been completed, she wants to convey more the intention that “you don't know it and now I want to tell you.” Therefore, this *le* is obligatory. Of course, if Li Hong, at the same time, additionally wants to express a completed activity, she can say (71) or (72). In a word, only verbal suffix *-le* cannot be used alone here.

- (71) 我 吃了 饭 了。  
 I eat-*le* meal *le*  
 I have eaten.
- (72) 我 吃 完 饭 了。  
 I eat finish (resultative *wan*) meal *le*  
 I have finished the meal.

*-le* indicates completion, which is not necessarily indicated by *le*. In teaching this, we should tell students although sentence-final *le*, in some cases, can be translated as signifying completion of activity the same as *-le*, it nevertheless does not indicate the completion of activity. On the contrary, the said action has not been completed yet. For example (73):

- (73) 你 听, 下 雨 了!  
 you listen fall rain *le*  
 Listen! It is raining.
- (74) 下 了 雨。  
 fall -*le* rain  
 It rained.

In this sentence, aspect suffix *-le* cannot be used because (74) expresses the completion of activity (raining). The Rain has stopped already, which is contradictory to “你听” [Listen!] in (73). So what the speaker wants to express must not be the completion of activity (raining). Here *le* in (73) performs the function that the speaker conveys and reminds the other party that the affair of raining is a new piece of information. In addition, under certain language environments, “下雨了” in (73) can also express the idea that the speaker himself/herself found the fact of raining. For example:

- (75) (After two hours meeting, the speaker came out of the office building and found it was raining.)  
 哟, 下 雨 了! 我 没 带 雨 伞。  
 Oh fall rain *le* I not take umbrella  
 It's raining! I didn't take my umbrella.

### 4.3 *-zhe*

*-Zhe* indicating activity-durative is different with *zai* indicating activity progressive. *Zai* functions to narrate activity-progressive, but not to describe things. *-Zhe* and *zai* are different in terms of their meaning and function. For example, (76b) sounds odd if *-zhe* is used here to represent activity-progressive.

- (76) a. 你 在 干 什么?  
 you *zai* do what  
 What are you doing?  
 b. ?你 干着 什么?  
 you do-*zhe* what

Although *-zhe* can indicate activity-durative, this usage nevertheless is rather constrained by semantic aspectual properties. In addition, Liu (2001) declared the following:

This kind of *-zhe* ((77)~(78)) usually appears in the background of the literary works before its story is developed. It is not narrating the activity-progressive. That is to say, the major function of *-zhe* indicating activity-progressive is still describing things, which is seldom used in spoken Chinese. For those who don't want to write the novel, this *-zhe* is rarely used<sup>iii</sup> (p.396).

- (77) 赵永进 静静地 听着, 一 声 也 不 响。  
 Zhao Yongjin quietly listen-*zhe*, one sound also not sound  
 Zhao Yongjin listened quietly and silently.  
 (78) 她的 眼 里 闪动着 泪花。  
 her eyes in flicker-*zhe* tears  
 Tears flickered in her eyes.

Due to the constraints of *-zhe*, should we consider not to teach activity-durative *-zhe* first? Or if we compose textbooks, should we postpone the appearance of *-zhe* in the texts? We can think about learning *-zhe*'s other usages first. Arakawa (2010) generalized a couple of the following usages of *-zhe* and proposed i and iv should be taught first. We can consider teaching “*zai*”, “*.....ne*” and “*zai.....ne*” first, indicating activity-progressive, since these words are less constrained by semantic aspectual properties.

- i. usage of adverbial modifier
- ii. usage of subordinating sentence
- iii. descriptive sentence
- iv. existential sentences
- v. usage of“说着, ...”[said and then...]

### 5. Conclusion

In this paper we introduced the preceding studies of *le* and *-zhe*, and discussed how to apply those studies to teaching. Chinese aspect is different from both Japanese and English aspect because it has no grammatical tense. For example, “我吃了饭”[I ate the meal] sounds unfinished. As a perfective aspect suffix, *-le* is unacceptable unless the predicate has a telic verb or is followed by the resultative or numeral-classifier compounds, while both “gohan wo tabe-ta” of Japanese and “I ate the meal” of English are acceptable. In addition, *-zhe* has often been regarded as having the same function with *-ing* of English and *-sita* of Japanese. However, only when occurring with the adverb *zai* and modality particle *ne*, does *-zhe* represent the activity-progressive. Due to the particular features of Chinese aspect, this requires us not only to teach students the meaning, but also to teach students to use *le* and *-zhe* combined with adverbs, resultatives, numeral-classifier compounds and modality particles.

### Notes

- i. In this paper we use “?” to refer to an utterance that sounds odd but not necessarily grammatically wrong to native speakers.
- ii. “\*” refers to an utterance structurally or semantically unacceptable to native speakers.
- iii. The English translation is ours.

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