

On the Syntactic Status of “*le*” in “NP *le*” Construction in Chinese

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In this paper, the so-called “verbless adverbial clauses” or “NP *le*” construction in Chinese, shown in (1), are revisited mainly based on Tang’s (2003) discussion. We agree that verbless clauses are not really without verbs, but with a phonetically null verb similar to the copula “*SHI*” ‘be’, while we question the syntactic status of the sentence final particle *le* as T and its obligatory realization within the verbless clauses. The syntactic consequence based on the assumptions has to face the following questions: first, why can Chinese void the “No Headless Fronting Constraint” (Hsieh & Sybesma, 2004; Takano, 2000; Wurmbrand, 2004) while German topicalization cannot? Second, why can the experiential aspect *guo* enter the verbless clauses as well, as shown in (2)? In this study, we argue that the obligatoriness of *le* is not due to the necessary realization of T within the verbless clauses and the parametric variation. We, adopting Lin’s (2006) frameworks, postulate that *le* in verbless clauses is actually more like an aspect, denoting “change of state”, and we argue that it is the “perfect” meaning implying “change of state” that licenses the Chinese verbless constructions.

Example:

- (1) Dou da guniang le, ...
 already big girl SFP
 ‘As (you are) already a grown-up girl, ...’ (Tang 2003)
- (2) Ye cengjing xuesheng guo, ...
 too ever student ASP
 ‘(I have) ever been a student, ...’

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