

ON SO-CALLED ‘EMPTY PARTICLES’ IN YUE-GUANGZHOU

A study of aspect¹

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1. Introduction

Sinitic or Chinese languages are well-known to be ‘isolating’ or analytic languages. Word-compounding processes are however highly productive, *forming* polysyllabic, polymorphemic words which are semantically transparent due to the monosyllabic nature of most morphemes. In comparison with polysynthetic languages such as the non-Pama-Nyungan languages of northern Australia and the Iroquoian languages of eastern North America or agglutinative languages such as Turkish and Japanese, little derivational morphology is apparent and even less of the inflectional type. The few nominalizing suffixes, modal particles occurring sentence- finally and aspectual suffixes modifying verbs in both Mandarin Chinese and Yuè dialects such as Cantonese have been traditionally called *xūzǐ* ‘empty particles’ in the domain of Chinese linguistics in China (cf. Lin 1963 and S. Cheung 1972). The standpoint concerning these particles was that they had no meaning but only a grammatical function.

The ‘empty particles’ which serve as aspectual suffixes in Yue-Guangzhou (or Cantonese) are the subject of the analysis presented below. The aim is to show that contrary to Chinese linguistic tradition, although the evolution of aspect markers in Yuè has involved a process of grammaticalisation out of verbal forms, they have not been completely desemantized or bleached of meaning; aspectual meaning is not arbitrary nor are the aspect particles in Yuè ‘empty’.

Following on from a general sociolinguistic outline of the Yuè dialect group, a synchronic description of the Yue-Guangzhou aspect system is presented, analysing the specific aspectual meaning coded by each aspect marker.²

¹ This paper was first presented at the Tense and Aspect Workshop held at the Annual Conference of the Australian Linguistics Society, Monash University in September, 1989. I thank participants of this workshop for their comments. The analysis is based on research begun at the University of Hong Kong during a field trip in June and July 1989 on a grant from the Australian Research Council (ARC) and is part of an ongoing study of aspect systems in Sinitic languages (see also Chappell 1989).

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² Following Hashimoto (1972) and Bauer (1988), I use the term Yue-Guangzhou to refer to the prestige dialect of the Yue group, which is usually called ‘Cantonese’ in English. Note that the term ‘Cantonese’ is inaccurately used as the generic name of this group of dialects, for which we substitute the traditional Chinese appellation *Yue* in standard Chinese or *Yuet* in the Yue-Guangzhou dialect.

The transcriptions for the Yue-Guangzhou examples are given in IPA, while those for standard Chinese or Mandarin are given in *pinyin*, the official romanized script of PR China. The tone numbers follow Lau (1977, 1978): Tone (1) High level / falling (2) High rising (3) Mid level (4) Mid falling (5) Low rising (6)

Low level. The Mandarin and Cantonese examples used in this paper have either been elicited by the author or selected from spoken and written texts gathered during the Hong Kong field trip (see appendix), apart from places where other sources have been indicated.

Abbreviations are as follows: ‘Diary’ refers to Kuan 1988 C a Cantonese novella), ‘Narratives to the personal narratives recorded and C = Cheung 1972, K = Kwok 1971 and L = Lau 1978. Details for all these are given in the lists of primary sources and references at the end of the paper. Note that examples taken from C,K and L have been retranscribed into WA, glossed and translated where necessary.

1.1 Yue-Guangzhou as a regional standard and prestige dialect

The Yuè group of dialects are spoken in the provinces of Guangdong and Guangxi in southeastern part of the People's Republic of China (PRC). Sinitic languages are in fact immigrant languages to the southern parts of modern China (Li 198 8:32). Originally, the areas now carved up into the provinces of Guangdong and Guangxi were inhabited by non-Han peoples called the Yuè. From historical records, this name appears to have been in use since the time of the Spring and Autumn period (770-476 BC). The modern day descendants of the Yuè are believed to be the Zhuang and the Li, who are now classified as minority ethnic groups in PR China.

Linguistic 'infiltration' by Sinitic languages began with the troops of generals sent into the area to settle by the first emperor of a unified China (*Qinshi Huangdi*) during the late 3rd century BC. For these reasons, substrate influence from non-Sinitic languages might be expected, evidence for which has been presented in M. Hashimoto (1976, 1986) and Bauer (1987) among others.

The prestige dialect of the Yuè group centres on the capital city of Guangzhou but extends to the surrounding Pearl River delta and the British crown colony of Hong Kong.³ There are roughly 50m speakers of Yuè dialects in China, which constitutes approximately 5% of the present population (Ramsey 1987:98; Norman 1988:214). In addition to this, large numbers of Yuè speakers are found in both continental and insular Southeast Asia, N. America and Australia, the result of large scale migrations in the last few centuries (O. Hashimoto 1972:12 and Wurm & Hattori 1981).

Most of the population in Hong Kong are immigrants from the Pearl River delta area (Li Xinkui 1988:29). For this reason, I follow the common practice in treating the form of Yuè spoken in Hong Kong, Guangzhou and Macau as the same dialect of Yuè, as do Kwok (1971), S. Cheung (1972), O. Hashimoto (1972) and Bauer (1984, 1988:285).

The status of Cantonese as the prestige dialect of Yuè reflects the more recent history of Guangzhou which achieved the position of dominant cultural centre for the southern regions of China from the Ming dynasty onwards (that is, from the 17th century). It had in fact become established as a trading centre many centuries earlier (Hashimoto 1972:4). Bauer (1984, 1988) and Ramsey (1987:99) both go further to claim that Cantonese is a 'genuine regional standard'. There are three major factors which justify such a standpoint: First, note that Yue-Guangzhou has its own tradition of vernacular literature (Hashimoto (1972:5-6). Written Cantonese is used in Hong Kong for example, in the less serious and stylistically less formal sections of some newspapers, in advertisements, comics, pulp fiction and colloquial-style private correspondence.⁴ To this end, dozens of special non-standard characters have been devised to write down colloquial words for which no cognates exist in standard Chinese.

On this first point, Yue-Guangzhou as a regional standard can be usefully compared to the status of the Fuzhou dialect as a potential representative of the Northern Mm group - Fuzhou is the capital of Fujian province in SE China, where the Mm dialects have their most concentrated distribution. Chan (1985:19) points out that there appears to be no vernacular literature extant in the Fuzhou dialect, unlike Yue-Guangzhou or the Wu dialect group, for example, the Suzhou (Soochow) dialect, for which a substantial corpus of vernacular

³ Guangzhou is the standard Chinese (Mandarin, *putonghua*) form. The name of this provincial capital was anglicised at an early stage as 'Canton.

⁴ For a detailed description of the domains of written Cantonese and its sociolinguistic status, see Bauer 1988

literature, ballads and local opera is preserved. Similarly, Min-Xiamen (Amoy Hokkien), the prestige dialect of Southern Mm, has only a restricted amount of dialect glossaries and lexis surviving from the Qing dynasty.

Second, note that in Guangdong province, Yue-Guangzhou is used as a lingua franca amongst all language and Yuè dialect users (Ramsey 1987:99). For example, speakers of Hakka and minority languages will also know Cantonese. This is similar to the situation in Hong Kong, where many of the ethnic Indian population (in contrast - few British expatriates) as well as speakers of Wu, Hakka and Mm dialects can speak Yue-Guangzhou fluently (Bauer 1984). In other words, those who have migrated to Hong Kong from other parts of China, particularly from Shanghai and Fujian province, have a positive attitude towards acquiring Cantonese as a second language.

In contrast to this, Min-Fuzhou is not widely accepted as a lingua franca in northern areas of Fujian province. Min-Xiamen (Amoy Hokkien) is in fact the only Mm dialect which has achieved widespread usage within this dialect group, but this is restricted to the southern parts of Fujian province. Note that the Mm group is very heterogeneous, northern and southern types being highly divergent in nature (Norman 1988).

Third, with consideration to language use, Yue-Guangzhou is used in more domains than Min-Fuzhou would be. In Fuzhou, a typically diglossic situation can be observed: Standard Chinese, which was introduced into schools as the teaching medium in 1956 in PR China, has replaced the use of the local dialect. Mandarin is also used to a large extent in the workplace and in the media (for example, films, radio and television). Min-Fuzhou will therefore be primarily restricted to informal domains such as the home (Mary Erbaugh, p.c.).⁵ In Hong Kong, all these domains use Cantonese for the majority group and as a lingua franca, Cantonese speakers accounting for 88% of the population (Bauer 1984: 80).⁶

⁵ M. Erbaugh was a visiting scholar at both Fuzhou Teachers' College and Xiamen University, Fujian province, PR China in 1989 where she carried out a project on Chinese sociolinguistics.

⁶ Note that English may be used in addition to this with non-Chinese such as British expatriates, tourists and other visitors to the colony as well as for the purposes of international trade and in English-medium schools. Mandarin is the written form of Chinese learnt in Chinese-medium schools and used in all formal written contexts, for example, most newspapers, books, official types of correspondence, administration and the law. The 1980s have seen a large increase in the learning of spoken Mandarin with the return of Hong Kong to PR China anticipated for 1997.

Textbooks and cassettes for learning Mandarin are in clear evidence in all the major bookshops as well as Cantonese-Mandarin dictionaries and glossaries. During my field trip to Hong Kong in June and July 1989, I was able to observe that people from all walks of life, from street hawkers, taxi drivers, sales assistants to university students, were now mostly proficient in conversational Mandarin, a situation quite changed from earlier stays in Hong Kong during 1976 and 1977 when it was the exception to the rule to be able to carry out daily 'social transactions' in Mandarin. One of the main radio stations in Hong Kong has introduced a news summary in Mandarin 4 times a day to help increase exposure to the spoken form. Nonetheless, films and newsclips in Mandarin from PR China and Taiwan continue to be subtitled for Cantonese viewers (paradoxically in standard Mandarin characters). In sum, despite the upward surge in the learning of Mandarin, it is not used regularly in any spoken domain in Hong Kong, except of course, by native speakers who have immigrated to Hong Kong and in the formal domain of some university courses and school subjects. We could say it fills the role of a 'High' language in the classic sense of diglossia as defined by Ferguson (1959). Cantonese is used by the broadcasting media, locally produced films, opera, drama and a large proportion of pop music. It is used by preference in public life such as at the workplace, in schools, in the local business world and at the marketplace (see particularly Bauer 1984, 1988 for detailed discussions).

2. Synchronic description of the aspect system in Yue-Guangzhou

Aspect marking in Yue-Guangzhou uses the same strategy as standard Chinese and the Mandarin dialect group in general. Yue-Guangzhou has six main aspect markers acting as suffixes on the main verb.

BOUNDED		UNBOUNDED	
<i>-tso</i> ²	Perfective	<i>-kan</i> ²	Progressive
<i>-kwo</i> ³	Experiential	<i>-tsy</i> ⁶	Continuative
<i>-hei</i> ² (<i>sæng</i> ⁵) <i>lai</i> ⁴	Inchoative	<i>-hoi</i> ¹	Stative

The verbal origins of four of these suffixes are transparent: the process of grammaticalization has moved from the status of verb to verb complement of direction/result to aspectual suffix. This largely corresponds to the situation in standard Chinese.

First, a synchronic description of the aspect markers in Yue-Guangzhou is presented with reference to standard Chinese.

2.1 Pragmatics of aspect marking

In Yue-Guangzhou, aspectual modification proceeds by means of suffixing of bound markers to the verb.⁷ It is not however an obligatory grammatical requirement as tense marking is on English finite verbs.⁸ When a verb is not aspectually modified, that is, when it has ‘zero marking’, the predicate will express a habitual or general state of affairs. Up to this point, all these features are identical to the use of aspect marking in standard Chinese (see Chappell 1988). S. Cheung (1972:141) labels the verb in its unmarked state as ‘the common aspect’ (*pǔtōngtǐ*). Consider the following example:

- (1) *Yam*⁶*ho*⁴ *jau*⁵ *kua:n*¹ *kam*²*tsi:ng*⁴ *ke*³
 any have concerning emotion SUB
*si*⁶ *to*¹ *hai*⁶ *m*⁴ *hap*⁶*lei*⁵ *ke*³!
 thing all be NEG reasonable SUB
 ‘Anything to do with the emotions is irrational.’ (Diary: 26)

The time of an event, action or state of affairs with respect to the reference time can be indicated by temporal adverbs and phrases

- (2) *T'ing*¹*.jat*⁶ *A*³ *Ho:ng*¹ *fong*³*-ka*³ *-∅*
 tomorrow take-holiday
 ‘Ah Hong will be on holidays tomorrow.’ (C)
- (3) *Kau*⁶*.si*⁴ *hai*⁶ *-∅* *go*² *lo*⁶ *tsy*⁶
 old:time be that place live
 ‘We used to live there.’ (K:90)

Unmarked verbs may be combined with any temporal framework or time reference. Moreover, time adverbs expressing the habitual or recurrent nature of an event such as *jat*⁶*.jat*⁶ ‘every day’ are highly compatible with the unmarked verb, serving to reinforce this basic semantic property of unboundedness:

⁷ The aspect suffixes cannot be used independently as a complete utterance by themselves.

⁸ Kwok (1971:104); S. Cheung (1972) and Chao (1947:98) all concur on this point for Cantonese.

- (4) *k'cei*⁵ *jat*⁶.*jat*⁶ *ta*²-*pa:i*⁴ - Ø
 3sg day:day hit-card
 'S/he plays mahjong every day.' (C)

It will be seen in the ensuing discussion that not all aspect markers are however compatible with the three main time categories - past, present, future/irrealis. The perfective marker - *tso*², for example, cannot combine with habitual expressions. Such restrictions tie in with the development of aspect markers into tense markers. Conversely, if an aspect marker *is* compatible with all three reference times, then polysemy may be involved.

S. Cheung (1972:143) claims that three meanings are expressed by the use of the 'common aspect': (i) habitual nature; (ii) immediate future and (iii) non-narrative predication. The first point has been discussed above. Regarding the second point, the morphologically unmarked form of the verb corresponds to the use of the semantically unmarked verb form in English - present tense of the verb (q.v. argumentation for this in Foley & Van Valin 1984). In English, the present tense forms of verbs are used to refer to future actions and events. Consider the following examples:

- (5) Harry leaves for Paris tonight.
 (6) We get our results next week.
 (7) They head off tomorrow for the coast.

However, English requires a temporal adverb of future time reference to be used in conjunction with the present tense form of the verb in order to obtain this interpretation

For Yue-Guangzhou, Cheung exemplifies meaning (ii) with a question which can hardly be considered as a clear-cut example of this type:

- (8) (Context: Bringing over a pot of noodles and asking:)
*Sik*⁶ *m*⁴ *sik*⁶ *a*[?]² *Sik*⁶ / *M*⁴ *sik*⁶.
 eat NEG eat Q eat / NEG eat
 'Are you going to eat?' 'Yes/No.'

Similarly, the examples of non-narrative predication (*fēi xùshùxìng de wèiyǔ*) both contain the adverb *ji*⁴*ka*¹ 'now' for examples of the assertive type (9) and of the contrastive type (10). (In Cheung's view, narrative predication requires the use of aspect markers such as - *tso*² to indicate narrative development):

- (9) *Ngo*⁵ *ji*⁴*ka*¹ *kong*².*je*⁵ *a*¹ *m*⁴ *hai*⁶ *m*⁴ *kong*².*je*⁵
 I now talk RP NEG be NEG talk
 'I'm talking now, it's not the case that I'm not talking!'
 (10) *Ngo*⁵ *ji*⁴*ka*¹ *hai*⁶ *sik*⁶ *fa:n*⁶ *m*⁴ *hai*⁶ *fan*³ *ka:u*³
 I now be eat food NEG be sleep
 'I'm eating now, not sleeping.'

Until the notion of non-narrative predication is further clarified, I believe the two last meanings are better explained in terms of the use of particular time adverbs with aspectually unmarked verb forms.

Kwok (197 1:88) observes that the choice of aspect marking does not involve a two-way contrast for each category as in English of [\pm Past], [\pm Perfect] and [\pm Prog] (see also Foley & Van Valin 1984) but a contrast of 'the unmarked form ... with all the others'. In the next sections, the individual aspect markers will be examined, semantically contrasting each with

the others. This section on aspectually unmarked verbs in Yue-Guangzhou has shown that these will typically be interpreted as either ongoing unbounded events or habitual statements.

3. Bounded aspects

By ‘bounded aspect’ I mean those aspect markers which encode that the event or state of affairs has either a definite beginning or endpoint, such as inchoatives and perfectives. This includes events that take place at a particular point in time or during a defined period of time.⁹ In contrast to this, ‘unbounded aspect’ refers to those aspect markers which have neither a limit placed on duration nor definite beginning or endpoints such as continuatives and progressives. Hence I propose that the basic division for the category of aspect is into bounded and unbounded types in the belief that this can better account for the specific aspectual meanings found in most of the languages of the world. This contrasts with the traditional division of ‘aspectology’ into perfective and imperfective, that is, into aspects encoding completion versus those encoding ongoing events and states of affairs (cf. Comrie 1976). The traditional division creates difficulties with the classification of inchoatives, for example, and with perfect aspects which both appear to be anomalous in this framework: Inchoatives typically mark the beginning of a new state of affairs or an event, hence are neither perfective nor imperfective. Perfect or resultative aspects encode an unspecified result state ensuing upon a specified completed event, and so, similarly fall outside the traditional classification system. In the schema proposed here, both would be placed into the bounded category.¹⁰ Yue-Guangzhou has three bounded aspect markers. These are the perfective *-tso²*, experiential *-kwo³* and inchoative *-hei² (sæng⁵)lai⁴*. I next discuss them in turn.

3.1 Perfective aspect VERB *-tso²*

When the perfective aspect marker *-tso²* modifies the verb, it encodes the completion of an action, event or state of affairs. It is directly suffixed to the verb, preceding the direct object or other postverbal NPs:

(11) *Ngø⁵ tsau⁶ hai⁶ Kwong²tsau¹ tsut¹-sai³ ke³ m⁵*
 I then at Guangzhou be:born POSS 5

Lok⁶ nin⁴ ne¹ tsau⁶ lai⁴ -tso² Hæng¹ Kong².
 6 year RP then come -PF Hong Kong

‘I was born in Guangzhou, and at five or six years of age, I came to Hong Kong.’

(Narrative 2)

Although on the whole it corresponds functionally to the standard Chinese perfective marker *le* which derives from the full verb *liǎo* ‘finish’ (Wang 1980:305), the syntactic origins of *tso²* and its development have not as yet been determined. S. Cheung (1972:147) observes that it only has the function of an aspectual suffix and that it is, therefore, an ‘empty word’ (*xūzǐ*).

⁹ The term ‘bounded’ is adopted and adapted from Li & Thompson (1981) who use it in the description and analysis of perfective *-le* in Mandarin.

¹⁰ See also Chappell 1989 for another application of this theoretical framework to the analysis of the aspect system in Min-Xiamen.

3.1.1 Past contexts

In contexts not explicitly marked for time reference, the use of *tso2* will typically lead to a past time interpretation as does *le* in standard Chinese, that is, of action completed before the time of speech (Chappell 1988). In past contexts (with or without an explicit time adverb), the predicate contains a quantified or definite noun phrase which may be grammatically the direct object as in (12) or could be a postverbal duration phrase as in (13).

- (12) *Tso*⁶ -*tso*² *ko*³ *ta:n*⁶ *go*¹
 make -PERF CLF cake
 ‘Made a cake.’¹¹ (K)
- (13) *Tsa:ng*¹ -*tso*² *læng*⁵ *ko*³ *tsung*¹.*t’au*⁴
 fight -PERF two CLF hour
 ‘(They) fought for two hours.’ (K)

In fact, Cheung (1972:145-6) claims that it is ungrammatical in Yue-Guangzhou not to use *tso* with quantified postverbal NPs in past context independent clauses. He uses this starred example:

- (14) **Ng*⁵ *kam*¹*t*^{siu}¹ *sik*⁶ *m*⁴ *kin*⁶ *to*¹.*si*⁶ *lak*³
 I this:morning eat 5 CL toast RP
 ‘This morning I ate 5 slices of toast.’

Unless this is a coordinate clause conveying consecutive events in temporal sequence in non-narrative genre, this sentence is not grammatical as an independent clause. The identical restriction applies to the use of perfective *le* in standard Chinese:

- (15) *W*³ *jīn*¹*fān* *zāo*¹*shang* *chī* *(-*le*) *w*⁵ *piān* *kǎ*.*mià*¹*abāo*
 I today morning eat 5 CLF toast
 ‘This morning I ate five slices of toast.’

This syntactic restriction for standard Chinese or Mandarin has been observed by linguists such as Chao (1968) and tested out in Spanos (1979) by means of a questionnaire. In Chappell 1988, 1 confirmed this rule of usage for *le* in past contexts in a discourse study examining 21 narratives in standard Chinese recorded after the viewing of the Pear Story film by Mary Erbaugh in 1976. In 96% of clauses describing past completed events and containing postverbal nouns, *le* was used. The following example comes from one of the narratives:

- (16) *tā* *zhāi* -*le* *sān* *lǒu* *guǒ*³*zi*
 3sg pick -PF 3 basket fruit
 ‘He picked 3 baskets of fruit.’ (Pear Story 1.4: 4)

3.1.2 Modality

In this section on the perfective in Yue-Guangzhou, I consider its use in modal contexts to express irrealis and imperatives, then relate these features of meaning to its absence in negated clauses. The modal meaning of *tso* may be regarded as its second major function.

¹¹ Note that CLASSIFIER +NOUN constructions have a definite interpretation in Yue-Guangzhou similar to English ‘the’.

3.1.2.1 Irrealis

The irrealis mode concerns events viewed by the speaker as happening in imagined or future possible worlds. The suffix *tso2*, like *le*, is compatible with irrealis contexts, the strongest piece of evidence for arguing for their classification as aspect markers rather than as past tense markers. In non-past contexts, the interpretation of both *Verb + tso2* and *Verb + le* is either that the event or state of affairs is hypothetical as in the condition clause of an ‘if statement exemplified by (17) or that it will be completed *before* some future reference point of time as in (18). Hence, in many cases the predicate will express a meaning similar to the future perfect in English: *will have Verb +ed*.

- (17) *P'ei³.ju⁴ tsng¹.loi⁴ a¹ pi¹.tsai² peng⁶ -tso²*
 if future RP baby ill -PERF
 ‘If baby becomes ill in the future...’ (K)
- (18) *Ky:³ ting⁶ -tso² tsau⁶ ta:p³fuk¹ nei⁵*
 decide -PF then reply 2sg
 ‘Once it’s been decided, (we’ll) let you know.’

In this example, *tso²* is used to indicate the chronological order of events. This is a preliminary indication that *tso²* may perform a similar discourse function to *le* in Mandarin Chinese in sequencing events in narrative and conversation (cf. Hopper 1979, Chappell 1988). A discourse analysis of the aspect marker *tso²* in Yue-Guangzhou would be a goal of some future investigation.

3.1.2.2 Imperatives

As a corollary to the above, *tso²* can also occur in imperatives. A core part of the meaning of an imperative is that the speaker wants a final result state to come about by means of the addressee’s action (*I’ m telling you: I want this done by you*).

- (19) *Sai² -tso² kin⁶ sa:m¹*
 wash -PERF CLF clothes
 ‘Wash the clothes.’ (= *I want them to become washed*)

The semantic relatedness of the use of *tso2* in the imperative to its use in irrealis contexts is apparent: Both refer to possible future worlds where the action or event has been completed (or the relevant state of affairs has come about).

Needless to say, *le* in standard Chinese also has this usage: it conveys an added sense of urgency to the basic imperative form of *Nǐ(men) VERB!* (You [pl] VERB!) (see also Li & Thompson 1981:207-213):

- (20) *Nǐ bǎ yīfu xǐ-hǎo le!*
 you BA clothes wash-proper PERF
 ‘Wash the clothes!’

The interpretation is not merely one of ordering the addressee to wash the clothes. The aspect markers *tso2* and *le* imply further that the task *must* be carried out in order to achieve some final result state that the speaker desires.

- (21) *Ngo*⁵ *ho*² *tsung*¹.*ji*³ *ko*² *ko*³ *sau*²*piu*¹
 I very like that CLF watch
*Neil ma.i*⁵ *tso*² *pei*² *ngo*⁵ *la!*¹
 you buy PERF for I RP
 'I like that watch very much. Buy it for me!' (L)

3.1.2.3 Negation

Negation belongs semantically to the domain of the irrealis, since it expresses the nonoccurrence of an event or state of affairs. Hence they may be classified into the same category of modality as future contexts.¹²

Both Kwok (1971:107) and S. Cheung (1972:147) point out that the suffix *tso*² is incompatible with negated clauses. I believe this is predictable from the semantic property it possesses of encoding completion of particular individuated events. Thus the marker *tso*² cannot be used in either contexts of negated clauses or independent main clauses with future reference, as opposed to its permitted use with future time reference in background or condition clauses (see section 3.1.2.1 above).

There are four negative markers in Yue-Guangzhou:

- (22) *mou*⁵ *mei*⁶ *pat*¹

Standard Chinese has only two such markers: *mei* and *bù* neither of which may be used with perfective *le*, identically to Yue-Guangzhou. The negated clauses in both languages must not contain the perfective aspect marker. Compare Yue-Guangzhou examples (23) and (25) with standard Chinese (24) and (26). In each case, the first pair of examples gives the ungrammatical sentences in each language where the perfective marker has been used in conjunction with the negative marker, whereas the second pair gives the correct form for a negated clause:

- (23) YUE-GUANGZHOU
 (**Mou*⁵ *ma.i*⁵ *-tso*² *sy*¹)
 NEG buy -PERF book
- (24) MANDARIN
 (**Méi* *yǒu* *mǎi* *-le* *shū*)
 NEG have buy -PERF book
- (25) YUE-GUANGZHOU
*Mou*⁵ *ma.i*⁵ *sy*¹
 NEG buy book
 '(I) didn't buy a book.'
- (26) MANDARIN
Méi *yǒu* *mǎi* *shū*
 NEG have buy book
 '(I) didn't buy a book.'

¹² N.B. *Tso*² can only be used in if/when conditional clauses to modify a *first* event to be completed in a sequence, but never in independent clauses with future time reference.

As a consequence of this restriction, neither do we find *tso*² in regular affirmative-negative questions (VERB-NEG-VERB) which function in a similar fashion to tag questions in English (but see S. Cheung 1972 for such a use in Yuè imperatives.)

3.1.3 Verb types

The examples above have all contained action and event verbs. The perfective marker can also be used with stative verbs, however, to imply a change (Kwok 1971:107; S. Cheung 1972: 155).

- (27) *Nei*⁵ *fei*⁴ *-tso*² *ho*² *to*¹ *po*³
 2sg fat -PERF very much RP
 ‘You’ve got very fat.’ (C)

S. Cheung (1972:155) states that, in general, ‘the productivity of aspect suffixes is high. They can combine with almost any verb, even adjectives can take these aspect suffixes’. From his chart (1972:156), it can be observed that the only restriction concerns the durative aspect marker *tsy*⁶ which does not co-occur with quality and status verbs such as *fei*⁴ ‘fat’ and *peng*⁶ ‘sick’. Similarly, standard Chinese *le* cannot be used with any verb that does not imply a change of state (q.v. Chappell 1988). Verbs such as *shì* ‘be’, *xiàng* ‘resemble’ and *zhīdao* ‘know’ are therefore all excluded for this reason.

3.1.4 Tone change

In some Yuè dialects, for example, Taishan, perfectivity is indicated by tone change and vowel lengthening (Kwok 1971:45; S. Cheung 1972:144-145; Yuan 1960:222). This is not a feature of contemporary Yue-Guangzhou however.¹³ Examples (28) and (29) show the same sentence, one marked by the perfective suffix and the other undergoing tone change.

- (28) PERFECTIVE SUFFIX
*Nei*⁵ *fa:t*³ *-tso*² *ta:t*³ *lak*³!
 2sg strike -PF arrive RP
 ‘You’ve got rich!’ (or: ‘You’ve struck it lucky!’)

- (29) TONE CHANGE
*Nei*⁵ *fa:t*³ *ta:t*³ *lak*³!
 2sg strike arrive RP
 ‘You’ve got rich!’

In conclusion, the use and meaning of the perfective marker *tso*² in Yue-Guangzhou bears striking similarities to that of *le* in standard Chinese (Mandarin). Their first main function is their use in past contexts with quantified or definite postverbal nouns to express completion of an individuated event. Secondly, they may also be used in irrealis contexts in the first clause of a series to denote, for example, the condition which must be fulfilled to enable another action or event to take place. Thirdly, both are used in imperatives which convey the urgency or necessity of a certain action being carried out by the addressee. These three uses of the two perfective markers are semantically related by the feature of completion of an event, even in the case of the second and third uses, where the speaker may want or imagine the completion of a given event and the effect it will have.

¹³ See S. Cheung (1972) for a detailed description of the tone changes involved. The explicit use of *tso*² as opposed to tone change is the favoured strategy in Yue-Guangzhou (R. Bauer; S. Leung p.c.)

Since both aspect markers encode the finishing or completion of an event, it is not surprising that neither may co-occur with any negative markers in negated statements, a fourth feature they share.

At this point in research, I have found no data showing that *iso2* can be used in the equivalent of English past perfect contexts. The standard Chinese marker *le* can also be used in narrative to denote past anterior or past perfect events, that is, events completed prior to another event completed in the past (Chappell 1988):

- (30) *Tāmen jiù kàndào tā diē-dǎo le, bǎ tā fú-qilai*
 3pl then see 3sg fall:over PF BA 3sg help:up
 ‘They saw that he **had fallen over**, so helped him up.’ (Pear Story 11.5:51-52)

It is expected that further research is likely to turn up such a use for *tso2* as well. Hence, the use of these two perfective markers in Yue-Guangzhou and standard Chinese appears to be otherwise entirely isomorphic.

Another interesting question which will not be dealt with in this article concerns the origin of the aspect marker *tso2*. It is not cognate with standard Chinese *le*, nor is it used as a verb or in any other grammatical function in modern Yue-Guangzhou. Unlike all the other aspect markers in Yue-Guangzhou, it has only this one use as an aspect marker. The question of its origins also awaits further diachronic investigation.¹⁴

3.2 Experiential aspect marker *-kwo3*

The aspect suffix *-kwo3* in Yue-Guangzhou modifies the verb to indicate the subject’s past experience of the event found in the predicate. It is cognate to standard Chinese *guo* [kwo], both being used side-by-side with the fully verbal form *kwo* meaning to cross, pass through (time or space). In addition to this, the experiential aspect marker in both languages is also used as a directional suffix, meaning ‘over’. The same written form is used in both languages. Their use is, however, not entirely identical. Yuè *kwo3* has two uses which Mandarin *guo* does not have. These are namely (i) its use as a comparative marker and (ii) its aspectual use in future contexts to encode repetition of an event.

Since this aspect marker is used to encode the experiencing of an event, it naturally falls in with past contexts. Moreover, the semantic link to its role as a verb meaning ‘pass through’ is transparent. These two non-aspectual uses are exemplified below:

- (31) VERB
Ji4ka1 kwo3 hoi2 mou5 sak1 ts’i1
 now cross sea NEG block car
 ‘Now you can cross the sea without any traffic jams.’

(Advertisement for the Mass Transit Railway in Central Station, Hong Kong seen in June, 1989 about the opening of the new Eastern Harbour tunnel).

- (32) DIRECTIONAL SUFFIX
Hang4 -kwo3 tso2 la1
 walk -DIR PERF RP
 ‘Walk over.’

¹⁴ Robert Bauer (p.c.) has found a possible counterpart to modern *-tso2* in Cantonese-English dictionaries from the mid-19th and early 20th centuries. This is *hiu4* which also marked completed action.

As can be seen from example (32), a verb modified by *kwo*³ as a directional marker may be further modified aspectually by *tso*². Only one aspect marker may modify any verb at a given time, which provides us with a diagnostic for testing the status of *kwo*³ in ambiguous cases.

*Kwo*³ in both Yue-Guangzhou and standard Chinese is a bounded aspect in that it encodes completion of an action or event. It implies that the agent or actor of the verb has gained experience or knowledge of a particular event through carrying it out.¹⁵ Secondly, it implies that the result state is no longer in effect (see Chappell - In prep. [a]):

(33) YUE
*Ng*⁵ *hæi*³ *-kwo*³ *O*³.*mun*⁴
 1sg go -EXP Macau
 ‘I’ve been to Macau’ (not: ‘I’ve gone to Macau’)

(34) MANDARIN
W^ǒ *q*^ù *-guo* *A*^ò*mén*
 1sg go -EXP Macau
 ‘I’ve been to Macau. (not: ‘I’ve gone to Macau)

Both (33) and (34) convey that (1) the subject has had the experience of going to Macau some time in the past, for example, on a holiday trip and thus knows something first hand about this place and that (2) it is understood at the time of speaking the subject is no longer in Macau,. Hence, neither (33) nor (34) could be uttered when the subject is known to be in Macau (this feature is discussed in more detail below).

The use of *kwo*³ can therefore only properly be equated with the experiential use of the verb *be* in English (*have been*) but not with any other verbs used in the English present perfect (*have Verb +ed*). Typically, the present perfect in English does imply an appropriate result state (*cf.* Comrie 1985) and this is understood to continue up until the time of speaking:

(35) She’s gone to Macau. (=> hence she is not here)

(36) I’ve lost my penknife. (=> and still can’t find it)

Therefore, the interpretation of any result state associated with the use of *kwo*³, if any, purely concerns that of the experience gained by the subject.

S. Cheung (1972:147) and Lau (1978:226) claim that *kwo*³ is not used for ‘customary actions’ as is the perfective aspect *tso*², but rather for one-off occasional events. Cheung uses the following contrastive minimal pair:

(37) *Nei*⁵ *kam*¹*jat*⁶ *jam*² *-tso*² *ts’*^a*mei*⁶?
 2sg today drink PERF tea NEG
 ‘Did you go for a yumcha lunch today?’

(38) *Nei*⁵ *jam*² *-kwo*³ *ts’*^a *mei*⁶?
 2sg drink EXP tea NEG
 ‘Have you (ever) had a yumcha lunch?’

¹⁵ The ‘experience’ element is agreed upon in most analyses. For example, see (Yuan (1960:220); S. Cheung (1972:142-148); Kwok (1971:108). Kwok also states that *kwo* is used for ‘an action that has been done at least once’.

Example (37) implies a context where the subject goes every day for *yumcha* (dimsum lunch), whereas (37) asks whether the subject has ever tried Out this kind of lunch before, that is, had such an experience. We can construct similar contrasting pairs for standard Chinese:

- (39) *Xiǎo Méi dāng -le dàifu*
 Xiao Mei act:as -PFV doctor
 ‘Xiao Mei worked as a doctor.’
- (40) *Xiǎo Méi dāng -guo dàifu*
 Xiao Mei act:as -EXP doctor
 ‘Xiao Mei has been a doctor.’

Example (39) refers to a particular period of time when Xiao Mei worked as a doctor which is now viewed as finished by the speaker, whereas example (40) views this situation differently, from the point of view of the knowledge gained through personal experience working as a doctor on the part of Xiao Mei.

Identically to Mandarin, the use of *kwo*³ entails the ‘anti-perfect feature as described for example (33) above (see Chappell - In prep.[a]). It implies the converse result state to that implied by the use of an inceptive or perfect aspect marker. Hence, Mandarin example (40) with *guo* encodes that Xiao Mei is no longer a doctor or, at least, is not working as a doctor now. Similarly for Yue-Guangzhou, an example such *hæi*³ -*kwo*³ *Meik*⁵ *wok*³ ‘have been to America’ implies, according to S. Cheung (1972:148) that the subject is ‘definitely not in the USA anymore, that is to say has been and gone’, providing the present analysis with an independent confirmation of this semantic feature.

The ‘anti-perfect’ feature of *kwo*³ needs to be contrasted with the use of the sentence final particle *la*³, encoding inception of a new state of affairs in a past context. The particle *la*³ is purported to be similar in function to sentence-final *le* in Mandarin (Kwok 1984, Chao 1968:800). Kwok (1984:46) gives a semantic description of it as encoding a change from a previous state or situation, exemplified by (41):

- (41) *Ji*⁴ *ga*¹ *m*⁴ *nga:m*¹ *tsæk*³ *la*³
 now NEG fit wear INC
 ‘It doesn’t fit me anymore.’

The change of state from an item of clothing fitting someone to not fitting that person anymore is readily apparent. The resulting state of affairs is understood to be still current at the time of speech. In this feature, inceptive or change of state *la*³ contrasts with the aspect marker *kwo*³ in the manner described above.¹⁶ When we contrast *kwo*³ with perfective *tso*², we find first of all that *kwo*³ does not suffer the restriction of *tso*² to realis contexts when used in main clause declaratives. First, it may be used, for example, with a negated verb as in (42) whereas *tso*² cannot, exemplified by (43):

- (42) *K’æi*⁵ *mei*⁶ *hæi*³ -*kwo*³ *Jat*⁶ *pun*²
 3sg NEG go -EXP Japan
 ‘S/he’s never been to Japan before’

¹⁶ N.B. perfective *tso*² is neutral with respect to this feature. For example, *hæy*³ -*kwo*³ *Meik*⁵ *wok*³ does not imply any kind of result state according to S. Cheung (1972: 148) which tallies well with Mandarin -*guo*.

- (43) *K'æi⁵ mou⁵ hæi³ (*tso²) Jat⁶pun²*
 3sg NEG go (*PERF) Japan
 'S/he didn't go to Japan.'

Second, it can be used in main clause imperatives with a future context. Here, it undergoes an extension of meaning to express the intention of doing an action once more.

- (44) *M⁴ goi¹ nei⁵ sei² -kwo³ kæy⁵ Ia¹*
 please 2sg write -EXP 3sg RP
 Please write it again! (C)

Mandarin does not have an analogous use of its experiential aspect marker *-guo*. Instead, the adverb *zài* 'again', used for future repeated events, is employed. The Mandarin counterpart to Yuè (44) is given in (45) below:

- (45) *Qǐng nǐ zài xiě ba!*
 please 2sg again write RP
 'Please write it again!'

The relatedness of this particular meaning of *-kwo³* of future repetition to its meaning in past contexts is nonetheless, easy to perceive in terms of extension of meaning from past experience to that of going through the action all over again.

In this section, it has been seen that the Yuè experiential marker *kwo³* is not completely identical in its aspectual behaviour to Mandarin *guo*. The Mandarin marker cannot be used in main clauses with a future context, unlike its Yuè counterpart. The use of the experiential aspect marker was also contrasted with the perfective. Here it was shown that *kwo³* unlike *tso²* can occur in negated clauses. The difference in meaning between inceptive markers or perfects of result and the experiential was also briefly outlined.

3.3 Inchoative aspect *-hei²(sæng⁵)lai⁴*

The inchoative aspect marker expresses the onset of an action or state of affairs, that is, of 'beginning to Verb'. In Yue-Guangzhou, if the verb is intransitive, then *-hei²(sæng⁵)lai⁴* is directly affixed to the verb.

- (46) *Ngo⁵ nau¹ -hei²(sæng⁵)lai⁴*
 I angry INCH
 'I'm getting angry'

If the verb is transitive, the polysyllabic aspectual suffix is separated into two parts: *-hei²-* and *-(søng⁵)lai⁴* which surround the object noun (see S. Cheung 1972). The object may be the noun designating the semantic undergoer or the non-referential object noun of a separable V-O compound verb.

- (47) *Ts'au:² hei² ka³lai⁴*
 'Start to quarrel'
- (48) *Ngo⁵ nau¹ hei² nei⁵ sæng⁵lai⁴*
 1sg angry INCH you INCH
 'I'm getting angry with you.'

It is related to the directional complement *-hei²lai⁴* 'arise, up' which has undergone semantic extension to acquire this use as an aspect marker.

4. Unbounded aspect

There are three markers of unbounded aspect in Yue-Guangzhou: *-kan²* *-tsy⁶* and *-hoi¹*. Each of these codes ongoing actions or states of affairs with however subtle differences in meaning. These are discussed in turn below.

4.1 Progressive *-kan²*

The aspect marker indicating that an event is happening or an action is being carried out at the given time of reference is the suffix *-kan* in Yue-Guangzhou. Below are some examples which indicate simultaneity of an ongoing event with the reference time, which in these examples is the time of speech:

- (49) (In a cartoon, a waitress asks one of the main story characters, Albert:)

Nei⁵ jiu³ mat¹ je⁵ ja¹?
2sg want what thing Q
'What do you want?'

- (50) (Albert points at another customer:)

K'æi⁵ sik⁶ -kan² go² ti¹ la¹
3sg eat -PROG that some RP
'The stuff he's eating.'

- (51) (Ca lying in wait to ambush the letter carrier:)

Jau⁴.ts'ai¹ hang⁴ -kan² lai⁴ la¹
letter:carrier walk -PROG come RP
'The letter carrier is walking in!'

The aspectual character of *-kan²* can be observed by virtue of it not being restricted to any time context. *Kan²* may occur in both future (52) and past contexts (53):

- (52) *Ha⁶ ko³ sing¹ k'ei⁴ k'ei⁵ tsung⁶ fong³-kan² ka³*
next CLF week 3sg still go-PROG holiday
'Next week s/he'll still be on holidays.'

- (53) *Kam¹tsiu¹ Lei⁵ sin¹sa:ng¹ lai⁴ wan² ngo⁵ ko² tsan⁶ ngo⁵*
this:morning Li Mr come visit 1sg REL time 1sg

hai²sy³ t'ai²-kan² po²tsi²
still look-PROG newspaper
'When Mr Li came to see me this morning, I was still reading the newspaper.'

In other Yuè dialects, according to Hashimoto's data (1972:19), we find that the progressive aspect suffix is also phonetically *kan²* in Yue-Tengxian but *-kin* in Yue-Taishan.

Concerning diachronic origins, the progressive marker *-kan* represents the second problem in the Yue-Guangzhou aspect system. It is possible that it is related to Mandarin *jǐn* 'tight' in that its homophone can be used to form resultative verb compounds with the meaning 'tight, firm':¹⁷

¹⁷ Note that orthographically the character for *-kan* differs by one component depending on whether it is an aspectual suffix or a resultative verb complement. The aspectual suffix has the mouth radical added to the left hand side. Otherwise the characters are identical. Cheung (1972: 149) points out in a footnote that this is merely to distinguish the two grammatical functions. Given that orthographic evidence has to be used with care, we mention this synchronic fact of written Cantonese in a preliminary fashion as the source of aspect marker *-kan²* will have to be carefully checked in historical records of the Yuè vernacular.

- (54) *kei*³ *-kan*² *tʂa*¹ *-kan*²
 ‘remember well’ ‘hold fast’

It is claimed that imperfective aspects such as the progressive typically develop out of stative verbs, particularly locatives (Foley & Van Valin 1984, Bybee 1985, Dahl 1985). Although the semantic relationship is intuitively plausible in this case between lexical verb and aspect marker, the historical relationship still needs to be established. Nonetheless, it would not be surprising, semantically, for a stative verb meaning ‘firm, tight’ to extend in meaning to this aspectual use of the progressive. Independent evidence is needed to show that this development did take place.

4.2 Durative *-hoi*¹

The aspect marker *-hoi*¹ is called the ‘durative’ marker by S. Cheung (1972: 149-150). The difference in aspectual meaning between *-hoi*¹ and *-kan*² can be neatly contrasted with the following minimal pair (taken from S. Cheung 1972:149):

- (55) *k’æi*⁵ *tʂæk*³ *-kan*² *kin*⁶ *hung*⁴ *sik*¹ *ke*³ *sa:m*¹
 3sg wear -PROG CLF red colour REL clothes
 ‘S/he is putting on red clothes’
- (56) *k’æi*⁵ *tʂæk*³ *-hoi*¹ *kin*⁶ *hung*⁴ *sik*¹ *ke*³ *sa:m*¹
 3sg wear -DUR CLF red colour REL clothes
 ‘S/he is wearing red clothes’

Sentence (55) means s/he is putting on red clothes, whereas (56) means s/he is wearing red clothes. The contrast is one of progressive ongoing action for *-kan*² versus a continuous state of affairs arising from some previous action for *-hoi*¹.

The same opposition can be found in Mandarin for the two markers of unbounded aspect, Verb *-zhe* and *za’i*+Verb (see Chappell - In prep. [bi]). The identical minimal pair can be used to contrast their aspectual **meanings**:

- (57) *Tā* *zài* *chuān* *yí* *-jiàn* *hóngsè* *de* *chènshān*
 3sg DUR wear one -CLF red REL shirt
 ‘S/he is putting on a red shirt.’
- (58) *Tā* *chuān* *-zhe* *yí* *-jiàn* *hóngsè* *de* *chènshān*
 3sg wear - CONT one -CLF red REL shirt
 ‘S/he is wearing a red shirt.’

Hence, the aspect marker *-hoi*¹ does not have an action reading. However, this does not result in *-hoi*¹ being excluded from co-occurrence with action verbs. When it modifies action verbs, the interpretation is one of habitual action as exemplified by (59) with *hæ*³ ‘go’:

- (59) *ŋgo*⁵.*tei*¹ *hæ*³-*hoi*¹ *ko*² *ka.n*¹ *ts’a:n*¹ *sat*¹ *m*⁴ *tso*³ *jay*¹!
 1pl go-DUR that CLF restaurant NEG bad RP
 ‘The restaurant we always go to is not bad.’

This aspect marker is related to the use of *hoi*¹ as a full lexical verb meaning ‘open’ (and also as a verb complement of direction).

4.3 Continuative aspect -*tsy6*

The morpheme *tsy* has three grammatical roles - those of verb, resultative complement and aspect marker. The basic meaning of *tsy6* as a verb is ‘live’, ‘stay’, ‘stop’. This is exemplified by (60):

- (60) *Ji4ka1 tsau6 hai6 Ta:i6Ha:ng1 Lai6Tak1 ts'y:n1 tsy6*
 now then be Tai Hang Lai Tak estate live
 ‘Now I live on the Lai Tak Estate in Tai Hang’ (Narrative 2)

Secondly, it can be used as a resultative verb complement, with the meaning of ‘tight’ or ‘firm’, which is again identical to the case in standard Chinese. Compare the following examples in (61) and (62):

- (61) *jat1 sau2 tsip3 -tsy6 ko3 po1*
 one hand receive-firm CLF ball
 ‘One-handedly catch the ball.’ (C)

- (62) MANDARIN
jiē-zhù, ná-zhù
 ‘catch’ ‘hold tight’

As a verb complement, it can take aspectual marking itself, evidence that enables us to distinguish grammatical function.

- (63) *tsip3-tsy6 -tso2 ko3 po1*
 receive-firm -PF CLF ball
 ‘caught a ball’ (C)

According to S. Cheung (1972:150-15 1), the aspect marker *-tsy6* focuses on ‘describing the state of affairs at the time of speech’. (Note that this could be generalized to the reference time rather than the ‘time of speech’). Consider the following ‘minimal triad’ of sentences which contrast the meaning of the three markers of unbounded aspect in Yue-Guangzhou:

- (64) *ta:i3 -kan2 nga:n5keng3*
 wear -PROG glasses
 ‘putting on glasses’
- (65) *ta:i3 -hoi1 nga:n5keng3*
 wear -DUR glasses
 ‘wearing glasses (always has to)’
- (66) *ta:i3 -tsy6 nga:n5keng3*
 wear -CONT glasses
 ‘wearing glasses (at reference time)’

From these three examples, it is apparent that Yue-Guangzhou is more finely differentiated as to its set of unbounded aspects than is Mandarin. Moreover, we can deduce that *tsy6* has no habitual reading as does *-hoi1* (Recall example 56 in the section above). Mandarin would use continuative *zhe* for both (65) and (66) (see also Yuan 1960:220) and *zhèng zài* for the action of putting on the glasses, given in (67) and (68):

- (67) *dài -zhe yǎnjīng*
 wear -CONT glasses
 ‘wearing glasses’

(68) *zhèng zài dài yǎnjīng*

right:now PROG wear glasses

‘putting on glasses right at this moment’

Identically to Mandarin *-zhe*, Yuè *-tsy⁶* may not combine with other: aspect markers such as perfective *tso²*.

(69) **Tai² -tsy⁶ tso² ngo⁵*
look -CONT PERF 1sg

(70) MANDARIN
**Kàn -zhe le wǒ*
look -CONT PERF 1sg

Mandarin *-zhe* has a second major aspectual use in clause combining when it modifies the verb in the first clause to indicate the manner in which the action of the second and main clause is carried out (see Chappell - In prep. [b]). From S. Cheung’s data (1972:15 1), it can be seen that Yuè *-tsy* similarly has this backgrounding function.

(71) *Wong⁴ Siu²tse² k’ei⁵-tsy⁶ hai²sy³ ts’æng³-ko¹*
Miss stand-CONT still sing-song
‘Miss Wong sang songs while standing.’

(72) MANDARIN
Huáng Xiǎojiě zhàn -zhe chàng gē
Miss stand -CONT sing song
‘Miss Huang sang songs while standing.’

Since both Mandarin *-zhe* and Yuè *-tsy⁶* modify verbs to express a continuing state of affairs including the stativizing of action verbs, it is not surprising that they both have a discourse function of providing the background for main events in, for example, a narrative. Yuan (1960:219) also points out that when *-tsy⁶* modifies the verb, the action becomes ‘incomplete but persists, losing its action character’.

This section on unbounded aspect markers has semantically differentiated *kan²*, *hoi¹* and *tsy⁶*, indicating the subtleties in meaning which can be expressed with respect to ongoing events, actions and states of affairs in Yuè.

5. Conclusion

Studies on the grammar of the six major Sinitic dialect groups other than Mandarin or Northern Chinese are rarities. Evidence of this can be seen in the fact that there is only one modern grammar of Yue-Guangzhou (S. Cheung 1972), apart from a handful of works on specific topics in Yuè syntax. This analysis has primarily set out to give a description of a small segment of Yuè grammar - its aspect system. The form, meaning and associated syntax of the aspect system of modern colloquial Yue-Guangzhou (Cantonese) has been examined from the perspective of the bounded versus unbounded distinction, with comparisons being made with the Mandarin aspect system. Furthermore, the probable diachronic source for four of the six aspect markers has been indicated, showing that aspectual meaning is not arbitrary. This provides further evidence to argue that aspect markers are not merely ‘empty particles’ but contribute in a significant way to the grammatical meaning of utterances.

Three of the aspect markers have their sources in verbs and related directional or resultative postverbal complements: *kwo*³ ‘pass through’ *hoi*¹ ‘open’, *hei*²(*sæng*⁵)*lai*⁴ ‘arise’ and *tsy*⁶ ‘stay’ which respectively code the experiential, the durative, the inchoative and the continuative aspects. A further two aspect markers, perfective *tso*² and progressive *kan*² remain temporarily problematic, although *kan*² seems to be related to a resultative complement meaning ‘tight’ or ‘firm’. Further diachronic work may resolve these conundrums.

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(ii) SPOKEN CANTONESE (TAPED MATERIAL)

a. Personal narratives:

1. Anna Fung Shuk-Han
2. Ada Chung Sau-Lin

b. Cantonese Opera Stories:

1. *Tsoi*³ *Sai*³ *Hung*⁴ *Mu:i*⁴ *Kei*³ [‘The tale of the reborn red plum lady’]
2. *Lau*⁴ *T’oi*⁴ *Wu:i*⁶ [‘Balcony rendezvous’]

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