THE EXPERIENTIAL PERFECT MARKER BÀT IN TAIWANESE SOUTHERN MIN

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1. Introduction

In Mandarin Chinese, guo is known as an experiential marker and a kind of perfective (cf. Lin 2006). In Taiwanese Southern Min, koè is cognate to guo. However, in contrast to koè in a postverbal position, bàt 識 (or pàt) occupies a preverbal position and expresses experiential meaning, as illustrated in (1).

(1) 我 識 去 過 美國
góa bàt khi koè bíkok
1SG EXP go PFV US
‘I have been to the US.’

In definition, bàt is defined as ‘to have done a thing, as has never done it at any time’ by Douglas (1873:13). In literature, Lien (2007: 732) considers bàt functioning as an experiential marker when preceding a predicate. Lien also mentions that the diachronic correlation of cheng 曾 ‘once’ and bat may explain the emergence of bàt as a new experiential marker and its meaning similar to cengjing 曾經 ‘once’ in Mandarin Chinese. In addition, Chappell (1989) characterizes bàt as an adverb with an experiential reading; but later in Chappell (2001), she argues that bàt is an evidential marker rather than an experiential marker based on semantic interpretations.

In this paper, I would like to investigate: what kind of maker is bàt, experiential or evidential, and what is the syntactic configuration of the bàt construction? In addition, since bàt and koè are both experiential markers, what are their correlations? For the later discussion, I try to propose that bàt is experiential perfect.

This article is organized as follows. Section 2 summarizes the main points of Lien (2007) and Chappell’s (2001) work and evaluates their analyses. Section 3 provides the relevant theories concerning perfect. Section 4 presents an alternative analysis of bàt along the lines of Pancheva (2003)’s theory. Section 5 concludes this article.

2. Literature Review

In this section, I will review Lien’s (2007) and Chappell (2001)’s literature on the word bàt.

2.1. Lien’s (2007) Analysis of Bàt

Lien (2007) investigates the polyfunctionality of the word bàt diachronically and from a cognitive perspective. For the etymology origin, the word bàt/pàt appears as 識 majorly and 看/在 minor in Ming and Qing play scripts (Lien 2007: 724). Lien further characterizes the functions of bàt, as in (2).
(2) “Pat4 functions both as a lexeme meaning know (KENNEN) opposed to know (WISSEN), and an experiential marker as a kind of grammatical function word.” (Lien 2007: 727)

Consider the following examples. Bât delivers the meaning of know (KENNEN) in most cases, as in (3)-(5). However, in cases where bêt is followed by a predicate complement, it functions as an experiential marker, which is the topic of this study, as in (1)

(3) 阮 認 識 伊
Gun2 si7 pat4 i1
I (PL.) is know he/she
‘I did know him.’ (Lien 2007: 730)

(4) 查 仍 不 識 禮
Cha1-bo2 m7 pat4 le2
Woman not know etiquette
‘Women do not know rules of etiquette.’ (Lien 2007: 730)

(5) 你 識 伊 是 誰
Li2 pat4 il chi7 chui5
You know he/she be who
‘Do you know who he is?’ (Lien 2007: 730)

In addition, according to Lien’s assumption, the emergence of bêt as a new experiential marker may contribute to the increasing use of chêng 証 as an old experience marker in non-positive sentences and also may be inferred by the juxtaposition of chêng bêt 證識.

In sum, Lien illustrates the diachronic change and interpretation of bêt as an experiential marker. However, the syntactic representation of the experiential marker bêt is unclear, which I will explore later in this paper.

2.2. Chappell’s (2001) Analysis of Bât

Chappell adopts the framework of prototype theory and argues that the experiential marker in Sinitic languages should be reconsidered an evidential based on its semantic properties.

In Chappell’s analysis, bêt and koè are reclassified as evidential marks, as illustrated in (6).

(6) Taiwanese Southern Min (Chappell 2001)
chia bat chhut koè chüi-chọan
here EVD appear EVD spring
‘There used to be a spring here (context: and now I only see factories).’

In addition, (7) is a conjectured pathway of semantic change from lexical verb to evidential in Sinitic languages.

(7) Pathway for ‘know’ (Min dialects only): BAT 識 (Chappell 2001)
Lexical verb → ‘know’ (‘once’) + V₂ → evidential + V₂

Regarding the scope of evidential markers, Chappell adopts Foley and Van Valin’s (1984: 218) assumption that evidentials constitute a ‘peripheral operator’ which take most other operators
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(apart from illocutionary force) in their scope, including tense, status and aspect. She points out that bât can take a verbal predicate and its adjuncts in its scope as in (8) (cf. Chappell 2001).

(8) 我 识 不 去 讀 冊
gúá bát m̄ k̄i thak chheh
1SG EVD NEG go study book
‘Once there was a stage when I didn’t want to go to school.’ (Chappell 2001)

However, the scope of evidential markers might be the challenge for Chappell’s proposal. Based on the hierarchy proposed by Nuyts (2006) in (9), evidential is higher than epistemic.

(9) > evidentiality > epistemic modality > deontic modality > time > quantificational aspect [frequency] / dynamic modality > quantificational aspect [internal phases] ∨ (parts of the) STATE OF AFFAIRS
(Nuyts 2006: 19)

As shown in (10), bât is lower than the epistemic model ittêng ‘must’, which excludes the possibility of bât being an evidential marker.

(10) 我 一定 认 看 过 伊
góá it-têng bát khoâ koè 1
1SG EPS EXP see EXP 3SG
‘I must have seen him (before).’

3. Background Theories of Perfect

In this paper, I argue that bât is an experiential perfect. Before the discussion, I would like to introduce the relevant theories of perfect, particularly experiential perfect.

Perfect has been a controversial issue in the tense and aspect systems. A traditional definition of perfect by Comrie (1976:52) is: “the perfect indicates the continuing present relevance of a past situation.”

Based on discourse functions, perfect is usually classified into three types: universal, experiential, and resultative (cf. Pancheva 2003: 277), as illustrated in (11).

(11) Three types of perfect
a. Since 1999, Bill has lived in Canada. UNIVERSAL
b. Bill has been in Canada (before). EXPERIENTIAL
c. Bill has (just) arrived in Canada (before). RESULTATIVE

The above distinctions lie in different temporal locations of the underlying eventuality with respect to a reference time.

It is attested by native speakers of Taiwanese Southern Min that they can render a sentence like (11b) for bât with experiential interpretation but not sentences with universal or resultative meanings.

In traditional grammar, experiential perfect is defined as “a given situation has held at least once during some time in the past leading up to the present” (Comrie 1976: 58). In Pancheva (2003), the experiential perfect is defined as follows.

(12) The EXPERIENTIAL perfect asserts that the underlying eventuality holds a proper subset of an interval, extending back from the utterance time (cf. Pancheva 2003: 277).

In addition, Pancheva proposes that the perfect is a higher aspect. Specifically, The Asp1 head contains feature of perfect and it embeds an AspP2 projected by viewpoint aspect (cf. Pancheva 2003: 284). The syntactic structure is shown in (13a) and the semantic role is
illustrated in (13b), in which perfect relates the Perfect Time Span (PTS) to the reference time.

(13) a. 

\[
\begin{array}{c}
TP \\
T \\
[PAST]/ \\
[PRESENT]/ \\
[FUTURE] \\
Asp_1 \\
Asp_2 \\
[PERFECT] \\
[PERFECT] \\
\{[UN]BOUNDED\} \\
[NEUTRAL] \\
vP \\
Aktionsart
\end{array}
\]

b. The Perfect:

\[
[PERFECT] = \lambda p \lambda \exists i'[PTS(i', i) \& p(i')] \\
PTS(i', i) \text{ iff } i \text{ is a final subinterval of } i'
\]

4. An Alternative Analysis of думал

Based on Pancheva’s analysis, I propose that думал is an experiential perfect, a higher aspect, and can be followed by viewpoint aspects, such as perfective ко́е or progressive, as shown in (14). The example (1) is represented here as (15a) and its structure is illustrated in (15b). Note that Chinese lacks tense morphology but the existence of Tense node is under debate. Here I assume no Tense node in Taiwanese Southern Min (cf. Lin 2006, 2010).

(14)

\[
\begin{array}{c}
AspP_1 \\
Asp_1 \\
Asp_2 \\
\{[UN]BOUNDED\} \\
\{[UN]BOUNDED\} \\
[NEUTRAL] \\
vP \\
Aktionsart
\end{array}
\]

(15) a. 我 识 去 過 美國
goá 夠 kí hoè bikok
1SG EXP go PFV US
‘I have been to the US.’

b. 

\[
\begin{array}{c}
IP \\
DP_1 \\
góa_i \\
I \\
AspP_1 \\
Asp_1 \\
báut \\
PFV \\
dtp
\end{array}
\]

In the following discussion, I provide evidence which supports my proposal.

First, 夠 is not used with specific time. Comrie provides a diagnosis of Perfect, as illustrated in (16).
“in English, the Perfect may not be used together with specification of the time of the past situation, i.e. one cannot say I have got up at five o’clock this morning, because the specific reference to the point of time at five o’clock this morning is incompatible with the English Perfect.” (Comrie 1976: 54)

In the similar vein, consider (17) and (18). (17) is odd since the specific time reference ê-chái cháp’tiâm ‘ten o’clock this morning’ is incompatible with the perfect bàt. In comparison, (18) is much better with the vague time reference téng-kò-gòeh ‘last month’.

(17) *今早 十點 我 識 去 台北 遊覽
*ê-chái cháp’tiâm góa bàt khi Tâipak iû-lám
morning 10 o’clock ISG PERF go Taipei travel
‘I have visited Taipei at 10 o’clock this morning.’

(18) 上個月 我 識 去 台北 遊覽
téng-kò-gòeh góa bàt khi Tâipak iû-lám
last.month ISG PERF go Taipei travel
‘I have been to Taipei last month.’

Second, bàt can co-occur with progressive, which supports the argument that bàt is perfect but not perfective. One diagnosis to distinguish perfect and perfective is illustrated in (19).

(19) PERFECT versus PERFECTIVE
“PFCT can in many languages be used in combination with progressive constructions, as in I have been sleeping, something not to be expected if PFCT expressed perfectivity.” (Dahl 1985:139)

Compare (20) and (21). The perfect bàt can co-occur with a progressive construction while the perfective koè cannot.

(20) 伊 識 一直 在 找 頭路
i bàt ittit teh chhôe thâu-ló’
3SG PERF all.the.time at look.for job
‘He had been looking for a job’

(21) *伊 一直 在 找 過 頭路
i ittit teh chhôe koè thâu-ló’
3SG all.the.time at look.for PFV job

Third, bàt is higher than koè in the syntactic hierarchy. To test the hierarchical order of bàt and koè, I adopt Cinque’s (1999) universal hierarchy as illustrated in (22).

(22) The universal hierarchy of clausal functional projections (based on Cinque 1999: 106)
…[allegedly Mood_evidential …[necessarily Mod_necessity ]possibly Mod_possibility ]usually Asp_habitual ]again Asp_repetitive(I) ]often Asp_frequentative(I) ]just Asp_retrospective …

In (23), bàt can be modified by the lowest Modal adverb khôleng ‘possibly’ but not the highest aspectual adverb, the habitual adverb tiār ‘usually’. It is thus surmised that bàt is located between Modal and Aspect projections.
(23) a. 伊可能識常做健康檢查
   i khólêng.bat tiāⁿ chò kiānkongkiámchā
   3SG possibly PERF usually do health.examination
   ‘He possibly had usually taken a health examination.’

b. *伊識可能做健康檢查
   i khólêng.bat chò kiānkongkiámchā
   3SG PERF possibly do health.examination

c. *伊常識做健康檢查
   i tiāⁿ bat chò kiānkongkiámchā
   3SG usually PERF do health.examination

(24) a. *伊常做過健康檢查
   i tiāⁿ koè chò kiānkongkiámchā
   3SG usual PFV do health.examination

b. 伊才做過健康檢查
   i tū chò koè kiānkongkiámchā
   3SG just do PFV health.examination
   ‘He just took a health examination.’

In addition, as shown in (24), koè cannot be modified by the habitual adverb, but by a lower aspect such as tū ‘just’, Aspretrospective. Therefore, bat is suggested to be higher than koè in the hierarchy, which also infers the possibility of bat as a perfect maker.

Forth, bat is not evidential. This argument is substantiated in Section 2.2 by the examples (9) and (10).

To conclude, I have shown that bat should be analyzed as an experiential perfect.

5. Concluding Remarks

This paper investigates syntactic properties and the interpretation of bat in Taiwanese Southern Min. I propose that bat is an experiential perfect, a higher aspect which embeds viewpoint aspects. It also differentiates the perfect bat and the perfective koè based on some syntactic diagnoses. This study is expected to shed some lights on the research concerning perfect in Chinese language. For the future inquiry, I would like to investigate further the semantic denotation of the experiential perfect bat.

References