

## The experiential perfect as an evidential marker in Sinitic languages Hilary Chappell

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### 1. *Introduction*

In this study, I argue that the experiential aspect marker in Sinitic languages should be reclassified as an evidential marker based on its semantic characteristics. The analysis shows that the relevant marker in each Sinitic language is used to express the speaker's commitment to the truth of the proposition, specifically, certainty about prior occurrence of an event in its core use. Furthermore, this is founded on either direct observation or knowledge, if not an inference from an observable result state which is made by the speaker.

Based on data from eight Chinese languages, I first discuss why the experiential aspect is, in essence, an evidential marker; next, the two main paths of grammaticalization in Sinitic languages are adumbrated; and finally, core and non-core semantic features are addressed as a reflection of morphosyntactic and semantic variation within Sinitic. I use the framework of prototype theory to analyse the evidential in terms of a radial category (Jurafsky 1997). This is the first study to analyse this grammatical category in Sinitic as a whole.

### 2. *The experiential aspect*

In broad terms, Chinese languages code aspect rather than tense distinctions. Time reference is made through temporal expressions such as adverbs, while aspect is coded onto the verb in the form of enclitics, although some preverbal markers are used, particularly in Min languages such as Xiamen and Fuzhou. There is a continuum of aspect marking available, from the more grammaticalized enclitics to verb complements which retain more of their original lexical content and function like *Aktionsarten* or lexical aspect (Chappell 1992; Ch. 4). The verbal origin of aspect categories from serial verb constructions in Sinitic is well-studied, particularly for Mandarin or Northern Chinese (see Mei 1981b; Peyraube 1996; Yue-Hashimoto 1993a).

Nonetheless, these aspect systems are neither fully-fledged nor obligatory in the sense of the Russian aspect system where past tense verbs must be marked for the imperfective or perfective distinction. Overall, Chinese aspect systems could be aptly described as discourse-driven, showing a certain degree of semantic freedom in their use by speakers. For example, aspect markers can be put to other uses, such as rhetorical ones in marking the peak of a narration (see Chappell 1998 on the Cantonese Yue perfective).

The experiential aspect, the focus of this study, is a relatively unknown and little-studied aspectual category in the languages of the world. Its prototypical function according to the main analyses of its use is to code that an event has taken place at least once at some point in the past. It is also described as frequently indicating that the subject, if human, gains experience or knowledge of the situation as a result. Dahl (1985: 141) has given the following general definition for this aspectual category: ‘The basic use of the EXPER(IENTIAL) is in sentences in which it is asserted (questioned, denied) that an event of a certain type took place at least once during a certain period up to a certain point in time’.

Comrie (1976: 58) similarly defines the experiential perfect as indicating ‘that a given situation has held at least once during some time in the past leading up to the present’.

Experiential markers used in Sinitic such as standard Mandarin *kuo*<sup>51</sup>, Cantonese Yue *kwo*<sup>33</sup>, Taiwanese Southern Min *bat* and Shanghainese Wu *ku*<sup>31</sup> (*çii*<sup>ʔ</sup>) are, however, rare in the languages of the world. The three main cross-linguistic studies on this category show scant attestation of the experiential aspect. In Comrie’s seminal work on aspect (1976) only two languages are mentioned which distinguish the experiential: Kpelle (Niger-Congo), and Mandarin (Sinitic), while Bybee, Perkins and Pagliuca (1994) do not discuss it at all. Dahl (1985: 139-41) similarly observes that the experiential is a relatively uncommon category represented in but eight of the sixty-four languages in his sample. Furthermore, these languages are concentrated in the areas of Asia and Africa: Mandarin, Japanese, Thai, Indonesian, Javanese and Sundanese from the Asian region, and Isekiri (Kwa, Niger-Congo) and Sotho (Bantu, Niger-Congo) from the African region. {1}

According to the data I have collected, the majority of Chinese languages possess such an ‘experiential aspect’ marker but, as will be shown, it codes more than aspectual properties pure and simple.

Furthermore, the perfect or completive meaning is shown to be integral to its semantics as both an immediate and inferential evidential. Given the paucity of data on the non-Mandarin Chinese languages, there is nonetheless a need for an adequate characterisation of this category of evidentials in terms of language universal features. This is what I propose to do in the analysis which follows.

The specific features examined in this study for Taiwanese (Southern Min), Fuzhouese (Northeastern Min), Hong Kong Cantonese (Yue), Changsha (New Xiang), Hakka, Gan (Nanchang), Shanghaiese (Wu) and standard Mandarin comprise the following:

- (i) Immediate or inferential evidence and the first person split
- (ii) Discontinuity, repeatability and verbs of destruction
- (iii) The novel element: ‘contrary to expectations’
- (iv) Phase complement marker of completion
- (v) Partitive meaning: ‘partial effect on an object’
- (vi) Future reference clauses and imperatives - ‘do VERB again’
- (vii) Irrealis and conditional use
- (viii) Scope of evidential markers

Dahl (1985) observes that Mandarin Chinese had the highest frequency of the so-called experiential aspect marker in the data compiled from the questionnaire used for the sixty-four languages in his sample. Since evidentials are a well-represented category in Sinitic, more in-depth research will enable us to set up an inventory of its prototypical and peripheral features that can be tested out in other unrelated language families. From this point on in the analysis, I refer to the experiential aspect markers as evidentials and use the glossing of ‘EVD’ in the language examples, unless citing other scholars’ work.

### 3. *Evidentials in crosslinguistic perspective*

Evidentials belong to the category of epistemic modality, expressing the speaker’s attitude towards the truth of the proposition, for example, the degree of certainty or validation that an event has taken place (Chafe and Nichols 1986; Willett 1988). Evidentials can also code the source or manner in which this information was obtained. It is revealing that Wierzbicka (1996, Ch. 15) defines evidentials from a number of unrelated languages in terms of the semantic prime *know*.

The cross-linguistic possibilities are manifold and can be ranged along a continuum, from markers for events which the speaker has personally witnessed or experienced, to markers of hearsay for which the speaker takes no responsibility or commitment to the truth value, and to inferential evidentials which are based on induction from the observable effects of an event. Such a tripartite classification is made in Willett (1988). In Amazonian languages such as Tuyuca (East Tucanoan), evidentiality is a well-developed system interacting with tense and person. It has a five-way contrast coding the source of information by means of a suffix on the verb. For example, given the event 'He played soccer', the speaker can code having seen it (Eyewitness); having heard it (Auditory); having made this conclusion on the basis of footprints (Apparent); having been told it (Reported); or having made this assumption on the basis that the subject regularly plays soccer (Assumed) (Willett 1988: 57; Aikhenvald and Dixon 1998: 244).

In English, there is no obligatory morphological category of evidentials marked on the verb. Instead, we find the use of clause-level evidential adverbs:

- (1) Evidently, he has no idea what to do at all, given the state of his finances.
- (2) Apparently, her plane's been diverted to Auckland.

Hence, there is a scale from direct to indirect evidence which may be singled out for special marking in particular languages (Bybee, Perkins and Pagliuca 1994: 95-8; Chafe and Nichols 1986; Willett 1988). The examples provided above were used to show that the evidential function may assume a variety of different forms in different languages. It does not necessarily correspond to a particular kind of affix. Furthermore, the precise semantics of each language-specific category may vary from the core universal meaning, according to predictable parameters.

Nichols (1986) proposes a universal co-variance between perfective meaning and inferential evidentials on the one hand, and imperfective meaning and the immediacy of directly witnessed evidentials on the other. This is highly pertinent in the case of Sinitic where the evidential markers generally have an accompanying perfect or perfective reading in main clause usage. In terms of the Pan-Eurasian languages represented in Chafe

and Nichols (1986), she argues that this link holds for Turkish, Tibetan, Sherpa, and Ussurian Chinese Pidgin Russian.

Furthermore, Nichols claims that crosslinguistically this is a first-ranked distinction which can be semantically conditioned by aspect, verb class and person splits. In the main analysis in Section 6, I show that the inferential interpretation versus the immediate interpretation for evidentials in Sinitic is conditioned by first person versus all other. The inferential interpretation is not available (or relevant) for first person subjects.

#### 4. *Coding of the evidential in Sinitic languages*

Let us examine the coding of the evidential marker in more detail for each of the representative languages from Sinitic. Dahl (1985: 141) observes that the experiential (evidential) marker is coded periphrastically in the eight languages in his sample. In my sample for Sinitic, the majority use a postverbal clitic cognate with Mandarin *guò* 過 ‘cross over’. The exception is the Min dialect group which uses a preverbal marker *bat* or *pei?* 識 which appears to be related to the verb ‘know’. In many of the Min dialects, however, the Northern suffixing strategy has also been adopted and is used side-by-side with the preverbal marker in a hybrid structure, as in examples (17), (19) and (60) with *bat* Verb *kue* 過 (where *kue* 過 is cognate to *guò*). Essentially, then, this concurs with Dahl’s generalisation, noting that the languages in his sample possessing the experiential (evidential) were in the main non-inflectional in type.

Table 1 presents the evidential markers found in eight branches of the Sinitic taxon:

Table 1: The evidential/experiential markers of Sinitic languages

LANGUAGE	PUTATIVE SOURCE	CODING STRATEGY AND FORM
1. Minnan (Taiwan)	<i>bat</i> ‘know’ 識 <i>koè</i> 過	<i>bat</i> VERB (X) - ( <i>koè</i> )
2. Yue (H.K. Cantonese)	<i>kwo</i> <sup>33</sup> ‘cross, pass’ 過	VERB - <i>kwo</i> <sup>33</sup>
3. New Xiang (Changsha)	<i>ko</i> <sup>45</sup> ‘cross, pass’ 過	VERB - <i>ko</i> <sup>45</sup>
4. Wu (Shanghainese)	<i>ku</i> <sup>34</sup> ‘pass, accompany’ <i>eiɿ</i> <sup>ɿ5</sup> 歇 ‘a moment’ <i>ku</i> <sup>34</sup> <i>eiɿ</i> <sup>ɿ5</sup> 過 歇	VERB - <i>ku</i> <sup>34</sup> ( <i>eiɿ</i> <sup>ɿ5</sup> ) 過 歇 Verb- <i>h’ih</i> , Verb- <i>kú</i> Verb- <i>kú-h’ih</i> (Edkins 1853:144) <i>ku</i> <sup>34</sup> ( <i>eiɿ</i> <sup>ɿ5</sup> ) Xu & Tang (1988: 445)
5. Mandarin (Beijing)	<i>kuo</i> <sup>51</sup> ‘cross, pass’	VERB - <i>kuo</i> <sup>51</sup>
6. Northeastern Min (Fuzhou)	<i>pai</i> <sup>ɿ31</sup> 八 ‘know’, ‘be familiar with’; <i>tseing</i> <sup>52</sup> 曾 ‘once’ <i>kuo</i> <sup>ɿ23</sup> ‘cross’ 過	<i>paik cheng</i> VERB 伙曾 (Baldwin 1871: 34) VERB - <i>kuo</i> <sup>ɿ23</sup> (Yuan Jiahua 1960: 310) <i>pei</i> <sup>ɿ31</sup> <i>tseing</i> <sup>52</sup> (Fujiansheng Hanyu Fangyan Gaikuang 1962: 211)
7. Hakka (Guangdong)	<i>ko</i> <sup>55</sup> ‘cross’ 過	VERB - <i>ko</i> <sup>55</sup> (Harkins 1975: 157, Luo 1985: 87, 295)
8. Gan (Nanchang)	<i>kuo</i> <sup>55</sup> 過 (no discussion of meaning)	VERB - <i>kuo</i> <sup>55</sup> (Yuan Jiahua 1960: 143)

Some examples of usage in narratives and conversation are provided below. Main clause usage is exemplified by Cantonese in (3); use in a negated clause in Shanghainese in (4); use in the embedded clause of a quotative in the Taiwanese Southern Min example in (5); and use in a relative clause in the Changsha Xiang example in (6).

Hong Kong Cantonese (Yue)

(3) 因為 我 噏日 去 捉... 哩 個 女仔  
 yan<sup>1</sup>wai<sup>6</sup> ngoh<sup>5</sup> kam<sup>4</sup>yat<sup>6</sup> hui<sup>3</sup> juk<sup>3</sup> lei<sup>5</sup> goh<sup>3</sup> nui<sup>5</sup>jai<sup>2</sup>  
 because 1SG yesterday go seize this CL young:woman

嘅 時候 我 曾經 見 過 哩 個 男 ...  
 ge<sup>3</sup> si<sup>4</sup>hau<sup>6</sup> ngoh<sup>5</sup> chang<sup>4</sup>ging<sup>1</sup> gin<sup>3</sup>-gwoh<sup>3</sup> lei<sup>5</sup> goh<sup>3</sup> naam<sup>4</sup>  
 L time 1SG once see-EVD this CL male

哩 個 書生 嘅  
 lei<sup>5</sup> goh<sup>3</sup> sue<sup>1</sup>saang<sup>1</sup> ge<sup>3</sup>  
 this CL scholar PRT<sub>asst</sub>

‘Because yesterday when I went to seize the young woman, (I knew) *I’d seen* this man, this scholar before.’  
 (Tale of the Reborn Lady in Red Plum-blossom Silk 再世紅梅記, 258-261)

Shanghainese (Wu)

(4) 我 只 表 直到 現在 還  
 ŋu<sup>13</sup> gəʔ<sup>2</sup> tsaʔ<sup>5</sup> piɔ<sup>34</sup> zəʔ<sup>2</sup>to<sup>34</sup> hi<sup>31</sup>zɛ<sup>13</sup> fue<sup>13</sup>  
 1sg this CL watch right:to now still

無 沒 出 過 大 個 毛病  
 m<sup>13</sup>məʔ<sup>2</sup> ts‘aʔ<sup>5</sup> -ku<sup>34</sup> du<sup>13</sup> ɣə mɔ<sup>13</sup>biŋ<sup>13</sup>  
 NEG appear-EXP big CL defect

‘This watch of mine *has never had* any major problems right up to now.’  
 (Xu and Tang 1988: 437)

Taiwanese Southern Min (Hokkien)

- (5) 一 個 日 本 人 及 別 人 講  
 chit ê jīt-pún lâng kā pát lâng kóng  
 one CL Japanese to other people say
- 伊 識 抵 著 一 擺 大 地 震  
 i bat tú-tiòh chit pái tōa tē-tāng  
 3SG EVD come:across one CL big earthquake  
 ‘A Japanese person told other people that he *had been through* a big earthquake.’  
 (Cheng and Cheng 1993: iv)

Changsha (New Xiang)

- (6) 到 過 長 沙 的 人 一 定 呢 會 曉 得  
 tau<sup>55</sup> ko<sup>55</sup> tsan<sup>24</sup> sa<sup>33</sup> ti zen<sup>24</sup> i<sup>24</sup> tin<sup>21</sup> ŋje<sup>33</sup> fei<sup>21</sup> ċiau<sup>42</sup> te<sup>24</sup>  
 go EVD Changsha L people certain PRT likely know
- 城 裏 有 一 條 街 道 叫 做  
 tsen<sup>13</sup> li<sup>42</sup> ieu<sup>42</sup> i<sup>24</sup> tiau<sup>24</sup> kai<sup>33</sup> tau<sup>55</sup> tċiau<sup>55</sup> tseu<sup>55</sup>  
 city:in there:be one CL street be:called
- 化 龍 池  
 fa<sup>55</sup> len<sup>13</sup> tsi<sup>13</sup>  
 change dragon pond  
 ‘People who *have been* to Changsha will certainly know that there is a street in the city called Fa Len Tsi.’  
 (Y. Li 1991: 623, line 1 of narrative by Zhong Jiangyu)

Note also the preverbal position of the evidential in Taiwanese Southern Min example in (5) in contrast to the other three languages exemplified, which all use a postverbal marker. In the next section, the issue of grammaticalization is discussed.

5. *Lexical source and semantic pathways*

There are two main semantic pathways in Sinitic languages for the grammaticalization of the evidential: one is the verb ‘cross, pass through’ and the other is the verb ‘know’. Thus, the lexical source for the evidential marker is semantically transparent in most cases of these eight

representative languages from Sinitic. The first source is represented by Mandarin *guo*<sup>51</sup> 過 and its cognates in Yue, Xiang, Wu, Kejia (Hakka) and Gan. Their cognate evidential markers have grammaticalized out of verbs meaning ‘cross/pass through space or time’. The same morpheme is used as a directional complement to form verb compounds with motion verbs, and here it has the meaning of ‘over, across’. This, in fact, is the typical pathway of development for Sinitic aspect markers (see Chappell 1992, Lamarre 2001):

- (7) (i) lexical verb →  
(ii) complement verb of direction (V<sub>2</sub>) in V<sub>1</sub>-V<sub>2</sub> compounds →  
(iii) phase marker of lexical aspect →  
(iv) ‘perfect of result’ or anterior aspect/modality marker {2}

It can be conjectured that the semantic extension and generalisation followed the path of movement through space to the more abstract notion of movement through time, then to the notion of completion of an action or situation, and finally to an evidential use of either the immediate or inferring kind. Semantic change from spatial to temporal concepts is well-attested in the languages of the world, particularly for aspect (Bybee, Perkins and Pagliuca 1994; Sweetser 1992) and is treated as part of a grammaticalization chain in Heine, Claudi and Hünnemeyer (1991). Furthermore, overlap between tense-aspect systems and modality is a common phenomenon, noting that evidentiality is generally considered to be a kind of epistemic modality (Chafe and Nichols 1986; Willett 1988). In Sinitic, stratification is common (termed ‘layering’ in Hopper 1991) as most of these functions can typically co-exist synchronically. For example, in standard Mandarin and Changsha Xiang, the cognate morphemes for the evidential remain in use as full lexical verbs - ‘cross, pass’ - and as directional verb complements - ‘over, across’ - as exemplified in (8) and (9) below respectively. See also Table 1.

- Mandarin:  
(8) 過 了 這 條 街 就 到 了。  
*guò le zhè tiáo jiē jiù dào le*  
*cross PFV this CL street then arrive INC*  
‘As soon as we’ve *crossed* this street, we’ll be there.’

- (9) 我游不過這條河。  
 wǒ yóu-bu-guò zhè tiáo hé  
 1SG swim-NEG-COMP<sub>dir</sub> this CL river  
 ‘I can’t swim *across* this river.’

Changsha Xiang:

- (10) 過噠河就到噠我屋裏。  
 ko<sup>45</sup> ta<sup>21</sup> xo<sup>13</sup> tɕiəu<sup>21</sup> tau<sup>45</sup> ta<sup>21</sup> ŋo<sup>41</sup> u<sup>24</sup>li  
*cross* PFV river then arrive PFV 1SG home  
 ‘Cross the river, then you’ll be at my house.’
- (11) 我每天都走過那條橋。  
 ŋo<sup>41</sup> mei<sup>41</sup>tʰiẽ<sup>33</sup> təu<sup>33</sup> tsəu<sup>41</sup>-ko<sup>45</sup> la<sup>45</sup> tʰiau<sup>13</sup> tɕʰiau<sup>13</sup>  
 1SG every:day all walk-COMP<sub>dir</sub> that CL bridge  
 ‘I cross *over* that bridge every day.’  
 (Xiang examples from Wu 1999a: 76)

The second source is represented by Min languages such as Taiwanese Southern Min, Amoy (Xiamen) Southern Min and Fuzhouese (Foochow) (Northeastern Min). All make use of a preverbal evidential marker which is homophonous with a verb meaning ‘know’. Indeed, this verb appears to be its diachronic source in the three languages (Y. Liang, C.F. Lien, pers. comm.). From the semantic point of view, it is an entirely plausible source for evidential markers. This verb is cognate with Mandarin *bié* 別 ‘other’ which earlier had the meaning of ‘know, discriminate’ according to the *Zuo Zhuan* (commentary on the *Spring and Autumn Annals*) which represents the much earlier period of Classical Chinese based on model texts from the fifth to the third centuries BCE (cf. *Zhongwen Da Cidian*, Vol. 4, 1963: 1663). Note that the formal distinction of marking the evidential preverbally accompanies the different semantic source in the Min dialects.

The closest example to the Min paradigm of evidential markers is found in early Cantonese texts. Cheung (2001) notes that *hiu* 曉 ‘know’ could be used with a perfective meaning similar to *gwoh* 過 ‘cross’ as the second verb in a compound, such as *sau-hiu* 收曉 ‘have received’.

Evidence for the verbal origin of this marker can be found in a Spanish manuscript describing the grammar of a Southern Min or Hokkien dialect of the late 16<sup>th</sup> and early 17<sup>th</sup> centuries, spoken by Chinese traders

from Fujian province who had settled near Manila in the Philippines. In these documents, the morpheme *bat* is glossed as ‘know, be used to doing’ (see van der Loon 1967: 141), that is, more like an habitual aspect marker in its nonlexical sense. There are also several examples with *bat* meaning ‘know’ in the Southern Min translation of the Catholic religious manual known as the *Doctrina Christiana* (see van der Loon 1967; Chappell 2000a).

- (12) 先七件乞人識僚氏根因  
 seng chit kia kir lang *bat* diosi kinyn  
 first seven item let person *know* God origin  
 ‘The first seven [Articles of Faith] enable us to *know* God as the origin.’  
 (*Doctrina Christiana* Section 3a, reproduced in van der Loon 1967: 148; my translation){3}

The evidential marker may have involved a reduction in the case of Taiwanese if we compare it with Fuzhouese *pɛi<sup>1</sup>tsɛi<sup>52</sup>* 伏曾 literally ‘have once known’. Some of the compound markers include constituents which appear to be related to forms homophonous with ‘once’ or ‘a moment’ such as *ɕiɿ<sup>ɕ</sup>* 歇 ‘a moment’ in Shanghainese and *tsɛi<sup>52</sup>* 曾 ‘once’ in the Fuzhou dialect of Min (Northeastern Min). This is undoubtedly cognate with a Mandarin adverb *céngjīng* 曾經 used with events which have happened once in the past. It is found in more formal registers of language. Note that a much earlier marker was *cháng* 嘗 ‘taste’, which can be found in classical texts such as the Works of Mencius (third century BCE) with this evidential meaning of ‘have once + VERB<sub>past participle</sub>’.

Willett (1988: Section 4) discusses the diachronic sources of evidentials in some detail. He finds that evidential markers in about half of the languages in his sample have the following sources:

- (i) attested evidentials arise from sensory perception verbs such as ‘hear’ or ‘see’
- (ii) reported evidentials arise from verbs of saying
- (iii) inferring evidentials arise from perfects or verbs of observation

Therefore, the semantic extension of a marker with perfect (or completive features) to use as an evidential in most of the Sinitic languages in the sample tallies well with his description. Note also that in many languages,

verbs of observation and perception develop into cognitive verbs such as ‘know’.

In the case of Min dialects, a verb of knowledge is highly compatible with the grammatical meaning of the evidential and fits in with Bybee, Perkins and Pagliuca’s description of anteriors and resultatives as the main source of documented evidentials in their sample of languages (1994: 95-7). This semantic change arises due to the fact that with resultatives, for example, some past action can be inferred as the cause of the resultant state.

(13) a. Resultative meaning of participial constructions:  
Mary is gone → Mary is not here because she has left

b. Potential evidential meaning:  
Mary is gone → I (the speaker) know Mary has left because she is not here (past action inferred from a resulting state)

(Bybee, Perkins and Pagliuca 1994: 96)

This is strikingly similar to the use of the verbal suffix *-guo* 過 ‘cross’ and its correlates:

Mandarin:

(14) 她來過又走了。  
tā lái guo (yòu zǒu le)  
3SG come EVD (again leave CRS)  
‘She’s been (and gone again).’

Example (14) is appropriately used when the speaker has personally seen the subject and knows they have left, or else can infer their leaving from circumstantial evidence such as the fact that her umbrella or bag is no longer in the office. If this were hearsay, then it would be more felicitous to embed the clause under a *say* verb such as *shuō* ‘speak, say’: *Mìshū shuō tā lái-guo le* 秘書說他來過了 ‘The secretary said that she’s been (and gone again)’. In other words, Sinitic evidentials conflate the immediate or observable and inferential types, while excluding Willett’s third ‘hearsay’ type.

Below are the two conjectured pathways of semantic change from lexical verb to evidential in Sinitic languages.

- (15) Pathway for ‘cross’ (Sinitic in general): GUO 過  
 Lexical verb → V<sub>1</sub> + directional complement →  
 V<sub>1</sub> + anterior perfect aspect →  
 V<sub>1</sub> + evidential
- (16) Pathway for ‘know’ (Min dialects only): BAT 識  
 Lexical verb → ‘know’ (‘once’) + V<sub>2</sub> → evidential + V<sub>2</sub>

6. *Why the experiential aspect is an evidential in Sinitic*

In most analyses of the experiential aspect, either cross-linguistically or in terms of Mandarin, there appears to be general agreement that this aspectual category codes at least one occurrence of the event in a remote or indefinite past, leading to implied repeatability of the event. Furthermore, for this to be so, a discontinuity between the event and the time of speech or reference time needs to be understood. This is aptly exemplified by (17) where a natural spring can no longer be seen welling up out of the ground, where it used to be, but the speaker thinks it could reappear if the ground were no longer built over by factories:

Taiwanese Southern Min:

- (17) 遮 識 出 過 水 泉  
 chia bat chhut koè chúi-chôa<sup>n</sup>  
 here *EVD* appear *EVD* spring  
 ‘There used to be a spring here (context: and now I only see factories).’

Some of the problems with these proposed semantic features are discussed in the following sections.

6.1. Immediate or inferential evidence and the first person split

The major difficulty in defining this aspectual category in terms of experience is that this feature of meaning can only be relevant when the subject of the verb is a human or possibly animate referent. But this does not even apply to all cases of animate subjects, as next discussed. The first example is from Xiang with a human animate subject, and the second from Taiwanese Southern Min with an inanimate subject:

Changsha Xiang:

- (18) 他們 喊 吃 過 杏仁 豆腐  
t'a<sup>33</sup>men xa<sup>21</sup> tɕ'ia<sup>24</sup> -ko<sup>45</sup> ɕin<sup>45</sup>ren<sup>13</sup> teu<sup>21</sup>fu  
3PL all eat *EVD* almond tofu  
'They've all eaten almond tofu before.'

Taiwanese Southern Min:

- (19) 本選集現代篇及鄉篇  
pún sóan-chip hiāntāi phi<sup>n</sup> kah hiong-thó' phi<sup>n</sup>  
this collection modern article and folk article  
  
的部分笑話 識分別佇民眾  
ê pō·hūn chhìo-oē bat hūn-piāt tì bîn-chiòng  
L section joke *EVD* separate LOC people  
  
日報及自立晚報刊登過  
jī-pò kah chū-líp àm-pò khan-ti<sup>n</sup> koè  
daily:news and independent evening:news publish *EVD*

'This collection of jokes from sections on both modern and folk literature has been separately published in the People's Daily and the Independent Evening News.'  
(Cheng and Cheng 1993: iv)

While having eaten the sweet dish of almond tofu and thus knowing its taste and flavour can be felicitously described as an experience for the subject 'they' in (18), particularly if considered a treat, the event of 'being published', in (19), obviously cannot be so described for an inanimate object, a book, 'this collection of jokes', in the second example. This difficulty can, of course, be overcome to some extent if the experience is ascribed to the authors as understood 'possessors'.

The same judgement applies to (17) with regard to its locative subject, 'here', and to the Shanghainese example in (4) for 'this watch of mine has never had any problems'. Indeed, it is the owner of the watch, or the associated persons - the people who live near the spot where the spring used to be (see example (17)) - to whom some kind of resultant knowledge can be attributed, but not 'experience', which is too imprecise. {4} For other examples, this description appears to be equally inappropriate, albeit for slightly different reasons, as with the Mandarin example in (14) with the

verb ‘to come’. The subject’s experience is similarly not salient in this case (‘She came-*EVD* and left again’) and it would be over-interpreting the meaning to claim that it codes the subject’s experience of having been at a particular place. What is salient for all these examples is the assertion of certainty on the part of the speaker that this event did in fact take place.

This leads to the conclusion that the experiential meaning is only relevant for a subset of examples of declarative clauses with human subjects and possessors in the first person and should not be used as a core feature in defining the general semantics of the category. {5} First person subjects do not need to infer a prior situation from any observed result state, since in the real-world situation they have undergone the process of the event, themselves. Reconsider the Cantonese example in (3) where a bodyguard of the Chief Minister ‘testifies’ to seeing the hero, a scholar, with his own eyes and uses the evidential form of the verb. This is significant in revealing to the villain of the story (the Chief Minister) the scholar’s plot to save the heroine, whom the Chief Minister wishes in fact to marry.

This subset can, nonetheless, be classified as an ‘immediate’ type of inferential according to Willett’s framework (1998). This creates a semantically-conditioned person split in the evidential paradigm: while both inferential and immediate readings, based on direct observation, are available for second and third person subjects, only the immediate one, based on direct experience, is relevant for first person ones. Such person splits are not uncommon crosslinguistically and are described in Chafe and Nichols (1986) and Aikhenvald and Dixon (1998).

Similarly, the description as an aspect marker of the remote or indefinite past cannot be upheld when examples such as the following, which constitute completely acceptable utterances in Taiwanese Southern Min, are considered:

- (20) 伊 今仔日 識 人 不 好 過  
 i kin-ná-jit bat lāng ĩn hó koè  
 3SG today *EVD* person NEG well *EVD*  
 ‘He didn’t feel well today [but now he’s OK].’

Of course, it could be argued that this features belongs to the language-specific semantics of *bat* in Southern Min. Nonetheless, other features such as discontinuity can be still be interpreted; namely, that the situation of being unwell no longer holds, which seems to suggest that

‘remoteness’ is not a sufficiently precise characterization for this component of meaning.

Hence, I claim that the prototype meaning of the evidential category in Sinitic languages in main clause declarative usage is to express that the speaker is certain of the truth of the proposition due to two possible sources of information, either an inferential or an immediate one:

- (i) Inferential type: the speaker infers a prior causing action from an observable result state and codes this as evidence for the truth of the assertion in clauses with non-first person subjects.
- (ii) Immediate type: the speaker has personally witnessed a situation and codes this as evidence for the truth of the assertion. In the case of first person subjects, the personal witnessing involves directly experiencing, that is, undergoing, the event. This subtype accounts for the traditional label of ‘experiential’ aspect in Chinese linguistics.

I next discuss each of the main semantic features in turn that belong to the prototype or core meaning of the Sinitic evidential category, before looking at some language-specific developments involving non-central meanings in different Sinitic languages. Thus, there are clearly shared features of meaning for the evidential in Sinitic languages which in fact allow us to recognize the relevant marker as such, despite the existence of non-cognate forms used for this purpose (the Min dialects versus Mandarin, Xiang, Wu, Gan, Hakka, Yue) and the existence of syntactic and morphological variation. In addition, it should be recognized that there are special uses of the evidential in each Sinitic language that further differentiate this category from language to language. Hence, I would like to make the following point clear from the outset: there is not one isomorphic evidential found in all Sinitic languages, but rather a set of morphemes which share the core semantic features but not necessarily a cognate form nor all the specific peripheral features.

## 6.2. Discontinuity, repeatability and verbs of destruction

It has been shown that the evidential category in Sinitic is used for observing result states from which a prior event is inferred, or for directly witnessing the events in the case of first person subjects. There is, however, a further semantic twist to describing its nature: normally, the question posed in (21) could only be appropriately used when the window is closed.

The evidential codes the speakers' certainty of their inference that the window has been open at some previous point in time:

Mandarin:

- (21) 誰 開 過 窗戶?  
shéi kāi -*guo* chuānghu  
who open *EVD* window  
'Who opened the window?' (Context: Despite the fact that the window is closed, there are raindrops on the window sill, the air is intensely cold, or papers are strewn on the floor, blown about by the wind.)

Similarly, in the Cantonese example in (22), it is understood that the subject, Lily, has visited America last year but has since returned, at the time of the utterance:

Cantonese:

- (22) 莉莉舊年去過美國。  
lei<sup>6</sup>lei<sup>6</sup> gau<sup>6</sup>nin<sup>4</sup> hui<sup>3</sup>gwoh<sup>3</sup> mei<sup>5</sup>gwok<sup>3</sup>  
(name) last:year go-*EVD* America  
'Lily went to America last year.'

Thus, the source of information typically relies upon observing the outcome of the past event. In the following Mandarin example, the assertion of poisoning is made in an appropriate context where the speaker has seen the after-effects, such as the subject's atypically rough or mottled skin:

Mandarin:

- (23) 她 中 過 毒  
tā zhòng-*guo* dú  
3SG hit-*EVD* poison  
'She's been poisoned before.'

However, this example may not be used at the scene-of-the-crime where a forensic doctor is examining the body. Why not? *A priori* this would appear to be an ideal context for the use of an evidential where clues to the cause of death are being sought. The use of example (23) has, however, the implication that the subject survived the poisoning and lived to tell the tale.

This leads us to discuss the feature of discontinuity which is common to all the Sinitic evidentials in this sample.

A detective could utter the following statement in (24) at the scene of the crime yet this would similarly not be understood as the cause of death. Rather, it would be a statement based on visible evidence such as abrasions on the neck, consistent with attempted strangling carried out at some time in the past, but again, as in (23), the subject is understood to have survived the event:

Mandarin:

- (24) 他 的 脖子 被 人 勒 過  
 tā de bózi bèi rén lēi-guo  
 3SG GEN neck PASS person force-EVD  
 ‘His neck has been held in a strangle-hold.’

The example in (25), which does not contain *-guo* but rather the explicit resultative *lēi-sǐ* 勒死 ‘strangle to death’, would be one way for a coroner to unequivocally state the cause of death:

- (25) 他 是 被 人 勒 死 的  
 tā shì bèi rén lēi-sǐ de  
 3SG be PASS person force-die DE<sub>asst</sub>  
 ‘He was strangled to death.’

The similar situation obtains in Taiwanese Southern Min. In (26), with the use of the evidential *bat*, it is understood that the subject survived, as opposed to the use of a passive in (27) which cannot co-occur with *bat*:

Taiwanese Southern Min:

- (26) 識 有 人 欲 及 搗 死  
 bat ū lâng beh kā ng-sì  
 EVD have people want PRETR suffocate-die  
 ‘It is the case that somebody once wanted to suffocate him.’
- (27) 伊 (\*識) 是 乎 人 搗 死 的  
 i (\*bat) sì hō lâng ng-sì ê  
 3SG (EVD) be PASS people suffocate-die EMP  
 ‘He was suffocated to death.’

This feature, described as ‘discontinuity’, is a remarkable semantic characteristic of the use of these evidential markers in Sinitic. When an evidential marker is used, the interpretation is that the result state associated with some prior or causing event no longer holds. We could paraphrase the discontinuity meaning as: *It is no longer the case that (associated result state of PREDICATE)* referring to the fact that the window is no longer open in the context of (21); and that the subject is no longer suffering from poisoning in (23), an attempted strangling in (24), or attempted suffocation in (26). {6} The same semantic feature is pertinent also for Japanese and Korean, as described in Kim (1998: 169).

This partially explains why predicates that lead to non-existence such as verbs of death and destruction are not generally compatible with the evidential: they do not allow for potential repeatability, as pointed out in Ma (1977) and Huang (1988), *inter alia*. Further semantic repercussions of this component are described in section 6.5 on a partitive use, and in section 6.6 on an imperative use which entails repeatability.

In contrast to this, the perfect marker in Sinitic languages yields the interpretation that the result state typically associated with the action or event of the main verb is still in force. In Mandarin, the perfect is coded by clause-final *le* 了, described as a marker of ‘the currently relevant state’ (Li and Thompson 1981: 238-300). As both these labels (traditional and contemporary) suggest, the effect of the action lingers on, similar to the English present perfect (Comrie 1976: 56-7):

Mandarin:

(28) 有人在這儿抽煙了。

yǒu rén zài zhèr chōu-yān le  
 have person at here draw-smoke CRS  
 ‘There are people smoking here [now].’

(29) 誰在這儿抽過煙?

shéi zài zhèr chōu-guo yān  
 who at here draw-EVD smoke  
 ‘Who’s been smoking here?’

The examples in (28) and (29) are chosen to illustrate the following semantic facts: using the context of someone trying to find a room for a private talk, the ‘currently relevant state’ marker *le* codes that the room which the speaker wishes to enter is occupied by others who can be seen in

the process of smoking. In contrast to this, the use of the *-guo* evidential is appropriate when one enters a very smoky room or detects the odour of smoke but there is no longer any sign of the smokers. The same semantic distinction applies for similar examples in Cantonese, also treated in Matthews and Yip (1994: 206):

Hong Kong Cantonese (Yue):

(30) 有人喺度食煙。  
 yau<sup>5</sup> yan<sup>4</sup> hai<sup>2</sup> do<sup>6</sup> sik<sup>6</sup> yin<sup>1</sup>  
 there:be person at place ingest smoke  
 ‘There are people smoking here.’ (Context: The speaker can see others smoking in the given location.)

(31) 有人喺度食過煙。  
 yau<sup>5</sup> yan<sup>4</sup> hai<sup>2</sup> do<sup>6</sup> sik<sup>6</sup> gwoh<sup>3</sup> yin<sup>1</sup>  
 there:be person at place ingest EVD smoke  
 ‘Someone’s been smoking here.’ (Context: The speaker can see cigarette ash or smell the odour, but the smokers have left.)

The discontinuity effect also applies to Taiwanese Southern Min, Nanchang Gan, Shanghainese Wu, Changsha Xiang and Hakka. This allows us to describe this category of evidential as one which implies potential repeatability, given the semantic feature of the result state associated with the predicate no longer being in force. From this it follows that verbs of destruction are not normally semantically compatible with the evidential. This, in fact, appears to be an essential basis for use of the evidential. If the event were taking place in the present at the moment of speech, the use of the evidential would be rendered superfluous.

### 6.3. The novel element: ‘contrary to expectations’

The explanation of *-guo* and its functional correlates in terms of an evidential permits us to account for a larger proportion of the data than does the notion of an experiential aspect. For example, for both subtypes of the core meaning, there is often a surprise element of the situation being understood as ‘contrary to expectations’. This explains why many predicates cannot be marked by *-guo* since, within the given context, they do not code that the result state was unexpected. {7}

To state that one has been young, that one is getting old, or even to discuss the stages of life — birth, growing to maturity and finally death —

involve universal givens. In general, any of these would be hard to interpret as unusual events whose truth, let alone occurrence, needs to be asserted by a speaker. For this reason, most of these predicates do not take an evidential marker unless the context is a special one, that is, either contrary to expectations or involving irony. In Xiang, this is certainly the case for the predicate ‘be young’ which generally cannot take the evidential marker *ko*<sup>45</sup>, unless there is a special context, for example, an older generation person reminding someone of the younger generation that they, too, were once young:

Changsha Xiang:

(32) ?我年輕過。  
 ŋo<sup>41</sup>    ŋjẽ<sup>13</sup>tɕ'in<sup>33</sup>    ko<sup>45</sup>  
 1SG    be:young    EVD  
 ‘I’ve been young once.’

(33) 哪個冇年輕過咧。  
 la<sup>41</sup>    ko<sup>45</sup>    mau<sup>21</sup>    ŋjẽ<sup>13</sup>tɕ'in<sup>33</sup>    ko<sup>45</sup>    .lie  
 which    CL    NEG<sub>exist</sub>    be:young    EVD    PRT  
 ‘Everyone’s been young once, haven’t they?’

The same applies to Mandarin. A very special context of an unusual nature is needed in which one could use verbs such as *chūshēng-guo* 出生過 (be:born-EVD), *lǎo-guo* 老過 (get:old-EVD) if at all, or *sǐ-guo* 死過 (die-EVD) with the evidential marker:

Mandarin:

(34) 白骨精死過三次。  
 Báigǔjīng    sǐ-guo    sāncì  
 (name)    die-EVD    three:VCL  
 ‘The White Bone demon died three times.’

Note that under normal circumstances, however, this set of verbs is not semantically compatible with the repeatability constraint.

Usage of the evidential is also conditioned by the nature of the postverbal noun, which should be generic in the general main clause construction. For example, with the event of the birth of a younger brother, *-guo* would be inappropriate in Mandarin, since, once born, the existence of such a brother is normally a well-known and uncontroversial fact within the

family circle and network of friends. It does not need to be asserted. This involves a semantic and syntactic constraint on the use of referential NPs as direct objects in predicates marked by *-guo*, also described in Kim (1998).

- (35) 我母親去年生過小弟弟。  
 wǒ mǔqīn qùnián shēng-guo xiǎo dìdi  
 1SG mother last:year give:birth-EVD little brother

In contrast to this, when the object NP is non-referential, the use of *-guo* is no longer semantically or pragmatically odd. Confirmation that a mother has given birth to three sons by use of the evidential marker may fit a context where she now fulfils eligibility requirements for childcare concessions or any context where this is somehow unexpected or out-of-the-ordinary news.

- (36) 伊識生過三個囡仔。  
 i bat se<sup>n</sup> koè sa<sup>n</sup> ê kiá<sup>n</sup>-á  
 3SG EVD give:birth EVD three CL son  
 ‘She has given birth to three sons.’

Similarly, with predicates for ‘die’ there is normally no need to use an evidential to make a strong assertion of commitment to certainty. In English, it would be odd to say ‘Apparently, he is dead’, unless this is ironic such as from the mouth of a successful sleuth in a detective novel. However, the evidential is semantically appropriate if the speaker is reporting a crisis situation of near death, as in the following Southern Min example, and in the case of financial difficulties, for the Cantonese idiom:

Taiwanese Southern Min:

- (37) 伊識死無去。  
 i bat sì bô khi  
 3sg EVD die NEG go  
 ‘He almost died.’

Hong Kong Cantonese Yue:

- (38) 我死過翻生。  
 ngoh<sup>5</sup> se<sup>2</sup> gwoh<sup>3</sup> faan<sup>1</sup>saang<sup>1</sup>  
 1SG die EVD turn:over:life  
 ‘I almost died.’ (idiom in Cantonese)

Apart from the hyperbole exemplified above, the evidential could be used in the case of resurrection or reincarnation, as in example (34), with respect to the story of the White Bone demon.

Thus, the semantic component of a result state which is novel or somehow contrary to expectations appears to be an invariant feature of this evidential category in Sinitic. The result state is required to be different from general expectations and our knowledge of the routine aspects of life.

#### 6.4. Phase complement marker of completion

Chao (1968), Chen (1979), and Iljic (1987) *inter alia* differentiate a phase complement *-guo* in Mandarin from its experiential use in terms of the phase complement's potential to keep its full tonal value and its ability to co-occur with the perfective aspect marker *-le*.

- (39) 我 吃 過 了 飯 就 走。  
 wǒ chī guò le fàn jiù zǒu  
 1SG eat CPL PFV meal then go  
 'I will go as soon as I have eaten my dinner.'  
 (Chao 1968: 450)

This particular function of the lexeme *-guo* is different from the evidential one in that it codes completion but not any assertion about the occurrence of an event. It co-occurs commonly with verbs of daily social activities including ingestive or consumption verbs and many of the separable intransitive verb compounds such as *chī-fàn* 吃過, 'eat rice', *shuì-jào* 睡覺 'sleep (nap)' and *hē-jiǔ* 喝酒 'drink (alcohol)' that incorporate a generic object. It is pertinent to the discussion that this function of *-guo* does not appear to have correlates in other Sinitic languages such as Cantonese, Hokkien, Hakka or Xiang, although it is possible in the new generation *-xīnpài* 新派 - Shanghainese, an increasingly Mandarinized variety of Wu.

Shanghainese Wu:

- (40) 儂飯吃過勒伐?  
 noŋ<sup>13</sup> ve<sup>13</sup> tɕ'iiŋ<sup>5</sup> ku<sup>34</sup> laŋ<sup>2</sup> vɔŋ<sup>2</sup>  
 2SG rice eat EVD<sub>comp</sub> PFV Q  
 'Have you eaten?' (a greeting or a real question)

In Taiwanese Hokkien, the use of *bat* is reserved for the evidential use and does not have the phase complement use as a completive marker. This means we get pairs such as (41) and (42), with the perfect aspect and evidential marking respectively:

(41) 爾 有 食 飯 無?  
 li ū chiáh pn#g bo⊥  
 2SG have:PFT eat rice NEG  
 ‘Have you had your meal?’

(42) 爾 識 食 飯 無?  
 li bat chiáh pn#g bo⊥  
 2SG EVD eat rice NEG  
 ‘Have you ever eaten [that substance called] rice before?’

The second example cannot mean ‘Have you eaten your meal?’, nor can it be used as a colloquial style of greeting, but rather asks for confirmation that the addressee has tried out or tasted rice before, a somewhat anomalous question in the Asian region. The same applies to the cognates of *-guo* in Cantonese and New Xiang:

Hong Kong Cantonese Yue:

(43) 食 左 (?過) 飯 未 啊?  
 sik<sup>6</sup> joh<sup>2</sup> (?gwoh<sup>3</sup>) faan<sup>6</sup> mei<sup>6</sup> a<sup>1</sup>  
 eat PFV (EVD) rice NEG PRT  
 ‘Have (you) eaten yet?’

Changsha Xiang:

(44) 你 吃 咖 (\*過) 飯 有 啦?  
 li<sup>41</sup> tɕHia<sup>24</sup> ka<sup>41</sup> (\*ko<sup>45</sup>) fan<sup>33</sup> mau<sup>21</sup> la  
 2SG eat PFV (EVD) rice NEG PRT  
 ‘Have you eaten yet?’

Y. Wu (1999a: 76-7) describes the Changsha Xiang aspect marker *ko*<sup>45</sup> as having only the anterior experiential use and not the perfective sense, explaining that the paths of grammaticalization in the two languages are not identical despite the common etymology. Huang (1996: 244) similarly points out that *ko* in Changting Hakka cannot be used in clauses

such as (39) to express completed action. Mandarin and varieties of Sinitic in close contact with Northern Chinese may thus prove to be the exception to the rule in Sinitic for this particular development of use of the marker *-guo*.

Kim (1998) draws a distinction between definite and indefinite types of experiential markers for Korean, Japanese and Mandarin, equating the definite experiential with completive phase marker *-guo* and the indefinite with the past experiential reading. Korean itself has distinct markers for these two meanings. The definite experiential is able to combine with specific nouns and with time adverbials that have reference to a particular point in time, but otherwise appears to be the more marked category. Although it is compatible with relative clauses and WH-questions, it cannot occur in conditionals, in topic introduction, in clauses of non-factive modality, or in Yes-No questions. This account lends support to the view in this analysis that the use of the evidential as a completive marker is an extended and therefore peripheral sense, possibly involving its own separate pathway of development.

#### 6.5 The partitive meaning: ‘partial effect on an object’

An interesting additional piece of evidence in favour of the evidential reading for *-guo* and its cognates is the partial effect meaning when used with ingestive verbs. This is possible in at least Mandarin, Shanghainese and Cantonese.

Particularly in Cantonese, the meaning of partitivity is clear in the semantics of this verb class when marked by *gwoh*<sup>33</sup> (see also C.-S. Li 1984).

- (45) 邊 個 飲 過 我 的 麥皮  
 bin<sup>1</sup> goh<sup>3</sup> yam<sup>2</sup> gwoh<sup>3</sup> ngoh<sup>5</sup> di<sup>1</sup> mak<sup>6</sup>pei<sup>4</sup>  
 who CL drink EVD 1SG CL porridge  
 ‘Who’s been eating my porridge?’

From the clearly visible result state of a partially eaten helping of porridge, the bears in the Goldilocks fable infer the past action of an unknown agent helping herself to their breakfast. This would not work with the perfective marker in Cantonese which implies totality. If the perfective marker *joh*<sup>2</sup> replaces *gwoh*<sup>3</sup> 過, then the overall meaning changes to total effect: ‘Who has eaten up my porridge?’. The same applies in Mandarin with ingestive verbs combined with a specific object in patient topicalization clauses.

(46) 這 枝 雪茄 我 抽 過。  
 zhèi zhī xuějiā wǒ chōu -guo  
 this CL cigar 1SG smoke EVD  
 ‘This cigar, I’ve had a puff on it (and haven’t finished smoking it yet).’

(47) 我 喝過 你 的 橘子水  
 wǒ hē-guo nǐ de júzishuǐ  
 1SG drink-EVD 2SG L orange:juice  
 ‘I’ve drunk some of your orange juice.’  
 (versus ‘I’ve drunk all your orange juice’ with *hē-le* 喝了 drink-PFV)

This use of the evidential marker arises with specific or referential objects employed with ingestive verbs. This use is also discussed in L. Huang (1988: 229, 243) for Mandarin.

6.6. Future reference clauses and imperatives of repeatability: ‘do VERB again!’

Some Yue, Gan, Hakka and Wu dialects are conspicuously different from other Sinitic languages in employing *-kwo*<sup>33</sup> or *-ko*<sup>55</sup> in future time-reference clauses with the meaning of ‘do the action again’.

Cantonese Yue:

(48) 買 過 | 個 熊熊 俾 我  
 maai<sup>5</sup> gwoh<sup>3</sup> yat<sup>1</sup> goh<sup>3</sup> hung<sup>4</sup>hung<sup>4</sup> bei<sup>2</sup> ngoh<sup>5</sup>  
 buy EVD<sub>rep</sub> one CL teddy:bear give 1SG  
  
 好 唔 好  
 ho<sup>2</sup> m<sup>4</sup> ho<sup>2</sup>  
 good NEG good  
 ‘Won’t you buy me another teddy bear?’

Nanchang Gan:

(49) 件件衣裳都是破個你人跟  
 chien<sup>6</sup> chien<sup>6</sup> yi<sup>1</sup>song tu<sup>1</sup> si<sup>6</sup> p<sup>h</sup>o<sup>3</sup> kè n<sup>3</sup> len ken<sup>1</sup>  
 CL CL clothes all be tear PRT 2SG for

我買過一件。  
 ngo<sup>3</sup> mai<sup>3</sup> kuo<sup>5</sup> yiq<sup>7</sup> chien<sup>6</sup>  
 1SG buy EVD<sub>rep</sub> one CL

‘All my clothes are worn out, [so] buy some more for me.’

Huang (1996: 243-4) gives examples of the same use of *-guo* for the Changting dialect of Hakka, Fujian province; the Yangjiang dialect of Yue, Guangdong province; and the Jinhua dialect of Wu, Zhejiang province. Many examples for these dialects provide a context where an action has been carried out improperly or incorrectly in the first instance, with the resulting situation viewed as not being ideal or desirable. Yue-Hashimoto (1993a: 73, 85) labels this aspect ‘the compensative’, although it does not seem to fully apply to the Cantonese data I collected.

The closest we get to this in Mandarin is the kind of example given by Li and Thompson (1981: 230) which they label ‘re-experience’; however, the notion of repeatability is explicitly coded by *cóngxīn* 從新 ‘again’, which must be present to construct a well-formed utterance in Mandarin:

(50) 這個得從新做過。  
 zhèi ge dēi cóngxīn zuò-guo  
 this CL must from:anew do-EVD  
 ‘This has to be done once again.’

In contrast to this, in Cantonese Yue, *gwoh*<sup>3</sup> may co-occur with adverbs meaning ‘again’ but these are not grammatically required in order to express ‘do VERB again’. This can be seen in the following example, where the facultative adverb *joi*<sup>3</sup> ‘again’ can combine with the repetition sense of *gwoh*<sup>3</sup> to reinforce this meaning, but may also be omitted without changing the essential interpretation.

Cantonese Yue:

(51) 我下次再請過你。  
 ngoh<sup>5</sup> ha<sup>6</sup>chi<sup>3</sup> (joi<sup>3</sup>) cheng<sup>2</sup>-gwoh<sup>3</sup> lei<sup>5</sup>  
 1SG next:time (again) invite-EVD<sub>rep</sub> 2SG  
 ‘Next time I’ll treat you again [to dinner].’

Huang (1996: 243-4) makes similar observations for Changting Hakka and Jinhua Wu whose evidential markers can co-occur with adverbs or clause-final particles meaning ‘again’. {8}

In Cantonese Yue there is also an imperative construction type which explicitly orders the addressee to do the action once more.

Cantonese Yue:

- (52) 打過佢。  
       da<sup>2</sup>  gwoh<sup>3</sup>  kui<sup>5</sup>  
       type  EVD<sub>rep</sub>  3SG  
       ‘Type it again.’

Note that this example could also be used to refer to a person: ‘Hit him again!’, since the verb *da<sup>2</sup>* 打 has ‘strike, hit’ as its core meaning. If the context were a past one, it would have the purely evidential meaning of ‘(I’ve) hit him before (→ so there is no need to hit him again)’. The context we are interested in here, however, is the imperative one. Matthews and Yip (1994: 207) neatly relate this use to the American English usage of ‘over’ to mean ‘again’: *sé gwo* 寫過 ‘rewrite’ or ‘write over’ showing a similar extension of meaning from the directional sense ‘cross over’ to the repetition sense ‘over’. This imperative appears to be a possible construction type in Hakka and Wu dialects, but more detailed research is needed on this topic. {9}

A further interesting syntactic constraint pertains to the verb in this imperative of repeatable action for Cantonese: it must be transitive. Hence, example (53) cannot be interpreted as ‘Have another rest’, even though the verb is compatible with other imperative forms, as (54) shows:

Cantonese Yue:

- (53) \*啱過了。  
       \*tau<sup>2</sup>  gwoh<sup>3</sup>  le<sup>1</sup>  
       rest  EVD<sub>rep</sub>  P
- (54) 啱    多    啲。  
       tau<sup>2</sup>  doh<sup>3</sup>  di<sup>1</sup>  
       rest  more  CL<sub>pl</sub>  
       ‘Rest more.’

Finally, a semantic restriction on the use of this repeatability evidential is its incompatibility with transitive verbs which code that a patient has been completely consumed, destroyed or used up in some way. For this reason, verbs such as *sik*<sup>6</sup> 食 ‘eat’ present implausible situations in terms of real world knowledge in coding ‘Eat it again’:

(55) 食        佢。  
       *sik*<sup>6</sup>    *kui*<sup>5</sup>  
       eat      3SG  
       ‘Eat it!’

(56) \*食        過        佢。  
       \**sik*<sup>6</sup>    *gwoh*<sup>3</sup>    *kui*<sup>5</sup>  
       eat      EVD<sub>rep</sub>    3SG

Nonetheless, this usage fits in with an analysis of *-guo* as an evidential as the core meaning, since the same kind of constraint obtains excluding verbs of destruction as discussed in Section 2. Moreover, this peripheral use of repetition is restricted to future clauses and the imperative in which it codes intention to perform an action or activity again, contrary to expectations. Further empirical research will doubtlessly uncover the same phenomenon in command forms for other dialects of Yue, Hakka and Wu.

Note that the repeatability meaning for similar verb classes is found in Hmong languages such as White Meo spoken in Northern Vietnam, Laos, Thailand and Burma (Heimbach 1969), for example, *ua dua* ‘to do again’. The particle *dua* appears to have the same verbal use of ‘pass, surpass’ and is also employed as a marker of past action in the experiential sense and a comparative marker of inequality (see Ansaldo 1999). This association of Cantonese Yue with Southeast Asian languages, specifically in the sinospheric zone, has been explored particularly in Bisang (1991, 1996).

#### 6.7. Irrealis and conditional use

Both Cantonese and Mandarin permit the use of *-guo* in irrealis clauses coding imagined future completion. The marker *kwo*<sup>33</sup> or *-guo* may only occur in the first dependent clause of a complex clause (see respectively Matthews and Yip 1994: 199; Huang 1988: 43).

Mandarin:

- (57) 你 明天 看過 就 知道了。  
nǐ míngtiān kàn-guo jiù zhīdao le  
2SG tomorrow see-EVD then know CRS  
'Once you've seen it tomorrow, you'll know.'

Cantonese:

- (58) 如果 你 吾 俾 我 拜過 阿  
yue<sup>4</sup>gwoo<sup>2</sup> lei<sup>5</sup> m<sup>4</sup> bei<sup>2</sup> ngoh<sup>5</sup> baai<sup>3</sup>-gwoh<sup>3</sup> a<sup>3</sup>  
if 2SG NEG give 1SG pay:respects-EVD prefix

梁山伯 呢 我 吾 肯 出嫁  
Leung<sup>4</sup>Saan<sup>1</sup>Baak<sup>3</sup> ne<sup>1</sup>, //ngoh<sup>5</sup> m<sup>4</sup> hang<sup>2</sup> chut<sup>1</sup>ga<sup>3</sup>  
(name)PRT 1SG NEG willing marry:husband  
'If you don't allow me to pay my last respects to Leung San Baak, I  
will not agree to be married.'  
(Balcony Rendezvous: 640-3)

This is a semantically related use to that of *-gwoh<sup>3</sup>* in Cantonese imperatives, which express the intention of carrying out a particular action again in order to achieve a desired result: in the protasis of a conditional or a dependent clause with future time reference, the speaker similarly desires the occurrence of an event to become a certainty, as a precondition for a second event to take place.

#### 6.8. Scope of evidential markers

For Foley and Van Valin (1984: 218), evidentials constitute a 'peripheral operator' which take most other operators (apart from illocutionary force) in their scope, including tense, status and aspect. Taiwanese Southern Min shows that *bat* can take a whole verbal predicate and its adjuncts in its scope as in (59). Only its own negator, as Foley and Van Valin would predict, has *bat* in its scope, as in the second example, (60), given below.

Taiwanese Southern Min:

- (59) 我 識 不 去 讀 冊  
guá bat m khi thak chheh  
1SG EVD NEG go study book  
'Once there was a stage when I didn't want to go to school.'

When the Mandarin calque, *-koè*, is used, it too does not act purely as a verb clitic. It may occur sentence-finally and take the predicate in its scope, as the following example shows with the use of *koè* seen in both postverbal and clause-final positions:

- (60) 伊 不 識 受 過 我 的 氣 過。  
 i m bat siū koè goá ê khi koè  
 3SG NEG EVD receive EVD 1SG L anger EVD  
 ‘She has never before borne the brunt of my anger.’

Given Foley and Van Valin’s description of evidentials as peripheral operators, it is not surprising that we can predict that Southern Min does not permit deontic modal verbs such as *ē-tàng* 會當 ‘can, may’, *tiòh-ài* 着愛 ‘must, have to’, and *m-thang* 不通 ‘shouldn’t’ in the scope of *bat*, whereas some epistemic modals, such as *ē* 會 ‘be possible to V’, and *m-bián* 不免 ‘not necessary’, can. Compare (61) with (62):

- (61) \*伊 識 不通 去 檢查 身軀。  
 i bat m-thang khi kiámcha sēngkhu  
 3SG EVD NEG should go check body  
 \*‘She once shouldn’t go for a check-up.’

- (62) \*伊 識 不免 去 上班  
 i bat m-bián khi siōng-pan  
 3SG EVD NEG:need go work  
 ‘Once he didn’t need to go to work.’

There is a semantic clash here between the use of a deontic modal and an evidential marker. This particular modal negative in (61) codes lack of obligation to do something, while the evidential asserts the certainty of an event having occurred. For this reason, they are incompatible. The fact that the evidential occurs in the slot for adverbs in Min dialects explains the looser semantic association with the verb.

Similarly in some dialects of Mandarin, it is possible to find sentence-final *-guo*.

- (63) 我 去 北京 過。  
 wǒ qù Běijīng guò  
 1SG go Beijing EVD  
 ‘I’ve been to Beijing.’

This section has shown that for the feature of scope, these markers act according to universal descriptions of evidentials, and take the whole predicate in their scope.

### 7. *Conclusion*

I have argued that the experiential aspect in Sinitic languages should not be considered as an aspect marker but rather as a type of evidential which conflates the immediate (personally observed or experienced) and inferential kinds, but not the reported or hearsay kind. It further entails a split between first person and all others in Sinitic.

The analysis also set out to capture the semantic variation evident between the different Sinitic languages in terms of a uniting function of evidentiality. After defining the term ‘evidential’, some of the extended uses of these markers were examined, such as the expression of partitivity, phase complement of completion, and use in conditional and imperative contexts mainly with respect to Mandarin, Taiwanese Southern Min, Cantonese, Shanghainese and Xiang, with lesser reference to Hakka, Gan and Fuzhouese.

This argumentation for evidentiality is based on the following considerations:

- (i) This marker is used to express the speaker’s certainty about the occurrence of an event. In expressing the speaker’s attitude towards the truth of a proposition, we do not have a case for aspect but rather for evidentiality which is a kind of epistemic modality. The source of information on which this assertion is based in the prototypical case can be through either (a) the observation of a result state from which a past action can be inferred, or (b) personally experiencing an event in the case of first person subjects. Furthermore, there must be a novel element of ‘contrary to expectations’ interpretable from the context to make the use of this evidential semantically and pragmatically appropriate. Predicates representing the stages of life or routine contexts such as daily social activities are typically incompatible.

The notion of discontinuity was briefly explored to show that the evidential is used when the result state associated with an event or situation no longer holds. A semantic constraint curtailing the use of verbs of destruction was also described. This verb class does not generally form predicates which allow the interpretation that the event could potentially take place again (the ‘repeatability’ feature of meaning) which inheres in the semantics of the Sinitic evidential.

(ii) I considered the non-core uses of the evidential in imperatives and clauses with future time reference in Cantonese which are also found in certain Wu, Gan and Hakka dialects. These express ‘to do a certain event again’ and are closely related to the use of evidential markers in the dependent clause of conditionals in Mandarin and Cantonese. It was shown that in both construction types, the basic evidential meaning is remoulded into the wish for a particular event to be realised and thus one about which the subject could affirm its truth value.

(iii) A further use of the evidential in a partitive construction was examined to show that the meaning of partial effect is tied to the use of a specific or referential object with a predicate containing an ingestive verb marked by the evidential. Once more, the implication of repeatability of the event with its precondition of incomplete consumption or using up of the object are key semantic features. The inference of a prior causing action is similarly based on an observable result state.

(iv) The use of *-guo* in Mandarin as a phase complement marker with the meaning of completion was examined and compared with Cantonese, Southern Min and Xiang, which do not have this usage for *gwoh*<sup>3</sup>, *bat*, or *ko*<sup>45</sup> respectively. This appears to be a development unique to Mandarin, which is not attested in the other languages, apart from contemporary Shanghainese which converges with Mandarin in this respect.

This usage does not deviate far from the evidential one since it too expresses a strong assertion in declarative form that an event has been completed, thus coding the speaker’s commitment to the certainty of occurrence of a particular event. In other words, more than just the simple aspectual notion of completion is expressed.

(v) In a final section, the scope of the evidential in Southern Min was shown to conform to universal descriptions of this category in acting as a

‘peripheral operator’ with most clausal elements under its aegis. These findings are summarized in the form of a radial category for *-guo* and its cognates in Figure 1. Following Jurafsky (1997), core and peripheral meanings are represented, as well as the layering created by diachronic developments.



4. 'Contrary to expectations' element



Partial effect:

[*Cantonese, Mandarin, Hakka, Shanghainese*]

1. Referential object noun
2. Ingestive verbs
3. Verbs of destruction excluded



Imperatives and suggestions:

[*Cantonese, Wu, Gan, Hakka, Shanghainese*]

1. Do V again to object noun
2. Transitive verbs only
3. Main clause use
4. Verbs of destruction excluded

<sup>a</sup>Only a partial listing of dialects is attempted here.

Notes

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Wu (Shanghainese): Chen Yao

Mandarin: Liu Mingchen, Zhang Yanpu

Hakka: Lai Deling, Wu Zhang Zhijing

Gan: Xie Chenglei, Luo Yunyan, Cao Suqing

The romanization systems used are as follows:

Taiwanese Southern Min: The Church romanization; Yue (Hong Kong Cantonese): Sidney Lau system; New Xiang (Changsha): IPA; Wu (Shanghainese): IPA; Mandarin: *pinyin*; Hakka: IPA; Gan: system devised by L. Sagart.

1. In the case of Sinitic, in-depth analyses are available only for Mandarin and Cantonese. For Mandarin *-guo*, there are the studies by Chen (1979), Iljic (1987) and Ma (1977), not to mention larger studies of the Mandarin aspect system, for example, by Huang (1988) and Smith (1991). For Cantonese, there is the study of the aspect system by Kwok (1971) and a specific study on *-kwo* by C.-S. Li (1984).
2. Note that there is no concrete evidence of this stage, apart from its use as a phase marker of completion. I am uncertain, however, as to the status of the phase marker in terms of diachronic developments. It appears anomalous in that it is only attested for Mandarin and marginally for Shanghainese in my data, despite its perfect and perfective meaning.
3. Note that the character 識 used in the *Doctrina Christiana* represents the meaning ‘know’ rather than the sound for this character, that is, it is not a homophone for *bat*. The example given in (12) is authentic to the original which lacks tone diacritics.
4. I thank Stephen Matthews and Virginia Yip for clarification and discussion of this point regarding possessors and the experiential meaning. In their view, the prototype for this evidential marker would be the first person usage, coding direct witnessing or undergoing of an event.
5. Note, however, that the interpretation of personally experiencing or witnessing an event is also pertinent in the case of the addressee of an interrogative as examples in

section 6.6 show, since a first person response is being elicited. As such it is not a counterexample. Indeed, the immediate evidential reading is readily available for interrogatives with second person subjects: as in examples (40) to (44) for ‘Have you eaten yet?’ which pragmatically require a second pair part, the response, in first person = ‘Yes, I’ve eaten’ or ‘No, I haven’t’. My claim is restricted to declarative clauses. I thank Sasha Aikhenvald for calling this to my attention.

6. Thanks to Nick Enfield for discussion and suggestion of this paraphrase.

7. Kim (1998: 166-8) describes this semantic feature in a similar way using the term ‘uniqueness’: ‘for events to be permissible in experiential sentences they must be perceived to be unique by the speaker’ by which ‘highly unusual, extraordinary or rare’ is the intended sense.

8. Huang (1996) in the main does not provide phonetic transliterations or any romanization of examples given in Chinese characters, for which reason I do not reproduce these in the text. For example (51), the notion of repeatability could also simply be coded by use of the adverb *joi*<sup>3</sup>. Possible different nuances of meaning need to be explored between the adverb and the use of *gwoh*<sup>3</sup>. Sean Zhu (pers. comm.) suggests that repetition GUO is used when the first occurrence of this event type has not been successful or ideal. This certainly applies to the Cantonese example (52) where the inference is that the addressee’s original piece of typing was not up to standard.

9. Some of the examples from the Changting Hakka dialect and the Jinhua Wu dialect given in Huang (1996: 243-4) contain such imperatives, although they are not explicitly discussed as such.

Thanks to Sean Zhu (pers. comm.) for information on repetition GUO in Gan and Wu dialects. The Shanghainese ‘new generation’ speaker I worked with was not able to use *ku*<sup>34</sup> in the repetition sense.

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