

# On the Learning of Chinese Aspect Markers through Multimedia

## Program\*

### 多媒體課程對華語時貌標記學習成效之研究

謝慈惠 Hsieh, Tzu-Hui

國立嘉義大學外國語言學系

Department of Foreign Languages

National Chiayi University

[ncl2008.teresa@gmail.com](mailto:ncl2008.teresa@gmail.com)

郭怡君 Kuo, Yi-Chun

國立嘉義大學外國語言學系

Department of Foreign Languages

National Chiayi University

[jennykuo@mail.ncyu.edu.tw](mailto:jennykuo@mail.ncyu.edu.tw)

鐘樹椽 Chung, Shu-Chun

國立嘉義大學數位學習設計及管理學系

Department of E-learning Design and Management

National Chiayi University

[tschung@mail.ncyu.edu.tw](mailto:tschung@mail.ncyu.edu.tw)

吳俊雄 Wu, Jiun-Shiung<sup>a</sup>

國立中正大學語言學研究所

Institute of Linguistics

National Chung Cheng University

[Lngwujs@ccu.edu.tw](mailto:Lngwujs@ccu.edu.tw)

## Abstract

---

\* This research was funded by the National Science Council (NSC) of the Republic of China under Contract No. NSC 98-2631-S415-005. Wu Jiun-Shiung is the primary investigator of the project. Jenny Yi-Chun Kuo and Chung, Shu-Chun are the co-primary investigators. We thank to Mandarin teachers Miao-Chin Chiu and Chen-Hsuan Huang in the Division of Chinese as a Second Language, Language Center, National Chiayi University, and Xiurong Gong in Chinese Language Center of Feng-Chia University for their suggestions and comments on our teaching materials. We also thank the anonymous reviewers of the ROCLING conference for their precious comments. All remaining errors are ours.

<sup>a</sup> All correspondences should be directed to: Wu Jiun-Shiung, Institute of Linguistics of National Chung Cheng University, 168 University Rd., Min-Hsiung, Chia-Yi 62102, Taiwan, R.O.C.

The purpose of this study is to develop a multimedia program and examine its effects on learning Chinese aspect markers *le*, *zai*, and *zhe*. The materials in the program were based on linguistic studies of *le*, *zai*, and *zhe* (Li & Thompson, 2005; Lin, 2002; Liu, 1997; Pan, 1996; Smith, 1997; Wu & Kuo, 2003; Wu, 2003, 2005, 2007; Xiao & McEnery, 2004; Yeh, 1993). We predicted that this multimedia program with animation presenting the target sentences can significantly improve Chinese as a Foreign Language (for short, CFL) learners' acquisition of these aspect markers. The participants were totally 35 CFL beginners. Nineteen of them in the experimental group received the interactive multimedia program and sixteen of them in the control group took the computer-based grammar program. The teaching experiment is a section of twenty minutes per day for 3 days. We conduct a pretest, immediate posttest, and one-month delayed posttest, and the performances between the two groups were compared using the independent T-test. Findings indicated that the experimental group showed a significant advantage over the control group both in the immediate posttest and the delayed posttest.

### 摘要

本研究基於語言學對於華語時貌標記之研究，製作多媒體動畫課程，透過動畫來呈現時貌標記的語態，幫助華語為外語學習者對「了」、「在」、「著」的習得。三十五位華語初級學習者參與實驗，其中十九位為實驗組，用多媒體動畫課程自學；十六位為控制組，用電腦輔助文法翻譯課程學習時貌標記，經過連續三天，每天二十分鐘的學習，以T-test來檢驗，結果顯示實驗組在後測以及延宕後測的表現，比控制組來得有顯著的進步。

Keywords: Chinese Aspect Markers, Interactive Multimedia Program, Chinese as a Foreign Language, Animation

關鍵詞：時貌標記，多媒體動畫課程，華語為外語學習

### 1. Introduction

The Chinese aspect markers<sup>1</sup> have considered difficult for Chinese as a Foreign Language learners (Chao, 2002; Kao, 2006). Kao (2006) analyze the errors of the usage of the perfective *le* and of the imperfective *zhe* based on the corpus consisting of inter-language of Chinese produced by Chinese as a Foreign Language (for short, CFL) students abroad. Based on his study, he suggests that the interaction between aspect markers and different types of events, the comparison of the similar aspect markers and their individual characteristics should be introduced and emphasized in CFL instruction.

In this study, we develop a curriculum for three Chinese aspect markers: the perfective *le*, the progressive *zai* and the durative *zhe*. In order to eliminate the negative effect of grammar translation and possibly insufficiency of pedagogical grammar, we use the generalizations

---

<sup>1</sup> Chinese aspect markers include the perfective aspect markers *le*, the imperfective markers *zai* and *zhe*, the experiential *guo*, and verbal reduplication (Li & Thompson, 1981). In this study, we focus on the perfective marker *le*, and the imperfective markers *zai* and *zhe*.

from linguistic research on these three aspect markers, e.g. Li & Thompson, 1981; Lin, 2002; Liu, 1997; Pan, 1996; Smith, 1997; Wu & Kuo, 2003; Wu, 2003, 2005, 2007; Xiao & McEnery, 2004; Yeh, 1993, and implement the generalizations with computer animations, an instruction method along the lines proposed in Form Focused Instruction (Ellis, 1985).

According to Wu (2003, 2007), *zai* as a progressive marker goes with an event ongoing at an instant and *le* as a perfective marker presents a completed event or a terminated event. Both of *zai* and *le* can go with accomplishment<sup>2</sup> and activity<sup>3</sup> events. Thus, the comparison between them in terms of accomplishment events is stated as the following sentences (1).

- (1) a. Tā **zài** xiě yì fēng xìn.  
 she PROG write one CL letter  
 “She is writing a letter.”  
 b. Tā xiě (wán) **le** yì fēng xìn.  
 she write (finish) PFV one CL letter  
 “She finished writing a letter.”

In (1), we can tell the difference between *zai* and *le* in terms of interacting with Accomplishment. For example, *xiě yì fēng xìn* ‘to write a letter’ gets an ongoing reading with *zai* in (1a) while it receives a completed meaning with *le* in (1b). As for Activity, the comparison between *zai* and *le* was presented in (2). As we can see, *pǎobù* ‘running’ gets an ongoing reading with *zai* in (2a) while it acquires a completed meaning with *le* in (2b).

- (2) a. Tā **zài** pǎobù.  
 he PROG running  
 “He is running.”  
 b. Tā pǎo **le** yí ge xiǎoshí de bù.  
 he run PFV one CL hour of steps.  
 “He ran for one hour.”

Also, in our curriculum, we included the contrast between *zhe* and *le*. *zhe* as the durative aspect marker signals the durative nature of a situation (e.g. Xiao & McEnery, 2004). When it comes to Activity such as the positional verb,<sup>4</sup> *zhe* selects the stative reading to signal its durative posture (e.g. Li & Thompson, 2005; Xia & McEnery, 2004). For example, *dai* ‘to put on; to wear’ receives a stative meaning with *zhe* in (3a). In contrast, it gets a completed meaning with *le* in (3b).

<sup>2</sup> According to Smith (1997), accomplishment events include a process and a change of state, an accomplishment event is compatible with both durational phrases and completive phrases. For example, *xiě zhe wu feng xin* ‘to write these five letters’ is classified as Accomplishment because it contains both a process and a natural final endpoint.

<sup>3</sup> Smith (1997) proposed that activity events only include a process but without a change of state; that is, they have no natural final points. Since it has no natural final endpoint, Activity requires a durational phrase to signal the final endpoint. For example, *Tā kàn le yí ge xiǎoshí de diǎn yǐng* ‘He saw a movie for one hour.’ *yí ge xiǎoshí* ‘one hour’ terminates the activity event *kàn diǎnyǐng* ‘to see the movie.’

<sup>4</sup> Positional verbs like *chuan/dai* ‘to put on; wear’, *na* ‘take; hold’, *fang* ‘put’ and *gua* ‘hang’ refer to verbs that indicate where something has been put or placed (e.g. Xiao & McEnery, 2004).

(3) a. Tā dài **zhe** yì dǐng màozi.

she wear DUR one CL hat

“She is wearing a hat.”

b. Tā dài **le** yì dǐng màozi.

she wear PFV one CL hat.

“She wore a hat.”

On the other hand, *zhe* can go with posture verbs<sup>5</sup> in addition to positional verbs and receive a stative reading as shown in (4). In (4a), the posture verb such as *zuo* ‘to sit’ acquires a stative meaning from the durative marker *zhe*. In addition, the V *zhe* such as that in (4a) can be used to provide a temporal background in the V *zhe* V construction (Wu & Kuo, 2003). For example, *zuo* ‘to sit’ in (4b) serves as a background of the main event *he kafei* ‘to drink coffee’.

(4) a. Tā zuò **zhe**.

she sit DUR

“She is sitting.”

b. Tā zuò **zhe** hē kāfēi.

she sit DUR drink coffee

“She is drinking coffee, while sitting.”

Furthermore, locative inversion in Chinese can take either *le* or *zhe*. However, the semantics of *zhe* differs from that of *le*. (5a), a locative inversion sentence with *zhe*, focuses on the lasting of the state part of the positional verb *fang* ‘to put’, while (5b), with *le*, focuses on the completion of the dynamic part of the same verb.

(5) a. Zhuōshàng fang **zhe** yì pán cài.

table put DUR one CL dish

“A dish of vegetables is on the table.”

b. Zhuōshàng fang **le** yì pán cài.

table put PFV one CL dish

“A dish of vegetables was put on the table.”

We also include in our curriculum the comparison among the three aspect markers *zhe*, *zai*, and *le*. Take the positional verb *chaun* ‘to put on; to wear’ as the example, shown in (6). *zhe* signifies the stative meaning in (6a), *zai* the progressive (ongoing) meaning in (6b) and *le* the completed meaning in (6c).

(6) a. Tā chuān **zhe** wàitào.

she wear DUR coat

“She is wearing a coat.”

b. Tā **zài** chuān wàitào.

---

<sup>5</sup> Posture verbs refer to verbs indicating posture or physical disposition at a location such as *zhan* ‘stand’, *zuo* ‘sit’, *tang* ‘lie’, *dun* ‘squat’, *pa* ‘crouch’ and *ting* ‘stop; park (a car)’ and they either denote an activity or the state resulting from the activity, refer to verbs indicating posture or physical disposition at a location.

- she PROG wear coat  
 “She is putting on a coat.”  
 c. Tā chuān le wàitào.  
 she wear PFV coat  
 “She wore a coat.”

So far, we have addressed the interactions of the aspect markers *le*, *zai*, and *zhe* with event types. As far as second language learning is concerned, there have been studies devoted to computer-based L2 grammar instruction, such as McEnery, Baker & Wilson, 1995; Nagata, 1996; Rachel, 1995; etc. These studies show that computer-based L2 grammar instruction is more effective than traditional instruction. Ragan, Boyce, Redwine, Savenye, and McMichael (1993) also find that multimedia instruction reduces learning time by 30% compared to traditional instruction.

In the study, we focus on CFL learners’ acquisition of aspect markers *le*, *zai*, and *zhe*. These aspect markers are too abstract to comprehend for CFL learners, even expressed in English translation. For example, *Ta dai zhe maozhi* “She is wearing a hat” and *Ta zai dai maozhi* “She is putting on a hat.” CFL beginners may be confused why *zai* changed the verb from ‘to wear’ to ‘to put on,’ and have difficulty in distinguishing these two expressions. We predict that the animation can present the slight difference among the interaction of these aspect markers with event types and then improve CFL beginners’ comprehension of the aspect markers.

However, few studies, if any, investigate the effect on the computer-based grammar instruction with animation representing the semantics of the target sentences. Hence, we address the following issue in this paper: Is a computer-based multimedia program of grammar instruction (hereafter the interactive multimedia program) more effective than a Chinese computer-based grammar translation program (hereafter the computer-based grammar program) on CFL beginners’ learning of aspect markers *le*, *zai*, and *zhe*?

The remainder of the paper is organized as follows. In Section 2, we present methodology including participants, instruments, data collection and data analysis. In Section 3 we report results and discussion. Results are presented with various analyses following each of these descriptive sections. Discussion included the effect of the interactive multimedia program vs. the computer-based grammar program. Finally, Section 4 concluded this study.

## 2. Methodology

This study chose a quantitative method to investigate the effect of interactive multimedia program on Chinese Aspect Marker *le*, *zai*, and *zhe* learning. Based on the purpose of the study, we examined if the interactive multimedia program is more efficient and effective than the computer-based grammar program on the learning of Chinese aspect markers.

The participants were 35 CFL beginners and they were divided into two groups. One is the control group and the other the experimental group. The control group studied *le*, *zai*, and *zhe*























