THE PUNCTUAL ASPECT IN CHINESE:

A STUDY OF THE PERFECTIVE AND INCHOATIVE ASPECT MARKERS

IN MANDARIN AND CANTONESE

A Thesis

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by

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Aspect has been a much debated topic in the field of Chinese syntax for many years. In recent years there has been a considerable amount of work done on the Chinese aspect system but theories and interpretations differ and contradict each other. In fact the morpheme *te* has probably attracted more attention by Chinese linguists than any other single morpheme. The reason that the Chinese aspect system has received so much attention is likely due to the fact that it is so little understood. Up until now this complex system and particularly the aspect marker *te*, both the verbal suffix perfective *te* and the sentence final inchoative *te* has eluded a clear, and succinct explanation that Chinese linguists can both understand and agree upon. Until such a work comes forth there will continue to be attempts at solving this linguistic riddle. This work is one such attempt.

It is felt that in order to better understand aspect and how it works in Chinese it would be beneficial to examine the aspect systems of at least two of the more prominent Chinese dialects. In this study we will focus our attention on standard Mandarin and Cantonese. By examining the aspectual
features of these two dialects in a comparative manner we may thus shed
important light and insight into the better understanding of the aspectual
features of both. In other words, by studying the aspectual features of
Cantonese and comparing them with Mandarin will enable us to gain a
greater understanding of aspect in Mandarin and vice versa. The scope of
this study will deal specifically with punctual aspect as opposed to durative
aspect. Punctual aspect includes the perfective as well as the inchoative
markers represented by the morpheme le in Mandarin Chinese and by jo
and la respectively in the Cantonese dialect. Because this is a comparative
study, the differences between the punctual aspect of these two dialects will
be clearly manifested.

Regarding the syntax of different Chinese dialects, even today it is a
commonly held view that all the dialects of Chinese share the same syntax.
The eminent Chinese scholar Y. R. Chao has said, "One can say that there is
practically one universal Chinese grammar" (1968:13). In an earlier work he
said, "... there is comparatively great uniformity of grammar among the
dialects" (1947:6). Though the syntactic differences between Chinese dialects
may not be as obvious or as great as their phonological differences,
important and distinct differences do occur. This study will also illustrate
some of the differences in the aspectual systems of Mandarin and Cantonese
in an attempt to dispel this myth of a universal Chinese grammar. Thus the purpose of this study is two-fold. One, to compare the punctual aspectual features of Mandarin and Cantonese as an attempt to come to a greater understanding of the systems in both dialects. The second is to illustrate the syntactic differences between Mandarin and Cantonese with regard to the punctual aspect. However, before we begin this study of the Mandarin and Cantonese punctual aspect systems a brief discussion of the general features of both tense and aspect and how they are related is in order.

This chapter will address the issue of the temporal systems of aspect and tense and their interplay along with a discussion as to why Chinese is regarded as an aspect prominent language as opposed to tense prominent. This will lay the groundwork for our analysis of punctual aspect in Chinese and specifically in the Mandarin and Cantonese dialects.

The second chapter will address the perfective aspect. It will begin with a brief discussion of the general features of the perfective aspect in Chinese generally and will then be followed by a more in depth look at the perfective aspect as it applies to Mandarin Chinese. The chapter will conclude with a discussion of the perfective aspect in Cantonese highlighting its unique characteristics and differences with Mandarin perfectivity. The third chapter will describe the inchoative aspect in Chinese. The general
features of this aspect marker in Mandarin will be addressed as well as the
dominant role it plays as it occurs in sentence final position. This will be
followed up by a description of the inchoative aspect system in Cantonese.
Again the difference between the inchoative aspect in Mandarin and
Cantonese will be highlighted in an attempt to better understand their
individual roles. The fourth chapter will deal with the relationship between
the perfective and inchoative aspect markers in both Mandarin and
Cantonese. The core of this chapter will deal with a series of surveys, their
results and implications, in an attempt to better understand the relationship
between these sometimes seemingly ambiguous aspect markers. This study
will then conclude with a summary of our findings and claims as well as with
a brief look at where we can and should go to better understand this
linguistic riddle. It should be noted that throughout this study four different
terms referring to Chinese or its dialects will be used. They are: Chinese,
Mandarin, Cantonese, and Taiwan Mandarin. The term Chinese will refer to
the Chinese language in general when discussing general features of the
syntax. Mandarin will refer to the standard modern Beijing dialect or
putonghua. Cantonese (Guangdonghua) refers to the standard Cantonese
dialect spoken in Guangzhou and Hong Kong. And Taiwan Mandarin refers to
the variety of Mandarin commonly spoken on the island of Taiwan. For all
examples of Chinese, Mandarin, and Taiwan Mandarin the *pinyin* system of romanization from the PRC will be used. Yale Cantonese Romanization will be used for all Cantonese examples.

1.1 Tense and Aspect

It is important to understand that tense and aspect are both systems that deal with temporal reference. In many cases they overlap and are both incorporated side by side within the syntax of a language. To better understand the unique features of each we will first attempt to explain the general features of tense and aspect in isolation and then bring them together to illustrate their interacting nature as pointed out by Lyons (1977). It will be beneficial throughout this study to refer to a series of time lines that will enable us to better visualize time reference and how tense and aspect relate to it. The time lines incorporated in this study were adopted from Chan (1980).

1.1.1 Tense

Tense is a rather common grammaticalized system found in various languages around the world, and is particularly common among Indo-European languages. Tense is regarded as a deictic system in that all events
are represented in relation to a time center (deictic center) or reference point and the distance in which these events occur from that point. Tense can further be divided into two subcategories: primary tense and secondary tense, also referred to as absolute and relative tense respectively. Primary tense refers to those tenses that take the present moment or speech time as their deictic center (Comrie 1985:36). Secondary tense, on the other hand, is when the reference point for location of an event is some point in time given by the context of the utterance, and not necessarily the speech time. Indeed this reference point in secondary tense may be prior to or subsequent to speech time. In most languages where tense is grammaticalized, tense is indicated on the verb, either by verb morphology (i.e. the verb is inflected) or by grammatical words adjacent to the verb (Comrie 1985:12). Tense then is a representation of events, processes, and states in time. Thus it is a system of temporal reference and has been defined by Comrie as the "... grammaticalised expression of location in time" (1985:9). On the most basic level primary tense with its speech time deixis tells us whether an event occurred in the past, present or future (non-past) and can be appropriately illustrated with a time line with zero 'Ø' representing the present or speech time.
(1) _________|_________

PAST  \  NON-PAST

In short, any event that occurs prior to the deictic center or speech time falls in the past. Events occurring subsequent to speech time fall in the future or non-past category, and events occurring simultaneous to speech time fall in the present. This can be clearly illustrated by the following examples from French.

(2) a. *je lisais le livre.*  'I read the book.'

b. *je lis le livre.*  'I am reading the book.'

c. *je lirai le livre.*  'I will read the book.'

Example (2a) indicates the past tense in that the action of reading the book has been completed. Example (2b) shows the present tense where the event occurs simultaneous to speech time, and example (2c) shows the future tense as the action of reading the book has not yet occurred.

As opposed to speech time as the deictic center, the secondary tense has a reference point that lies elsewhere on our time line and can be clearly illustrated by the English pluperfect. Example (3) illustrates secondary tense with (a) occurring prior to (b) and both occur prior to the speech time, or the present moment, indicated by zero '∅'.

(3) He had read the book(a) when John entered(b).

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<tr>
<td>a</td>
<td>b</td>
<td>o</td>
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According to Comrie, the difference between primary and secondary tense is not between speech time and some other point in time as a reference point, but rather between speech time and another point whose meaning does not specify that speech time must be its reference point (1985:58). In other words secondary tenses have speech time as one of their possible reference points. Furthermore a secondary tense reference point may lie prior to speech time as in the above example or it may lie subsequent to it.

1.1.2 Aspect

Though aspect may seem more abstract and less common than tense it is in reality even more basic and common than tense. In fact, it has been noted that children whose native language incorporates both aspect and tense learn aspect first. Furthermore aspect is far more commonly found in the various languages of the world than is tense (Lyons 1977:705). Many of the worlds' languages do not have tense as a grammatical feature but few, if any, do not have aspectual features (1977:705). This lack of knowledge surrounding aspect, at least among Americans, is probably due to the fact
that the average American is never taught what aspect is and how it works in the English language. In fact most high school graduates in the United States have probably never even heard of the term. This makes the task of teaching and learning about aspect in Chinese and other aspect prominent languages more difficult than the more commonly taught and learned system of tense.

Aspect, like tense, is also a system of temporal reference but it deals with time in a different way. Unlike tense it is a non-deictic grammatical system. Whereas tense locates situations or events in time in relation to a reference point aspect is exclusively concerned with the internal time of a given situation (Comrie 1976:5) Aspect then, is not relative to speech time but deals with situation-internal time versus situation-external time features of tense. Rather than dealing with past, present and future references, aspect deals with a variety of situations. Lyons has pointed out that aspect involves stativity, progressivity, duration, completion, habituality, iteration, momentariness, inception, and termination, all of which are non-deictic notions (1977:706). These notions are non-deictic because they all deal with the internal time frame of a situation and not whether that situation occurred before or after speech time. For example, completion tells us that the situation or event has reached an end point; likewise duration
tells us that the situation is in a state of continuance. Both of these have no relation or reference whatsoever as to when the situation occurred in relation to a specified point in time. Aspect then deals with different ways of viewing the internal temporal structure of a situation or event or in other words, it is concerned with the time contained within a situation. Aspect as a grammatical category may be expressed by means of inflectional morphology of the language, like the verbal suffixes and affixes of Chinese and Russian respectively. The time line below will better illustrate aspect in the realm of temporal reference. Chan has noted that regarding events, which are momentary, the beginning and end of these situations form points on the time axis. Furthermore, the system of aspect with its concern with situation time also accounts for the probability of one situation being included within another of greater duration (1980:41).
Aspect is a term that was first used by the Russians to refer to the distinction of perfective and imperfective in the inflexion of Russian verbs (Lyons 1968:313). The following examples taken from Lyons (1968:314) illustrate the distinction between the perfective and imperfective in Russian.

(5) a. *ja procitálo roman.* (perfective)

b. *ja citaio roman.* (imperfective)

The perfective sentence (5a) indicates the completion of the action of reading the book, or that the book was finished. On the other hand, the imperfective sentence (5b) does not deal with completeness but rather indicates that the action took place; that is, the speaker spent some time reading but did not necessarily finish the book (1968:314).

Aspect deals specifically with how a situation is viewed internally. As we have seen it is more complex and far-reaching than tense. Examples (5a and b) deal specifically with completion and non-completion of an event, which constitute just one of the many notions of aspect. As mentioned above (page 9) aspect involves various different notions such as duration, completion, stativity and so on.
1.2 The Interaction of Aspect and Tense

The features of aspect and tense, though different and distinct, sometimes overlap, both playing important roles in the syntax of a language. Indeed many languages of the world incorporate both grammatical systems (like English) side by side. The time lines below show how both tense and aspect are related as they both appear on the same time axis and yet are different and distinct in that they deal with time in different ways.

(6) a. 

\[ \begin{array}{c}
\emptyset \\
B \quad E
\end{array} \]

b. 

\[ \begin{array}{c}
\emptyset \\
B \quad E
\end{array} \]

c. 

\[ \begin{array}{c}
\emptyset \\
B \quad E
\end{array} \]

As is noticed on the time line, aspect deals specifically with the situation time represented by the beginning of the situation (B) and the end of the situation (E) and is not related to the speech time, (indicated by zero '∅') in that speech time may occur in various locations: before (6a), in the midst of (6b), or after a situation (6c). We also may notice from this time line that
aspect and tense both share the same scale of temporal reference and may interact with each other. For example the French *il lisait* and *il lut* or the corresponding English 'he was reading' and 'he read' are both categorized with the absolute past tense but involve aspectual distinctions as well. Likewise the English present tense 'he is reading' is also characterized by the progressive aspect. English has two aspects that interact with tense, the perfect and progressive. The perfect aspect in English can be illustrated in example (7) and the progressive aspect in example (8).

(7) a. John has read the book.

b. John will have read the book.

(8) a. John is/was reading the book.

b. John will/would be reading the book.

As can be seen from these examples the English perfect and progressive aspects overlap with tense. Example (7) indicates the past tense as well as the perfect aspect. Likewise example (8) indicates the present and future tenses as well as the progressive aspect. From the illustrations above one can clearly see that English is a language that incorporates both aspect and tense in its grammar. We also see that aspect and tense can occur simultaneously. Lyons further points out that the perfect aspect is used in conjunction with 'just' to refer to the very recent past in the sentence 'I have just seen him'
(from Lyons 1968:316). The concept of secondary tense discussed earlier (page 6) also correlates with aspect and has even been argued that secondary tense is so closely associated with aspect that it may in fact be nothing more than aspect (Lyons 1977:705).

1.3 Non-Grammaticalization of Tense in Chinese

Chinese lacks the grammaticalization of tense in its syntax and thus may be regarded as a tense-less language. This may be illustrated by examples (9) through (11) below. It is important to note that Chinese verbs are never conjugated and remain the same in all situations. Lacking tense marking, it is common in Chinese to indicate the time that an event or situation occurred by using time words. The use of time words to indicate the time a situation occurred with respect to speech time is illustrated below.

(12) *Zuotian* wo *kanshu*.

yesterday I read-book

I read yesterday.

(13) *Jintian* wo *kanshu*.

today I read-book

I read today.
(14) *Mingtian wo kanshu.*

tomorrow I read-book

I will read tomorrow.

Notice that the verb *kan* 'to read' remains unchanged in all three sentences even though the time reference is different. Also note that the time words in these sentences are the indicators of deictic temporal reference. This does not suggest that Chinese lacks any type of verbal inflection for this is not the case. As we have already seen Chinese does contain verbal markers (aspectual, resultative, etc.) that are an integral part of the syntax. In sentences where time words are absent and there are no aspect markers we are left to interpret the sentences according to the context.

1.4 Aspect in Chinese

Though it has been argued against (Mullie 1932; Li Jiinshi 1938; Dragonov 1952; Jakhontov 1957), for the most part it is agreed upon by Chinese linguists that Chinese is an aspect prominent language, and as shown above, lacks tense as a grammatical category altogether. It is aspect that is grammaticalized in the syntax of the language. In other words, in Chinese sentences there is no reference to speech time in their grammatical structure, but rather an emphasis on the time within a situation. Examples
(12) through (14) show this emphasis. In the diagrams the solid line represents the potion of the event that is actualized, the broken line implies that a situation may continue beyond the point of interception, and the short arrow represents the point of interception. Note that 'PFV' indicates the perfective aspect marker and 'SFP' indicates a sentence final particle.

(12) a. 

\[
\begin{array}{c}
\text{B} \\
\text{---} \\
\text{E} \\
\hline
\emptyset
\end{array}
\]

b. *Wo qu tushuguan.*

I go library

I'm going to the library.

(13) a. 

\[
\begin{array}{c}
\text{B} \\
\hline
\text{E} \\
\hline
\emptyset
\end{array}
\]

b. *Ta zou-le san yingli.*

he walk-PFV three mile

He walked three miles.

(14) a. 

\[
\begin{array}{c}
\text{B} \\
\hline
\text{---} \\
\hline
\emptyset
\end{array}
\]
b. *Wo zai chi fan (ne).*

I am eat rice SFP

I'm eating.

With zero 'ø' indicating speech time we see from these examples that in Chinese it is the time within a situation that is important and not when a situation or event occurred in relation to some reference point. These examples clearly show that speech time may occur prior to, simultaneous with, or subsequent to the situation and have no bearing on it.

Within the Chinese aspect system we see distinctions between completeness and non-completeness, duration, inception of a new situation, progressivity and so on. Li and Thompson (1981) have also effectively pointed out that the perfective *le* in Chinese does not mean past tense.

Examples are given below: (15) is an imperative sentence, (16) a sequence-of-action sentence, and (17) a sentence indicating simple future (from Li & Thompson 1981:213). These examples further illustrate the aspevtual nature of Chinese and its lack of tense distinctions.

(15) *Bie dapo-le beizi.*

don't hit-broken-PFV glass

Don't break the glass.
(16) *Wo chi-le fan zai zou.*
I eat-PFV rice then go
I'll go after I eat.

(17) *Mingtian wo jiu kaichu-le ta.*
tomorrow I then expel-PFV him/her
I'll expel him/her tomorrow!

Oftentimes in Chinese aspect markers are absent leaving the reader to interpret according to the context of the situation. This brings up the question of markedness in Chinese. This is not to say that aspect markers are unnecessary, they are merely marked in such a way as to prescribe when and where they can and do occur. This situation of markedness and the aspect marker *le* in Chinese can be compared to an apple. An apple without an adjective like ‘red’ or ‘green’ in front of it can be either a red or a green apple. However as soon as you refer to the apple as red then it cannot be a green apple. Likewise the aspect marker *le* in Chinese is like this apple. Aspect marker *le* may occur in a given place in a sentence as prescribed by the syntax or it may be absent.

We have seen from the discussion above that Chinese indeed is an aspect prominent language and lacks tense as a grammaticalized category in
its syntax. The aspect system in Chinese is rather straightforward and can be meaningfully divided into two spheres, the punctual aspect and the durative aspect.

1.5 Punctual Aspect in Chinese

As has been postulated by Chan (1980), the Chinese aspectual system can be conveniently and effectively divided into two major spheres or categories: the punctual aspect and the durative aspect. Chan points out that the punctual aspect "intercepts a situation at its beginning . . . or termination" and is marked by the inchoative *le* to indicate the beginning of a situation, which occurs in the sentence final position, and the perfective *le* indicating termination of the situation, which occurs post-verbally. It should be noted that the notion of perfectivity throughout this paper encompasses also the notions of completion and termination. In other words completion and termination, and related notions fall within the framework of perfectivity. It is the punctual aspect that is the focus of this thesis.

The durative aspect will not be studied herein, but a brief description is in order for comparison. The durative aspect deals specifically with the internal structure of a process or state and requires that the action or a portion of it be actualized prior to the point of interception as was illustrated
in example (14) above (1980:42-3). The durative aspect is realized by the morphemes *zai, zhe, and ne*. The following examples with accompanying time lines will help illustrate the distinction between the punctual and durative aspects in Chinese. Regarding the time lines the arrow indicates the point of interception; the solid line indicates the portion of the situation that has been actualized, and the broken line indicates that the situation may continue beyond the point of interception (Chan 1980:42). Examples (18) through (21) are cited in Chan (1980:42-3) focusing specifically on representing aspect on a time line. Also note that 'INC' indicates the inchoative aspect marker and 'CL' indicates a classifier.

(18) a. B E

\[ \]

b. *Xia yu le.*

descend rain INC

It is raining (now).

(19) a. B E

\[ \]

b. *Ta xie-le liangfeng xin.*

he write-PFV two-CL letter(s)

He wrote two letters.
(20) a. \[ \text{B \hspace{1cm} E-B} \]

b. *Ta xie-le liangfeng xin le.*

he write-PFV two-CL letter(s) INC

He has written two letters (now).

(21) a. \[ \text{B \hspace{1cm} E} \]

b. *Wo zai kanshu (ne).*

I am read-book SFP

I am reading.

In example (18) we see that some of the situation may already have been actualized and that the situation continues beyond the actualized state. Example (19) is a straightforward perfectivized sentence wherein the point of interception is at the end point of the situation. In situations such as example (20) the termination point of one situation also serves as the beginning point of another. It is the inchoative aspect here that indicates the beginning of a new state resulting from the completion of some event, namely the writing of two letters in (20). Example (21) deals with the durative aspect in Chinese. Notice that the durative requires that a portion of the actualized situation or event be prior to the point of inception. Making
this distinction in the Chinese aspectual system enables us to better focus
our attention on one category or the other, and in this case it is the punctual
aspect, marked by verbal suffix *le* and sentence final *le*.

The morpheme(s) *le* and its meaning and function has been a much
debated topic in Chinese syntax. The most common view is that *le* is best
regarded as two different grammatical morphemes (Wang 1969; Chao 1968;
Teng 1973). This view is supported by several good arguments. The opposite
view, that being that there is one morpheme *le* has also been argued
(Rosenow 1977; Shi 1989). Chan (1980) has postulated a compromise
between the two positions that effectively and succinctly explains the
syntactic and semantic functions of this morpheme. It is this view that this
writer has also adopted. There is one punctual aspect in Chinese which
contains two homophonous aspect markers, inchoative *le* and perfective *le*.
These two aspect markers are syntactically and semantically distinct.
Syntactically, inchoative *le* occurs in sentence final position and perfective *le*
occurs post-verbally. Though it is commonly held that the inchoative *le* is a
sentence final particle (Chao 1968; Li and Thompson 1981), for our purposes
in discussing aspect, it can be more accurately described as an aspect marker
that occurs in sentence final position. Semantically, the inchoative *le*
indicates a change of state or specifies the inception of a new situation. The
perfective \textit{le} "marks the end of a situation, indicating the completion of a situation with a natural termination point" (Chan 1980:44). Though some scholars have tried to deal with these two markers separately, namely as aspect marker and sentence final particle, it must be emphasized that both markers are dealing with aspect regardless of where they occur in the sentence. Thus when discussing the punctual aspect it is essential to include an analysis of both markers, for to discuss perfective \textit{le} alone would render an incomplete viewpoint. It is precisely because of the overlapping nature and potentially ambiguous situations produced by these markers that compel us to analyze both markers together. This will also enable us to better understand how each is used and what kind of an interpretation they indicate in their various functions. In short, the two grammatical markers cannot be divorced from each other when undertaking a study of punctual aspect.
CHAPTER II PERFECTIVE ASPECT

As we have seen above perfectivization is a feature of the aspect system of Chinese and makes up part of the punctual aspect. Within the Chinese language perfectivization is commonly indicated by verbal suffix markers but not exclusively. The perfective aspect marker in Chinese generally indicates completion or termination of a situation. The first part of this chapter will deal specifically with the perfective aspect in Mandarin. The discussion will include a look at the different interpretations possible with perfective *le* as well as other ways in which it is used in Mandarin. The section following that will discuss perfective aspect as it functions in Cantonese. Included in that section will be a discussion of the general features of the Cantonese perfective marker, a discussion of perfectivity by tone change in Cantonese, the existential aspect marker *yaub* 𪽆 'have' in Cantonese, and how it relates to perfectivity, and a final section will discuss *you* in Taiwan Mandarin and how it relates to the Cantonese situation. Throughout this chapter we will bring out the differences and similarities between Mandarin and Cantonese with regards to the perfective aspect.
2.1 Perfective Aspect in Mandarin

As has been mentioned above, the perfective aspect marker *le* is a verbal suffix that marks the end of a situation and typically indicates the completion of the event but is not restricted to this condition. This perfective marker works in all cases except with permanent states. For example, *ta hui-le dazi* is ungrammatical whereas the inchoative counterpart, *ta hui dazi le* ('He knows how to type now') is acceptable (Chan 1980:45). In the simplest and most typical sense the perfective *le* tells us whether an action is complete or not. For example, in the sentence, *wo mai shu*, aside from context we have no way of knowing if the action of buying the book is complete or not. It could be interpreted as 'I will buy books', 'I bought books', or 'I’m buying books'. On the other hand this sentence with the perfective *le*, *wo mai-le shu*, clearly tells us that the action of buying a/the book(s) is complete. The following sentences are typical examples of perfectivization indicating completed action. All three of these sentences can be schematized in the time line in (1b).

(1) a. Zhangsan kan-le zheiben shu.

Zhangsan read-PFV this-CL book

Zhangsan read this book.
b.  

(2) *Ta pao-le wu ying li.*

s/he run-PFV five English mile  
S/he ran five (English) miles.

(3) *Ta xie-le wenzhang.*

s/he write-PFV language-chapter  
S/he wrote an essay.

The inclusion of the perfective *le* clearly indicates the completion of the events described in the examples above.

Perfectivized sentences in Chinese can also have different readings depending on whether a given sentence is interpreted as describing a telic or an atelic situation. A telic situation is one in which there is a clear terminal or ending point that yields a product, and is thus well defined. An atelic situation is one that may or may not have a natural ending point, and is thus not well defined and is vague in nature. For example, the English verbs 'to play' and 'to watch' in the examples below are examples of atelic situations.

(4) John played basketball.

(5) The children watched television.

These atelic situations lack a natural ending point and thus are interpreted
differently than telic situations. We simply know that the action occurred.
Likewise, Mandarin and Cantonese alike have both telic and atelic situations
indicated by the perfective aspect. Consider the following examples cited in
Chan (1980:47-8).

(6) \textit{wo xie-le xin}.
    
    I write-PFV letter
    
    I wrote/have written a/the/some letter(s).

(7) \textit{wo xie-le xin}.
    
    I write-PFV letter
    
    I did some letter writing.

(8) \textit{Lisi kan-le dianshi}.
    
    Lisi look-PFV electric-look at
    
    Lisi watched (some) television.

(9) \textit{Ta chang-le ge}.
    
    s/he sing-PFV song
    
    S/he sang/did some singing.

Sentence (6) presents a telic interpretation in that there is a clear ending
point of the action of writing a letter(s). However, in sentence (7) we have an
atelic interpretation in that we do not know if the activity of letter-writing is
complete, we simply know that the action has been terminated before
completion was specified. Sentences (8) and (9) illustrate possible atelic situations in that in these activities described there is no natural ending point. In the cases of atelic situations the perfective \textit{le} does not always indicate completed action but it still holds to our definition in that it marks the termination of a situation. We see from these examples that is is context that ultimately dictates the interpretation of a situation, whether it be telic or atelic.

Li and Thompson (1981) have pointed out other instances when perfective \textit{le} does not indicate completed action. Consider their examples (1981:213-4).

(10) \textit{Qiangshang gua-le yi\textquotesingle u hua.}  
\begin{quote}
wall-on\hang-PFV one-CL painting  
On the wall hangs a painting.
\end{quote}

(11) \textit{Wo chi-le fan zai zou.}  
\begin{quote}
I eat-PFV rice then go  
I'll go after I eat.
\end{quote}

Sentence (10), according to Li and Thompson, shows that the perfective \textit{le} does not indicate completed action as the verb \textit{gua} does not indicate an action but rather describes an event. However this sentence may also be glossed as: 'On the wall was hung a painting'. In this sentence it seems that Li
and Thompson have relied too heavily on the English translation. According to the English this sentence could also be rendered as: *Qiangshang guazhe yifu hua* utilizing the durative marker *zhe* instead of the perfective *le*. Nevertheless the interpretation of this sentence and others like it relies on context and what is relevant to the situation. In sentences with sequences of action, such as example (11), the perfective *le* indicates that the first action will occur before the second and thus also does not indicate completed action. Li and Thompson also suggest that in sentences that include both punctual aspect markers the perfective *le* does not indicate completed action. Their reasoning is that because the starting point of the action occurs before speech time and the end point of the action is left open the interpretation is left to the total context of the situation. They conclude that the action might have ended before speech time, at the end of speech time or at a time later than speech time. The example that they used is given below (1981:216).

(12) *Ta pao-le liangge zhongtou le.*

s/he run-PFV two-CL hour INC

S/he has run for two hours.

Li and Thompson's reasoning however, can be countered. In sentences with a quantified object and the co-occurrence of perfective and inchoative aspect
markers indicates that the action extends beyond the point indicated by the perfective (Chan 1980:56). Chan further gives the following examples which clearly indicate the continuance of the situation.

(13) *Wo xie-le shige zi le. Hai yao zai xie shige.*

I write-PFV ten-CL character INC. still want again write ten-CL I have written ten characters (now/so far). I still want to write ten more.

(14) *Ta si-le shi nian le.*

s/he die-PFV ten year INC

S/he has been dead for ten years (now/so far).

It is the inclusion of the inchoative aspect marker in these sentences that gives us the sense of the continued relevance of the action or event beyond the perfectivized state. In sentence (12) we see that the action is complete to the extent of two hours worth and then the relevance of the situation continues beyond this point. The inchoative *le* in (12) functions to indicate a change of state, i.e., a new state, resulting from the completion of the event marked by perfective *le.* The same is true for sentences (13) and (14) The occurrence of a situation or event in relation to speech time is not relevant as Li and Thompson argue. Regarding sentence (12) even if the event of running ended with speech time or before speech time you still have at least
two hours of running completed and thus the perfective *le* does indeed indicate completed action. It should also be pointed out that the verbs in examples (13) and (14) differ. Example (13) indicates that the process continues, at least this is one of the possible interpretations. However, in example (14) it would be impossible for a person to die again, therfore this example indicate the achievement of a situation that does not continue. Other verbs such as *wang* 'to forget' also function in this way. This is not to say then that the situation does not continue. Rather it merely excludes the possibility of that verb (*si*) to continue; but it is possible that a new situation arise from this situation as indicated by the inchoative *le*.

It is important at this point to acknowledge the interplay or overlapping nature of perfective *le* and inchoative *le*. This has been seen to some degree in the examples above. Though these aspect markers have distinct and separate functions when they occur alone, their functions and interpretations can sometimes seem unclear when they occur jointly. For example, consider sentence (12) above. If the perfective *le* were to occur alone in this sentence it would indicate completion and could be interpreted as 'S/h ran for two hours.' And when the inchoative *le* occurs alone it generally indicates the inception of a new situation implying a change of state from a previous situation. When the two *le*’s occur jointly, as
in example (12) the interpretation reveals a combination of the two aspect markers as they work together: first the completion of the situation then a new state emerges as a result, reflecting the continued relevance of the preceding situation beyond the point of its completion. A time line can best illustrate this dual usage of the punctual aspect markers.

(15) \[\text{B} \quad \text{E-B} \quad \text{---} \]

This is the essence of how these two aspect markers interact in a sentence. A more complete discussion of this will follow in Chapters 3 and 4. Returning now to the perfective aspect we will see in the following section how the perfective aspect functions in Cantonese and how it differs from Mandarin.

2.2 Perfectivization in Cantonese

The Cantonese perfective aspect marker は ( ) functions in much the same way as the Mandarin perfective 了. Its primary and most common function is that of completion of action. In fact several elementary textbooks of Cantonese list this as its only function (Chao 1947; Parker and Kok 1960; Man 1980; ). Like the perfective marker in Mandarin, the Cantonese perfective marker is necessary to indicate the completion of an action. Without the perfective は we are left with an ambiguous reading and must
rly on the context of the situation. The following examples illustrate the
perfectivizing nature of the aspect marker *jo* and indicate completed action.

(16) *Keuih maaih-jo nibun syu.*

s/he buy-PFV this-CL book

S/he bought this book.

(17) *Yeuikohn heui-jo Meihgwok.*

John go-PFV beautiful-country

John went to America.

(18) *Ngoh sihk-jo leungwuhn faahn.*

I eat-PFV two-CL/bowl rice

I ate two bowls of rice.

Again the perfective *jo* clearly indicates the completion of the above
mentioned activities just as the Mandarin perfective *le* does. Cantonese also
functions the same as Mandarin regarding telic and atelic situations. Up to
this point Cantonese perfective *jo* and Mandarin perfective *le* have nearly
the same usage. However, perfectivization in Cantonese does differ from
Mandarin in that Cantonese employs other means to make perfectivity
besides with perfective *jo*. Perfectivity by tone change will be discussed in
section 2.2.1 below and the use of *yauh* 'have' for aspectral purposes is
presented in section 2.2.2.
2.2.1 Perfectivization by Tone Change in Cantonese

Unlike Mandarin, perfectivization can occur in Cantonese by means of a tonal change. The verb that is to be perfectivized changes from its present tone to a high rising tone and the perfective aspect marker ˊ is deleted. The following examples of this phenomenon are cited in Cheung (1972:144-5). The (a) sentences include the perfective ˊ and the (b) sentences have the ˊ dropped. ˊ is replaced by a change of tone on the verb from its original tone to a high rising tone, indicated in the (b) sentences by an asterisk (*) following the verb. It should be clearly understood here that the 'h' in the Yale romanization of Cantonese indicates a low tone register and has no phonetic value. Tone diacritics have also been added for further clarification (ˊ for high level tone, ˊ for rising tone, ˊ for falling tone, and non-high level tone is unmarked).

(19) a. ˊeuih ˋaih-ˊ jo la!

s/he come-PFV INC
S/he has come.

b. ˊeuih ˋai* la!

s/he come INC
S/he has come.
(20) a. *Keuih heui-jó la!
    s/he go-PFV INC
    S/he has gone/ left.

b. *Keuih heuí* la!
    s/he go INC
    S/he has left/ gone.

(21) a. *Leih máaih-jó syú meih a?*
    you buy-PFV book yet SFP
    Have you bought the book(s) yet?

b. *Leih máai* syú meih a?
    you buy book yet SFP
    Have you bought the book(s) yet?

(22) a. *Leih máaih-jó syú meih a?*
    you sell-PFV book yet SFP
    Have you sold the book(s) yet?

b. *Leih máai* syú meih a?
    you sell book yet SFP
    Have you sold the book(s) yet?

As is illustrated above there is no semantic difference between the (a)

sentences and the (b) sentences. The full perfectivized value is represented
by the high rising tone. Oftentimes this change in tone and subsequent perfectivization occurs in rapid speech. This perfectivizing function is unique to Cantonese and does not occur in Mandarin.

2.2.2 Existential Aspect *yauh*

In an article titled "Two Aspect Markers in Mandarin" William Wang (1965) briefly addressed the issue of *yauh* being an aspect marker in Cantonese and the Min dialects. As will be shown below this morpheme (有) is indeed a marker of aspect in Cantonese. Regarding aspecual categories Lyons (1977:708) has postulated seven groups of aspecual distinctions which include (i) stative vs. non-stative, (ii) dynamic vs. non-dynamic, (iii) stative vs. dynamic, (iv) durative vs. non-durative, (v) punctual vs. non-punctual, (vi) durative vs. punctual, and (vii) progressive vs. non-progressive. Though existence is not necessarily related to the internal temporal constituency of a situation, it is nevertheless felt to be associated closely enough with aspect so as to regard it along with Lyons' aspecual groups. The plausibility of *yauh* functioning as an aspect marker is related to the experiential aspect marker *guo*. The latter is identified as such by Thompson (1968), for example. Chao (1968:251) also treats -*guo* as an aspect marker, but mixes it with tense, giving it the meaning of "happened at
least once in the past, -ever." More recently Li and Thompson (1981:226-32) also regard -guo as marking experiential aspect. Example (22) illustrates how guo, indicated by 'EXP' accounts for experientiality.

(23) *Wo chi-guo Zhongguo cai.*

*I eat-EXP China vegetable*

I've eaten Chinese food before.

As is shown in this example guo makes a distinction between the experience of a situation and the non-experience of a situation. Indeed, the negative form of example (23) would be that I have never eaten Chinese food before.

The existential aspect marker makes a similar distinction. Yauh in Cantonese makes the distinction between the existence of a situation and the non-existence of a situation. Because Cantonese does display the use of an existential aspect marker, and because it is semantically closely related to the perfective aspect, it is postulated here that an eighth category, existence vs. non-existence, is essential to the analysis of aspect in Cantonese. Furthermore it is precisely because of its close semantic ties to the perfective aspect jo the existential aspect yauh is relevant to our discussion.

The two aspect markers yauh and jo are syntactically and semantically distinct. Syntactically jo is a verbal suffix and yauh occurs in pre-verbal position. Semantically jo is a simple perfectivizing marker that
has the meaning as has been described above. Wang (1965:460) has argued that in Mandarin there are five homophonous morphemes all written with the same logograph but have different grammatical properties. These include *you* (aspect), *you* 'possess', *you* 'exist', the determiner *you*, and the comparative *you*. Whether all these fine distinctions exist in the corresponding Cantonese *yaub* is irrelevant. What is important is that when *yaub* occurs as an aspect marker it makes the distinction between the existence or non-existence of an event or situation and is usually best translated as 'have' as in 'He has come'. An analysis of examples (24) and (25) will help us understand the semantic differences between *jo* and *yaub*.

(24) *Ngoh sihk-jo faahn.*

I eat-PFV rice

I ate (or I've eaten).

(25) *Ngoh yaub sihkfaahn.*

I have eat-rice

I have eaten/I did eat.

It is clear from these examples that both of these morphemes function as markers of aspect. However, the semantic differences are not as clear. Though example (24) does not contain any definite particle nor does it conform to the typical description of definiteness as outlined by Lyons
(1977:179) it does however seem to refer to a definite event or time period. The implication in (24) is that I ate a meal at a specific meal time. For example, when asked the question: Leih sihk-jo faahn meih a? the implication is if you have eaten a specific meal yet whether it be breakfast, lunch, or dinner. In example (24) we see no such implication or reference to any specific time or event. It merely indicates that the situation occurred or existed. Likewise when the question is asked: Leih yauhmouh sihkfaahn a? the question is whether you ate or not without any reference or implication to a specific meal or meal time. Though the translations are similar the implications and underlying references are significantly different. The differences between yauh and jo is undoubtedly also related to mood and context. Notice the slightly different implications manifested in examples (26) and (27).

(26) Wohng sinsaang leih-jo.

Wong Mr. come-PFV

Mr. Wong came.

(27) Wohng sinsaang yauh leih.

Wong Mr. have come

Mr. Wong did come.

Again (26) indicates that Mr. Wong came, probably in response to a question
referring to a specific event or place. Example (27), on the other hand, merely indicates that the event of coming did occur and is broader and more general in nature. It simply states that the person speaking did come as opposed to not coming and is not necessarily referring to a specific event or place. In short we are talking about a completion of action in (26) versus the existence or non-existence of a situation in (27).

Though it is perfectly grammatical and acceptable for the perfective _jo_ and the inchoative _la_ to occur jointly in a sentence as in example (20) it is ungrammatical and unacceptable for the existential aspect _yauh_ to occur jointly with the inchoative aspect marker. In light of our discussion above this does not come as a surprise. Consider example (28) below.

(28) *Wohng sinsaang yauh leih la.

Wong Mr. have come INC

*Mr. wong has come.

(29) Wohng sinsaang leih-jo la.

Wong Mr. come-PFV INC

Mr Wong has come.

It is only natural that the inchoative aspect marker assumes the existence of a situation or event in order to act upon it and therefore the existence of the situation need not be specified. What we see with these two markers is an
incompatible focus. *Yauh* focuses on the existence/non-existence distinction whereas the inchoative *le* deals primarily with the inception of a situation. Clearly a new situation cannot arise if it does not exist. Likewise if we are concerned whether a situation exists or not the inception of that situation is totally irrelevant. It is for these reasons that it is ungrammatical for the existential aspect marker and the inchoative aspect marker to occur jointly in a sentence. Likewise the existential aspect cannot occur with the perfective aspect marker. Perfectivity precludes the existence of a situation and therefore it is redundant to include both aspect markers. Furthermore the semantic meanings of these two aspect markers are too close to allow them to occur jointly in a sentence.

Though this existential aspect marker does not occur in modern standard Mandarin as spoken in Beijing it is found in Taiwan Mandarin and functions in much the same way as in Cantonese.

2.2.3 Existential Aspect *you* in Taiwan Mandarin

It is commonly known that the Mandarin spoken in Taiwan varies from that spoken on the Mainland not only phonologically but also syntactically. In Taiwan Mandarin the morpheme *you* 'have' functions similarly to the way it does in Cantonese. Indeed it also functions as a
marker of aspect. Syntactically it functions in the very same way as Cantonese, in the preverbal position; however, it seems to vary slightly in its usage. For example, it is very common in Taiwan to substitute *you in a sentence in place of perfective *le. The following examples illustrate this.

(30) *Ta you lai.

s/he have/PFV come
S/he has come or s/he came.

(31) *Wo you chi fan.

I have/PFV eat rice
I've eaten.

(32) *Ta you qu zhongguo.

s/he have/PFV go center-country
S/he went to China.

Though *you in Taiwan Mandarin functions in the same way as *yauh in Cantonese it seems to be used more often and in a wider variety of situations. Among some speakers it seems to be even more commonly used than the perfective *le. Regardless of this, the bottom line is that it makes the aspectual distinction of existence versus non-existence as is the case with Mandarin. Like Cantonese it is also ungrammatical for *you to occur jointly with inchoative *le as in *Ta you lai le. Therefore, in order to have an
inchoative as well as a perfective reading of a sentence it is necessary to use the two *le's. Thus (33) is grammatical with the perfective and inchoative functions whereas (34) in ungrammatical.

(33) *Wo chi-le liangwan fan le.
I eat-PFV two-CL/bowl rice INC
I have eaten two bowls of rice.

(34) *Wo you chi liangwan fan le.
I have eat two-CL/bowl rice INC
*I have eaten two bowls of rice.

2.2.4 Existential Aspect *you in Mandarin Today

In standard Mandarin it is known that *you cannot be used like it has been illustrated for both Taiwan Mandarin and Cantonese. It no longer functions as an existential aspect marker. However it is interesting to note that though it is ungrammatical to use it as an existential aspect marker it is commonly used in its negative form in questions and statements. The following examples show the grammatical and ungrammatical possibilities in Mandarin.
(35) *Ni chi fan le meiyou?
   you eat rice INC not-have
   Have you eaten?

(36) *Ni you meiyou chi fan?
   you have not-have eat rice
   *Have you eaten?

(37) Wo meiyou chi fan.
   I not-have eat rice
   I have not eaten.

(38) *Wo you chi fan.
   I have eat rice
   *I have eaten.

The reasons for these peculiarities have been postulated by Wang (1965). He argues that you once existed as an aspect marker in Mandarin but was phased out in favor of le. He explains this by a series of three chronological steps following the version of the transformational syntax model of that time. Wang explains these steps in light of the following pair of sentences (1965:459).
(39) a. *Ta you mai shu.*

s/he PFV buy book

S/he bought a/the book(s).

b. *Ta bu you mai shu.*

s/he not PFV buy book

S/he did not buy a/the book(s).

Wang explains that in order to transform (39a & b) into grammatical sentences three changes must take place in the following order. First, *bu* must be changed to *mei*; second, transpose the aspect marker (*you*) to follow the verb; and third, change the post-verbal *you* to *le* or zero. By following these steps of change we produce a grammatical sentence. Thus, according to Wang *you* is merely an alternate form of *le* (459). According to Wang's argument we see that these changes have been implemented into the modern syntax of standard Mandarin. He further points out that *meiyou* is not simply the unabbreviated form of the negative *mei* but is in reality much more complex. He states that it is "... a sequence of a negative marker and an aspect marker..." (1965:459). In his opinion this then explains why we still use the negative form of *you* in the language today. According to Wang *you* as an aspect marker in its positive role has been replaced by *le*, but in negative sentences we still see it functioning as an aspect marker.
Thus sentence (40) illustrates aspect marker you in its negative function in the language today.

(40) Wo meiyou mai shu.

I not-PFV buy book
I did not buy a/the book(s).

It is interesting to note that from the point of view of Cantonese, standard Mandarin has collapsed two sets of information into one. Cantonese has two ways of asking choice type questions: with the existential yauh coupled with its negative counterpart mouh ( ḫ ) as in Leih yauhmouh sikfaahn?; and the perfectivizing choice type question employing jo and the older term meih ( 未 ) as in Leih sik-jo faahn meih a?. Mandarin, on the other hand, has collapsed this information into one form of choice-type question incorporating the perfective le and the negative meiyou ( 没有 ) as in Ni chi-le fan meiyou?

If Wang's generalizations were correct then it would make sense that sentences such as Wo you chi fan are ungrammatical in standard Mandarin today. Wang does seem to be partly correct in his analysis of you as an aspect marker. We have seen this to be correct from our claims above. However, Wang errs when he assumes that you and le are alternate forms of the same morpheme. By so doing he equates the two aspect markers when
in reality they indicate different aspects namely existence and perfectivity. It is probably true that *you* existed in the language as an aspect marker before *le*, and that *le* indeed took over as the dominant marker of aspect. However, we cannot merely say that the one made an equal substitution of the other. In light of our discussion it would be more accurate to say that at one point in the history of the Chinese language the preferred and possibly the only way to express completion of an event or situation was by means of existential *you*. In time this method of expressing aspect was phased out and replaced by the more modern method of perfectivity. Though this claim has not been explored thoroughly it makes more sense in light of our claims above regarding the nature of *you* as an existential aspect marker.
CHAPTER III  THE INCHOATIVE ASPECT

Having discussed the perfective aspect in Chapter 2, we now turn to the discussion of the inchoative aspect. By so doing we may more fully understand the interaction of the two aspect markers along with their semantic implications. We will begin this chapter by discussing the general features of the inchoative aspect as it relates to Mandarin (3.1). The first subsection (3.1.1) will deal with the dominant role of the inchoative aspect in relation to the perfective aspect. Other subsections will address the topics of the role of the inchoative aspect in sequence-of-action sentences and the role of the inchoative aspect in cases of ambiguity. The next section (3.2) will deal with the inchoative aspect marker /a/ in Cantonese with its function and usage.

3.1 The Inchoative Aspect in Mandarin

Whereas the perfective aspect in Mandarin intercepts a situation at its termination, the inchoative aspect in Mandarin intercepts a situation at its beginning regardless if some amount of the action has already occurred
(Chan 1980:52). Though these two aspect markers are phonologically identical in Mandarin they are syntactically distinct. The inchoative aspect is also valid for both states and processes. As has been expressed above, the inchoative *le* occurs in sentence final position and can be regarded vaguely as a sentence final particle in this regard but can be more accurately described as an aspect marker. In its most basic form the inchoative aspect indicates a change of state with stative verbs and the inception of a new situation with verbs that denote a process. The examples below illustrate this point. The time line given in (1b) can also be used to represent sentences (2) through (4).

(1) a. *Wo shi laoshi le.*

I am/is teacher INC.

I am a teacher now.

b.  

\[ \text{B} \]

\[ \text{\_\_\_\_\_}\]

\[ \text{\_\_\_\_\_}\]

\[ \varnothing \]

(2) *Ta hen piaoliang le.*

she very pretty INC

She is very pretty now.
Sentences (1) and (2) show that in situations with stative verbs the inchoative aspect indicates a change of state. In (1) the implication is that he was not a teacher previously and in (2) the implication is that previously she was not pretty but now that state has changed to her being pretty now.

Sentences (3) and (4) illustrate processes that, with the inchoative aspect, indicate a new situation. Indeed (3) implies that he used to eat fish but no longer does and (4) gives us a new situation indicating that the child can now walk when he previously could not.

The inchoative aspect also indicates the inception of a new situation by means of imminent action. In this sense the new situation is not yet implemented but the intention of it is voiced. For example:

(5) **Wo zou le.**

I go INC

I'm leaving.
(6) *Chi' an le.*

eat-rice INC

(Let's) eat now!

Chan gives still another function of the inchoative aspect by saying, "When the inchoative combines with a verb denoting an event, the situation which arises is a state which is the result phase or aftermath of the event" (1980:54). In these situations the event continues beyond the point of reference. The following are cited in Chan (1980). Sentence (9) is represented with a time line.

(7) *Ta guahao nei'u hua le.*

s/he hang-good that-CL picture INC

S/he has hung up that picture (now).

(8) *Wo zhaodao tade shu le.*

I look for-RVC s/he-POS book INC

I have found his book (now).

(9) a. *Ta xiewan xin le.*

s/he write-finish letter INC

S/he has finished writing the letter (now).
3.1.1 The Dominant Role of the Inchoative Aspect

We have pointed out above that the perfective aspect and the inchoative aspect are syntactically distinct. The perfective aspect occurs in verbal suffix position and the inchoative aspect occurs in sentence final position. By following this syntactic distinction we may say that any *le* that occurs as a verb suffix will be the perfective aspect and any *le* that occurs in sentence-final position will be the inchoative aspect. Likewise, in accordance to this description the inchoative aspect occurs more frequently in Mandarin syntax than does the perfective aspect. For these reasons we will see that the inchoative aspect plays a more dominant role in the syntax by virtue of its more frequent and broader use than the perfective aspect. Evidence to support this claim will follow in this section by discussing the role of the inchoative aspect when it co-occurs with the perfective aspect and in cases of ambiguity between the two *le's*. Chapter 4 will also provide further evidence in support of these findings.
Let us first review the exact functions of perfective *te* and inchoative *te*. Perfective *te* deals specifically with the completion of an event or situation and thus always occurs at the end point of a situation. Inchoative *te* on the other hand is concerned with the inception of a new situation or a change of state and thus is always manifested at the beginning of a situation. The time lines below illustrate where these aspect markers occur in time with perfective *te* in example (10) and inchoative *te* in example (11).

(10) \[ \begin{array}{c}
\text{B} \\
\hline
\end{array} \quad \begin{array}{c}
\text{E} \\
\hline
\end{array} \]

(11) \[ \begin{array}{c}
\text{B} \\
\hline
\end{array} \quad \begin{array}{c}
\text{E} \\
\hline
\end{array} \]

In sentences where both aspect markers occur jointly we have both the beginning and the end of a situation being affected. However, keep in mind that the end of one situation may also serve as the beginning of another situation. This is seen in perfectivized sentences with a quantified object and inchoative aspect marker. The inchoative *te* indicates a continuance of the action or the inception of a new situation beyond the perfectivized state. Example (12) illustrates this.
(12) a. *Wo kan-le liangben shu le*.

    I read-PFV two-CL book INC

    I've read two books (so far).

b. \[\text{B} \quad \text{E-B} \]

The implication here is that there is more to be read. It is certain that two books have been read and it is at this end point that the new situation appears, that being the situation of reading more. This is clear when the two aspect markers are both present in a sentence but it becomes potentially unclear when only one marker is manifested and we do not know which marker it is.

3.1.2 The Role of the Inchoative Aspect in Cases of Ambiguity

    We know that the perfective *le* follows verbs and that the inchoative *le* comes at the end of sentences but because the aspect markers are phonologically identical we may have trouble distinguishing which marker appears when it follows a verb that occurs in sentence final position. Do we assume a perfective interpretation because *le* follows the verb or do we assume an inchoative interpretation because *le* occurs in sentence final position, or do we assume an interpretation of both? In situations like this a
variety of interpretations are possible. Despite the various interpretations possible in these situations it is postulated here that the *le* which occurs both post-verbally and sentence-finally simultaneously is the inchoative aspect marker.

Chao (1968:246) has suggested that it is by means of haplology that the two *le's* cannot occur side by side. He suggests that in such cases the meaning of one is absorbed into the other. This is indeed the case when we have an interpretation of both perfectivity and inchoativity. The perfective *le* is absorbed into the inchoative *le* in that the perfective state is implied but not overtly marked. In this way the perfective marker is dropped but the inchoative marker is retained. This is seen in example (13) with the time line showing the perfectivized state.

(13) a. *Ta lai le.*

s/he come INC

S/he has come (arrived).

b. 

In situations like this we know that the perfective *le* is dropped because of haplology but it still may be accounted for on our time line. In the above example since the perfective *le* is deleted the implication of perfectivity is
manifested on the time line at the end of where the new situation begins. However, this sentence may also be interpreted with a perfectivized meaning alone. In such cases, as they are dictated by context, it is still the inchoative *le* being manifested by means of the inception of a new situation. If example (13) were to be interpreted by context as being a perfectivized state we would account for this by saying that the inchoative *le* has indicated a new situation. Before he had not come and now he has.

Along these lines Kwan-Terry has also said: "in cases where the linguistic/situational context makes the point clear, the aspect marker [perfective *le*] may be deleted without affecting the meaning"(1979:54). In these situations the inchoative *le* functions as in the above example. Examples like this are very similar to cases where the perfective marker is present as in example (12) above. The only difference being that in one case the perfective *le* has been deleted. Nevertheless, perfective *le* is still accounted for on the time line as it appears at the end of the previous unmarked situation which also serves as the beginning of another situation.

One thing that is vital to our understanding of these potentially ambiguous situations is the context of the situation. We cannot say for certain how the sentence is to be interpreted until the context of the situation is clearly ascertained. Once this has been done we can then identify
how the sentence to be interpreted. Depending on the context of the situation the inchoative \textit{le} serves as an indicator of pure inchoative aspect, or as a combination of the perfective and inchoative aspects. Examples (14) through (16) illustrate the broad domain of the inchoative aspect marker. The time lines show the perfective functions of the sentences though they are not overtly marked in the sentences.

(14) a. \textit{Tamen dou zou le.}

they all go INC

They all left.

b. \begin{center}
\begin{tikzpicture}
\draw[->] (0,0) -- (5,0);
\node at (2.5,0) (E-B) {E-B};
\node at (4.5,0) (E) {E};
\end{tikzpicture}
\end{center}

(15) a. \textit{Tamen dou lai le.}

they all come INC

They all come (now).

b. \begin{center}
\begin{tikzpicture}
\draw[->] (0,0) -- (5,0);
\node at (2.5,0) (B) {B};
\node at (4.5,0) (E) {E};
\end{tikzpicture}
\end{center}

(16) a. \textit{Tamen dou lai le.}

they all come INC

They have all come (arrived) now.
Example (13) indicate perfectivity in that the action of leaving has occurred and we are in the resultant state. The context behind this situation may be in response to the question 'Where did everybody go?' this example shows completed action in that everybody left. Example (14) gives us a pure inchoative interpretation when we assign the context that they didn’t used to come (referring to parties, lectures etc.). This example may also be interpreted according to other inchoative interpretations such as imminent action ('They're coming.' i.e. about to arrive), or as action underway ('They're coming now.' i.e. on their way). Example (15) is interpreted with both the perfective and inchoative aspects when the context indicates the result phase of the action as in response to the question: 'Did they all come yet?' Again it should be pointed out that it is the context of the situation that dictates the interpretation in these cases of ambiguity.

Two things have been learned here. One, according to our syntactic viewpoint of the perfective and inchoative aspect markers it is the inchoative *le* that is represented in cases where *le* occurs in post-verbal and sentence final position simultaneously. Thus we have seen from our discussion above that inchoative *le* has broader functional capabilities than
perfective \textit{le}. Second, context plays a vital role in the aspectual interpretation of any sentence. Ambiguity therefore is not so much caused by the aspect marker but by the context of the situation.

3.2 Cantonese Inchoative Aspect

The Cantonese inchoative aspect marker \textit{la} 噌, functions in much the same way as the Mandarin inchoative aspect marker \textit{le}. The most obvious and dramatic difference is phonological. The most significant implication of this difference is the lack of ambiguity in Cantonese between the perfective and inchoative aspect markers. While Mandarin has phonologically identical aspect markers, the Cantonese markers are very distinct; \textit{jo} versus \textit{la}. The inchoative aspect in Cantonese may also be expressed by the following variations of \textit{la} 噌: \textit{laak} 嚆勒; \textit{lo} 噸 or \textit{lok} 嚺. All of these variations retain the same inchoative meaning of inception of a new situation or change of state. The following examples are the Cantonese equivalents of examples (1) through (4) and illustrate the same functions.

(16) \textit{Ngoh haih lousi la.}

I am teacher INC

I’m a teacher now.
(17) *Keuih hou leng ka.*  
she very pretty INC  
She is very pretty now.

(18) *Keuih mhsikh yu ka.*  
s/he not-eat fish INC  
S/he doesn’t eat fish anymore.

(19) *Saimanjai sik haahng ka.*  
small-child know-how walk INC  
The little child knows how to walk now.

These Cantonese applications and the usage of inchoative aspect *la* are for the most part the same as for those with their Mandarin counterpart. However, this is not to say that their functions are identical. In fact, it is felt by this writer that their domain and usage does vary. Preliminary research into the usage and occurrence of the Cantonese inchoative *la* indicate that its usage and domain are much narrower than for the Mandarin inchoative *le*. An informal survey of the occurrence of inchoative *la* in Cantonese was undertaken to ascertain how often it is used in comparison with what we know about the occurrence of Mandarin *le*. In two hours of taped casual conversation among four people the inchoative *la* as described above was uttered less than five times. This is not to be confused with the sentence
final particle /a/ (时拉) in Cantonese that differs in pronunciation only by
tone. This particle, which indicates a lack of definiteness or finality (Kwok
1984:55), was used quite liberally (over twenty times in the same
conversation). Television news, commercials and popular movies from Hong
Kong also exhibited a low occurrence of the use of the inchoative /a/. These
preliminary results indicate that when the inchoative aspect marker is used
it functions very similarly to Mandarin inchoative /te/; but it occurs in far
fewer situations than does its Mandarin counterpart. Inchoative aspectual
distinctions in Cantonese may be accounted for to a large degree by context.

Further indications of these findings are also found in section 4.2 of the
following chapter. The exact role and how and when inchoative /a/ in
Cantonese is used in 'real' speech has yet to be identified, but our
preliminary findings suggest that there may be significant differences in
usage between it and the Mandarin inchoative aspect marker especially
regarding frequency of use.
CHAPTER IV  THE PERFECTIVE/INCHOATIVE RELATIONSHIP

The relationship between the two *le's* in Mandarin has been a much debated topic in Chinese syntax. Besides knowing that the perfective *le* occurs in verb suffix position and the inchoative *le* occurs in sentence final position, we are still somewhat unclear as to their domain and overlapping nature. We will begin this section by discussing the co-occurrence of the two *le's* in the same sentence in light of some survey research that will lay the foundation for this problem. Sections 4.1 and 4.2 will discuss the survey results dealing with the relationship between these two aspect markers in Mandarin and in Cantonese respectively. Following in section 4.3 will be a discussion of how time words and certain adverbs provide temporal reference to a sentence.

4.1 Co-Occurrence of Perfective and Inchoative *le*

It is common and perfectly grammatical for the perfective and inchoative aspect markers to occur jointly in the same sentence as has been seen above. In these situations we simply have a perfective and inchoative
interpretation of the sentence. However, in cases where both aspect markers co-occur in the same sentence with a quantified object there is a sense that the action continues beyond the point of perfection. In the following examples the continuance of the action is obvious. The time line in (4) shows the schematization of these types of sentences. Note that 'POS' indicates a possessive particle.

(1) *Ta shui-le sange xiaoshi le.*

s/he sleep-PFV small-time INC

S/he has been slept for three hours (so far).

(2) *Ta zou-le wuge zhongtou de lu le.*

s/he walk-PFV five-CL clock-head POS road INC

S/he has been walking for five hours.

(3) *Wo xie-le liangpian wenzhang le.*

I write-PFV two-CL language-section INC

I have written two essays (so far).

(4) B E-B

It is undoubtedly the presence of the inchoative *le* that gives us the implication that the action continues beyond the perfectivized state. Note that the end point of the perfectivized situation acts also as the beginning of
the inchoative situation. Indeed, if the inchoative aspect marker was not present the sentences would simply have a perfective interpretation. For example, *Ta zou-le wuge zhongtou de lu* would simply be interpreted as 'S/he walked for five hours.'

Chao (1968) has stated that there is a distinct difference in sentences that include both the perfective and inchoative aspects and sentences that include only the perfective. This fact is illustrated in the examples below cited in Chao (1968.799).

(5) *Wo jiar zaochen xie-le sanfeng xin.*

I wrote three letters this morning (speaking in the afternoon or evening).

(6) *Wo jiar zaochen xie-le sanfeng xin le.*

I have written three letters this morning (speaking in the morning).

Furthermore Chao states: "... if there is a quantified object and the verb refers to past action, a perfective-aspect suffix *le* is required" (1968.702). According to this statement the perfective *le* in examples (1) through (3) is mandatory. This concept has been questioned by Chan (1980) but not pursued. By discussing this topic with native Chinese speakers it was felt by this writer that in sentences with a quantified object and the co-occurrence
of the perfective and inchoative aspect markers that the perfective marker could be deleted without losing the perfective interpretation or rendering the sentence ungrammatical.

4.1.1 Survey on the Co-Occurrence of the Two Le's

To test the hypothesis that the perfective le can be deleted in sentences where it occurs with a quantified object and the inchoative aspect marker surveys were distributed among native speakers of Mandarin Chinese, both from the Mainland and Taiwan. The survey, given in Appendix A, consisted of two parts. The first part was a series of twenty English sentences that the respondents were asked to translate into colloquial speech. These English sentences were designed to motivate a translation that would typically include the perfective and inchoative aspect markers in Chinese. The purpose of this portion of the survey was to test to see if the sentences were translated using both aspect markers. The following examples were used in the survey.

(7) They have eaten those apples.

(8) The bird has been flying for two hours.

The second part of this survey consisted of fifteen sentences written in Chinese characters. Some of these sentences were grammatically correct and
some were not. The respondents were asked to correct those sentences they felt were ungrammatical by adding or deleting characters. The majority of the Chinese sentences were those which included a quantified object and the inchoative aspect marker but did not include the perfective aspect marker. The purpose of this portion of the survey was to see if the respondents regarded these sentences as grammatical even though they did not include the perfective aspect marker or if they would add the perfective *le* to make the sentence grammatical in their point of view. Examples (9) and (10) show typical sentences used in the survey (they appear in the survey with Chinese characters rather than *pinyin*).

(9) *Ta shui sange xiaoshi le.*

s/he sleep three-CL hour INC

S/he has slept for three hours.

(10) *Ta xie liangpian wenzhang le.*

s/he write two-CL essay INC

S/he has written two essays.

4.1.2 Perfective/Inchoative Survey Results

The difficulty of administering this type of test is the likelihood of receiving prescriptive or 'textbook' answers as opposed to those motivated
by natural speech. Indeed this did seem to have some bearing on the results of the survey, especially on the translation portion. Of the thirty copies of the surveys distributed seventeen were completed and returned. The results of the translation portion of the surveys were for the most part 'textbook' interpretations for all the respondents. In other words, in the majority of cases the English sentences were translated with both the perfective and inchoative aspect markers. There were a few exceptions to this but they were few and seemingly random. It is presumed that the nature of this type of test (i.e. translation) motivated grammatically prescribed translations. Most likely the respondents relied on their formal education and the grammar rules they learned there to aid them in this translation exercise.

The results of the correction portion of the survey were more revealing. The majority of those respondents from the Mainland added the perfective *le* in sentences that included a quantified object and the inchoative *le*. In other words they regarded these types of sentences as ungrammatical and thus showed by adding the perfective *le* that they subscribe to Chao's rule. Two respondents, both from Nanjing were more lenient in their conclusions in that they added the perfective aspect marker about two-thirds of the time. The most interesting results however, came from the respondents from Taiwan. All the respondents from Taiwan
(totalling six), except one, regarded every sentence with a quantified object and inchoative aspect marker but without the perfective aspect marker as grammatical and acceptable. It is still unclear as to why the Taiwan Mandarin speakers regarded the sentences as grammatical when the Mainland speakers did not. Perhaps this has something to do with the Taiwanese language background of the respondents.

It is also interesting to note that the way the Taiwan speakers responded to the correction portion of the surveys was incompatible with the way they responded to the translation portion. They translated the sentences with both aspect markers but regarded the Chinese sentences without the perfective aspect marker as acceptable. This is probably due to the fact they it is likely that in a translation exercise of this type they relied more heavily on their prescriptive knowledge as opposed to natural speech. However, the correction portion of the survey more resembled natural speech in that it was written in their own language and was thus more familiar to them and easier for them to respond according to how they really speak. Upon receiving the results of this survey further questions were raised. Why did the Taiwan Mandarin speakers and not the Mainland speakers find those sentences lacking perfective markers as grammatical?

The translation portion of the surveys also did not seem to reveal accurate
results. Overall the results seemed somewhat incomplete. For these reasons it was felt it would be appropriate to issue a follow-up survey to find answers to these questions and concerns.

4.1.3 Second Survey on Perfective/Inchoative Markers

The second survey was simpler and more direct than the first. This survey is given in Appendix B. It consisted of seven pairs of sentences written in Chinese characters with quantified objects. Both sentences in the pair were identical except for the aspect markers. The first sentence in the pair included both the perfective and inchoative aspect markers and the second sentences only contained the inchoative aspect marker. Two of the pairs of sentences, numbers four and seven in the survey, differed from the rest in that, besides the quantified object, they also contained a time reference. The reason these types of sentences were included was in part to test Chao's hypothesis about the mandatory inclusion of perfective markers is such situations and also to get a better feel for how time words interact with aspect. Examples (11) and (12) below are taken from the survey. They show the type of sentences used in the survey that lacked a time reference. Again, the sentences in the survey were written in Chinese characters.
(11) a. *Wo kan-le sanben shu le.*

I read-PFV three-CL book INC

I've read three books (so far).

b. *Wo kan san-ben shu le.*

I read-PFV three-CL book INC

(12) a. *Ta pao-le liangge xiaoshi le.*

s/he run two-CL hour INC

S/he has run/been running for two hours.

b. *Ta pao liangge xiaoshi le.*

s/he run two-CL hour INC

S/he has run/been running for two hours.

The respondents were asked if both of the sentences of each pair could be regarded as conveying the same meaning. The purpose of this follow-up survey was to determine precisely if the perfective aspect marker could be deleted in these types of sentences and still retain the perfectivized meaning. This survey was completed by seven of the same respondents who completed the first survey. Three of the respondents were from Taiwan and four were from the Mainland. Though this survey was not very extensive the results nevertheless were significant. With the exception of the two pairs of sentences that contained deictic temporal reference (*jintian zaoshang* 'this
morning', and *jiintian xiawu 'this afternoon') all the other pairs of sentences were regarded as conveying the same meaning by all the respondents, both from the Mainland and Taiwan. Interestingly, though they all regarded the sentences as conveying the same meaning, the majority of the respondents nevertheless preferred the sentences that contained both the perfective and inchoative aspect markers. None of the respondents regarded the two pairs with quantified object and time reference as having the same meaning. Rather, they regarded as ungrammatical the (b) sentences in such pairs as those in examples (13) and (14) below, from the survey.

(13) a. *jiintian zaoshang wo he-le sanbei cha le.

today morning I drink-PFV three-CL/cup tea INC

I have drunk three cups of tea this morning.

b. jiintian zaoshang wo he sanbei cha le.

today morning I drink three-CL/cup tea INC

*I have drunk three cups of tea this morning.

(14) a. Ta jiintian xiawu zou-le wu yingli le.

s/he today afternoon walk-PFV five mile INC

S/he has walked five miles this afternoon.
b. *Tai jintian xiwu zou wu yingli le.

s/he today afternoon walk five mile INC

*S/he has walked five miles this afternoon.

In each of these pairs the (b) sentences were regarded as ungrammatical and not conveying the same meaning as the corresponding (a) sentences. As for these types of sentences with a quantified object and a time reference, Chao seems to have been correct. However, this does not seem to be the case with those sentences with a quantified object but lack a time reference. Sentences that lacked a time reference (examples 11 and 12) and the others like them in the survey were regarded by all the respondents as conveying the same meaning. It is admitted that more work on this problem is in order but these preliminary surveys do indicate that the perfective *le can be omitted in sentences that contain a quantified object and the inchoative *le without losing the perfectivized meaning. This suggests that perhaps the inchoative *le has a wider domain than the perfective *le in that the perfective marker may merely be implied and not always overtly marked. Inchoative *le, on the other hand, cannot be omitted or implied without overt marking. This coincides with our discussion in Chapter three regarding the nature of inchoative *le in situations of possible ambiguity.
Along these lines Lu (1975) has suggested a similar function of the inchoative aspect marker or as he calls it the inception marker /le. Lu explains that with transitive verbs, /le can occur either right after the verb or at the end of the sentence or in both places. He believes that the function of /le when occurring with transitive verbs is determined by its position in the sentence. Regarding these situations he states: "... it is permitted by the grammar of the language to have the aspect marker /le deleted without change of sentence meaning..." (1975,59). He used the following examples to argue his case (1975,58).

(15) a. *Ta mai-le neiben shu.*

he buy-PFV that-CL book

He bought that book.

b. *Ta mai neiben shu le.*

he buy that-CL book INC

He has bought that book (implying that he was not expected to buy that book before).

c. *Ta mai-le neiben shu le.*

he buy-PFV that-CL book INC

He has bought that book (implying that he was not expected to buy that book before).
It should be noted that the determiner *nei* 'that' is present in these examples. Lyons has suggested that quantifiers function in much the same way as determiners and as such are intersubstitutable with them. The primary role of both determiners and quantifiers is to determine something whether it be in terms of identity or in terms of size and amount (1977:454-55). In other words they both make reference to definiteness. In light of this we see that the determiner *nei* 'that' in Lu's examples functions in the same way as the quantifiers in the sentences from the survey. Therefore Lu's conclusions regarding the deletion of perfective *le* are compatible with our findings in the surveys.

A work currently in progress by Hu (1990) discussing the use of *le* in Beijing Mandarin and Taipei *guoyu* uses 'real' speech as the basis of his discussion. He has used scripts compiled from recorded natural conversations from a pilot investigation conducted by Sanders. The participants of these conversations, both in Beijing and Taipei are college graduates and from families of higher educational officials. Among Hu's conclusions of particular relevance here is his finding of a higher rate of usage of inchoative *le* than of perfective *le*. This conclusion coincides with our results in this study also.

Our research has shown that the inchoative *le* is used more frequently than perfective *le*. This is especially apparent in cases where
perfective *le* can be omitted with the perfective interpretation being
implied. Also we have seen that inchoative *le* cannot be omitted without
losing an inchoative interpretation. The relationship of deictic temporal
expressions and aspect markers has only been touched upon in this chapter.
Therefore we will explore this relationship in more detail in section 4.3.

4.2 Cantonese Survey on Perfective/Inchoative Relationship

Another difference between the aspectual systems in Cantonese and
Mandarin was brought forth in the findings of the Cantonese survey on the
perfective/inchoative aspectual relationship. The Cantonese survey, given in
Appendix C, was identical to the Mandarin surveys except that the second
portion written in Chinese characters was written in the colloquial Cantonese
characters used in Hong Kong so as to best represent the spoken language. In
the first section the respondents were asked to translate the English
sentences into modern colloquial Cantonese and in the second section they
were asked to correct the ungrammatical sentences if they felt they were
unacceptable. The purpose of this survey was to determine how the punctual
aspect in Cantonese differed from Mandarin and to try to determine the
relationship between the perfective and inchoative aspect markers in
Cantonese. Before the survey was issued it was felt that the perfective aspect
marker in Cantonese played a more dominate role than the perfective *le* in Mandarin in that it is used more frequently, but is also more restricted in its use. As mentioned in section 3.2 above it is also felt that the Cantonese inchoative *la* plays a less significant role than the inchoative *le* in Mandarin in that it tends to be used less frequently. However, it is also less restricted in its use.

Of the fifteen copies of the survey issued eleven were completed and returned. The results were consistent for the translation portion of the survey but somewhat inconsistent on the correction portion. In the translation exercise the perfective *jo* was used extensively by all the respondents in all the cases when it could have been used. The inchoative *la* was used in some cases but not nearly as widespread as the usage of the perfective aspect marker even though the English sentences were designed to influence a translation with an inchoative aspectual interpretation. In several cases the characters *yihging* (.isLoggedIn) 'already' were used in conjunction with the perfective marker implying an interpretation similar to an inchoative one. Examples (16) and (17) are sentences from the survey with sample translations provided by respondents.
(16) He has written three letters.

Keuih yihging se-jo saamsfung seun.

he already write-PFV three-CL letter

(17) He has been dead for ten years.

Keuih yihging sei-jo sahp lihn.

he already die-PFV ten year

In general there seemed to be a reluctance to use the inchoative /a/ in the translations. On the second portion of the survey (the correction section) the perfective /jo/ again played an important role. Among all the respondents the perfective /jo/ was added to all sentences that it presumably applied to. For example, the perfective /jo/ was added to such sentences as examples (18) and (19) below, as answers in the survey. /jo/ underlined in these examples, was added by the respondents.

(18) Keuih se-jo leuhngpin mahnjeung /a.

s/he write-PFV two-CL essay INC

S/he has written two essays.


s/he sell-PFV four-CL Chinese book INC

S/he has sold four Chinese books.

On the other hand, five of the eleven respondents deleted inchoative /a/ in
anywhere from one to seven of the sentences where it was prescriptively grammatical. The remaining six respondents did not delete it in any of the sentences. The following examples (20 and 21) show where the inchoative /a was deleted when prescriptively speaking it should be considered grammatical. The deleted /a is placed within parentheses.

(20) *Keuih haahng-jo saamgo jungtuhge louh (la).*

s/he walk-PFV three-CL hour-POS road (INC)

S/he has walked for three hours.

(21) *Keuih maaih seibun jungmahm syu (la).*

s/he sell four-CL Chinese book (INC)

S/he has sold four Chinese books.

According to this data the respondents then felt that the inchoative /a was acceptable in some cases and either optional or ungrammatical in others even though it was prescriptively grammatical in the majority of the cases in the survey. The results of the four respondents who were more lenient in their deletion of the inchoative /a showed more compatibility with the translation portion of the survey in that the inchoative /a was deemed necessary in fewer instances than what would presumably be the case.

From these survey results we have drawn the following conclusions.

The perfective aspect marker in Cantonese seems to be used more
frequently and in more contexts than its Mandarin counterpart. It was concluded in the surveys that the perfective *jo* cannot be deleted in any situation without losing the perfectivized interpretation. Perfective *jo* may only be deleted if it is replaced by tone change to signal perfectivization as discussed earlier in section 2.1.1. In such cases, since the change of tone in the verb replaces the perfective *jo*, some indication of perfectivization is still present. The results of the surveys have thus shown that the Mandarin perfective *le* can be deleted at times, whereas the Cantonese perfective *jo* does not share this characteristic, thereby playing a more dominant role in the grammar.

This raises the question as to the exact role of the inchoative *la* in Cantonese. Unlike *jo*, inchoative *la* in Cantonese was subject to deletion at times in the survey. The data compiled by this research is not sufficient to make more refined statements regarding the nature and function of the inchoative *la*. What we have learned from these surveys is that the Cantonese inchoative *la* does differ from its Mandarin counterpart. First of all, it does not seem to be used as frequently as the Mandarin inchoative *le*. The data also seems to suggest that the inchoative *la* in Cantonese plays a less dominant role than does the perfective *jo* in that dialect. The inchoative *la* tends to be deleted in sentences containing both *yihging* 'already' and
perfective \( j o \), as examples (16) and (17) have demonstrated. The reasons for possible omissions of the inchoative \( la \) in Cantonese is still puzzling. To fully understand this problem will require further research and evaluation.

4.3 Deictic Temporal Expressions and Markers of Punctual Aspect

Time words with deictic reference play an important role in their interaction with punctual aspect markers in Mandarin. The importance of this relationship was first realized by examining Chao's examples that included such time words with punctual aspect markers (1968:799). Interest in this topic was further stimulated by the survey research discussed previously. Time words with deictic reference in Mandarin include zuotian 'yesterday', mingtian 'tomorrow', jintian 'today', and xiawu 'afternoon'. Such time words in Mandarin anchor an event with respect to speech time. Since Chinese lacks grammatical tense, of interest here is the exploration of how deictic temporal reference using time words interacts with the aspectual system in Mandarin. Example (22) shows how a sentence with perfective \( le \) and zuotian 'yesterday' as the time word are represented on the time line.

(22) a. Wo zuotian xie-le sanfeng xin.

I yesterday write-PFV three-CL letter

I wrote three letters yesterday.
b. \[ \begin{array}{c}
\text{'yesterday'} \quad \text{'now'}
\end{array} \]

As we see from this time line the time word *zuotian* anchors the event in relation to speech time, in this case prior to speech time. In most cases time words that relate to punctual aspect will also anchor the event to a time prior to speech time. This obviously is not true for cases when the inchoative aspect marker indicates imminent action. It was felt by this writer that the inchoative aspect occurs more frequently than the perfective aspect in relation to time words with deictic temporal reference. A short survey was administered to test this hypothesis and to better determine the role of time words with aspect.

4.3.1 Survey on the Relationship of Deictic Temporal Expressions and Punctual Aspect Markers

This was a simple survey which consisted of four sets of sentences written in Chinese characters. Each of the sentences contained a time word as well as various combinations of aspect markers, quantified objects, and non-quantified objects. Respondents were simply asked whether the sentences were grammatical or not, if certain aspect markers were redundant, or if any
of the sentences were ambiguous. This survey is found in Appendix D. The survey was administered to five native speakers of Chinese, three from the Mainland and two from Taiwan. Though the data was limited it yielded fairly consistent results.

It was learned from this survey that all the time words that were used in this survey (zuotian, jintian, and jintian xiawu) must occur with an aspect marker. In order to be grammatical, sentences with time words and a non-quantified object must have the presence of the perfective aspect marker, the inchoative aspect marker, or a combination of the two. Sentences of this type that lack an aspect marker seem to leave the situation incomplete and ambiguous. As has been illustrated in section 4.1.3 sentences with a time word and quantified object must have perfective le or the combination of perfective and inchoative le. In this regard all time words function in basically the same way. It was also learned that sentences with quantified objects and those with non-quantified objects functioned uniformly. Examples (23) through (28), excerpted from the survey, illustrate sentences that were regarded as grammatical and ungrammatical.

(23) *Wo jintian xie xin le.*

I today write letter INC

I wrote a/some letter(s) today.
(24) *Wo jintian xie sanfeng xin.
   I today write three-CL letter
   *I wrote three letters today.

(25) Wo jintian xiawu xie-le sanfeng xin.
   I today afternoon write-PFV three-CL letter
   I wrote three letters this afternoon.

(26) *Wo jintian xiawu xie sanfeng xin.
   I today afternoon write three-CL letter
   *I wrote three letters this afternoon.

(27) Wo zuotian xie xin le.
   I yesterday write letter INC
   I wrote a/some letter(s) yesterday.

(28) *Wo zuotian xie sanfeng xin.
   I yesterday write three-CL letter
   *I wrote three letters yesterday.

These examples illustrate the ungrammaticality of sentences that contain a

time word but lack aspect marking.

It was also learned in the survey that when a time word occurs with

both perfective le and inchoative le the perfective le is often times

regarded as redundant. Examples (29) and (30), also excerpted from the
survey, illustrate this situation.

(29) *Wo jintian xie-le sanfeng xin le.*

I today write-PFV three-CL letter INC

I have written three letters today.

(30) *Wo zuotian xie-le xin le.*

I yesterday write-PFV letter INC

I wrote a/some letter(s) yesterday.

It was felt by all the respondents that these sentences were grammatical and acceptable. However, three of the five respondents also indicated that the perfective *le* in these and like sentences was redundant and unnecessary. The reason behind these responses is probably due to the fact that since the time word in these sentences anchors the event in relation to speech time, and in these instances time reference was in the past, perfectivity is assumed and therefore redundant. This can be likened to the redundancy of perfective *le* in sentences that also include a resultative verb complement (RVC). As Chan has stated (1980:55), the RVC already indicates the successful completion of an action and therefore the perfective *le* is optional (see section 3.1 example 9). In the survey, unanimously regarded as grammatical were sentences that lacked perfective *le* but contained inchoative *le* and a time word anchoring the events with respect to speech time. Two
respondents indicated that there could be two possible meanings to these
types of sentences and the other three respondents indicated that these
sentences have the same meaning as sentences of the kind that also include
the perfective *le*. For example,

(31) *Wǒ jintian xié xīn le.*

I today write letter INC

a. I wrote a/some letter(s) today.

b. I wrote a/some letter(s) today (implying that he didn't used to
    write letters.

The first translation would indicate a perfectivized and inchoative
interpretation and the second translation would indicate a purely inchoative
interpretation indicating a change of status. Without context we would not be
able to distinguish the correct interpretation. However, as mentioned above
three of the respondents preferred the first (a) translation for sentences of
this type. Whether or not these types of sentences are ambiguous is not as
important as the fact that the perfective *le* can be deleted in sentences that
contain a time word and the inchoative *le*. In these cases the function of the
inchoative *le* overlaps with perfective *le* in that it may also indicate
perfectivity. It should also be noted that the occurrence of a quantified
object or the absence of one does not alter these findings.
In this survey the relationship of the word *yijing* 'already' with aspect markers was also investigated. It was learned that this word functions in the same way as time words such as 'yesterday' in that it also anchors the event to speech time, more specifically prior to speech time. As with the time words investigated, the occurrence of *yijing* must also accompany an aspect marker whether it be perfective *le*, inchoative *le*, or a combination of the two. This study of the deictic temporal reference and its relationship to punctual aspect markers was limited to an analysis of Mandarin. Due to the complex nature of this topic and the time involved in doing a thorough analysis Cantonese was not involved here. However, this does not presuppose that Cantonese conforms or differs from our findings with Mandarin. A more detailed and thorough investigation of this type is in order both for Mandarin and other Chinese dialects.
CHAPTER V CONCLUSION

Throughout the course of this study we have learned many things. Most importantly we gained a clearer understanding of the punctual aspect systems in Mandarin and Cantonese as well as the differences that are apparent between the dialects. The first section of this chapter (5.1) will discuss where we have come and the claims that we have made. The second section (5.2) will discuss where we can go from here to gain greater understanding of aspect in Chinese and her dialects.

5.1 Our Understanding of Punctual Aspect in Chinese

We saw in the introduction of this work that the grammatical systems of tense and aspect are separate and distinct and yet also interact with each other. Their interaction is especially visible in languages that incorporate both systems in their grammar. In section 1.3 it was further reinforced that Chinese is an aspect prominent language in that the grammar specifically involves situation-internal time and makes no reference to speech time. Thus Chinese can be regarded as a tenseless language. Section 1.4 illustrated
the fact that the aspect system in Chinese can be conveniently and effectively divided into two spheres. They are the punctual aspect and the durative aspect. Punctuality in Chinese, both Mandarin and Cantonese, deals specifically with the perfective and inchoative aspects and durativity deals specifically with duration and progress.

In Chapter 2 we addressed the topic of perfectivization in Chinese, both Cantonese and Mandarin. We learned that there are significant differences in perfectivity between Mandarin and Cantonese. Unlike Mandarin, Cantonese can indicate perfectivity by means of tone change. Cantonese also has an existential aspect marker (有) which is absent in modern Mandarin. We have postulated that this aspect marker is not a substitute for perfectivity but rather makes a distinction between existence and non-existence. Thus we have created a new aspectual category, augmenting the set already established by Lyons (1977), and complementing the experiential aspect in Chinese marked by guo in Mandarin. We have also shown the similarities of the Cantonese existential aspect with that same marker in Taiwan Mandarin.

Chapter 3 was devoted to a discussion of the inchoative aspect in Mandarin and Cantonese. In that chapter we pointed out the general features of the inchoative aspect in both dialects of Chinese as well as discussed the
nature of that aspect marker. We have postulated that by means of syntactic position the inchoative *le* in Mandarin occurs more frequently and in more situations in the grammar of the language than perfective *le*. When the morpheme *le* occurs in post verbal and sentence final position simultaneously it is the inchoative *le* that is represented. Furthermore, it is the context that must be considered when assigning a specific function to the inchoative *le* in these situations. We have also stated that according to our data the Cantonese inchoative *la* is used far less frequently than the Mandarin inchoative *le* and thus plays a less significant role in the grammar of that dialect.

A series of surveys was the main point of discussion in Chapter 4. These surveys were designed to gain greater insight into the understanding of the relationship between perfective *le* and inchoative *le* in Mandarin and the corresponding markers, perfective *jo* and inchoative *la*, in Cantonese. They were also intended to provide information showing the differences between these aspect markers in Mandarin and Cantonese. The results of these surveys suggest several things. One, that the inchoative aspect marker in Mandarin is more dominant than the perfective aspect marker in that it can account for perfectivity when the perfective aspect marker has been deleted. This was seen in situations where sentences with quantified object,
and inchoative *le* were considered as having a perfective interpretation or that the perfective *le* may be deleted without losing a perfective interpretation. Second, the inchoative aspect marker is used much more frequently than the perfective aspect marker in that in many cases the perfective *le* may be deleted.

Contrary to the Mandarin findings, the Cantonese survey results suggest that perfective marker *jo* plays a more dominant role in the grammar than does the inchoative aspect marker *la*. Our surveys indicated that perfective *jo* could never be deleted like the Mandarin counterpart could. On the other hand, inchoative *la* was found to be optional or deleted in many situations. As far as frequency of use and importance to the grammar inchoative *la* in Cantonese is less dominant than inchoative *le* in Mandarin. The reasons for these findings is most likely directly related to frequency of use. The fact that perfective *jo* has more rigid guidelines than inchoative *la* as to when it can and cannot appear suggests that it plays a more significant role in the grammar. Likewise we have shown that inchoative *la* is used far less frequently and may at times be deleted.

The relationship of words with deictic temporal reference and aspect markers has also been addressed. Our research indicates that such time words must be accompanied by an aspect marker, be it perfective,
inchoative, or both depending on the context. Deictic temporal expressions and adverbs such as *yijing* 'already', as well as resultative verb complements anchor a situation or event in relation to speech time. With the punctual aspect we see that time words such as *zuotian* anchor the event prior to speech time. It should be noted at this point that our discussion of punctual aspect markers co-occurring with time words was limited to those words that indicate deictic reference. By so doing we have limited our analysis to the interaction of aspect with deictic time expressions. To cover the full spectrum of this topic, studies in the future should also include the relationship of aspect in Chinese with non-deictic time expressions. Non-deictic time expressions would include such notions as 'on Wednesday', 'on August 30, 1990', 'in December', 'in the Spring' etc. By including all the possibilities that may occur with punctual aspect markers we may more fully understand their relationship and how they affect each other.

Though much has been accomplished through this study there is still much research and evaluation needed in the area of comparative syntax, particularly with regards to aspect in Chinese and her dialects.
5.2 The Study of Aspect in the Future

In this study we have explored many different aspects of the punctual aspect system in Chinese as it is manifested in Mandarin and Cantonese. Through this study we have come to better understand the punctual aspect system in both Mandarin and Cantonese and have also gained an appreciation for the significant difference between the two systems. However, this study does not purport to be exhaustive. It is important in the future that studies of this type broaden their resources. This study was limited and restrictive in several regards. For example, the nature of the surveys conducted allowed for the possibility of prescriptive and subjective viewpoints. Though little work has been done analyzing 'real' speech it is felt by this writer that in order to come to a fuller understanding of aspect in Chinese this is precisely what must be done (see Spanos 1979). In his work-in-progress Hu (1990) has succeeded in evaluating natural speech in an objective way. This gives researchers an objective look at the language as it is really spoken and not how it is supposed to be spoken, thus enabling the study of sociolinguistic variation and a comparison among dialects.

Experimental methods of research, as this study has employed, are an important means of collecting and evaluating data. Likewise the evaluation of natural speech is also an important method of research. However, in order
to fully understand aspect in Chinese and her dialects it would be beneficial to employ both methods of research and collectively compare the results. By so doing we may substantially eliminate subjective and prescriptive data and thus see the picture more clearly. The aspect system in Chinese is both complex and intriguing. Studies such as this bring us one step closer to fully understanding the syntactic and semantic functions of Chinese aspect markers.
APPENDIX A

Mandarin Survey on Perfective/Inchoative Relationship

sex:
age:
hometown:
native dialect:

Part A:

1) They have already eaten their meal.
2) She has eaten four bowls of rice,
3) They have already eaten those apples.
4) They have eaten those apples.
5) He has gone there many times.
6) He wrote two letters.
7) He has written three letters.
8) I have written ten characters.
9) He has driven five miles.
10) The bird has been flying for two hours.
11) He has been dead for ten years.
12) He drinks coffee now (he didn't used to).

13) I wrote three letters this morning.

14) He has slept for four hours.

15) He ate six bowls of rice.

16) She bought three pairs of shoes.

17) I have written five letters this morning.

18) He has run for two hours.

19) He has bought two shirts (so far).

20) I have been teaching for forty years.
Part B:

1) 他走了三个钟头的路了。
2) 他已经喝了杯茶了。
3) 我在那里住了两个月。
4) 他在穿皮鞋。
5) 他睡三个小时了。
6) 我把狗打了一顿。
7) 他写两篇文章了。
8) 我昨天晚上吃了三碗饭了。
9) 他哭着不吃饭。
10) 他死七年了。
11) 那个人走了五小时里了。
12) 他能在骑马射箭。
13) 他卖四本中文书了。
14) 他去那儿很多次了。
15) 我教书教二十年了。
APPENDIX B

Follow-up Survey on Perfective/Inchoative Relationship in Mandarin

1. a) 我看了三本书了。
   b) 我看三本书了。

2. a) 他跑了两个小时了。
   b) 他跑两个小时了。

3. a) 他写了五封信了。
   b) 他写五封信了。

4. a) 今天早上我喝了三杯茶了。
   b) 今天早上我喝三杯茶了。

5. a) 他教书教了三十年了。
   b) 他教书教三十年了。

6. a) 他死了十年了。
   b) 他死十年了。

7. a) 他今天下午走了五英里了。
   b) 他今天下午走五英里了。

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APPENDIX C

Survey on Perfective/Inchoative Relationship in Cantonese

1) 佢行咗三個鐘頭喺落喇.
2) 佢已經飲四杯茶喇.
3) 我喺個度住咗兩個月.
4) 佢穿著緊皮鞋.
5) 佢睇三個鐘頭喇.
6) 我寫兩個文章喇.
7) 佢打咗狗兩次.
8) 我嘅日晚上食三碗飯喇.
9) 佢喺緊唔食飯.
10) 佢死咗七年喇.
11) 唸個人行咗五個英里喇.
12) 佢能騎馬射箭.
13) 佢賣四本中文書喇.
14) 佢去個度好多次喇.
15) 我攞書教二十年喇.
APPENDIX D

Survey on the Relationship of Deictic Temporal Expressions and Punctual Aspect Markers in Mandarin

1. a) 我今天写了信了。
   b) 我今天写信了。
   c) 我今天写三封信。
   d) 我今天写了三封信了。

2. a) 我今天下午写了信了。
   b) 我今天下午写信了。
   c) 我今天下午写三封信。
   d) 我今天下午写了三封信。

3. a) 我昨天写了信了。
   b) 我昨天写信了。
   c) 我昨天写三封信。
   d) 我昨天写了三封信。
   e) 我昨天写了三封信了。

4. a) 我已经写信。
   b) 我已经写了信。
c) 我已经写信了。
d) 我已经写了信了。
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