

Hongyuan Sun

Temporal Construals of Bare Predicates in Mandarin Chinese

This dissertation contributes to the research on tense and eventualities across languages. It presents the first systematic investigation and detailed theoretical analysis of the temporal interpretations of sentences with *bare* (aspectually unmarked) predicates in Mandarin.

Traditionally considered a “tenseless” language, Mandarin lacks the morphological tense that we find in “tensed” languages such as English and French. Instead, its grammatical system displays a variety of aspectual markers giving information on the perspective on the eventuality described by the predicate.

This study shows how a careful investigation of the temporal construals of sentences *without* overt morphological aspect can lead to novel and insightful generalizations about temporal reference in Mandarin. It attributes the contrast between stative and eventive predicates in the temporal interpretation to their argument structure, and claims that aspect must be overt in Mandarin root clauses.

The interaction of past vs. future time adverbs and bare predicates provides evidence for a covert semantic tense in Mandarin, restricting the time reference of bare root clauses to non-future times. It is argued that bare sentences yielding “future” construals involve a non-future *plan*.

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