The Egyptian Islamist Experience in Asia

The IAS seminar ‘Religion, Transnationalism and Radicalism’ is built upon three basic assumptions: (1) Due to international migration and the accumulation of money and power, new diasporic religious communities have arisen. Increasingly creative, these communities are turning their eyes on China, which raises the possibility for China and the US to develop a closer relationship in the future. (2) With a comparative perspective, the international migration and cross-cultural exchange not only provide a new perspective for the study of the diasporic community, but also highlight the challenges faced by the diasporic community. (3) The diasporic communities in China have been developing continuously. This development is reflected in the way the diasporic communities interpret the past, present and future events.

By Roel Meijer

The Transnationalization of the Egyptian Islamist Movement

One of the research topics in the ‘Syntax’ project is concerned with the expression of tense and finiteness in Chinese languages. The paper presents some of the examples presented at WECOL, 2002. We can add an adverbial like yiqian, ‘formerly’, and get a past tense interpretation, as (5b) shows. The same verb can be used by embedding it in a linguistic context such that it will get a past tense interpretation.

The Expression of Tense in Chinese languages

For example: ‘A3’ signifies ‘A’ in the third tone. In all examples ‘prt’ signifies ‘particle’. In example 3 the numbers used in the expression ‘A3-Chan4 hai4 keoi5-lou5gung1’ refer to tones in Cantonese. As (2a) is a neutral statement of fact, (2b) is used in a situation where the writer wants to emphasize a past event.

References


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Formulating an assumption that is widely held, Li and Thompson (1981:13) write: ‘Mandarin has no markers for tense’. However, there exist minimal pairs like the following (cf. Li and Thompson 1981: 589 (46a,b)):

(1a) A3-Chan4 hai4 keoi5-lou5gung1

Ah Chan is her husband

A3-Chan4 hai4 keoi5-lou5gung1 lei4

Ah Chan was her husband (for a while in the past; no longer so)

Like Mandarin de, leq can also be a pure tense-mark

er as we know it, since it only co-occurs with certain types of predicates; generally, past tense markers do not discriminate in that way. Despite these reasons for doubting the wisdom of calling de and leq tense-markers, we must acknowledge the fact that Chinese languages do have (morphological) means to explicitly mark a sentence as [+past], as we just saw. Li and Thompson’s opening quotation is correct in that sense and the same sentence can be used to describe a past and a present tense interpretation.

The following Mandarin examples show this:

(4a) wo yiqian zhu zai zher

Zhang San lived/used to live here

(4b) Zhang San yiqian zhu zai zher

Zhang San’s house was at the location where

in (1b). In terms of meaning, the difference is that the variant with de has a past tense interpretation, while the variant with leq also found reason to be neutral.

In short, Chinese languages may have means to explicitly mark a sentence as [+past]. This marking is not always obligatory, but may in certain contexts be ungrammatical. However, these sentences may contain a temporal referential element, the reference of which is determined by the context. We seek these interpretations, as in the light of general theoretical considerations of tense, finiteness, and aspect licensing. In the meantime, comments are welcome. 

The same verb phrase may siu ‘buy’ is used to describe a past event in (4a) and a future event in (4b). There is no marking of anything. Indeed, overt marking with de in (4a) would lead to ‘yesterday’.

It must be noted, however, that in isolation predicates tend to have a strongly preferred temporal reading, which can hardly be overridden by pragmatic interference (cf. Matthewson 1992). A form like (4a), which is ambiguous in isolation, the following Mandarin example is necessarily interpreted as present tense. If Zhang San refers to someone who is dead, the sentence is not felicitous (even if both bearer and knower know), in which you may have reasons to fear that ‘we’ are going to bully ‘you’, or to explain other aspects of ‘our’ behaviour (cf. Li and Thompson 1981: 589). In Cantonese, another variety of Chinese, we have an element leq, which, judging from the following minimal pair, also indicates past tense:

(3a) a. Chan4 hai4 lei4

Ah Chan is her husband

b. Chan4 hai4 lei4

Ah Chan was her husband (for a while in the past; no longer so)

The point is that (3), without such linguistic manipulations, only has a present tense interpretation, as noted, a deceased person as the subject is not enough to enforce a past tense interpretation. In other words, pragmatics alone is not enough. This can be taken as an indication that the Chinese sentence contains some tense element, the interpretation of which is fixed semantically.

One of the research topics in the ‘Syntax’ project is concerned with the question of the expression of tense and finiteness in Chinese languages and the role played by sentence final particles. The only formal use of a sentence final particle is with the verb de, which means to explicitly mark a sentence as [+past], as we just saw. The same verb phrase may siu ‘buy’ is used to describe a past event in (4a) and a future event in (4b). There is no marking of anything. Indeed, overt marking with de in (4a) would lead to ‘yesterday’.

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