

The Ji Resultatives – A Semantic Study of the Aspect Marker from the Perspectives of Grammaticalization and Translation

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Abstract: The focus of this research is on the semantic behaviors of the Chinese character 既 (*ji*) in Archaic Chinese (11th century B.C. – 3rd century B.C.). It demonstrates how the lexical and grammatical meanings of this character are captured by diachronical studies, sorted by contemporary grammaticalization theories, and made accessible to the English academic world with the aid of the monumental translation work of James Legge. It is found that *ji* in this period is mainly an aspectual marker of combined resultatives, which is the overlapping area of objective resultative and passive perfect, concerning the resultant state of a situation that has happened with regard to another situation or another time. The syntactic relations play an important role in deciphering the semantic subtleties of *ji*. With regard to Chinese/English translation studies, it is evident that translation of classic literary works, as part of the noble goals of intercultural communication for better human understanding, can often turn the dusty opacity in one language into clean transparency in the other language. This will help to build a bridge between the past and the present for contemporary readers of both languages to comprehend and appreciate the ancient language data in the light of contemporary linguistics.

Keywords: Grammaticalization, Archaic Chinese, Resultatives, Translation Studies, *Ji* (既)

1. Introduction

It has long been a challenge for Chinese native speakers, linguists, or translators to determine the accurate semantics of *xuzi* 虚字, or grammatical markers, in classical Chinese, particularly of those in the literature of the Archaic Chinese (11th century B.C. – 3rd century B.C.). One of the traditional methodologies in researching Chinese *xuzi* is the use of Chinese etymological dictionaries, in combination with the careful examination of the original texts. While this approach is certainly solid, it is nevertheless constrained within the Chinese philological framework. As a result, it is difficult to present the findings cross-culturally and cross-linguistically. In the study below, I will attempt to explore the semantics of grammatical markers of Archaic Chinese from two different perspectives: grammaticalization and Chinese to English translation, so that we can see the phenomena of ancient grammatical markers in the light of a cross-linguistic framework and enhance our understanding of their meanings from semantic renderings in the English translation of classical literature of the Archaic Chinese Period.

In particular, I will study the grammatical functions and meanings of one of the earliest aspectual markers – *ji*. The major texts from which the main body of the data of *ji* will be extracted come from *The Book of Poetry* (11th century – 5th century B.C.). The English translation of *The Book of Poetry* was done by James Legge, which was reprinted in 2000 by SMC Publishing Inc. of Taipei under the series title of *The Chinese Classics*. In addition, examples from other literary texts, such as the oracle literature (about 16th century – 14th century B.C.), will be cited when necessary.

The investigation of the grammatical performances of *ji* will be both diachronic and synchronic.

Diachronically, since the texts which we are going to use cover a wide span of time, we will be able to find some useful diachronic evidence of the grammaticalization of it. On the other hand, since we do not have adequate data for the initial stage of the grammaticalization of *ji*, we then have to use some synchronic data, in the light of the current grammaticalization hypotheses, to infer the grammaticalization stage in question. For example, *ji* in the *Book of Poetry* simultaneously displays a number of grammatical functions, such as resultative, anterior, imperfective, and causal. Without the guidance of the grammaticalization theories, it will be difficult to work out which of these functions might have occurred earlier, or to figure out a reasonable diachronic sequence in which one of these functions might have developed from another.

That *ji* is chosen for this investigation is mainly motivated by these considerations: first, in Dobson's 1974 *A Dictionary of Chinese Particles*, *ji* is listed as the first grammatical marker in the Archaic Chinese period that is used for what we designate as the resultative and anterior aspects (1974, p. 33). Secondly, it appears with a high frequency in the *Book of Poetry*. *Ji* is one of the very few aspectual markers in that period that frequently indicate resultative, anterior, and some other related grammatical functions. As Dobson (1974) reports, in the Early Archaic Chinese Period, *ji* and *yi* are two aspectual markers that have those grammatical functions. Nevertheless, due to the limited length of the presentation time, only *ji* resultative will be discussed here.

While *ji* appears about 180 times in the *Book of Poetry*, expressing a variety of grammatical functions, *yi* in the same text only occurs twice as a resultative marker. This strongly suggests that *ji* is a much older grammatical marker. In addition, on the basis of my data analysis and the investigations that have been done by previous linguists, it is evident that *ji* is one of the oldest grammatical markers in Chinese that signal resultative, anterior, and the related aspects (Pulleyblank, 1995, Sun, 1996).

2. The Origin of Ji?

Ji as a recognizable character appears on some fragments of the tortoise shells excavated at the end of the 19th century and during the first half of the 20th century at the *Yin-Shang* site in ventral China. The Chinese characters and texts found on these fragments are generally known as the oracle literature. Historically, the *Shang* Dynasty existed between the 16th century B.C. and 11th century B.C. The *Yin* period is the last 273 years of the *Shang* Dynasty. So the date of the oracle literature can be traced back to as early as the 14th century B.C.

Orthographically, this character is one of the few that are very similar to their contemporary forms, so it is easy to recognize. Semantically, however, the deciphering of its original meanings and its uses turns out to be an extremely difficult task.

Among others, one of the difficulties arises from the fragmentation of the context. In most cases, a line of the oracle literature is pieced up with a number of fragments which are believed to belong to the same tortoise shell. A piecing process like this is prone to misaligning the fragments. Consequently, characters that originally are not in a line may be arranged into that line, which then makes up a false line. Similarly, if lines that are not originally in a mutual context are put together, the outcome will be an unnatural context.

Secondly, many of the characters on these shells are greatly unrecognizable. According to the statistics, of the approximate 4,500 characters excavated, only some 1,700 are recognized so far. Such a gloomy fact undoubtedly impedes the efforts to determine the exact meanings and the uses of certain recognized characters.

Regardless of these uncertainties, one thing about the oracle literature is established without too

much controversy: the content of this kind of literature is mainly concerned with divination practice. In particular, much of it is about the weather. This clue is certainly useful in judging the semantics of each line and each character as well.

From several volumes of the oracle literature I have examined (cf. Chang Ping-chuan, 1959), I only found six *ji* sentences, the meaning of some of which seems to be decipherable to a certain extent, as in:

- (1) 丁 亥 卜 貞 既 雨?
 Ding Hai bu , zhen: ji yu?
 divination divine exhaust? rain
 貞 毋 其 既 雨?
 zhen: mou qi ji yu ?
 divine should not it exhaust? rain
 Divination on the day of Ding Hai Divining: it will finish raining.
 Divining: it will not finish raining.
 (from Chang Ping-chuan, 1959: part I (i), p. 5)

From these readable data, the closest meanings of *ji* we can get might be “to exhaust” or “to finish.” Therefore it is reasonable to presume that these two meanings might be the original verbal semantics of character *ji*. This presumption can be readily attested by the verbal uses of *ji* in the literature of later periods, which probably are the best candidates to confirm, or to refute, the original semantics of this character, such as:

- (2) 既 月
 Ji que.
 finish month
 When the month is over....
Book of Books, 5th century B.C. or earlier
- (3) 吾 與 汝 既 其 文 未 既 其 事
 Wu yu ru ji qi wen wei ji qi shi.
 I to you exhaust its writing not yet exhaust its reality

I have communicated to you but the outward letter of my doctrine, and have not communicated its reality and spirit;...
Works of Zhuang Zi, 1st century A.D.

As to when it first started to be grammaticalized into an aspectual marker, it is indeed a question as difficult, if not more difficult, as the determination of its original leanings.

3. Objective Resultative

In the *Book of Poetry*, as we will soon see, *ji* is already a frequently used aspectual marker for the resultative and anterior. According to Bybee (1988 Bybee et al., 1994), anterior (or perfect) is a stage in

grammaticalization after resultative or completing in the grammaticalization paths, which is like the following:

(4). resultative → anterior → perfective → past

In the light of the contemporary grammaticalization hypotheses, we therefore can speculate that the grammaticalization of *ji* must have occurred much earlier than the period in which the poems of the *Book of Poetry* emerged (11th century – 5th century B.C.). Grammaticalization is a historical process that usually takes a long span of time. Therefore, the widely seen synchronic phenomena of a grammatical marker, such as *ji* in the *Book of Poetry*, would normally imply an earlier starting point of its grammaticalization process.

Resultative signals that a state exists as a result of a past action (Bybee, 1988; Bybee et al., 1994). The resultative is often similar to the passive in that it usually makes the logical patient into the grammatical subject of the clause, but differs in that the resultative may apply to an intransitive verb, as in “He is gone,” without a change of subject.

Bybee's definition of the resultative is based on Nedjalkov's. Nedjalkov states that the term “resultative” is applied to those verb forms that express a state implying a previous event. Here, two things are emphasized: a state, and the preceding action from which the state has resulted (Nedjalkov, 1988, p. 6). In addition to this general definition, Nedjalkov classifies resultatives into six diathesis types: the subjective, the objective, the possessive, the oblique-objective, the subjective-impersonal, and the objective-impersonal. Following Xolodovic's 1970 definition, Nedjalkov uses the term “diathesis” to refer to the scheme of correlations between the underlying rules (agent, patient), and surface constituents (subject, object) (Nedjalkov, 1988, p. 17). Clearly, what he means here by underlying roles is equivalent to Comrie's semantic roles, (i.e., event, patient, instrument, etc.), and his surface constituents are basically what Comrie calls grammatical (which connote the narrow sense of “syntactic” relations, such as subject, direct object and indirect object (Comrie, 1981), pp. 51-60).

In the study of *ji* resultative in the *Book of Poetry*, I found four types of resultative: the objective resultative, the subjective resultative, the possessive resultative, and the specific resultative, among which the objective resultative is the most frequent.

In the case of the objective resultative, the underlying subject of the state is co-referential with the underlying object on the preceding action; according to Nedjalkov, (5) illustrates such a relationship:

(5) a. John has opened his eyes ---> b. John's eyes are opened.

The objective resultative construction also requires the verb in question to be transitive. That is, the verb has to be at least divalent, capable of taking no fewer than two arguments: subject and direct object. However, in the objective resultative, which typically expresses the state of the patient of a transitive verb, the patient often surfaces as subject. As a result, the agent, which would have surfaced as subject in the preceding action, usually does not appear. There are numerous *ji* examples of this kind in the *Book of Poetry*, as in:

(6) 四 方 既 平
 si fang ji ping.
 four sides to pacify

When the whole country was pacified,
(The king's State began to feel settled.) p. 552

- (7). 戎 车 既 驾
Rong che ji jia.
War chariot to yoke
His war carriage is yoked

These sentences, translated by James Legge (1871), have a common syntactic-semantic construction in the Chinese original:

- (8) Subject + *ji* + Verb (tr.)
(patient)

Semantically, therefore, all of the above sentences express a state that is the result of a past action. Take (6) for example. In (6), only after the king has pacified the whole country (which is an action in the past) can the country – *si fang* – be in a state of being pacified. Similarly, in (7), the war chariot will not be in a state of being yoked until somebody has yoked the horses to it.

4. Resultative and Passive

Syntactically, the construction for the objective resultative and one of the most common passive constructions in early and Middle Archaic Chinese (the Chinese language before 5th century B.C.) are almost identical. Like the objective resultative, the underlying object, or the patient, in the passive is proposed before the transitive verb, so that it surfaces as subject. Consequently, the passive construction is (Xu, 2006):

- (9) subject + Verb (tr.)
(patient)

as in (from Zhou Fa-gao, 1961, vol. 1, p. 89)

- (10) 国 治
Guo zhi.
country well-govern
The country is (was) well-governed.

- (11) 军 败
jun bai
army to defeat
Army is (was) defeated.

Then, what is the difference between objective resultative and passive? Indeed, the difference between them is very subtle. Though the occurrence of *ji* in such constructions as (9) is a necessary

condition for us to affirm that the clause is resultative, it is not a sufficient condition for excluding the possibility that the clause is passive. For instance, *ji* also occurs in (9)

- (12) 周 宗 既 灭
 Zhou zong ji mie.
 honored house to extinguish
 The honored house of Chow (Zhou) is (nearly) extinguished.
Book of Poetry, p. 326

Nevertheless, the meaning of the verb *mie* “to extinguish” in its particular context is obviously passive. As Legge, the translator, points out, “*ji mie*” should have been translated into “has been extinguished.” However, this is probably a vivid expression for what the writer saw to be in progress (1871, p. 326). What Legge means here is that the House of Zhou is now in the process of being extinguished, which certainly is more inclined to the passivity than the resultative. In fact, Legge is not alone in regarding (12) as being passive, Gao Ming-kai (1951:399) and Zhou Fa-gao (1961, vol. 1, p. 89) - two of the most influential linguists of Contemporary Chinese - take the same position. From a historical point of view, the position proposed by Legge, Gao, and Zhou is well grounded. The Zhou Dynasty as a whole covered a time span from the 11th century B.C. to 221 B.C. Hence, in 5th century B.C., the Zhou Dynasty still existed, although it was in a disintegrating situation.

Following from these historical facts then, (12) poses some difficulty for determining whether it is the objective resultative or the passive. If we use Nedjalkov's notion of combined resultative here, (12) is apparently a case relevant to this notion. By combined resultative, Nedjalkov means that the verb form is regularly used with the resultative as well as with some other meaning; for instance, the objective resultative combined with the passive in English (1988, p. 18). Evidently, in addition to their syntactic similarities, the objective resultative and the passive in Archaic Chinese can have the same morphological verb form: Patient *ji* + V(tr). Namely, since (9) is a passive construction in Early and Middle Archaic Chinese, we have little reason not to take (8) as a case where the passive also occurs in perfect aspect. Perfect aspect here refers, according to Nedjalkov, to a form that expresses an action (process, or state) in the past which has continuing relevance for the present (1988, p. 15). Nedjalkov's "perfect" is basically equivalent to Bybee's (1988; Bybee et al., 1994) anterior. Consequently, regardless of (8) being taken as a construction of objective resultative or passive perfect, the overall meaning differences between them will be insignificant (cf. Nedjalkov, 1988, p. 45). On the one hand, to interpret (12) as objective resultative, we address the state resulting from the past action that persists at the reference time. On the other hand, if we take (12) as passive perfect, we then have “state” from the passive part, and recurrent relevance's from the perfect part. In combination, the latter will mean something like “a state that is currently relevant”. If this is the case, is there a lot of difference between a “state that persists at the reference time” and a “state that is currently relevant to the reference times”? The difference would seem to be very small. In this case it is like the difference between “the door has been closed” (passive perfect) and “the door is closed” (objective resultative). So it is here that the properties of resultative and passive are intertwined with each other (Johanson, 2000).

However, as Bybee (1988; Bybee et al., 1994) points out, the difference between resultative, passives and anterior is that only resultative consistently signals that the state persists at the reference time. If *ji* does not appear in such a passive construction as (9), we certainly cannot obtain the reading indicating that the state consistently persists at the reference time, as in (10), and (11). If there happens

to be any reading like that, it will be from the context rather than from the clause itself. In other words, without *ji*, there is no consistent signaling of the state persistence. Once again, the occurrence of *ji* is the necessary condition for resultatives.

Furthermore, in order to prove that *ji* is indeed a resultative marker, we have to find out if it is also used with other resultative constructions. In particular, we want to know if it can apply to intransitive verbs to form the so-called subjective resultative.

5. Subjective Resultative

In the case of the subjective resultative, the underlying subject of the state, which is expressed by the surface subject of stative predicate, is co-referential with the underlying subject of the preceding action (Nedjalkov, 1988, p. 9). As I mentioned above, Bybee (1988; Bybee et al., 1994) points out that a resultative may apply to an intransitive verb without a change of subject.

Apparently, passive cannot do this. Therefore, if *ji* can be used with an intransitive verb to express the resultative state of the subject (both the underlying and the surface), then it can be reaffirmed that *ji* is indeed a resultative marker. In fact, we find many examples of this kind of *ji* construction in the *Book of Poetry*:

- (13) 尔 酒 既 清
 Er jiu ji qing.
 your wine become clear
- 尔 肴 既 馨
 Er xiao ji xing
 your viands become fragrant

Your spirits are clear.
 Your viands are fragrant (p. 479)

- (14)
- 兄 弟 既 翕
 Xiong di ji xi
 brothers agreeable
- 和 樂 且 湛
 He le qe zhan
 Harmony happiness ever lasting

But it is with the accord of brothers
 Which makes the harmony and happiness lasting. (p. 252)

A resultative sense is only compatible with a predicate that indicates a change of state, or an action that produces a change of state. Therefore, change-of-state verbs, or process verbs, are the verbs that should be found in the resultative constructions.

The verbs in the *ji* subjective resultative not only are intransitive but also express a change of state,

such as *qing* “to become clear,” and *he* “to become agreeable.” The form *ji* + V (process) has a durative aspectual force. Take *ji qing* for example. It expresses a state of being clear which is a result of the process of becoming clear. So, from the subjective resultative construction, which is Subject + *ji* + V (process), the meaning we obtain is that a changed state attains at the reference time with regard to the subject. We can see such persistence from the data above. Since in (13) - (14) the arguments that experience the change of state are the subjects (both underlying and surface) of the clause, these data should only be classified as subjective resultative.

6. Possessive Resultative

Strictly speaking, the possessive form is a special form of subjective resultative. According to Nedjalkov, the possessive resultative may be derived from a transitive verb, and may have a subjective diathesis if the underlying object of the previous action refers to a body part or possession of the underlying subject or to some something in immediate contact with the subject. Briefly, possessive resultative constructions are typically derived from transitive constructions which describe situations changing the state of underlying subject – the possessor, rather than the object, the possessed – of the action. (Nedjalkov, 1988, pp. 9, 23).

Nedjalkov lists eight groups of transitive verbs or verb phrases from which the possessive resultative is typically derived. The semantic gist of these verbs is essentially possession, physically or mentally, temporarily or permanently, such as “to take,” “to learn,” “to lower one's head,” and “to lose.” In the case of *ji* the semantics of some transitive verbs related to the possessive resultative are straightforward: they simply mean “to possess,” as in the following examples in the *Book of Poetry*:

- (15) 既 有 淫 威
 Ji you ying wei.
 to possess great dignity
 Adorned with such great dignity,
 (It is very natural that he should be blessed.) p. 593

- (16) 既 有 肥 豕
 Ji you fei ning.
 to possess fat lambs
 And the fattened lambs are provided.
 (To which to invite my paternal uncles.)

Other verbs include “to take,” “to grasp,” and “to hold” as in

- (17) 既 取 我 子
 Ji qu wo zi.
 to take my son

(O owl, O owls)
 You have taken my young ones –
 (Do not (also) destroy my nests)

In (15), it is obvious that the result of the action into being possessed affects the underlying subject, which is “he,” appearing in the following line. The action changes the state of the underlying subject: from not having great dignity to having it. Hence, the English translation, we have been “adorned with such great dignity,” which undoubtedly signals a resultative state. (16) is very similar to (15). Even the English translation shows that. In (17), the verb is simply *qu*, meaning “to take and possess.”

Hence, it is clear that *ji* does indicate possessive resultative, which in turn is one part of the subjective resultative. In both cases, the agent, which surfaces as the subject, is affected by the resultant state. The difference between them is that only in possessive resultative the agent is in possession of the object, or the patient, in various ways.

7. Specific-Resultatives

Some data of the *ji* resultative in the *Book of Poetry* present what Nedjalkov refers to as specific-resultative meanings, by which he means that the visual state of a thing or person allows us to deduce the particular action (or process) that has brought it about (1988, p. 28). The examples below clearly carry such a meaning:

(18) 四 马 既 闲
 Si ma ji xian
 four horse to put through practice
 His four horses display their training. (p. 192)

(19) 四 牡 既 佺
 si mu ji ji
 four steed strong

既 佺 且 闲
 Ji ji qie xian.
 strong and to put through practice

Their four steeds were strong,
 Both strong and well trained. (p. 283)

Legge explains the meaning of *xian* as “to put through their practice.” The whole line, he adds, means that the horse now went gently along, not driven about as in the chase, and displayed the skill with which they had been trained (1871, p. 192)

Therefore, the best deduction of the display of the good training of these horses is that they have been well-trained. (19) is similar to (18).

7. Summary

As we can see from the *ji* data, Archaic Chinese possesses both of the main diathesis types of resultatives: the subjective and the objective. A special form of the subjective resultative is the possessive resultative where the verb is transitive; otherwise, the subjective resultative is formed with

intransitive verbs. To be more specific, these verbs are process verbs, such as *qing*, “to become clear”, etc. In the objective resultative, which is more frequent in the *Book of Poetry* than the subjective resultative, the verbs are transitive, being at least bi-valent.

Traditionally, the grammatical marker *ji* was regarded either as a past tense sign (Legge, 1871, p. 556), or as an aspectual particle (Dobson, 1974, pp. 409-410). From the examples of *ji* we have discussed so far, *ji* is evidently an aspectual marker. It is not a grammatical marker for locating a situation in time. Rather, it is concerned with the resultant state of a situation that has happened with regard to another situation or another time. Hence, this grammatical function of *ji* indicates the resultative aspect, which is in the domain of aspect, rather than that of tense.

Syntactically, the construction of the *ji* objective resultative and one of the passive constructions in Archaic Chinese are very similar. In both cases, the direct object of the clause is proposed, and the semantic subject of the previous action that produces the resultant state does not appear. The appearance of *ji* is the only morphological difference between (11) and (12). Therefore, it is difficult to claim that all clauses in the form of (8) must be objective resultative. As I have argued, some can be passive perfect.

Therefore, the *ji* objective resultative is what Nedjalkov (1988) calls combined resultative. It is often difficult to make a clear distinction between objective resultative and passive perfect in archaic Chinese.

The investigation of the semantics of *ji* resultatives in the perspectives of grammaticalization and translation shows that when a linguistic phenomenon in one language is examined outside its own traditional theoretical framework, we can obtain valuable insights that can often be opaque from within the framework alone. To a larger extent, such intercultural and inter-linguistic communication allows us to have a two-way vehicle that delivers the value-added outcomes for better understanding of Chinese classics to not only English readers but also Chinese readers.

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