

Chapter 1

Introduction

1.1. Motivations and goals

Modality has been drawing great interest in the field of linguistics, regarding its ambiguity in the definition of semantic category and multiple semantic-pragmatic functions (Palmer 1979, Bybee & Fleischman 1995, etc.). Though it is generally agreed that modality concerns the grammaticalization of the speaker's opinions and attitudes (Bybee et al. 1994, Palmer 1979, 1990), there has not been an agreed-upon categorization of modality (Lyons 1979, Palmer 1979, 1990, Jennifer Coates 1983, Hoffman 1993, Bybee et al. 1994, Van der Auwera 2001, Nuyts 2005 etc.). The situation of categorization of modality is even more complicated in Chinese (Tang & Tang 1997, Hsieh 2003, 2006a, 2006b).

Cross-linguistic evidence has come to a conclusion that the modal auxiliaries have to trace their origin to lexical verbs (Heine et al. 1991, Hopper & Traugott 1993, 2000, Bybee et al. 1994, Sun 1996, Xing 2003). Most researches on grammaticalization of modality have been conducted based on the data of English or African languages, both synchronically and diachronically. It is not until recently that a growing attention has been paid to the modality of Chinese (Chao 1968, Lü 1980, Zhu 1982, Li & Thompson 1981, Li 1982, Sanders 1992, Alleton 1994, Tang & Tang 1997, Hsieh 2003, 2006a, 2006b, etc.). In spite of the dedication of academic efforts to Chinese modality, most of the studies were based on synchronic data but fewer conducted diachronic investigations on it (Peyraube 1991, Sun 1996, Chang 1996, Xing 2003, 2006, Li 2004). Given the richness of diachronic data of written

Chinese, it is indeed a pity that we did not devote enough energy and interest to the diachronic study of Chinese modals.

Since Chinese is an analytic language, few morphological markings can be relied on to define clearly the grammatical categories of Chinese vocabulary. Therefore, unlike the case of English modal auxiliaries, which are easily distinguished, it has always been a difficult and controversial task to define the Chinese modal auxiliaries (Tang & Tang 1997, Hsieh 2003). In addition, Chinese is considered a highly pragmatic language (Xing 2003), the semantics of words and sentences depends a lot on the context, and so do the grammatical status and relations of the constituents (Xing 2003). Some researchers even considered that, in Chinese, a word can not be assigned a definite syntactic category unless it is used in specific contexts (Ma 1898, referred to in Xing 2003). Such is the situation that Chinese words can invite quite flexible interpretations in different contexts. In the process of grammaticalization, they can thus undergo much more complicated and interesting developments, which may not be found in the case of English words (Li 2004). It has been found that, when a Chinese lexical verb developed into a modal auxiliary verb, chances are that they may go on to acquire more abstract and grammatical functions and meanings (Liu 1997, Sun 1996, Chang 1996, Wu 2003).

Previous research devoted to the investigation of Chinese modals, be it synchronic or diachronic in perspectives, mainly focused on the syntactic and semantic change of modal auxiliaries from lexical verbs. Few extended their discussions to the post-modal usage (Sun 1996, Chang 1996, Li 2004). Even if they did, relations between modal and post-modal usages were not well-accounted for (Li 2004). The post-modal development of modal

auxiliaries has not received enough attention. Therefore, it is our hope that, by examining the diachronic data of one of the Chinese modals, we would be able to provide a satisfactory account of the various functions of Chinese modals and their post-modal usages in modern Chinese. Most important of all, we hope to be able to offer a comprehensive picture of how these functions relate to one another and how these functions were acquired during the change of time.

Given the limits of space of our study, we will focus on only one Chinese modal, *ke*, which is one of the most recurring modals in Chinese (Peyraube 1991). *Ke* has been used as a modal since three thousand years ago, about the period of Shangshu and Shijing (11th-6th B.C). Due to the polysemy of its verb origin, *ke* has evolved into many other meanings which are not shared by the other modals. We hope that through our study of *ke*'s diachronic development, we can give a comprehensive picture of the synchronic distributions of *ke*'s various uses.

1.2. Modern Functions of *Ke*

As one of the most frequently employed modals in Mandarin Chinese, *ke* is seen to serve various syntactic and discourse functions and denote many different meanings. As our pilot study based on the corpus of Academic Sinica¹ shows, *ke* is canonically used as a modal in modern Chinese, as in examples (1)-(2). Furthermore, it also functions as an emphatic adverb, as in examples (3)-(5), a contrastive conjunction, as in examples (6)-(7), and as an prefix as in examples (8)-(9).

¹ The URL of Academic Sinica Balanced Corpus of Modern Chinese is < <http://www.sinica.edu.tw/SinicaCorpus/> >

(i) Ke as a modal:

- (1) 國內舞者到了外國都可成為獨當一面的舞者.

Guonei wuzhe dao le waiguo dou ke chengwei dudangyimian de wuzhe.

‘Domestic dancers can /are able to be independent and responsible when they work abroad.’

- (2) 員工可隨時打電話回家報平安.

Yuangong ke suishi dadianhua huijia bao pingan.

‘The staff can/are permitted to call back home at anytime.’

(ii) Ke as an emphatic adverb:

- (3) 這場大風雪可了不得.

Zhechang da fengxue ke liaobude.

‘This big storm is really something!’

- (4) 要幫忙你自己去，我可不去.

Yao bangmang ni ziji qu, wo ke bu qu.

‘You want to help; then you go, but I won’t go.’

- (5) 你可得快快回來.

Ni ke dei kuai kuai huilai

‘Do come back soon!’

(iii) Ke as a contrastive conjunction:

- (6) 這篇文章雖然不長，可內容卻很精采.

Zhe pian wenzhang suiran bu chang, ke neirong que hen jingcai.

‘This article is not long, but the content is really rich.’

- (7) 她嘴裡雖然沒說什麼，可心裡卻在意得很.

Ta zuili suiran mei shou shenme, ke xinli que zaiyi dehen.

‘Though she did not say anything, yet she cared so much.’

(iv) Ke as a prefix:

(8) 你的小孩真可愛.

Nide xiaohai zhen keai.

‘How cute your baby is!’

(9) 可憐之人必有可恨之處!

Kelian zhi ren bi you kehen zhi chu.

‘Those who are pitiful must have a cause for having sunk to their lows.’

Except for the modal usage, no other Chinese modals seem to share the same functions with ke. Moreover, ke’s combination with other morphemes as a disyllabic word, such as keyi, keshi, also complicates its grammatical status and process of grammaticalization. While all the above functions are documented in dictionaries and grammar books, what has been done is simply listing them; few discussed the relations among and the developments of these functions. Although previous studies have an overall discussion of Chinese modals, and the modal function of ke has also been exclusively examined in some studies (Huang 1999, Chen 2000, Hsu 2005), yet they did not spend space on the other usages of ke. Liu & Chu (1993) have conducted a study to the adverbial use and the conjunctive use of ke and have discussed their relations, but they did not relate these two uses to its modal use. Therefore, this is our motivation to dedicate a thorough study to the multifunctional Chinese morpheme ke.

1.3. Data and Methodology

Our selection of texts was based on that of Sun (1996), Wang (2002) and Wang (2004). The texts in our study were chosen for their representativity of

the vernacular language in the period they were produced (Sun 1996). Thus, texts of folk stories, collections of talks and conversations were preferred. When there were no proper texts of colloquial speeches, we would choose novels or historical records that contain a relatively larger proportion of conversations than other texts. To avoid any a priori assumption, we will arrange our discussion in terms of periods. The chosen texts and their corresponding periods are as follows:

(i) Early Old Chinese: 尚書 Shangshu and 詩經 Shijing (from 11th century B.C. to 6th century B.C.)

Shangshu 'Book of History' is said to be the oldest Chinese book that records the history of Chinese, most of which is about politics. It may be the oldest collection of Chinese literary work. Shijing 'Book of Odes' is the oldest collection of Chinese ballads, which consists of folk songs mainly from within the reach of the Yellow River to as far as the reach of the Yangtze River (Legge 1971). The exact date when Shangshu and Shijing were written is not clear, but the oldest song collected in Shijing can be traced back to the 11th century B.C (Legge 1971). Both Shangshu and Shijing are representative of the language used in the period of Early Old Chinese. The English translation of sentences in these two texts is based on Legge (1971). In addition, we also refer to Chu's (1969) annotation of Shangshu and Wu's (1993) annotation of Shijing.

(ii) Late Old Chinese: 論語 Lunyu (from 5th century B.C. to 3rd century B.C)

Lunyu 'Analects of Confucius' is the collection of the teachings and words of Confucius and his disciples. Most of the texts are conversations among Confucius and his students; thus it can represent the colloquial style of the

language spoken (by the educated persons in the north) in the period of Late Old Chinese. The English translation of data from Lunyu is also based on Legge (1971). We also refer to Cai et al.'s translation (1994).

(iii) Pre-Middle Chinese: 史記 Shiji (from 2nd century B.C. to 3rd century A.D.)

Shiji 'The Grand Scribe's Record' is written by the Han historian Sima-Qian (2nd -1st century B.C.). It is the first history book written in the biographical style and has a great influence on the history of Chinese literature. Though it is an official document, it is often praised for its language (cf. Lai 1998) and its critical comments after each chapter. Moreover, it contains a larger proportion of conversations than other contemporary works in this period. Shiji is seen as the vivid reflection of the language in Pre-Middle Chinese. We refer to Wang & Zhang's (1997) translation of Shiji.

(iv) Early Middle Chinese: 世說新語 Shishouxinyu (from 3rd century A.D. to 6th century A.D.)

Shishouxinyu 'Anecdotes of Short Stories' is a compilation of the speeches and stories of educated people in Northern and Southern Dynasties (5th century A.D.), during the period of Early Middle Chinese. A large part of the content is colloquial dialogues or comments of literati on the ancient or contemporary famous figures. It is also praised for its language and vivid records of life in that period. We refer to Liu et al.'s (1996) translation of Shishouxinyu.

(v) Late Middle Chinese: 敦煌變文 Dunhuang Bianwen (from 7th century A.D. to 13th century A.D.)

Dunhuang Bianwen 'Adapted Stories of Buddhism' is "a popular form of literature (generally on Buddhism themes) with alternating prose and rhymed

parts for recitation and singing” (Sun 1996). It is said to play an important role in the study of literature and language in Tang dynasty and the period of Five Dynasties and Ten Kingdoms (9th -10th century A.D.). We refer to Xiang’s (1990) annotation of Dunhuang Bianwen.

(vi) Early Pre-Modern Chinese: 水滸傳 Shuihuzhuan (from 13th century A.D. to 16th century A.D.)

Shuihuzhuan ‘Stories of 108 Heroes’ (14th century A.D.) is said to be the first Chinese novel written in colloquial language. It contains vivid description of ordinary people’s life, culture and language. It provides an honest reflection of the social conditions and social values. Conversations accounts for a considerable proportion of this novel. The edition of Shuihuzhuan we refer to is an online edition at <<http://www.open-it.com>>

(vii) Late Pre-Modern Chinese: 紅樓夢 Honglouloumeng (from 17th century A.D. to 19th Century A.D.)

Honglouloumeng ‘Dream of the Red Chamber’ is said to be written by Cao-Xueqin (18th century A.D.) in Qing dynasty. It is famous for its fascinating description of life of the noble rank in Qing dynasty. The language of conversations in Honglouloumeng is quite colloquial and representative of the language used in the period of Late Pre-Modern Chinese. We also refer to its online edition at <<http://www.open-it.com>>

(viii) Modern Chinese: 聯合副刊 Lianhe Fukan (20th Century A.D~)

We chose our Modern data of ke from Lianhe Fukan ‘United Daily News Supplement.’ The chosen texts are articles submitted by readers from April 16th to April 23rd, in the year 2007.

100 tokens of ke will be selected from each of the above texts. We will count the token frequency of ke rather than its type frequency. The analysis of

ke's uses will be based on its semantic meaning and pragmatic inference. Cultural factors and contextual factors such as background information and relations among interlocutors will be also taken into consideration.

1.4. Organization of the thesis

Following this chapter, chapter 2 reviews previous studies on modality, grammaticalization and the diachronic and synchronic studies of ke. Chapter 3 focuses on the distribution of ke's functions in different periods. Chapter 4 discusses the grammaticalization of ke and chapter 5 concludes this thesis.