Lexicogrammar in Mandarin Chinese – the case of *guo* and *le*

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June 16, 2018
Overview

• Motivation of this study
• Literature review
• Principled Polysemy Model (PPM)
• The corpus-based study and analysis
• Conclusion and limitation
Syntax-oriented textbook grammar

• One usage of 过/过 [guo] is as a complement indicating completion. This usage of 过/过 [guo] is similar to the dynamic particle 了 [le]. However, there are also several differences.

• As a complement, 过/过 [guo] must be used with 了 [le] when occurring at the end of a sentence, as in (1) and (2).

• However, if there is an object, 了 can be omitted, as in (3).

• 过/过 as a complement is interchangeable with 了 [le], as seen in (3a).

• If there’s 了 [le] after 过/过 [guo], 过/过 [guo] can be omitted without changing the meaning, as seen in (1a) and (2a). (From Integrated Chinese, Level 2 Part 2, 3rd Edition, pp. 49-51, by Liu et al., 2010.)

(1) 我 去 过 了。  (2) 我 看 过 了。  (3) 我 洗 过 澡 就 走。
Wo qu-guo le  Wo kan-guo le  Wo xi -guo zao jiu zou
l  go-GUO LE  l  read-GUO LE  l  wash-GUO bath then go
‘I’ve already gone [there].’  ‘I’ve already read [it].’  ‘I’ll leave as soon as I take a shower.’

(1a) 我 去 了。  (2a) 我 看 了。  (3a) 我 洗 了 澡 就 走。
Wo qu  le  Wo kan  le  Wo xi  -le zao jiu zou
l  go  LE  l  read  LE  l  wash-LE bath then go
‘I’ve already gone [there].’  ‘I’ve already read [it].’  ‘I’ll leave as soon as I take a shower.’
Literature review

**Guo:**

- **Aspect marker:** viewpoint on a situation -- the senses of experientiality, discontinuity, repeatability, recurrence, reversibility and indefiniteness (e.g., Chao, 1968; Li and Thompson, 1981; Iljic, 1990; Smith, 1997, 2005; Pan and Lee, 2004; Lin, 2003, 2006, 2007; Chen, 2009; Li, 2011).

- **“Phase complement”** (Chao, 1968): the occurrence of a determined event, comparable to a past event (Iljic, 2009).

**Le:**

- Perfective aspect (e.g. Chao, 1968; Li and Thompson, 1981, Smith, 1997)
- Temporal or conditional relation (e.g. Chao, 1968)
- Past event (e.g. Chao, 1968)
- New situation/change of state (e.g. Chao, 1968)
- **“Current Relevant State”** (Li and Thompson, 1981)
- **“Boundary”** marking (Huang and Davis, 1989)
- **“Termination”** (Smith, 1997)
Gaps in the literature

Previous studies have made important findings on the semantics of *guo* and *le*; however, no satisfying, unified account has been offered in the literature.

1. Lack of **systematicity**
2. Lack of **motivated explanations** of the semantics of *guo* and *le*
3. The **inter-lexical polysemy**, i.e., the seemingly interchangeable, but subtly different uses of *guo* and *le*?
Principled Polysemy (Tyler and Evans, 2003)

- **Principled Polysemy Model (PPM)** holds that a particular linguistic form is conventionally associated with a number of distinct but related meanings. The distinct senses that derived from a proto-scene/primary sense constitute a semantic network or continuum in a *systematic* and *motivated* way (Tyler and Evans, 2003, pp. 37-38).

- PPM provides a methodology for determining the primary sense and the distinct senses with constrained principles. There are five criteria for determining the primary sense. The most important criterion is the “earliest attested meaning” (Tyler and Evans, 2003, p. 47).
Grammaticalization

• “Grammaticalization consists in the increase of the range of a morpheme advancing from a lexical to a grammatical or from a less grammatical to a more grammatical status” (Kuryłowicz, 1975, p. 52).

• “Both grammatical complexity and abstract vocabulary are historically derived from concrete lexemes” (Heine, Claudi and Hummemeyer, 1991, p. 5).

• Although the Chinese term for grammaticalization, yǔfāhuà 语法化, was not coined until the 1980’s, discussions on language change in the Chinese language have a history of more than two thousand years.

• A Yuan dynasty (1271-1368 CE) scholar, Zhou Boqi, wrote in his book that “generally ancient people created characters all starting from objects and things. Today’s empty words are all ancient content words” (大抵古人制字，皆从事物上起。今之虚字，皆古之实字).

• In order to understand the semantics and functions of Chinese guo and le, it is important to know their etymology.
The etymology of *guo* (過/过)
The proto-scene of *guo*

He crossed (in the manner of walking) the bridge to the other side of the river.

‘He crossed (in the manner of walking) the bridge to the other side of the river.’

(This Chinese sentence is from an online dictionary www.dict.cn.)
The proto-scene of le

• The earliest Chinese dictionary, *Shuowen Jiezi* 说文解字 (Explaining Graphs and Analyzing Characters), defines the Chinese character 了 as “Liao, following the character of a child but without arms” (尦也從子無臂).

• *Liao* is the earliest attested pronunciation of the Chinese character 了. *Le* is the pronunciation of the Chinese character 了 used nowadays.

• The Chinese character 了 (liao/le) was created to mean a child without arms (compared with the Chinese character 子 (zi) which means a child with arms); thus, ‘a child without arms’ is taken as the primary sense of liao/le.

The Liao Character in Seal Scrip
(The image is from the online corpus of ctext.org.)
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<th>Text/Corpus</th>
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<th>Tokens of <em>liao/le</em></th>
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<td><em>Sanguo yanyi 三国演义 (Romance of the Three Kingdoms)</em></td>
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<td><em>Rulin waishi 儒林外史 (The Scholars)</em></td>
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<td>Center for Chinese Linguistics of Peking University—Modern Chinese Section 北京大学中国语言研究中心—现代汉语</td>
<td>Modern times</td>
<td>First 300</td>
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**Total tokens** | **1877** | **1026**
Semantic Network of Guo
The Extended Senses of *Guo*

Proto-scene: ‘to go through a certain situation/process’ > ‘to finish’ > ‘completion’ > ‘indefinite past’ event > ‘experientiality’ (‘repeatability’, ‘indefiniteness’, ‘discontinuity’ and ‘reversibility’)

(2.61) 吾所苦渐平，明日鶉鸣，年便五十，建平之戒，真必过矣。
Wu suo ku jian ping, mingri ji ming, nian bian wushi, Jianping zhi jie, zhen bi guo yi
I SUO bitter gradually heal, tomorrow rooster cry, age then fifty, Jianping of calamity, really must pass YI.

‘My distress gradually healed. Tomorrow (when the) roosters cry, (I will be) fifty years old. (I) really (will) surely go through (the) calamity (predicted by) Jianping.’ (From *Sanguozhi* 三国志, Western Jin dynasty [265-316 CE])

(2.75) 阮光禄赴山陵，至都，不往殷、刘许，过事便还。
Ruan Guanglu fu shan ling, zhi du, bu wang Yin, Liu xu, guo shi bian huan
Ruan Guanglu go-to mountain emperor’s-mausoleum, arrive-at capital, not go Yin, Liu etc., finish thing then return.

‘Guanglu Ruan went to (attend the) emperor’s funeral. (When he) arrived at (the) capital (city), (he did) not go to (visit) Yin (and) Liu, (but) returned right after (the) matters were finished.’ (From *Shishuo Xinyu* 世说新语, Liu Song dynasty [420-479 CE])
The Extended Senses of Guo

Proto-scene > ‘to go through a certain situation/process’ > ‘to finish’ > ‘completion’ > ‘indefinite past’ event > ‘experientiality’ (‘repeatability’, ‘indefiniteness’, ‘discontinuity’ and ‘reversibility’ cluster)

(2.98) Jin yue: “xian di jian guo Wu Hou, que lai xu hua.”
Jin say: “virtuous younger-brother see GUO Wu Marquis, still come express speech.”
‘Jin said: “After you have seen Marquis Wu, (you will) come (and) tell (me your) news.”’
(From Sanguo yanyi 三国演义, Yuan [1271-1368] and Ming [1368-1644] dynasties)
The Extended Senses of Guo

Proto-scene > ‘to go through a certain situation/process’ > ‘to finish’ > ‘completion’ > ‘indefinite past’ event > ‘experientiality’ (‘repeatability’, ‘indefiniteness’, ‘discontinuity’ and ‘reversibility’ cluster)

(2.102) 当 日 曹 操 果 是 重 待 某，某 已 斩 颜 良，
Dang ri Cao Cao guo shi zhong dai mou, mou yi zhan Yan Liang,
That day Cao Cao really is heavy treat me, I already chop Yan Liang,

诛 文 丑，解 白 马之 围， 报 过 他 了。
zhu Wen Chou, jie baima zhi wei, bao-GUO ta le.
kill Wen Chou, resolve Boma of besiege, repay-GUO him LE

‘(It) is true (that) Cao Cao treated me well that day, (but) I have **repaired** him (by) killing Yan Liang (and) Wen Chou (two of his most redoubtable opponents), (and) raising (a) siege at Boma.’ (From *Sanguo yanyi* 三国演义, Yuan [1271-1368] and Ming [1368-1644] dynasties)
The Extended Senses of *Guo*

Proto-scene > ‘to go through a certain situation/process’ > ‘to finish’ > ‘completion’ > ‘indefinite past’ event > ‘experientiality’ (‘repeatability’, ‘indefiniteness’, ‘discontinuity’ and ‘reversibility’ cluster)

(2.109) 张世兄，你是做过官的，这件事正该商之于你
Zhang shixiong, ni shi zuo -guo guan de, zhei -jian shi zheng gai shang zhi yu ni
Zhang brogher, you SHI work-as-GUO government-official DE, this -CL thing just should consult it with you
‘Mr. Zhang, you have held official posts. I would like your opinion on this.’

(2.110) 他从来不曾见过官府的人，害怕不敢来了
Ta cong lai bu ceng jian -guo guanfu de ren, haipa bu gan lai le
‘He has never seen (an) official before in his life. (so) he’s afraid to come.’

(2.111) 叫请小弟进去，换了两遍茶，就像相与过几十年的一般。
Jiao qing xiao di jin -qu, huan -le liang bian cha, jiuxiang xiangyu -guo ji shi nian de yiban
‘(He) invited me in, (and) offered me tea twice, as if we had known each-GUO several ten year of same
as if (we) had known each (for) many years.’

(From *Rulin waishi* 儒林外史, Qing dynasty [1644-1912])
proto-scene
‘newborn baby without arms’

know understand

finish/complete put to an end

completely (+not) actualization

closure

conviction

contrastive state/situation change

state/situation change along a continuum

extreme degree

semantic network of Le
Proto-scene > finish/complete/put to an end > completion > completion of the first event > sequencing

(3.83)亮 数 出 军，仪 常 规 画 分 部，…，斯 须 便 了。
   Liang shu chu jun, Yi chang guihua fen bu, …, sixu bian liao.
   Liang several go-out army, Yi often program divide troops, …, a-very-short-time then finish
   ‘Liang sent army (for) several (times), (and) Yi often programed (and) divided troops, …, then (they) finished (it in) a
very short time.’
(From Sanguozhi 三国志 Records of the Three Kingdoms, Western Jin period [265-316 CE])
Proto-scene > finish/complete/put to an end > completion > completion of the first event > sequencing

(3.100) 四月  以后    运送，  五月  三十  日 内    纳   了。
Siyue yihou yunsong, wuyue sanshi ri nei na -liao.
April after transport, May thirty day within bring-in -finish.
‘(If) transporting after April, (one should) finish bringing in (grain) before May 30th.’
(From Tongdian 通典 Comprehensive Institutions, Tang dynasty, 618-907 CE)

(3.102) 教    战    了， 欲    散    还    营， 看    大    总    管    处    两    旗    卧， 即    分散
Jiao zhan liao, yu san huan ying, kan da zongguan chu liang qi wo, ji fensan
Teach war finish, want disperse return base, look big manager place two flag lie, then disperse
“After teaching (how to do) battle, (the soldiers) want (to) disperse (and) return (the) base, (when they) see (the)
general manager (with) two flags down, then (they) disperse.”
(From Tongdian 通典 Comprehensive Institutions, Tang dynasty, 618-907 CE)
Proto-scene > finish/complete/put to an end > completion > completion of the first event > sequencing
> ‘prerequisite/cause/manner’ event

(3.109) 喂饱了马，曹操先睡。
Wei bao-le ma, Cao Cao xian shui.
Feed-full-LE horse, Cao Cao first sleep.
‘After (they) fed (the) horses, Cao Cao slept first.’
(From Sanguo yanyi 三国演义 Romance of the Three Kingdoms, Yuan [1271-1368] and Ming [1368-1644] dynasties)

(3.111) 若擒了吕布，董卓易诛耳。
Ruo qin -le Lu Bu, Dong Zhuo yi zhu er.
If capture -LE Lu Bu, Dong Zhuo easy kill ER
‘If (we) capture Lu Bu, Dong Zhuo (will be) easy (to) kill.’
(From Sanguo yanyi 三国演义 Romance of the Three Kingdoms, Yuan [1271-1368] and Ming [1368-1644] dynasties)
Proto-scene > finish/complete/put to an end > completion > completion of the first event > sequencing > ‘prerequisite/cause/manner’ event

Temporal Sequence Sense and Cause/Prerequisite/Manner Sense of -le

(3.114) 慈于军中讨了一匹马，取了枪，上马复来。
Ci in military middle ask-for one-CL horse, get spear, on horse again come
‘Ci asked for (a) horse from (the) army, got (a) spear, got on (the) horse (and) came again.’
(From Sanguo yanyi 三国演义 Romance of the Three Kingdoms, Yuan [1271-1368] and Ming [1368-1644] dynasties)
Past Sense of -le

(3.121) 操乘马正行，忽田中惊起一鸠，
Cao ride horse ZHENG move, suddenly farm-field middle surprise up one dove,

那马眼生，窜入麦中，践坏了一大块麦田。
that horse eye new, flee enter wheat middle, stomp bad -LE one big patch wheat farm-field.

‘(While) Cao was riding (a) horse, a dove suddenly got up (from the) farm field (by) surprise, startling the horse (so that it) swerved into (the standing) grain, (and) stomped down a large patch (of) grain.’
(From Sanguo yanyi 三国演义 Romance of the Three Kingdoms, Yuan [1271-1368] and Ming [1368-1644] dynasties)
Panic seized upon Zhang Hu at (the) fall (of) Chen Sheng, (and) he could no longer defend himself. (Then) Han Dang (with) a (slash of his) sword clove (Zhang Hui’s) skull in twain.

‘Panic seized upon Zhang Hu at (the) fall (of) Chen Sheng, (and) he could no longer defend himself. (Then) Han Dang (with) a (slash of his) sword clove (Zhang Hui’s) skull in twain.’

(From Sanguo yanyi 三国演义 Romance of the Three Kingdoms, Yuan [1271-1368] and Ming [1368-1644] dynasties)
‘Completion/Closure of Event Complex’ Sense of the particle le

(3.129) 且说董卓欲杀袁绍，李儒止之曰：“事未可定，不可妄杀。”袁绍手提宝剑，辞别百官而出，悬节东门，奔回冀州去了。
‘Dong Zhuo was on the point of slaying Yuan Shao, but Li Ru checked him, saying, “You must not kill rashly while the business hangs in the balance.” Yuan Shao, his sword still unsheathed, left the assembly. He hung up the seals of his office at the east gate and went to Jizhou Region.’
(From *Sanguo yanyi* Romance of the Three Kingdoms, Yuan [1271-1368] and Ming [1368-1644] dynasties)
Proto-scene > finish/complete/put to an end > completion/closure of event complex > speaker’s conviction

‘Completion/Closure of Event Complex’ Sense of the particle le

(3.152) 那 瘦子 道: “危 老 先生 要 算 一 个 学者 了。”
Na shouzi dao: “Wei lao xiansheng yao suan yi -ge xuezhe le.”
That thin-person say: “Wei old sir will/should consider one-CL scholar LE.”
‘That thin man said: “Mr. Wei should be considered a scholar.”’
(From Rulin waishi 儒林外史 The Scholars, Qing dynasty [1644-1912])

(3.153) 河 水 北 流, 天 下 自 此 将 大 乱 了。
He shui bei liu, tian xia zi ci jiang da luan le.
River water north flow, sky below since this will big messy LE.
‘River water flows northward (which has left its course). This invariably is (a) prelude to (a period of) great chaos.’
(From Rulin waishi 儒林外史 The Scholars, Qing dynasty [1644-1912])
Inter-lexical polysemy of *guo* and *le*

- ‘Past’ events – event type vs. instance
- ‘Completed’ actions – completion vs. termination
- Aspect – experiential vs. speaker’s stance/conviction
- Sequencing events
1. The corpus study shows that all of the senses and functions of *guo* and *le* are systematically and diachronically derived from their proto-scenes or primary senses. Whether *guo* and *le* are considered as a lexical (e.g., verb) or grammatical item (e.g., complement, aspect marker) depends on the linguistic environment in which they occur.

2. The establishment of an extended sense and function is determined by usage events, i.e., actual language use with a contextual understanding. A more accurate explanation and understanding of the lexicogrammar involving *guo* and *le* involves a comprehension of the communicative context.

3. This study has potential benefit to Chinese learners and teachers. It changes the focus from abstract, arbitrary sentence structures to the semantic basis of grammar, which allows L2 learners and teachers to select the most appropriate lexical or grammatical items to use based on their understanding of the situation and the information that they want to communicate.
Limitation

1. This particular data set may not contain all senses and functions of *guo* and *le*.

2. Although this study has potential benefits to learners and teachers of Chinese as a foreign language, there is still a lot of work to do until this analysis of *guo* and *le* can be adapted to classroom teaching materials, and the actual teaching and learning effect hinges on later empirical verification.
References


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Thank you!
Questions? 😊
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The Semantic Development of Guo

- New senses of guo
- New words/set phrases formed with guo

The Semantic Development of Liao/Le

- New senses of liao/le
- New set phrases/words formed with liao/le
**Principled Polysemy (Tyler and Evans, 2003)**

- **Embodied meaning:** Language reflects conceptualization. Much research in cognitive science and psychology has suggested that conceptualization relies on our perceptual/sensorimotor system and the raw information provided by the physical, spatial world ‘out there’ (Mandler, 1992, 2008). That is, our experience with the world ‘out there’ is crucially mediated by the nature of our bodies (Tyler and Evans, 2003). Hence, our experience is embodied. “[I]t is this embodied experience that gives rise to conceptual structure” (Tyler and Evans, 2003, p. 23). Therefore, meanings generated from conceptualization are embodied.

- **Experiential correlation:** One way in which experience gives rise to meaning is through experiential correlation (Tyler and Evans, 2003, p. 32). That is, two distinct experiences can be correlated or linked at the conceptual level and give rise to conventionalized linguistic readings, e.g., seeing and knowing as illustrated in *I see [= understand] what you mean* (Tyler and Evans, 2003).

- **Perceptual resemblance** is a cognitive process that establishes links between concepts based on “perceived physical resemblance, or the perception of shared abstract qualities or characteristics” (p. 35). For instance, we can conceptualize a person in terms of a twig due to the perceived physical resemblance, e.g., “in both cases there is no excess flesh to conceal the rigid structural materials of the entity” (Tyler and Evans, 2003, p. 35), as in *She is just a twig*.

- **Pragmatic strengthening** (or pragmatic inferencing) refers to a process in which contextual implicatures or inferences come to be conventionally associated with a linguistic form as new senses through continued use of the linguistic form in those particular contexts. Note that “invited inferences,” i.e., the writer or speaker evokes implications and invites the reader or listener to infer them (Traugott and Dasher, 2002, 2010; Bybee, Perkins and Pagliuca, 1994), are a key part of the notion of pragmatic strengthening in a broad sense.
Grammaticalization

• For example, a Han dynasty (206 BCE-220 CE) philologist, Xu Shen, stated in his book Shuōwén jiězì 说文解字 (Explaining and Analyzing Characters) that “Cover [bèi 被] is nightwear, and is extended into a verb to mean to cover or to suffer.” (Bèi, qǐnyī yě. Yǐnshēn zuò dòngcí, yǒu fùgài, mēngshòu liǎng yì. 被，寝衣也。引申作动词，有覆盖、蒙受两义。)

• From the Wei-Jin period to the Song dynasty (220-1279 CE), the Chinese word bèi 被 evolved into a passive voice marker from the meaning to suffer. In recent years, the passive voice marker bèi 被 has developed a new meaning or function. It is used right before a verbal predicate to indicate a ‘false claim/act’ (Liu, 2017, unpublished comments).

• We can see the grammaticalization path of the Chinese passive voice marker bèi 被, Noun>Verb>Preposition>Particle for speaker stance.

• Interestingly, the character of the Chinese passive voice marker bèi 被 is composed of two components – the component on the left side means clothing and the component on the right side refers to skin – representing its earliest attested meaning, nightwear.

• A Yuan dynasty (1271-1368 CE) scholar, Zhou Boqi, wrote in his book Liù shū zhèng wěi 六书正伪 that “generally ancient people created characters all starting from objects and things. Today’s empty words are all ancient content words.” (Dàdǐ gūrén zhì zì jiē cóng shì wù shàng qǐ. Jīn zhī xū zì, jiē gǔ zhī shí zì. 大抵古人制字，皆从事物上起。今之虚字，皆古之实字。)

• In order to understand the semantics of Chinese guo and le, it is important to know their etymology. “The secret of words lies in their etymology” (Tooke; see Heine, Claudi and Hummemeyer, 1991, p. 5).
Proto-scene of \( \text{guo 过/过} \)

‘Pass or depart (from a place)’ sense of \( \text{guo 过/过} \)

‘Go beyond/exceed/surpass’ sense of \( \text{guo 过/过} \)

‘Have a fault/wrong’ sense of \( \text{guo 过/过} \)
The extended senses of *guo*

**Proto-scene > ‘pass time’ > sequencing (‘after’)**

(2.57) 然君寿亦不过十年，病不能杀君，
Ran jun shou yi bu guo shi nian, bing bu neng sha jun,
However your life also not pass ten year, illness not can kill you

忍病十岁，寿俱当尽
ren bing shi sui, shou ju dang jin
endure illness ten year, lifespan all should end

‘However, you have no more than ten years to live, (if the) disease does not kill you, (you will) bear it (for) ten years, (then) you will still die.’

(From *Sanguozhi, Wei Shu Ershijiu, Hua Tuo Zhuan* 三国志・魏书二十九・华佗传)
The extended senses of *guo*  

Proto-scene > ‘pass time’ > sequencing (‘after’) clusters

(2.59) 饮盛宴自娱，过期一年，六十三卒。

Yin yan zi yu, *guo qi yi nian*, liushi san zu
Drink feast oneself amuse, pass period one year, sixty three die
‘(He indulged) himself (in the) pleasure (of) drinks (and) feasts. **After** one year, (he) died (at the age of) sixty three.’

(From *Sanguozhi, Wei Shu Ershijiu, Zhu Jianping Zhuan* 三国志・魏书二十 九・朱建平传)

(2.60) 晏曰："过岁更当相见。"

Yan yue: "*guo sui geng dang xiang jian.*"
Yan said: "pass year more should together see."
‘Yan said: "(we) should meet **after** (one) year."’

(From *Sanguozhi, Wei Shu Ershijiu, Guan Lu Zhuan* 三国志・魏书二十九・管辂传)
The Extended Senses of *Guo*
proto-scene
‘newborn baby without arms’

know/understand

finish/complete/end

Liao/Le’s Semantic Network

(Renwuzhi 人物志 [Biographical Notes and Data], Three Kingdoms period [CE 220-265] and Sanguozhi 三国志 [Records of the Three Kingdoms], Western Jin dynasty [265-316 CE])

(3.81) 欲人之聽己，人亦以其方思之故，

Yu ren zhi ting ji, ren yi yi qi fang si zhi gu,

Want person to listen self, person also use his/her just think of reason,

不了己意，則以為不解。

bu liao ji yi, ze yiwei bu jie.

not know self meaning, then think not understand.

‘(You) want others to listen to you, (however) because they were thinking just now, (and) did not know your meaning, then (you) thought (mistakenly that they) did not understand (you).’
如今曹嵩辎重车辆无数，你们欲得富贵不难，

Rujin Cao Song zi zhong cheliang wu shu, ni-men yu de fugui bu nan,

Now Cao Song supply heavy vehicle no number, you-pl want get rich not difficult

只就今夜三更，大家砍将入去，

zhi jiu jin ye san geng, dajia kan jiang ru qu,
only then today night three watch, everyone chop use enter go,

把曹嵩一家杀了，取了财物，同往山中落草。

ba Cao Song yi jia sha-le, qu-le cai wu, tong wang shan zhong luo-cao.
BA Cao Song one family kill-LE, get-LE property thing, together toward mountain middle become-outlaw.

“Now Cao Song has no end (of) gear, (and it’s) not hard (for) you guys to become rich. Just tonight (at the) third watch, we (will) enter (his house) with knife, kill Cao Song’s family, grab (Cao Song’s) treasure, (and get away) to (the) mountains (to) become outlaws together.” (From Sanguo yanyi 三国演义 Romance of the Three Kingdoms, Yuan [1271-1368] and Ming [1368-1644] dynasties)
Contrastive State/Situation Change Sense of the Particle *le*

(3.133) 便 丞相 诛我三族，也不来了。

Even-if Prime-Minister kill I three relative, also not come LE.

‘Even if the Prime Minister will/would kill my father, mother and wife, I won’t/wouldn’t come (any more).’

(From *Sanguo yanyi* 三国演义 Romance of the Three Kingdoms, Yuan [1271-1368] and Ming [1368-1644] dynasties)

(3.146) 一 日，母亲吩咐王冕道：‘我眼见得不济事了。……’

One day, mother tell Wang Mian say: ‘I soon no-use LE…’

‘One day, (his) mother told Wang Mian: “I will be useless (or die) soon…”’

(From *Rulin waishi* 儒林外史 The Scholars, Qing dynasty [1644-1912])
The key ideas throughout this dissertation are:

(1) The synchronic representation of the polysemy of *guo* and *le* is a result of their historical semantic development;

(2) A more accurate explanation and understanding of any particular sense or function associated with *guo* or *le* involves a comprehension of the sense or function within the larger semantic network (especially the relationship between the primary sense and the extended sense, and the relationship between the extended sense and other comparable senses) and the communicative context.