
The absence/presence of aspectual markers in narrative discourse in Mandarin

Time in Translation

PIs



PhDs



Post-Docs



- > Variation at the syntax/semantics interface
- > Initial focus on tense/aspect
- > Initial focus on Western European languages
- > Context (sentence-discourse-dialogue)
- > Data- and theory-driven use of parallel corpora

From data to theory: Translation Mining

Translation Mining

Data from translation corpora allows us to visualize variation across tense/aspect systems of languages and study it in detail.

Example 1: translations of Camus' *L'Étranger*, Chapter 1

FRENCH

Perfect

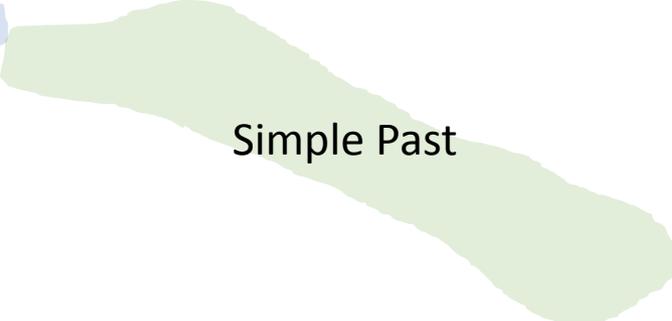
Imperfective

Present

PluPerfect

ENGLISH

Perfect

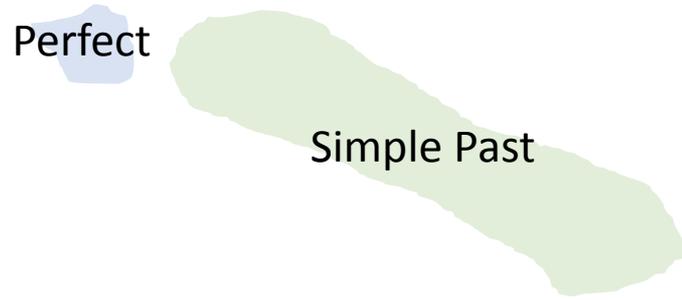


Simple Past

SPANISH

Perfect

Simple Past



DUTCH

Perfect

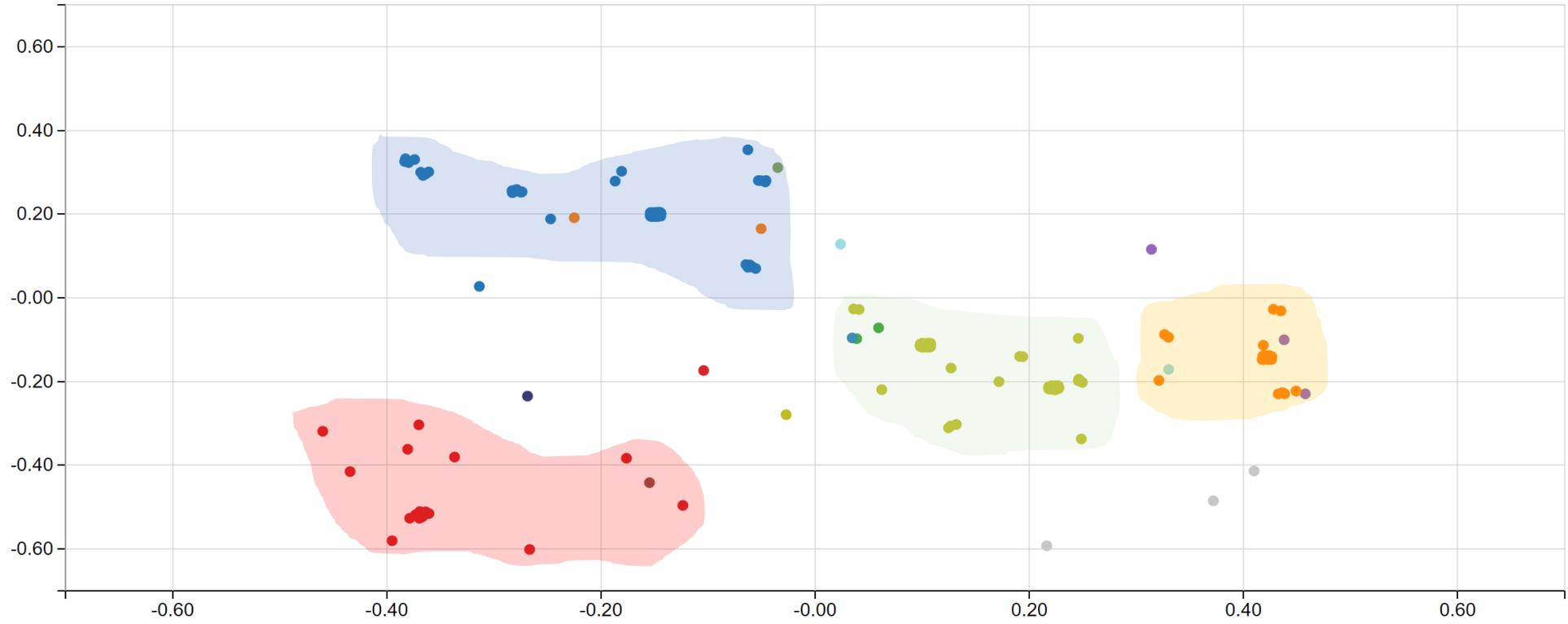
Simple Past

GERMAN

Perfect

Simple Past

FRENCH



French

passé composé (fr) 1.xml - 24774

J' ai lu le dossier de votre mère .

Translations

German

Perfekt

Ich habe die Akte Ihrer Mutter gelesen .

English

present perfect

I 've read your mother 's file .

Spanish

pretérito perfecto compuesto

He leído el expediente de su madre .

Italian

passato prossimo

Ho letto la pratica di vostra madre .

Dutch

vtt

Ik heb uw moeders map doorgelezen .

Translation Mining

Data from translation corpora allows us to visualize variation across tense/aspect systems of languages and study it in detail.

Example 1: translations of Camus' *L'Étranger*, Chapter 1

Example 2: translations of Harry Potter, Book 1, Chapter 1

ENGLISH

Simple Past

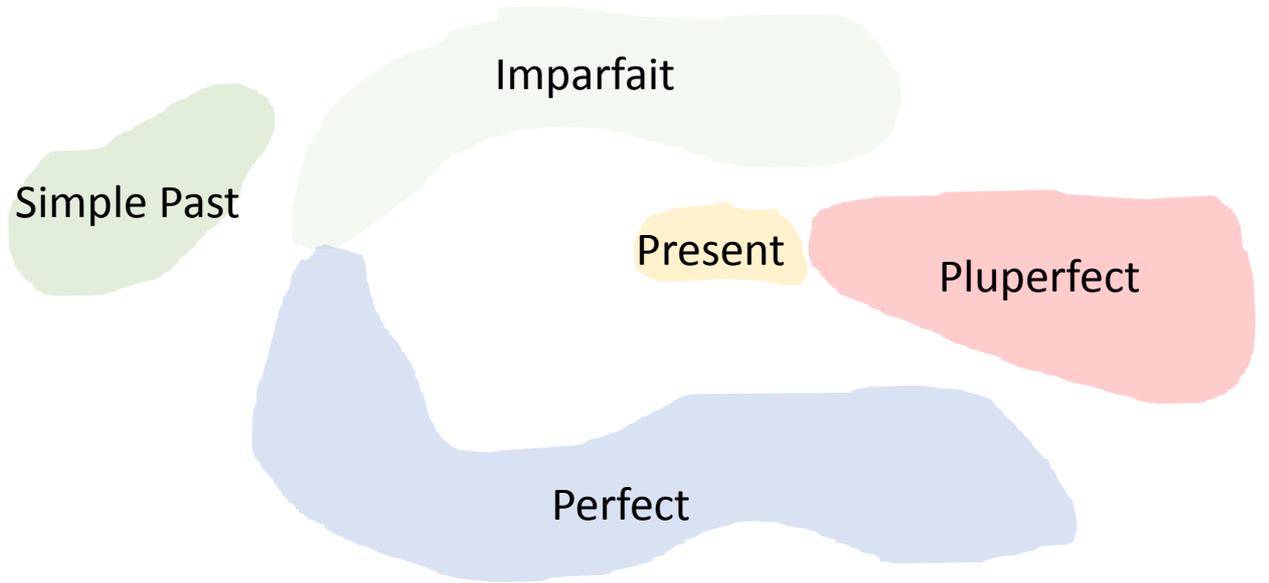
Past Continuous

Present

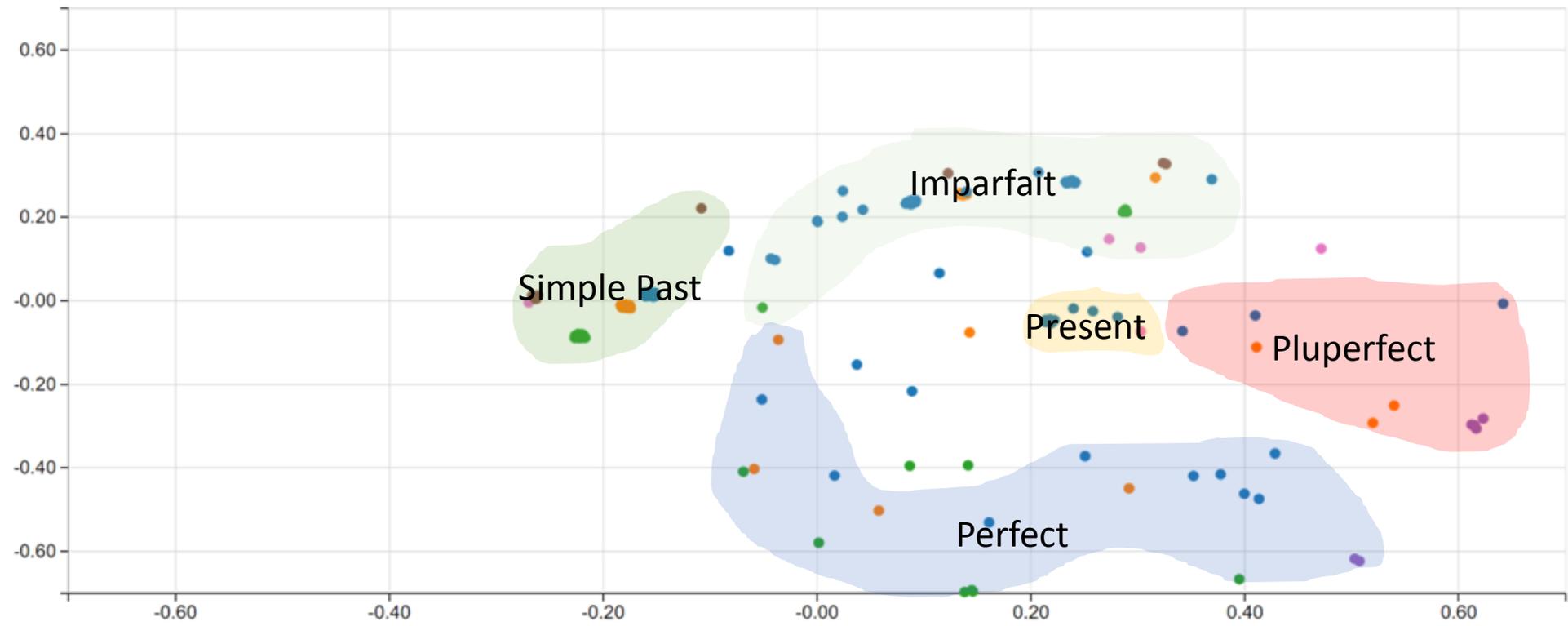
Pluperfect

Perfect

FRENCH



 unmarked  zai  guo  le1  zhe



From theory to data: the presence/absence of aspectual markers in Mandarin

Sun's generalization

Unmarked forms only receive a stative/generic interpretation. Episodic interpretations require aspectual markers.

Sun (2014:226)

> Put this generalization to the test for our data.

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> Put this generalization to the test **for our data**.

Narrative (past) data from Camus, Chapters 1-3.

> Make grateful use of our translation data.

> Build towards a richer account.

Putting Sun's generalization to the test

Rationale

Stative interpretations

can be bare

Contexts that – in European languages would go:

Imparfait (French)
Imperfecto (Spanish)
Präteritum (German)
Simple Past (English)

Imperfective Past Cluster

Eventive interpretations

cannot be bare

Contexts that – in European languages would go:

Passé Composé (French)
Pretérito Indefinido (Spanish)
Perfekt (German)
Simple Past (English)

Perfective Past Cluster

The Imperfective Past Cluster

Stative interpretations

can be bare

Contexts that – in
European languages
would go:

Imparfait (French)

Imperfecto (Spanish)

Präteritum (German)

Simple Past (English)

Imperfective Past Cluster

Il lui **fallait** une garde.

French

Necesitaba una enfermera.

Spanish

Sie **brauchte** Pflege.

German

She **needed** a nurse.

English

Ta **xuyao** you ren zhaoliao.

She need have person take care



The Perfective Past Cluster

Eventive interpretations

cannot be bare

Contexts that – in
European languages
would go:

Passé Composé (French)

Pretérito Indefinido (Spanish)

Perfekt (German)

Simple Past (English)

Perfective Past Cluster

J'**ai pris** le tram [...]

French

Tomé el tranvía [...]

Spanish

Ich **habe** die Strassenbahn

German

genommen [...]

I **caught** the tram [...]

English

Wo **cheng** che qu haibin yuchan

I take tram go shore bathing spot



Quantitative data

	bare	not bare
Imperfective Past Cluster (IPC)	XX	XX
Perfective Past Cluster (PPC)	0	XX

Prediction based on Sun's generalization

Quantitative data

	bare	not bare
Imperfective Past Cluster (IPC)	65	22
Perfective Past Cluster (PPC)	177	83

Our data

68% of all Perfective Past Cluster verbs

73% of all bare verbs

Two-way association PPC/bare verbs (NPMI) = 0

Interim conclusion/discussion

- > Sun's generalization predicts a strong negative association between the Perfective Past Cluster and bare forms.
- > This prediction is not borne out.
- > Part of the explanation lies in the limitation of our methodology: contexts that are eventive in European languages can be rendered as stative in the Mandarin translation. (N=18)
- > Other special cases involve *when* clauses (N=2), negation with *mei(ou)* (N=6), cleft structures with *shi...de* (N=5) and the *yibian... yibian* ('while...while') construction (N=2).

Interim conclusion/discussion

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Our data

68% of all Perfective Past Cluster verbs
73% of all bare verbs
Two-way association PPC/bare verbs (NPMI) = 0

Stative/generic clauses

bare
83

not bare
22

Eventive clauses

bare
144

not bare
98

59% of all eventive clauses

63% of all bare clauses

Two-way association eventive/bare clauses (NPMI) = -0.1

Towards a richer account

Working assumption

Marking aspectual information for events is truly optional.



Marking aspectual information for events is obligatory but run-of-the-mill aspectual markers are not the only option.

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Strategy

- > Make an inventory of alternative ways of marking aspectual information.
- > Check their explanatory potential for the unmarked eventive data.

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Inventory

Stronger information gets precedence over weaker information

Le marks simple boundedness. Sources of telicity marking are stronger.

Within the verbal domain

Result Verb Compounds (RVCs)

Within clauses

Endpoint markers (e.g. goal arguments)

Across clauses

Clauses conveying consequent states

Inventory

Avoid double marking

We would never say *shui-le-le*.

An interesting dynamic twist to this principle is that if two verbs refer to the same event, we need only add an aspectual marker (or endpoint marker) to one of them.

Dynamic aspectual marking

Inventory

- > Result Verb Compounds (RVCs)
- > Endpoint markers (e.g. goal arguments)
- > Clauses conveying consequent states
- > Dynamic aspectual marking

Strategy

- > Make an inventory of alternative ways of marking aspectual information.**
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Strategy

- > Make an inventory of alternative ways of marking aspectual information.
- > **Check their explanatory potential for the unmarked data.**

Result Verb Compounds (RVCs)

Ta feng shang xin.

He close up envelope

‘He closed the envelope.’

N=44

Endpoint markers

Wo zou de shihou, tamen yizhi
I leave DE moment they all the way

song wo dao menkou.
accompany I to doorway

‘When I left , they came to the door with me.’

N=8

Clauses conveying consequent states

Wo shi Xiaoli **hen xingfu**.

'I made Xiaoli very happy.'

N=0

Dynamic aspectual marking

Wo cheng che qu haibin yuchang.
I take tram go shore bathing spot

'I caught the tram going to the bathing station at the port.'

N=10

Discussion

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Eventive clauses	144	98

59% of all eventive clauses
63% of all bare clauses
Two-way association eventive/bare clauses (NPMI) = -0.1

Stative/generic clauses

83

22

Eventive clauses

82

160

34% of all eventive clauses

50% of all bare clauses

Two-way association eventive/bare clauses (NPMI) = -0.2

Discussion

- > We still only find a very mild negative association between eventive and bare verbs.
- > Interestingly, the vast majority of unmarked eventive cases that are left involve a single verb class: verbs of saying like *shuo* 'say' (N=77).

Wo **shuo**: “dui”
I say right
'I said , “Yes”.'

We consider it unlikely that the high frequency of bare uses of verbs of saying is accidental.

Discussion

> Interestingly, the vast majority of unmarked eventive cases that are left involve a single verb class: verbs of saying like *shuo* 'say' (N=77).

Wo **shuo**: “*dui*”
I say right
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We consider it unlikely that the high frequency of bare uses of verbs of saying is accidental.

> One way to look at them is to assume that the (in)direct speech that follows them is the realization of the result of saying.

Discussion

	bare	not bare
Stative/generic clauses	83	22
Eventive clauses	5	236

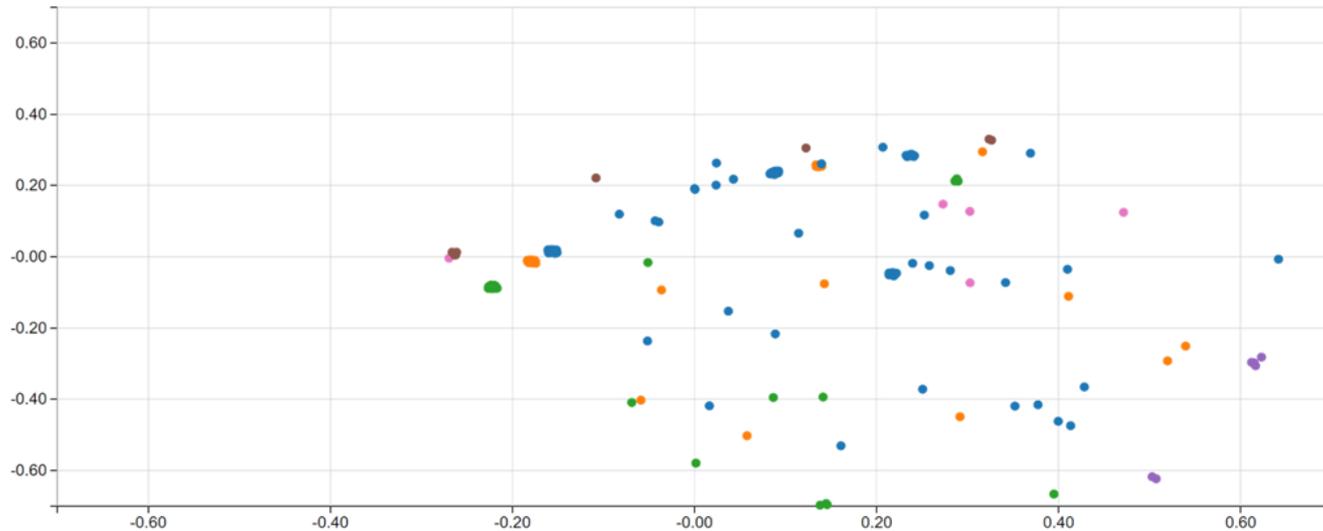
2% of all eventive clauses

6% of all bare clauses

Two-way association eventive/bare clauses (NPMI) = -0.6

Conclusion

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Sun (2014:226)

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Two-way association eventive/bare clauses (NPMI) = -0.1		

Conclusion

Unmarked forms only receive a stative/generic interpretation. Episodic interpretations need to be marked by one of a variety of aspectual markers.

Sun's extended generalization

- > Classical aspectual markers
- > Result Verb Compounds (RVCs)
- > Result of saying
- > Endpoint markers (e.g. goal arguments)
- > Clauses conveying consequent states
- > Dynamic aspectual marking

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Narrow verbal
domain

Across clauses/
sentences

Thank you for your attention!

<http://time-in-translation.hum.uu.nl/>

Special cases

[jiedeng] shi yewan kongzhong
street lamp make night sky-middle

chuxian de xingxing **anranhise.**
first-appear DE star turn pale

‘The street lamps made the first few stars that were appearing in the night sky look quite pale.’

Special cases

Yihuier, yi ge laotou xing le,
After a while, one CL old people wake up LE,

shijingde kesou.
fiercely cough

‘After a while, an old man woke up and coughed
fiercely.’

Special cases

Ta yizhi **zai** xiao [...]

She continuously ZAI laugh

Ta haishi xiao [...]

she still laugh

‘She was still laughing.’