Abstract This paper argues that experiential *guo* in Mandarin predicates on situations whose semantics as a whole is terminable. Situations in the world can be categorized into two groups in terms of the number of components in the semantics: The first group denotes bipartite semantics, i.e. a bounded event plus a (resultative) state or an activity plus a (resultative) state, and the second group unary semantics, which can be either an activity or a state. Terminability means completion for a bounded situation and termination for an unbound situation. To be compatible with experiential *guo*, both parts in bipartite semantics and the only part in unary semantics must be terminable. Because terminability is the required condition for the compatibility with experiential *guo*, I argue that, among the properties *guo* is usually claimed to have in the literature, only discontinuity is an inherent property of *guo*. As for properties such as a class meaning and the condition of recurrence, I first show that an eventuality *guo* presents does not necessarily have a class meaning. Then I argue that these two properties are just one facet of terminability and that they both follow naturally from terminability. Furthermore, I establish that temporal independence and indefinite past are defeasible inferences from terminability. I also argue that the difference between perfective *le* and experiential *guo* lies in that perfective *le* accesses only the left side of the semantics of a situation *le* presents, while experiential *guo* accesses the whole semantics of a situation *guo* presents. This difference explains why perfective *le* and experiential *guo* are interchangeable in some contexts, but not in the others. This paper is interesting in that the proposed semantics of *guo* can explain all the examples with *guo*, including those traditionally considered as counterexamples to the condition of recurrence and those concerning a class meaning.
Keywords  Experiential *guo* · Perfective aspect · Aspects · Semantics

1 Introduction

In the literature, such as Chao (1968), Iljic (1990), Lin (1979), Ma (1977), Smith (1997), Yeh (1996), etc., experiential *guo* is claimed to have the following properties: (a) an eventuality presented by *guo* has at least one occurrence, (b) *guo* has a ‘class’ meaning, (c) *guo* involves discontinuity, (d) *guo* goes only with recurrable eventualities, and (e) an eventuality presented by *guo* is temporally independent of others in the same discourse. The following examples demonstrate these five properties.

(1) a. ta kan guo zhe bu dianying
   he see Exp¹ this CL movie
   ‘He has seen this movie (before).’

b. ta dang guo zhe zhi biao
   he pawn Exp this CL watch
   ‘He has the experience of pawning this watch.’ (redeemed)

c. Ta dang guo haoji zhi biao
   he pawn Exp several CL watch
   ‘He has the experience of pawning several watches.’ (redeemed or not)

d. *ta gai guo zhe san dong fangzi
   he build Exp this three CL house

(1a) does not talk about any specific he-see-this-movie event. Instead, it describes one kind of event, i.e. a ‘class’ meaning. (1b) and (1c) show that an eventuality presented by *guo* can involve discontinuity, but does not have to. (1d) shows that *guo* cannot go with an eventuality that cannot recur, such as *gai zhe san dong fangzi* ‘to build these three houses.’ Once these three houses are built, it is impossible for the process of building the same three houses to happen again. (2) demonstrates the temporal independence of *guo*.

(2) a. *zuotian wanshang wo kan guo dianshi chi guo fan
   yesterday night I see Exp TV eat Exp meal
   jiu qu shuijiao
   then go sleep
b. zuotian wanshang wo kan le dianshi chi le fan
   yesterday night I see Pfv TV eat Pfv meal
   jiu qu shuijiao
   then go sleep
   ‘Last night, I watched TV, ate a meal and then went to bed.’

¹ The abbreviations used in this paper are: Exp for the experiential marker, CL for a classifier, DE for the possessive/modifier marker, Dur for the durative marker, PL for a plural marker, Prc for a sentence particle, Pfv for the perfective marker, Prg for the progressive marker, and Rel for the relative clause marker.