

Perfect in the Yi group

Stative and dynamic information management^{*}

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The languages of the Yi group shed new light on the Perfect forms of other languages through their perfect particles. Several Yi languages display two perfect particles which unite in one paradigmatic picture the English type and the Mandarin type. I will first present Liangshan Nuosu's ta^{33} (stative perfect) and o^{44} (dynamic perfect) with Klein's aspect-tense terminology (1992) and will then establish a formal definition of the notion of stative and dynamic perfect. It appears that both perfects have in common their relating the utterance situation to the discourse topic (in Klein's terminology: $TU \subseteq TT$). I will claim that the property ' $TU \subseteq TT$ ' is the essence of perfect and can be viewed as an aspect-tense characterization of 'current relevance', a vague term that is employed by an array of authors without precise definition.

1. Introduction: Aim of this paper and terminology

The aim of this paper is to introduce the case of the Yi languages, Tibeto-Burman languages from South West China (cf. appendix for more details). Several Yi languages exhibit two types of verb particles: the first type shares much of the aspect-tense message of the English present perfect, whereas the second type mirrors Mandarin's *le*, a particle under intense scrutiny from scholars working on Chinese. Only very recently has the suggestion been made to view Mandarin's *le* as perfect (see Bisang & Sonaiya 1997), without working out, however, its cross-linguistic status and typological idiosyncrasies. Much of this paper (Section 2.1) will be devoted to the study of Liangshan Nuosu's two relevant particles: ta^{33} , corresponding to the English present perfect, and o^{44} , which is close to Mandarin's *le*. (Mandarin's *le* is, however, relatively complex and will be discussed in Section 4.) The contrast of ta^{33} and o^{44} will be illustrated with minimal pairs and will yield much insight into the aspect, tense and