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The Scope of Final Particle *erh* 耳 in *Lun Yü* and *Meng Tzu*¹

“Distinguo est le plus universel membre de ma logique.” Montaigne, Essais 2.1

The final particle *erh* 耳 is generally interpreted as a fusion of *erh* + 而 + 已 and as synonymous with *erh i* 而已. The construction *erh i* (i 而已矣 “and that is all” is current enough. *I* 已 is, I suppose, generally recognized as a verb here which is linked with the preceding sentence by the anaphoric connective *erh* 而 “and it/he”. That is why we can have the verbal particle *i* 矣 after *erh i* 而已.

But there is a problem with the scope of *erh i* 而已 “and that is all” which is less generally understood. The point is that we need to ask “What is all?”. To put the matter more technically: What is the subject of the verb *i* 已? The scope of *erh* 耳 may not be the same as that of *erh i* 而已.

The scope of *erh i* 而已

The scope or subject of *i* 已 in *erh i* 而已 may be a number predicate:

(1) 有婦人焉九人而已

“With a woman among them there were only nine.” (*Lun Yu* 8.20, cf. D. C. Lau (1983) p. 75)

It may be a nominal predicate:

(2) 夫子之道忠恕而已矣

“Our Master’s Way is simply this: loyalty, consideration.” (*Lun Yu* 4.15) I follow the translation in A. Waley (1938) p. 105. D. C. Lau (1983) p. 33 is uncharacteristically discursive: “The way of the Master consists in doing one’s best and in

¹ In discussing these two texts I shall always compare the translations by D. C. Lau, because—though nowhere as good as his translations of *Lao Tzu*—these are by far the most reliable translations of the Analects and of *Memcius* available to date. It is important to point out that the new bilingual edition of the *Memcius* includes a great many improvements on the earlier version published in Penguin Books. I owe a profound debt of gratitude to D. C. Lau, whose translations have saved me from many possible misunderstandings.

using oneself as a measure to gauge others. That is all". The crucial point for us is that D. C. Lau, unlike A. Waley, fails to make clear the scope of *erh i* 而已)

The subject of *i* 已 may also be a time-expression preceding the main verb:

(3) As 回也其心三月不違仁其餘則日月圭焉而已矣

"As for Hui, his heart does not offend against benevolence for three months (at a time). The others attain only for a day or a month." (*Lun Yu* 6,7) D. C. Lau (1983) p. 49 translates: "The others attain benevolence merely by fits and starts." This may be acceptable as a very loose paraphrase of the ancient commentary (ed. Liu Pao-nan, *Wan-yu-wen-k'u*, vol. 2 p. 10) but it certainly does not translate the original.

The relevant time expression may come after the main verb:

(4) 苟有用我者期月而可也三年有成

"If anyone were to really employ me for only as much as a full year [the result] would be acceptable". (*Lun Yu* 13.10.) D. C. Lau (1983) p. 125 fails to recognize the force of *kou* 苟 in spite of the fact that the old commentary gives the correct and current gloss *ch'eng* 誠 "really", then leaves out our *erh i* 而已 and translates: "If anyone were to employ me, in a years' time I would have brought things to a satisfactionary state [...]". Again A. Waley (1983) p. 173f is superior to D. C. Lau in precision "If only someone were to make use of me, even for a single year [...]".

The subject or scope of *i* 已 regularly is the object of the main verb:

(5) 子誠齊人也知管仲晏子而已矣

"You are a genuine Ch'i man: you know only of Kuan Chung and Yen Tzu". (*Meng Tzu* 1A1, our translation follows D. C. Lau (1984) p. 51 which at this point is perfectly satisfactory and explicit.)

(6) 言舉斯心加諸彼而已

"He set an example for his brothers consort,
And also for his brothers,
And so ruled over the family and the state".

This means only: "simply taking this very heart here and applying it to what is over there". (*Meng Tzu* 1A7, cf. D. C. Lau (1984) p. 17 "In other words, all you to do is to take this very heart here [...]")

(7) 求民於水火之中取殘而已矣

"[The King of Chou] rescued the people from water and fire and took captive only their cruel masters". (*Meng Tzu* 3B5. I quote the translation in D. C. Lau (1984) p. 123.)

(8) 憂之如何？如舜而已矣

"If one worries about this, whom should one be like? One should simply be like Shun". (*Meng Tzu* 4B2B, cf. D. C. Lau (1984) p. 171 who fails to make clear the scope of *erh i* 而已)

(9) 夫仁亦在乎孰之而已矣

“In the case of benevolence the point is also simply in making it mature”. (*Meng Tzu* 6A19, cf. D. C. Lau (1984) p. 241 who disregards our *erh i* 而已 in his translation.)

(10) 盡信書則不如無書。吾於武取二三策而已矣

“If one believed everything in the Book of History, it would have been better to be without the Book of History”. In the Wu Ch’eng chapter I accept only two or three stripes. (*Meng Tzu* 7B3, cf. D. C. Lau (1984) p. 287)

(11) 君子之事君也務引其君以當道志於仁而已

“In serving his lord, a gentleman aims only to put him on the right path and set his mind on benevolence”. (*Meng Tzu* 6B8, cf. D. C. Lau (1984) p. 257, which at this point is satisfactory.)

(12) 亦教之孝悌而已矣

“You should teach him quite simply the duties of a son and a younger brother”. (*Meng Tzu* 7A39, cf. D. C. Lau (1984) p. 281, who omits the *i* 亦.)

(13) 其為人也小有才未聞君子之大道也則定以殺其軀而已矣

“When someone is a man with limited talent who had never quite been taught the great Way of the gentleman, then that is enough only to lead to his own death”. (*Meng Tzu* 7B29, cf. D. C. Lau (1984) p. 297 who misconstrues the *tse* 則 “then”: “He was a man with limited talent who had never been taught the great way of gentleman. That was just enough to cost him his life.”)

The object may even be more deeply embedded:

(14) 否天不言以行勿事乎之而已矣

“No. Heaven does not speak. Only through its acts and deeds does it reveal itself”. (*Meng Tzu* 5A5, (twice), cf. D. C. Lau (1984) p. 189 who disregards our *erh i* 而已 in both occurrences of this sentence.)

(15) 君子行法以俟命而已矣

“The gentleman follows the norm only with a view to awaiting his destiny”. (*Meng Tzu* 7B33, cf. D. C. Lau (1984) p. 301 has a different scope for *erh i* 而已. “A gentleman merely follows the norm and awaits his destiny”. This is quite possibly correct.

Finally, the subject of *i* 已 may be a whole sentence:

(16) 子曰不占而已矣

The Master said: “[It is that] he does not conduct proper prognostication, that is all,” (*Lun Yu* 14.39, cf. D. C. Lau (1983) p. 145, (1983) p. 129)

(17) 莫已知也斯已而已矣

“If it is the case that no one recognizes him, then he should give up, that is all”. (*Lun Yu* 14.39, cf. D. C. Lau (1983) p. 145 who wrongly takes *chih* 知 “recognize somebody’s talents” in its ordinary meaning “understand”.)

I must emphasise that the scope which I have ascribed to *erh i* 而已 will not necessarily be felt by everyone to be the correct one. What matters is that *erh i* 而已 raises such problems of scope which have hitherto gone unnoticed in grammars of Classical Chinese. We shall always have to ask ourselves, when we see *erh i* 而已, precisely what its scope is, exactly what it is, "that is all". And this scope is not, I think, necessarily the same as that of *erh* 耳.

The scope of final *erh* 耳

Let us now turn to the scope of the final particle *erh* 耳. First I want to outline the interesting distribution of *erh* 耳 more generally in ancient Chinese literature.

There are no cases of *erh* 耳 in any part of *Shu Ching*, none in *Shih Ching*, none in *Ch'u Tz'u*, none in the *Shen Tzu* fragments, none in *I Ching*, none in *Kuo Yu*, none in the *Sun Tzu*, none in the *Lao Tzu*, none even recorded in Fraser's careful dictionary of the Index to the *Tso Chuan*. On the other hand the particle is common in *Chuang Tzu* as well as *Lun Yu* and *Meng Tzu*. Moreover, unlike the particle 已 *i*, *erh* 耳 remained current in Literary Chinese from Han times onwards.

It appears that *erh* 耳 is a word that originated about the time of the *Lun Yu* and had become common in the time and in the dialect area where texts like *Meng Tzu* were written down. In this exploratory essay I shall deal exhaustively with final *erh* in those two texts. I hope to show that the scope¹ of *erh* 耳 is always at least the whole predicate.

There are only two cases of *erh* 耳 in *Lun Yu*, and one of these is also the trickiest of all cases I have found:

(18) 子游為武城宰子曰女得人焉耳乎

Tzu Yu was the administrator of Wu Ch'eng. The Master asked: "Have you simply found the right man in that place?" *Lun Yu* 6.14, cf. D. C. Lau (1983) p. 50 who neglected both the *erh* 耳 and the *yen* 焉 "in that place". The old commentary says: "K'ung says *yen* 焉, *erh* 耳 and *hu* 乎 are all particles (*tz'u* 辭). "Yang Po-chun gives no interpretation for the *erh*.

(19) 前言戲之耳

"In what I was saying before I was simply joking about this." (*Lun Yu* 17.4, cf. D. C. Lau (1983) p. 171)

The combination *yen erh i* 焉耳矣 comes in:

(20) 寡人之於國也尽心焉耳矣

"As for my relation to the state, I simply have done my utmost in the respect!" (*Meng Tzu* 1A3, cf. D. C. Lau (1984) p. 5 who disregards our particles.) There are many examples of this in *Li Chi*.

(21) 直不百步耳是亦走也

"They simply did not run one hundred steps. Such a case is also still a case of running." (*Meng Tzu* 1A3, cf. D. C. Lau (1984) p. 7 "He did not quite run a hundred paces. That is all. But all the same, he ran." D. C. Lau adds a "quite" in "not quite" which is unsupported by the text. On the contrary: the people in question had only run half the distance.)

(22) 不敢請耳固所願也

"I simply didn't dare make the suggestion, but this certainly is what I wish." (*Meng Tzu* 2B10, cf. D. C. Lau (1984) p. 87 who disregards our *erh* 耳 and adds a "just", which is unsupported by the text: "That is just what I should wish", answered Mencius, "though I did not dare make the suggestion.")

(23) 有司者治之耳

"The authorities simply supervised it." (*Meng Tzu* 2B10, cf. D. C. Lau (1984) p. 87)

(24) 亦不用於耕耳

"It is not true that Yao and Shun had nothing to use their minds on when they were governing the empire. They quite simply did not use their minds on ploughing." (*Meng Tzu* 3A4, cf. D. C. Lau (1984) p. 107: "It is not true that in ruling the Empire Yao and Shun did not have to use their minds. Only they did not use their minds on ploughing the fields." There is no "have to" in the Chinese text. On the other hand there is an *i* 亦 which D. C. Lau fails to translate.)

(25) 人之易其也無責耳矣

"When a person uses his words lightly he simply has no responsibilities of office." (*Meng Tzu* 4A23, cf. D. C. Lau (1984) p. 155)

(26) 堯舜與人同耳

Ch'u Tzu said: "The king sent someone to spy on you to see whether you really were different in some respects from other people." Mencius replied: "How should I be different from other people? [After all] Yao and Shun simply were the same as other people." (*Meng Tzu* 4B32, cf. D. C. Lau (1984) p. 175 who disregards our *erh* but remembers to put in an "even" which is indeed suggested by the context, though not in the sentence itself.)

(27) 我固有之也弗思耳矣

"I inherently have these things, [but] I simply do not reflect on them." (*Meng Tzu* 6A6, cf. D. C. Lau (1984) p. 229: "They are in me originally. Only this has never dawned on me." "Something dawning on me" is not, as far as I know, expressed by *ssu* 思 "to long for", "to think", "to reflect" in Classical Chinese.)

(28) 人人有貴於己者弗思耳矣

"All men have the exalted in themselves. They simply do not reflect on it." (*Meng Tzu* 6A18, cf. D. C. Lau (1984) p. 241)

(29) 聖人先得我心之所同然耳

“The sage simply is the first to get hold of what our hearts equally approve.” (*Meng Tzu* 6A7, cf. D. C. Lau (1984) p. 231)

(30) 賢者能勿喪耳

“It is not as if the talented (moral) man is the only one to have such a way of thinking. All men have it. The talented (moral) man simply is able to avoid losing this way of thinking.” *Meng Tzu*: „Walking slowly is surely not beyond the ability of men! He simply refuses to do it.” (*Meng Tzu* 6B2, cf. D. C. Lau (1984) p. 245: “The trouble with a man is surely not his lack of sufficient strength but his refusal to make the effort.” This disregards our *erh* 耳, and indeed it disregards the syntax of the original.) Amusingly, in a later sentence we read:

(31) 夫得行者豈人所不能哉？所不為也

“Walking slowly surely is not something men are incapable of. It is something they [may] fail to do.” (*Meng Tzu* 6B2, where D. C. Lau translates as if there had been *erh* 耳 or something of the sort: “It is simply a matter of his not making the effort.”)

(32) 人病不求耳

(“The Way is like a wide road. Surely it is not hard to recognize.) When things go wrong for people they simply fail to look for the Way.” (*Meng Tzu* 6B2, cf. D. C. Lau (1984) p. 245)

(33) 寡人非能好先王之樂也直好世俗之樂

“I by no means love the music of the ancient kings. I simply love the music belonging to the customs of this time.” (*Meng Tzu* 1B1, cf. D. C. Lau (1984) p. 25 „It is not the music of the Former Kings that I am capable of appreciating. I am merely fond of popular music.” D. C. Lau misconstrues the *fei* in the first sentence.) Note that this example does not provide evidence in favour of our interpretation of the scope of *erh* 耳. We could take the scope of *erh* 耳 the object of *hao* 好 only, and not the whole predicate. However the rest of the examples in *Meng Tzu* suggest that we might perhaps, also in this case, take the scope to be as indicated in my translation.

I hope that I have shown that final *erh i* 而已 in *Lun Yu* and in *Meng Tzu* is not simply synonymous with *erh* 耳. There is a clear distinction in scope. *Erh* 耳 typically has at least the whole predicate as its scope (possibly the whole sentence in which it occurs), *erh i* 而已 often has a much more limited scope. Looking over the examples as lined up above one cannot fail to notice that remarkably many cases invite a paraphrase for *erh* 耳 along the lines of “it is simply that S” which would take the whole sentence as the scope of *erh* 耳.

Finally, let us turn to a methodological conclusion: the etymological point that

erh 耳 must be historically explained as a fusion of *erh i* 而已 does explain why the particle *erh* 耳 can in turn be modified by *i* 矣, as it often is in *Meng Tzu* and elsewhere. Then the fused verb *i* 已 can still trigger a verbal particle *i* 矣! But the fusion must not be taken as syntactic evidence that the two expressions are synonymous. Etymological explanation must never be confused with semantic explanation. Not even in a language, that is as distant to us, and as poorly understood, as Classical Chinese.

References

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