

Complementation Pattern Studies in Mandarin

This report discusses complementation patterns in standard Mandarin, and tries to answer the questions about finite and non-finite complements, clausal subjects, etc. However, the fundamental question “does Mandarin have both finite and non-finite complements” has been controversial in the past decade. To answer this question, we have to address issues such as the tense, aspect and modal in Mandarin. This report tries to give a brief review of different opinions in related work, and answer the questions based on that.

1. Does Mandarin have both finite and non-finite complements?

It has been a long-lasting discussion of the existence of distinction of finiteness and non-finiteness in mandarin and it's still open-ended. Generally, one group of linguists think that there's no distinction between finite and non-finite clauses in mandarin; the other group of linguists opposite the former opinion. The main cause of this confusion is the fact that mandarin lacks most of the morphological markers. Furthermore, the pioneers of this discussion are mostly from Taiwan. These linguists speak Taiwanese mandarin which takes some influences of other non-mandarin languages. As time goes by, more and more linguists take parts in this discussion. Lots of them come from the Chinese mainland and use standard mandarin or some may call it Beijing mandarin. I, myself, come from mainland too. Therefore, all of my explanation and examples will be based on standard mandarin.

First of all, I'm basically on the distinction-existed side. So, I believe that mandarin have both finite and non-finite complements. Furthermore, I think the key to distinguishing finite or non-finite complements is the verb.

According to Lexical functional grammar theory, we briefly categorize Mandarin verbs into 3 categories:

1. finite clause verbs
2. non-finite clause verbs
3. dual finite/non-finite clause verbs

This classification is supported by [He 2013].

Finite clause verbs semantically expect or allow only one finite clause as complement, but the embedded subject could be dropped in some situation. Although we don't have any overt tense markers, the covert tense can be recognized through several clues. For example, if the covert tense is present, we can usually find stative verbs or some modal auxiliaries, or progressive aspect markers, in the embedded clauses. If the covert tense is past tense, we can usually find some perfective aspect markers.

For example, in (1a) below, ka4njia4n (see) semantically demand two arguments: an experiencer and a content. This content could be a specific thing or person (a noun phrase), or it can also be a scene (a finite clause). The example (1a) represents the latter case. Furthermore, we can find a progressive aspect marker zhe4ngza4i in the embedded clause, which implies present tense.

- 1a) 我 看见 [小明 正在 玩 手机。]
 wo3 kan4jian4 xia3omi2ng zhe4ngza4i wa2n sho3uji1
 p1sg see Xiaoming progressive play cell phone.
 I see that Xiaoming is playing his cell phone.

Non-finite clause verbs allow only non-finite clauses as complement. But even in some sentences with finite clause verbs, the embedded subject can be dropped (mandarin is a pro-drop language, [Huang, C.-T 1989]). This phenomenon makes an original finite clause "looks" like a non-finite clause. How can we tell one from another? The key is: in the sentence with real non-finite clauses, we can *usually* find functional control constructions and the covert pronoun is usually the controlee. In fact, [He 2007] argues that we can *always* find control construction in non-finite clauses, yet I think that we may need more studies to conclude that.

In the example (1b) below, the verb jia1o (teach) semantically demand three arguments: the teacher (la3oshi1/teacher), the student (wo3men/p1pl), and the thing taught (cha4ng zhe4sho3u ge1/sing this song). If we only look at "wo3men cha4ng zhe4 sho3u ge1", it can form a sentence by itself (we sing this song), but we cannot conclude that it is a finite clause, since if this is a chunk, the whole sentence will be ungrammatical as one of the argument -- the student is missing. Moreover, we can find control construction in this example. The embedded subject of this non-finite clause is the controlee of the matrix clause.

- 1b) 老师 教 我们 [唱 这 首 歌]。
 la3oshi1 jia1o wo3men cha4ng zhe4 sho3u ge1
 teacher teach p1pl sing this classifier song
 The teacher teaches us to sing this song.

On the other hand, in the second sentence of example (1c) below, the clause in the brackets seems to be incomplete because of the missing subject "ta1 (it)", or the cake. However, the word re4nwe2i (think) demands only two arguments: one is the thinker, the other is the content. The content/opinion in the answer is "it (the cake) is baked by Xiaoming". There is no control construction nor raising construction here. Therefore, this is a simple pronoun-dropped example.

- 1c) 这个 蛋糕 是 谁 烤的?
 zhe4ge da4nga1o shi4 she2i ka3ode
 this cake is who bake
 Who baked this cake?

我	认为	[(它)	是	小明	烤的]。
wo3	re4nwe2i	(ta1)	shi4	xia3omi2ng	ka3ode
p1sg	think	(it)	is	Xiaoming	bake

I think Xiaoming baked (it).

Dual finite/non-finite clause verbs allow finite or non-finite clause, depending on the specific situation when using this kind of verbs. However, we looked at many cases in previous studies [*He 2013*] and found that most examples are based on Taiwanese Mandarin, and sound unnatural in standard Mandarin. Some people may use these expressions in oral communications.

2. Does Mandarin have clausal subjects? If so, can they be both finite and non-finite?

The answer is yes -- Mandarin have clausal subjects, and they can be both finite and non-finite.

In the example 2a) below, the subject is a complete clause with agent (people), verb (cut) and patient (forest), and according to the principles discussed in Section 1, it should be a finite clause.

2a) [人们 砍伐 森林] 导致了 水土流失。
re2nmen ka3nfa2se1nli2n da3ozhi4le shui3tu3liu2shi1.
people cut forest caused water and soil erosion
That people cut forests caused water and soil erosion.

In the example 2b) below, the subject is an incomplete clause without agent. it should be a non-finite clause. The matrix clause does not have a real verb, it has a nominal predicate, so we cannot use the rule discussed in Section 1.

2b) [出版 一 本 书] 是 他 的 梦想。
chu1ba3n yi1 be3n shu1 shi4 ta1 de me4ngxia3ng
publish one classifier book copula p3sg.mas. poss. dream
Publishing a book is his dream.

3. Does your language exhibit matrix-coding constructions?

I can only find matrix-coding constructions in a situation similar to "tough movement" in English, see example (3a) below:

3a) 这 张 照片 很 难 [看 清楚]。
zhe zhang zhaopian hen nan kan qingchu
dem. classifier photo very hard see clearly
This photo is very hard to see clearly.

4. Does your language exhibit control constructions?

Yes. As I mentioned in Section 1, similar as (1b), or below (4a):

- 4a) 我 爱 [弹 钢琴]。
wo ai tan gangqin
p1sg love play piano
I love playing piano.

5. Are the constituent orders occurring in subordinate clauses the same as those in main clauses, or different?

Same. See examples below:

- 5a) 因为 他 待 人 真诚, 所以 大家 都 喜欢 他。
yinwei ta dai ren zhengcheng suoyi dajia dou xihuan ta
becausep3sg.mas. treat people sincerely so everyone all like p3sg.mas.
Because he treats people sincerely, everybody likes him.

- 5a') 他 待 人 很 真诚
ta dai ren hen zhengcheng
p3sg.mas. treat people very sincerely
He treats people very sincerely.

- 5b) 他 读 了 我 推荐 的 书。
ta du le wo tuijian de shu
p3sg.mas. read perfective p1sg recommend relativizer book
He read the book that I recommended.

- 5b') 我 推荐 这 本 书。
wo tuijian zhe ben shu
p1sg recommend demonstrator classifier book
I recommend this book.

- 5c) 暗杀 总统 的 嫌疑人 落网 了。
ansha zongtong de xianyiren luowang le
assassinate president relativizer suspect be caught perfective
The suspect who assassinated the president was caught.

5c') 这 个 人 暗杀 了 总统。
 zhe ge ren ansha le zongtong
 demonstrator classifier person assassinate perfective president
 This person assassinated the president.

6. Does Mandarin rely largely on subordination? Or, does it use coordination or serialization?

We can find all of these phenomena in mandarin, but it's hard for now to conclude which one is the majority. I need more time to do some research on this problem.

Notes

For question 2--6, I haven't spent enough time to come up with detailed explanations, since I was mostly focused on finite/non-finite distinction problem, which I found the most important question of the project. I will later spend time to go through 2--6 in more depth.

References

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