Mandarin Chinese notes

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Overview

1.1 Historical notes

1.2 Prosody

One distinct feature of Mandarin is its morphosyntax relies strongly on prosody (冯胜利, 2000).

1.3 Parts of speech

1.4 Clause structure

1.4.1 Alignment

Mandarin is an typical accusative language. Mandarin clauses have a rather rigid constituent order: It's usually classified as having a SVO clausal constituent order, and the subject and the object(s) can be told from the positions in the clause (1, 2). Certain "SOV" orders can be obtained by invoking the disposal construction (§ 8.1), as in (3).

- (1) 我生病 了 1 get.sick SFP 'I got sick.'
- (2) [我]_{subject} 今天 去看 [电影]_{object} 了 1 today to watch movie SFP

'I went to watch a movie today.'

(3) [我]_{subject} 今天 把 [一 个 碗]_{object} 摔 碎 了 1 today BA one QNT bowl break crack SFP 'I broke one bowl today.'

The usual tests of syntactic accusative alignment can be run on Mandarin (4).

(4) 陈 经理 昨天 没有 和 他的 客户 聊 过 。他 Chen (surname) manager yesterday NEG with 3sg-POSS client talk SFP 3sg 生病 了 。 get.sick SFP

'Manager Chen didn't talk with his client yesterday. He (Chen, not his client) got sick.'

1.4.2 TAME categories

Mandarin lacks the category of tense – all tense information is expressed by time adverbs. Modality is marked similarly be adverbs or complement clause constructions. Yet there is a system marking the aspect (\S 6.3). (5) is an example.

(5) a. 我去过 上海 了 1 go GUO Shanghai SFP 'I have been in Shanghai.' b. 我去了上海 了 1 go LE Shanghai SFP 'I have gone to Shanghai.'

1.4.3 Negation

Like the case in standard English, there is no negative concord in Mandarin Chinese. There is, however, no uniform negation operator like the English *not*. Several negation operators and strategies are used frequently (§ 9.2). Verbs can be negated by $\overline{\wedge}$ while nouns generally cannot, and this is a criterion to tell verbs from nouns. There is another negation operator \mathcal{B} , which has subtle differences in its meaning and syntactic properties compared with $\overline{\wedge}$ (6, 7). On the other hand, the negative potential complement construction, i.e. the $V\overline{\wedge}\overrightarrow{\rfloor}$ construction, isn't obtained by inserting a negator in the clause (8).

- (6) a. 我不 喜欢吃 芹菜 1 NEG like eat celery 'I don't like eating celery.'
 - b. * 我没喜欢吃芹菜
- (7) a. 我不 吃 早饭
 1 NEG eat breakfast
 'I don't eat breakfast. (I usually don't, I don't want any today, etc.)'
 b. 我没 吃 早饭
 1 NEG eat breakfast
 'I didn't eat breakfast. (I may usually do, but somehow I didn't today.)'
- (8) a. 我做 [不了]_{potential complement, negative} 这件事。
 b. *我{没有/并非/不}_{negative operator} 做 [得了]_{potential complement, positive} 这件事。

1.4.4 The topic-comment structure

1.5 Clause combining

1.6 Remarkable features

1.6.1 Serializing

It's often said Mandarin is a serializing language: it contains A closer look, however,

Prosody and the writing system

Parts of speech

Nominal derivation

The structure of noun phrase

The verbal complex

Mandarin is generally regarded as a prototypical analytic language, without traditionally acknowledged verb inflections. Indeed it will be weird to posit something like a paradigm in Mandarin, but it doesn't mean there is no such thing as verbal affixation that are active in the morphosyntax (instead of not fully productive and arguably historical derivations). Some items involved here however may have partial mobility. Consider (1): In the first sentence, \mathcal{T} is an aspectual suffix (§ 6.3), while \mathbb{Z} is a verb which never appear without an argument in uncontroversial phrasal grammar. So we conclude \mathcal{T} and \mathbb{Z} are suffixes, and by structural comparison, we conclude \mathcal{T} in (1b) is also a suffix, with the same status as \mathbb{Z} . But there comes (1c), in which \mathcal{T} moves to the end of the sentence.

- (1) a. 他 带 走 了 他的 文件 3sg carry go.away PERF 3sg-POSS file 'He carried his files away.'
 - b. 他 带 [过来] 了 三 瓶 汽水 3sg carry come PERF three bottle.QNT soda 'He carried here three bottles of soda.'
 - c. 他带了三瓶汽水[过来]

To avoid the useless quarrelling about what is a word and whether a grammar point is morphology (which isn't that important in non-lexicalist generative theories, anyway), I use the term $verbal\ complex$ to cover the main verb and the "suffixes" in (1). There are roughly three systems in the verbal complex. The first is the uncontroversial derivation system, like & '-ize'. The second is the verbal complement system, which includes three subsystems: the resultative complements, the directional complements, and the potential complements (\S 6.2). The third is the aspectual system (\S 6.3).

Box 6.1: On the notion of *complements*

The Chinese term 补语 corresponding to my *verbal complement* is frequently translated into the English term *complement*. This creates some confusion, because the term *complement* can also denote clausal dependents that are arguments of the main verb, as in Huddleston and Pullum (2002). The term *non-argument complement* may be used to avoid this confusion. There are, however, further confusions: Should we regard a clausal dependent that records the quantity or amount of an action as a non-argument complement? This construction can also be seen in Latin, like the Latin accusative expression of time (Greenough and Allen, 2013, § 423). Thus, I use the term *verbal complement* to refer to things like 完 as in 做完了.

- (2) is an example in which all the three systems appear. In real world speeches, such combinations have relatively lower distributions, possibly because of the prosodic constraint that verb shouldn't be too heavy unless it appears at the end of a clause (TDOO: ref).
 - (2) ... 并且企业 [数字 [化]_{derivation} [完]_{complement} [了]_{aspectual}]_V 之后还不一定赚钱 ...

You may note the so-called serial verb constructions aren't mentioned here. Paul (2008) and 邓思颖 (2010, § 9.4) summarizes several constructions that are frequently referred to as serial

verb constructions, and points out after deeper investigation, they can all be described in terms of the usual complement clause constructions, purpose clause constructions, etc. that are well attested cross-linguistically.

- 6.1 Verbal derivations
- 6.2 Verbal complements
- 6.3 The aspectual system
- 6.4 Separable verbs

It's sometimes possible to split a verb and inject some clausal dependents into it. The interaction between this separation operation and the structure of the verbal complex is of some interest.

Verb and arguments

Valency changing

There are two ways of valency changing in Mandarin. The first is via a coverb construction, as in the disposal constructions (§ 8.1), TODO The second is *doing nothing* to the verb and relying on the unusual semantic roles of clausal complements to inform the listener about the valency changing, as in TODO: ref. Since there is no morphological marking, constructions of this type are often recognized as topic-comment structures, in which the "topic" – which is the subject under closer investigation – is said to be freely occupied by any argument in the clause, though this claim can be falsified by detailed syntactic tests (Box 9.1).

8.1 The disposal constructions

Clause structure

9.1 The topic-comment structure

Box 9.1: Distinguishing topics from subjects Shi (2000)

- 9.2 Negation
- 9.3 Sentence final particles

Subordination

10.1 Overview

Box 10.1: Non-existence of finite-nonfinite distinction in Mandarin

Cross-linguistically, we find a finite-nonfinite distinction in subordination. This distinction is arguably absent in Mandarin, even after detailed syntactic tests (Hu et al., 2001).

Clause linking

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