Mandarin Chinese notes

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Chapter 1

Introduction

1.1 The history and the classification

Mandarin Chinese is a predominant language in the world, belonging to the Sinitic branch

1.2 Previous studies

There are already sufficient works concerning the grammar of Mandarin Chinese. The tradition used in colleges (and occasionally high schools) is largely structuralist à la Bloomfield: A clause is divided into a topic and a comment, and the comment is divided into a subject and a predicate, and the predicate is divided into a predicator and an object, etc. Examples of works in this tradition usually have names like 现代汉语 'Modern Chinese' (王理嘉 et al., 2004). This tradition is still seen in many contemporary grammars, like Huddleston and Pullum (2002). This tradition is largely coherent with the generative tradition, and indeed there are books which are generative in essence but organized in the traditional and structuralist framework (邓思颖, 2010).

Teaching materials of Mandarin Chinese are also largely influenced by the structuralist tradition. TODO

Mandarin also gains much attention in the functional-typological tradition. TODO

> **Box 1.1: The difference between the frameworks**
>
> The differences between the generative tradition, the traditional structuralist school and the so-called functionalist (or "Basic Linguistic Theory" (Dixon, 2009)) are mainly notational.
>
> Since modern generative syntax contains lots of hidden functional heads, the notion of, say, a DP which is the specifier of T, is to be replaced by an NP filling a subject position in a surface-oriented structuralist constituency analysis. Both "NP" and "subject" should be labeled on the syntactic tree in the structuralist tradition, while in generative syntax, the latter can be read directly from the (more complicated) tree structure.
>
> The Basic Linguistic Theory approach, or the functional-typological grammar writing approach, is based on *dependency relations* on the other hand. It's also possible to formulate generative grammar in terms of dependency relations, so it can be expected that the BLT approach is still largely equivalent with the grammatical complexity of generative grammar. BLT only recognizes two types of constituents: NPs and clauses, which are called *domains* in generative syntax: The former is the DP domain while the latter is the vP-TP-CP domain. The complicated binary constituency tree is replaced by a flat tree with lots of dependency relations labeled inside, containing the same amount of information.

1.2.1 About this note

This note is an attempt to reconcile the several approaches in previous researches. I will use less structuralist constituency trees compared with structuralist grammars. That's to say, for example, the "serial verb construction" is not divided into two verb phrases following rigidly the structuralist tenets, but is analyzed with a flat-tree structure instead, following BLT.

Chapter 2

Grammatical overview

2.1 Prosody

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

2.2 Parts of speech

2.3 Clause structure

2.3.1 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 (§ 9.1), 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 normal 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 生病   了 。
    Chen (surname) manager yesterday NEG with 3sg-POSS client talk SFP   3sg get.sick SFP

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

2.3.2 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 (§ 7.3). (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.'

2.3.3 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 (§ 10.3). Verbs can be negated by 不 while nouns generally cannot, and this is a criterion to tell verbs from nouns. There is another negation operator 没, which has subtle differences in its meaning and syntactic properties compared with 不 (6, 7). On the other hand, the negative potential complement construction, i.e. the V不了 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　]$_{\text{potential complement, negative}}$ 这 件　事
　　　1　do　NEG finish　　　　　　　　　　　　this QNT affair

　　　'I'm not able to do this.'

　　b. 　* 我 没有/并非/不 做 [得 了　]$_{\text{potential complement, positive}}$ 这 件　事
　　　　1　NEG　　　　do　DE finish　　　　　　　　　　this QNT affair

2.3.4 The topic-comment structure

2.4 Clause combining

2.5 Remarkable features

2.5.1 Serializing

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

Chapter 3

Prosody and the writing system

Chapter 4

Parts of speech

Chapter 5

Nominal derivation

Chapter 6

The structure of noun phrase

Chapter 7

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, 了 is an aspectual suffix (§ 7.3), while 走 is a verb which never appear without an argument in uncontroversial phrasal grammar. So we conclude 了 and 走 are suffixes, and by structural comparison, we conclude 过来 in (1b) is also a suffix, with the same status as 走. But there comes (1c), in which 过来 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 化 '-ize'. The second is the verbal complement system, which includes three subsystems: the resultative complements, the directional complements, and the potential complements (§ 7.2). The third is the aspectual system (§ 7.3).

> **Box 7.1: 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.

7.1   Verbal derivations

7.2   Verbal complements

7.3   The aspectual system

7.4   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.

Chapter 8

Verb and arguments

Chapter 9

Valency changing

There are two ways of valency changing in Mandarin. The first is via a coverb construction, as in the disposal constructions (§ 9.1), 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 semantic (and not necessarily syntactic) argument in the clause, though this claim can be falsified by detailed syntactic tests (Box 10.2).

9.1   The disposal constructions

Chapter 10

Simple clauses

10.1 Overview

A sentence can be divided into several clauses linked by clause linking constructions (chap. 12). A clause can be divided into one or more topics (if any) and a comment, the latter being the nucleus clause, and possibly SFPs. The comment may further be divided into a subject (if any), a series of adverbials, the verbal complex, and post-verbal constituents, the most important types including object(s), the second part of a separable verb, certain directional complements, and purpose clauses. This chapter is denoted to everything on the clause level, postponing details in subordination and clause linking to the next several chapters.

> **Box 10.1: The term *clause***
>
> Some people, like 邓思颖 (2010, pp. 140) as well as Dixon (2009), use the term *clause* for subject-predict constructions that don't receive complete marking of speech forces. (In generative terms, *clause* is for lower level CPs or even TPs.) So in this way, sentence-final particles shouldn't be discussed in this chapter because they are of course dependents in the sentence level. They may be discussed together with other sentence-level constructions like chap. 12. But this notion of clause certainly goes against the tradition in descriptive grammars. So the approach of this note is to acknowledge everything larger than TP as a clause, which may or may not be a sentence, and discuss its structure in this chapter, while "adjunctions" – or in other words, optional dependents – are discussed in, say, chap. 12, for the sake of convenience. The narrative order of this note is not the ideal "small unit – large unit" scheme, but the "simple large unit – complicated large unit" scheme. Needless to say, when it comes to clause combining, the problem of what the clause really is – with or without SFPs, for example – is still relevant, but it is not answered by saying "the construction takes a clause, not a sentence".

10.2 The topic-comment structure

I follow Shi (2000)'s approach and define a topic as an unmarked NP that has certain relations with a position in the clause after it and is indeed the topic in the information structure (i.e. some (probably already known) object to which new information is added). Constructions like 连…都…are not discussed in this section – they are to be found in TODO: ref.

> **Box 10.2: Rejection of the notion of dangling topics**
>
> Some people, like 朱德熙 (2009, § 7.1), equate *subject* with *topic* in Mandarin grammar. Some (especially those from the functional-typological tradition) go further and assert that "the notion of the subject (as the position of the most agentive argument) isn't grammaticalized in Mandarin Chinese", and therefore the topic is just an NP which the comment is "about", and this base-generated and syntactically unconstrained topic is called a "dangling topic". This view is rejected in this note, because such accounts usually end up in severe overgeneration. Here I briefly summarize Shi (2000)'s argumentation.

> **Type 1** In the first type of "dangling topic", it's impossible for any NP in the comment to be syntactically related to the topic. Such cases are however rather unproductive. In (1) and (2), the orders of the constituents can never be changed. Nor is it possible to change a word or two in the bracketed "comments". A reasonable assumption is these bracketed "comments" are actually idioms, which are to be regarded as a single verbal element that can't be further analyzed.
>
> (1) 他们[大鱼吃小鱼]（，厮杀成一片）
> (2) 他们[你看看我我看看你]
>
> **Type 2** asdf
>
> The conclusion is all topics in Chinese are closely linked to a position in the comment, be it a core argument position or a peripheral one. So the notion of dangling topics is to be rejected in Mandarin grammar, and we can always recover the "canonical" i.e. non-topic-comment clause from a topic-comment structure. After this, if the canonical clause can be divided into an NP or a complement clause and a verbal constituent following it, we can uncontroversially say the first is the subject while the second is the predicate. (TODO: predicate def) So equating the subject with the topic is also wrong.
>
> It's possible to find the semantic role of the subject isn't agentive; in this case I assert there is a valency changing mechanism here.

10.2.1 Topicalization of possessor

(3) [他]_{topic} [[个子]_{subject} 高高　　 的]_{comment}
    3sg　　　 stature　　 tall~TODO DE
    'As for him, the stature is tall.'

10.2.2 Topicalization of preposition objects

(4) 这件事你不能就麻烦他一个人
(5) 你不能[在这件事上]_{adverbial:PP} 就麻烦他一个人

This is also a demonstration of the preposition status of 在 in this sentence, because if it's a verb or an auxiliary verb, it will be hard to have its object topicalized and have it deleted at the same time, but deletion of the preposition in topicalization is well-attested cross-linguistically.

10.3 Negation

10.4 Sentence final particles

Chapter 11

Subordination

11.1 Overview

> **Box 11.1: 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).

Chapter 12

Clause linking

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