

Chinese Finiteness Marking by Directionals

Xinhan Jiang^{1*}

¹*School of Foreign Languages and Literature, Shandong University, Jinan, Shandong 250100, China*

**Corresponding author. Email: xinhanjiang2020@163.com*

ABSTRACT

Finiteness is generally marked by tense and agreement in languages like English, but can also be marked by directionals in Chinese. Spatial PPs can be categorized into locative PPs and directional PPs, and directional PPs can be further categorized according to their different syntactic roles. Some directional PPs, such as *lái* ‘come’ and *qù* ‘go’, can license the finiteness of the sentence. Compared with the aspect in the IP domain, the position of these directionals is relatively lower, thus they can only express finiteness of the sentence without an overt aspect marker.

Keywords: *finiteness, directional, syntax, Chinese*

1. INTRODUCTION

In languages like English, finiteness is uniformly marked by tense and agreement, whereas in many other languages, the finiteness of a sentence may be signaled by a variety of markers, such as mood, aspect, etc.

Chinese directionals, particularly *lái* ‘come’ and *qù* ‘go’, may play a role in marking finiteness. They can be used in both the lexical layer and the inflectional layer. For example, in (1):

- (1) a. *Zuótiān wǒ liǎnggè qīnqī lái -le.*
 yesterday 1.sg two relative come PFV
 ‘Yesterday my two relatives came.’ [1]
- b. *Tāmen zǒu lái.*
 3.pl walk come
 ‘They are coming.’

The directional *lái* used in the VP domain (as shown in 1a) does not license the finiteness of the sentence. Instead, the aspect *le* licenses the finiteness. On the contrary, the directional *lái* used in the IP domain (as shown in 1b) seems to license the finiteness, since the sentence would be incomplete without it.

Moreover, even in the IP domain, Chinese directionals function differently and can be further divided into two categories: the Speaker-Directional (s-Dir), referring to the directional which takes the speaker as the reference, and the Entity-Directional (e-Dir), referring to the directional in terms of the displacement of the participated entity. The difference between the two can be identified in (2):

- (2) a. *Tāmen zǒu shàng lái.*
 3.pl walk up-e-Dir come-s-Dir
 ‘They are walking forward/upwards.’
- b. **Tāmen zǒu shàng.*
 3.pl walk up-e-Dir
 Intended: ‘They are walking forward/upwards.’

The result clearly indicates that the use of Speaker-Directionals is closely related to the finiteness of the sentence and that Speaker-Directionals may bring a notion of finiteness. The question is then whether the Chinese directionals *lái* ‘come’ and *qù* ‘go’ can truly license finiteness and what their relative syntactic position is in the sentence.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Before analyzing the finiteness marked by directionals in Chinese, I will first review the definition of finiteness and then the categorization of spatial Prepositional Phrases in previous studies.

2.1. Finiteness

The definition of finiteness, which evolves from traditional grammar, has always been a controversial issue in various linguistic frameworks. Generally speaking, finiteness is the property of the verbal form which relates to (i) tense marking, (ii) subject agreement, and (iii) the ability of the form to be used exclusively or predominantly in independent/main contexts [2]. However, these three features differ from language to language. Although tense is often considered as an important feature of finiteness, some languages use agreement markers only to license finiteness. Sybesma [3] also claims that tense need not play a role and that all languages, including Chinese, have finite sentences without any overt reflex of tense. When tense or agreement is absent in the language, this mostly used definition of finiteness cannot be applied. In addition, other categories, such as mood and morphological evidentials, can be included in finiteness markers as well. Moreover, regarding finiteness as a property of the verb also brings the problem when the language, such as Chinese, has no inflectional morphology. Therefore, the definition of finiteness needs to be complemented. More recently, finiteness is reconsidered as a scalar meta-phenomenon or a functional tendency confined by certain

correlating parameters [2]. Features that define finiteness tend to be less important, since different languages appear in different morphological and syntactic structures. Finiteness, in this sense, should not be regarded as a single category made up of several features. However, there are still certain patterns of finiteness across languages.

With exceptions appearing in those regular patterns, the definition of finiteness has evolved into a discrete binary phenomenon and that the distinction between finiteness and non-finiteness relies on certain cognitive concepts, such as illocutionary force, person and politeness [4]. Finiteness becomes an open concept because any grammatical category which explicitly marks structural independence of the sentence can be involved. Finiteness does not require specific grammatical categories and is not necessarily marked in different languages.

The above definitions only consider the morphological aspect with the inflectional marking, but some previous studies indicate that the notion of finiteness in morphology and syntax may be independent. For instance, in Welsh [5] and other languages with “Balkan Infinitive” [6], finiteness can be distinguished in the syntactic sense but is not reflected in morphology. Besides, languages without inflectional morphology still show similar syntactic features that can be used to differentiate between finiteness and non-finiteness. Finiteness, therefore, is treated as an abstract syntactic category which regulates the syntactic distribution of NPs, instead of showing morphological features explicitly marked on the verb [2]. The realization of finiteness is considered to be in the Complementizer Phrase (CP) instead of the Inflectional Phrase (IP), since in some languages the complementizers are related to the finiteness of the sentence and inflectional categories can be shown in the CP domain. For example, the complementizers in Irish express more temporal information than the finite verbs do [7]. For Chomsky [8], finite clauses are full CPs that select for IPs specified for tense. In Rizzi’s [9] syntactic cartography, finiteness reflects on a functional head (Fin^o) which is located in the CP domain.

In Chinese, finiteness has also been defined according to different criteria. With no inflectional morphology in Chinese, finite markers are opaque. Since tensed clauses in Chinese are finite, Tsai [10] considers tensed clauses are “complete sentences” which have “the ability to stand alone”. Besides, sentence-final aspect particles, such as *ne*, *le*, and *laizhe*, are also finite markers, although Chinese has no tense or case system [11]. Furthermore, adverbs of degree, such as *hěn*, *tíng*, *guài*, *lǎo*, are frequently used to mark finiteness in sentences with adjectival predicates [12]. In addition, some special sentence structures, for example, parallel and contrastive sentence patterns, can also change a non-finite sentence into a finite one. The rich repertoire of finiteness markers in Chinese adds to the difficulty in the recognition of the specific marker in various contexts.

2.2. Directionals

When it comes to the categorization of Prepositional Phrases (PPs) concerning the position, the most fundamental types are locative PPs and directional PPs. According to Cinque & Rizzi [13], locative PPs, or stative PPs, are embedded under directional PPs: [Dir P [StatP P]]. Directional PPs are not candidates for the head of PP_{Stat} but are modifiers of a DP_{Place} projection headed by PLACE and selected by a stative P, whose projection is in turn selected by a directional P.

In Chinese, the relationship between locative PPs and Directional PPs is also in the same pattern, as shown in (3):

- (3) *Tāmen zǒu shàng qián lái.*
 3.pl walk up-Dir front-Loc come-Dir
 ‘They are walking forward.’

In (3), the locative PP *shàng* is embedded under the directional PP *shàng qián*, which is further embedded under the higher directional PP *zǒu shàng qián lái*: [DirP [VP zǒu [DirP shàng qián]] lái]. This kind of structure in Chinese is consistent with the model put forward by Cinque & Rizzi [13].

In addition, directionals can be a candidate for finiteness markers. For example, in (4), it is only with the directional *lái* that the sentence could be finite:

- (4) a. ??*Tāmen zǒu.*
 3.pl walk
 ‘They walk.’
 b. *Tāmen zǒu lái.*
 3.pl walk come
 ‘They are coming.’

However, directionals can only license finiteness in certain contexts. In this article, I will divide spatial directionals into two categories: the Speaker-Directional (s-Dir), which takes the speaker as the reference, and the Entity-Directional (e-Dir), which concerns the displacement of the participated entity. Different from Cinque & Rizzi’s [13] research on spatial PPs modifying DPs, my research focuses on the directional PPs related to VPs. In addition, I will discuss the relation between directionals and aspects in the IP domain. Finally, I will arrive at a conclusion on what kind of directionals can license finiteness in Chinese and the relative position of directionals in the sentence.

3. ANALYSIS

Now I am in a position to analyze the directionals which may license finiteness in Chinese. First, I will discuss spatial PPs and differentiate directional PPs from locative PPs. Second, I will further categorize directional PPs into two types: the Speaker-Directional (s-Dir) and the Entity-Directional (e-Dir), which have different syntactic functions related to the finiteness of the sentence. Third, I will discuss the relative position of Speaker-Directionals

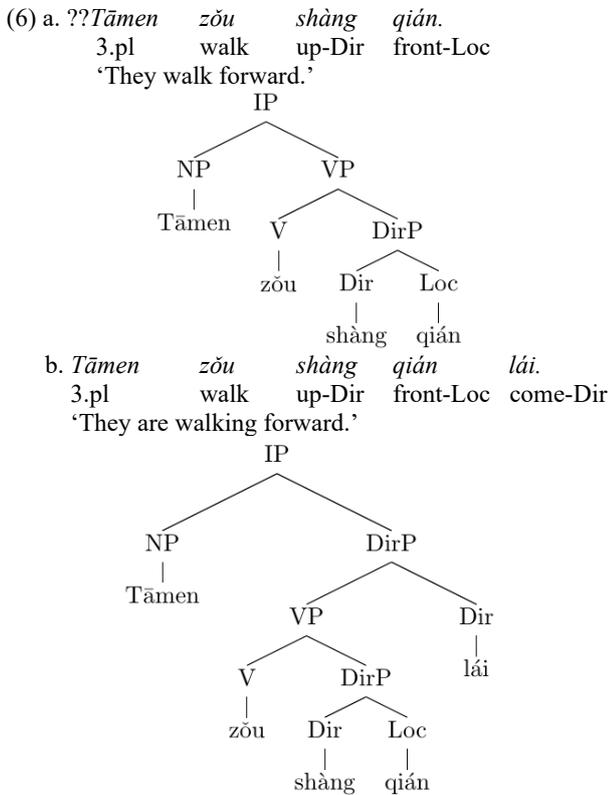
and aspects in the IP domain and find out which syntactic part is able to license finiteness in Chinese.

3.1. Locative PPs and Directional PPs

Spatial PPs can be categorized into locative PPs (as shown in 5a) and directional PPs (as shown in 5b) in many languages [13-14], and Chinese is of no exception:

- (5) a. *qián* ‘front’ *hòu* ‘behind’ *zuǒ* ‘left’ *yòu* ‘right’
 b. *lái* ‘come’ *qù* ‘go’ *shàng* ‘up’ *xià* ‘down’

Although both types express spatial meanings, their syntactic roles in the sentence are different. The position of locative PPs is relatively lower than that of directional PPs in the sentence, as compared in (6):



The sentence in (6b) would be ungrammatical without the directional *shàng*, for the DirP would lack its head, as shown in (7):

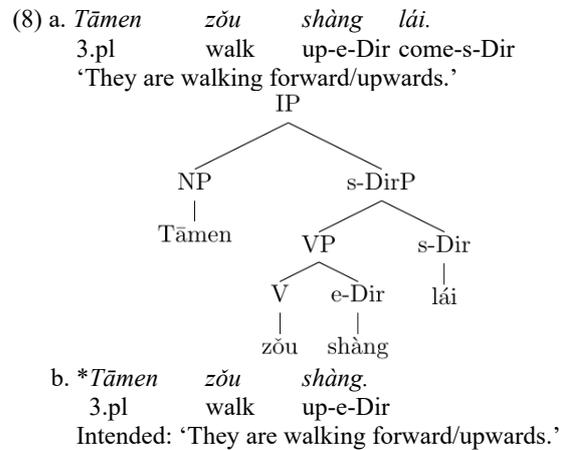
- (7) **Tāmen zǒu qián lái.*
 3.pl walk front-Loc come-Dir
 Intended: ‘They are walking forward.’

However, the sentence in (6b) is correct without the locative P *shàng*. This further proves that locative PPs are embedded under directional PPs and that the directional *shàng* is the head of the directional PP.

3.2. Speaker-Directionals and Entity-Directionals

In section 2.1, the categorization of spatial PPs has been discussed. In Chinese, it is necessary to make a distinction between Speaker-Directionals (s-Dir) and Entity-Directionals (e-Dir), because they show different semantic features and play different syntactic roles.

Speaker-Directionals refer to those which take the speaker as the reference, while Entity-Directionals indicate the displacement of the entity participating in the movement. For example, *lái* is a Speaker-Directional, whereas *shàng* is an Entity-Directional. One of the most significant differences between the two is that the Speaker-Directional can license the finiteness of the sentence (as shown in 8a, which is reproduced from 2a), while the Entity-Directional cannot (as shown in 8b, which is reproduced from 2b):



The result indicates that the position of the Speaker-Directional in the sentence may be higher than that of the Entity-Directional. The Speaker-Directional is able to license finiteness, whereas the Entity-Directional is not a candidate for finiteness markers. Another proof is shown in (9):

- (9) *Tāmen gǔn xià qù.*
 3.pl roll down-e-Dir go-s-Dir
 ‘They are rolling down.’

It should be noted that locative PPs alone cannot license finiteness (as shown in 10a). However, when preceded by an Entity-Directional, the locative PP, together with the Entity-Directional, can license finiteness (as shown in 6a, which is reproduced as 10b). This kind of structure has the same effect as the Speaker-Directional alone (as shown in 1b, which is reproduced as 10c):

- (10) a. **Tāmen zǒu qián.*
 3.pl walk front-Loc
 Intended: ‘They walk forward.’
 b. *Tāmen zǒu shàng qián.*
 3.pl walk up-e-Dir front-Loc
 ‘They walk forward.’

c. *Tāmen zǒu lái.*
 3.pl walk come-s-Dir
 ‘They are coming.’

Other similar Entity-Directionals in Chinese include *xiàng*, *chào*, *wǎng* ‘towards’, which indicate the direction of the entity (as shown in 11):

(11) *Tāmen xiàng/chào/wǎng qián zǒu.*
 3.pl towards-e-Dir front-Loc walk
 ‘They walk forward.’

When the Entity-Directional and the locative PP are used together, the sentence could be finite as well.

3.3. Speaker-Directionals and Aspects

In section 2.2, it is clear that Speaker-Directionals can license finiteness in Chinese. According to Rizzi [9], the C domain contains four heads: Force, Topic, Focus, and Finiteness. The position of the Finiteness Phrase (FinP) is in the CP domain which immediately dominates the IP. In the IP domain, Cinque [15] concluded the relative order of “nonclosing” (agglutinating) suffixes across agglutinating languages. He added that the same pattern is also manifested in Chinese, a non-agglutinating language: T(Past) > T(Future) > Mod_{root} / T(Anterior) > Aspect_{perfect} > Aspect_{progressive} / Aspect_{completive} / Voice > V. It can be inferred from the pattern that the position of the aspect is higher than that of the Verb Phrase (VP).

In example (1b), reproduced as (12a) here, the finiteness of the sentence is licensed by the Speaker-Directional *lái*. However, when an aspect marker shows up in the sentence, the finiteness of the sentence is licensed by the aspect, such as *le*, rather than the Speaker-Directional (as shown in 12b):

(12) a. *Tāmen zǒu lái.*
 3.pl walk come-s-Dir
 ‘They are walking forward.’
 b. *Tāmen zǒu lái -le.*
 3.pl walk come-s-Dir PFV
 ‘They have walked forward.’

Although both sentences in (12) are grammatical, they have different semantic meanings and thus are used in different contexts. (12a) is used to describe the process of the displacement, usually when the participated entity is moving. However, (12b) is used to narrate the whole event of the movement, usually after the movement has occurred. Another similar example is shown in (13):

(13) a. *Tāmen dūn xià lái.*
 3.pl squat down-e-Dir come-s-Dir
 ‘They are squatting.’
 b. *Tāmen dūn xià lái -le.*
 3.pl squat down-e-Dir come-s-Dir PFV
 ‘They have squatted.’

From the examples in (12) and (13), it can be inferred that the position of the aspect is higher than that of the Speaker-Directional, and that the VP is embedded under both the aspect and the Speaker-Directional. Therefore, the relative order of the three is Aspect > Speaker-Directional > VP, and the Speaker-Directional is in the IP domain. Both the aspect and the Speaker-Directional can license finiteness in Chinese, but the priority is given to the aspect.

4. CONCLUSION

Through careful analysis, spatial PPs can be categorized into locative PPs and directional PPs, which have different syntactic roles in the sentence. Directional PPs can be further divided into the Speaker-Directional (s-Dir) and the Entity-Directional (e-Dir), which behaves differently concerning the finiteness licensing. It can be concluded that the position of the Speaker-Directional is relatively lower than that of the aspect in the IP domain but higher than that of the VP. In Chinese, the aspect can license finiteness if the sentence has an overt aspect marker; or, the Speaker-Directional can license finiteness of the sentence without an overt aspect marker. The research provides a new perspective related to the finiteness licensing in Chinese, proposing that Speaker-Directionals, which is in the IP domain, can also be a candidate for finiteness markers.

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