The Typology of Mandarin Infinitives
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EVIDENCE OF INFINITIVES

Silent subject of infinitives.
• Ziji in Mandarin has at least two meanings: (i) reflexive meaning ‘oneself’, or (ii) an advrb meaning ‘on one’s own’.
• When ziji is not in an argument position, it only occurs on the adverbial meaning. In (1), Xiaoming overtly occupies the subject position and ziji has the adverbial meaning.

(1) Xiaoming ziji shoushi. Xiaoming adverb eat sushi
‘Xiaoming eats sushi by himself.’

(2) Xiaoming xihuan ziji shoushi. Xiaoming like (he) eat sushi
‘Xiaoming likes to eat sushi by himself.’
Many verbs that are canonically classified as subject control in English also display this pattern in Mandarin - changing ‘try’, judging ‘decide’, xiang ‘want’, dausun ‘intend’, jujue ‘refuse’.

By contrast, xiangxin ‘believe’ seemingly takes a finite clause.
(3) Xiaoming xiangxin (ta) ch shoushi. Xiaoming like adverb eat sushi
‘Xiaoming likes to eat adverb by himself.’

Aspect markers distinguish between raising and control.
(4) Xiaoming, xiangxin (ta) nenggou dadao zhe fen gongzuo. Xiaoming, believe he, can get DET CL job
‘Xiaoming believes that he can get this job.’
(5) Xiaoming, xiangxin ziji, nenggou dadao zhe fen gongzuo. Xiaoming, believe reflexive, can get DET CL job
‘Xiaoming believes that he can get this job’

The embedded subject ts is usually pronounced in (4). In (5) ziji occupies the same subject position of the embedded clause and can only be interpreted as a reflexive co-indexed with Xiaoming.

Ziji as a ‘Fake’ Reflexive

‘Like’ vs ‘Believe’

Embedded Aspect

Remembering ‘Forget’

GOALS
• Synthesize the debate in the literature about whether Mandarin distinguishes between finite and non-finite clauses.
• Provide additional evidence in support of Mandarin having non-finite clauses.
• Illustrate the semantic nuances of control constructions with respect to embedded reflexives and aspect markers.
• Propose that what looks like a reflexive is actually an adverbial.
• Evaluate diagnostics that have been used to distinguish between finite and non-finite clauses.

BACKGROUND

The Distinction Camp (DC): Mandarin has both finite and non-finite clauses.
• Li (1985/1990): Some modal markers are actually tense markers. An embedded clause that contains a tense marker is finite.
• Li also argues that negative polarity items and certain time adverbials can only be licensed across a nonfinite clause boundary.

Huang (1998): Assumes modal and aspectual markers to belong to AUX. The grammaticality of embedded aspectual markers indicates a finite clause.


Lin (2011/2012): Within predicates that take nonfinite clauses, there are raising and control predicates. Epistemic modals are raising predicates, while root modals are control predicates.

The No Distinction Camp (NDC):
• The stronger position: Mandarin has only finite clauses. No morphological indication of non-finiteness. (Huang 1994)
• The weaker position: Mandarin doesn’t distinguish between finite and non-finite clauses. (Hu, Pan, Xu 2001; Xu 2003). (This suggests that Mandarin has only finite clauses.)

O UR PROPOSAL
• Mandarin has infinitival clauses.
• Overt ‘subjects’ of infinitives are actually adverbs.
• The various interpretations of “forget” clauses suggest a finite/non-finite distinction.
• Aspect markers are allowed in non-finite clauses.
• le allows for telic or atelic interpretations with raising.
• le forces a telic interpretation with control.
• The embedded question diagnostic fails to distinguish different kinds of clauses.

EMBEDDED QUESTIONS
• Mandarin and English pattern alike w.r.t. the interpretation of wh words with control infinitives. The wh word can scope over the matrix or embedded clause.

Embedded scope
• (11) Sally told Jim how to eat chocolate.
• (12) Zhangsan gaosu Lisi zhenme chi jiaoqiei. Zhangsan tells L how eat chocolate ‘Z told L how to eat chocolate.’

Matrix scope
• (13) How did Sally tell Jim to eat chocolate?
• (14) Zhangsan zhenme gaosu Lisi chi jiaoqiei de. ‘Z how tell L eat chocolate ?’

Raising patterns differently in Mandarin than in English. In English, there is no clear scope distinction in raising infinitives.

• ‘In (15) ‘how could refer to either ‘seem’ or ‘get fat.’
• (15) How does Alex seem to have gotten fat?

Mandarin raising constructions have wh-scope interpretations similar to control.
• If zhenme ‘how’ appears outside of the embedded clause, it questions ‘seem’ rather than ‘get fat’.
• (16) Xixi zhenme kanqilai zhangpang le. Xixi how seem grow fat ASP ‘How does Xixi seem to have gotten fat?’
• A possible answer to (16) would explain why the speaker thinks that Xixi seems fat. For example, his/her clothes don’t fit.
• Zhenme can also take scope over the lower clause, while this specifically is impossible in English.

• (17) ‘Alex seems to have gotten fat.’

(18) Xixi zhenme kanqilai zhangpang le. Xixi seem how grow fat ASP ‘How does Xixi seem to have gotten fat?’

In (18), zhenme takes scope over only the lower clause. That the wh can scope over just the lower clause might suggest that Mandarin raising clause is structurally larger than that in English.

SUMMARY
• Mandarin infinitives allow for aspectual markers and their interpretation distinguishes between raising and control.
• When ziji appears inside of an infinitive, it functions as an adverbial.
• The behavior of ziji with ‘forget’ provides additional evidence for infinitival clauses.
• The interpretation of embedded questions suggests that raising clauses can host a wh operator and are, thus, larger than TP.

Selected References