Motion Constructions in Singapore Mandarin Chinese: A Typological Perspective

Yong Kang Khoo and Jingxia Lin[1]

[1] Nanyang Technological University, Singapore
ykhoo002@e.ntu.edu.sg
jingxialin@ntu.edu.sg

Abstract. Research on Singapore Mandarin Chinese has shown that it is influenced, to a certain degree, by dialects such as Min (e.g. Hokkien) and Cantonese. This has resulted in many differences between Mainland China Mandarin Chinese and Singapore Mandarin Chinese. This paper examines one such difference: the expression of self-agentive motion constructions. This study finds that Singapore Mandarin Chinese lies somewhere in between dialects and modern Mandarin Chinese with respect to lexicalization of motion events. The findings suggest that rather than the categorical patterns that have been proposed in many previous studies, the lexicalization patterns in different languages may form a continuum.

Keywords: self-agentive motion event · Singapore Mandarin Chinese · word order

1 Introduction

Motion events are those that involve the movement or maintenance of position of an object, known as the Figure, with respect to another object, known as the Ground; this movement or maintenance is known as the Path [1]. The expression of such events can be done in several ways, and can be classified typologically into two main types: the verb-framed and the satellite-framed. Modern Mandarin Chinese can be considered the latter in terms of the expression of motion events [2]. The satellites are Path complements, which includes non-deictic complements (C_{nd}) such as 上 *shang* 'up' and 下 *xia* 'down' and deictic complements (C_d) such as 来 *lai* 'come' and 去 *qu* 'go' and they indicate the Path of the Figure. Such is the case for the various Chinese dialects as well; however, the position of these complements with respect to the Ground, especially the deictic complements, differ from dialect to dialect.

In Mainland China Mandarin Chinese (MC), these Path complements can be used in three main ways. The deictic and non-deictic complements can be used either individually as simple Path complements or in conjunction as complex Path complements. They can then be used together with different manner verbs (V) and objects (O), and grammaticality of the constructions are given by factors such as the agentivity of the

manner verb and the type of object (e.g. location, patient or agent) [3, 4]. Examples of these constructions can be found in (1).

(1)   Examples of how Path complements can be used

  a.   V + C_{nd} + O

      送回学校

song	hui	xuexiao
send	back	school

      'send (it) back to the school'

  b.   V + O + C_d

      飞房间里来

fei	fangjian li	lai
fly	room in	come

      'flew into the room'

  c.   V + C_{nd} + O + C_d

      走进房间去

zou	jin	fangjian	qu
walk	in	room	go

      'walk into the room'

However, as far as locative nouns are concerned, these constructions seem to be only few types that are allowed in MC and there seems to be no exceptions [3].

As for the Chinese dialects, a wider range of constructions are permitted [5]. In Yiu's study, she examined the motion event constructions in five different Chinese dialects, namely Wu (吴), Cantonese (广东), and three different Min (闽) dialects, namely Hui'an (惠安), Chao'an (潮安) and Fuqing (福清). Her results showed that constructions where the deictic complement comes before the locative object are permitted in some dialects. Interestingly, there are some internal differences amongst the three Min dialects where Fuqing and Hui'an are more similar to MC in their typologies. She attributed this to language contact, given that Fuqing and Hui'an are spoken in regions nearer to where MC is the dominant dialect. This demonstrates that the typologies of languages and dialects are not as neatly defined as previously defined.

This then raises a question with regards to motion constructions in Singapore Mandarin Chinese (SC). Research on SC has shown that it has been influenced to a certain degree by Chinese dialects such as Min (e.g. Hokkien) and Cantonese [6]. This has caused variations in the language such that it can differ quite significantly from other varieties of Mandarin Chinese (like those spoken in Mainland China or Taiwan), making it typologically interesting to investigate the lexicalization patterns in SC and discuss its position with respect to MC and other Chinese dialects. This paper examines motion constructions that involve self-agentive manner verbs, with a focus on those in which the Figure moves with respect to a location noun. An analysis of these constructions provides a typological overview of SC, suggesting that SC rests in the middle of the typological continuum.

2   Approach and Data

This paper will focus on constructions expressing self-agentive directed motion events in SC, with particular focus on the distribution of the deictic complements, 来 *lai* 'come' and 去 *qu* 'go' in these constructions. The data of this study comes from a corpus of 26 episodes of five different Singaporean Chinese variety shows. These variety shows are selected as they are either talk shows or game shows and are therefore unscripted, allowing for the observation of natural speech. A total of around 360,000 characters (around 20,000 sentences) were transcribed from these shows. The sentences containing the words 来 *lai* 'come' and 去 *qu* 'go' are first identified, before narrowing the scope down to only sentences that expresses self-agentive directed motion events.

3   Major Findings

A total of 2882 sentences containing 来 *lai* 'come' and 去 *qu* 'go' were identified from the data, and out of these sentences, 70 of them are expressions of self-agentive directed motion events. A detailed breakdown can be found in Table 1.

Table 1. Word orders exhibited in SC

Construction Type	Frequency	Example
C_d: 来 *lai* 'come'		
C_{nd} + Loc + *lai*	1	进门来 jin men lai enter door come 'enter (through) the door'
2. C_{nd} + *lai* + Loc	4	回来工厂 hui lai gongchang return come factory 'return to the factory'
3. V_m + C_{nd} + *lai* + Loc	4	走进来我们家 zou jin lai women jia walk enter come our house 'walk into our house'
4. V_m + *lai* + Loc	4	跑来carpark pao lai carpark run come carpark 'run to the carpark'
5. V_m + *dao* (to) + Loc + *lai*	3	跑到家里来 pao dao jiali lai run to house come 'run to (and arrive in) the house'

C_d: 去 qu 'go'		
6. C_{nd} + Loc + qu	2	往哪里去 wang nali qu towards where go 'where (do we) go'
7. C_{nd} + qu + Loc	14	回 去 厨房 hui qu chufang return go kitchen 'go back to the kitchen'
8. V_m + C_{nd} + qu + Loc	9	跑 进 去 里面 pao jin qu limian run enter go inside 'run inside'
9. V_m + qu + Loc	16	走去哪个小贩中心 zou qu nage xiaofanzhongxin walk go which food centre 'whichever food centre (do I) go to'
10. V_m + dao (to) + Loc + qu	13	吊到那上面去 diao dao na shangmian qu hang to that above go 'hang (something) onto that'

A symmetrical distribution has been observed in the two deictic complements – all structures permitted for 来 *lai* 'come' are also permitted for 去 *qu* 'go' and this gives rise to five unique types of constructions. Out of these five different types, the following two are also permitted in MC:

(2) C_{nd} + Loc + C_d
(3) V_m + dao (to) + Loc + C_d

However, it seems that these are not preferred constructions in SC, as seen from the relatively higher usage of each of the other three types of constructions, namely "V_m + C_d + Loc", "V_m + C_{nd} + C_d + Loc" and "Cnd + C_d + Loc". This suggests that SC is rather accepting of constructions. This acceptance and flexibility is even more apparent when compared to other Chinese dialects, as given by Table 2.

It is also observed that there is a significant usage of the construction 去到 *qu dao* 'go to and arrive at', a construction that is quite uncommon in MC [7], but used so frequently in SC that it has extended beyond spatial directional constructions, such as 去到什么样的程度 *qu dao shenme yang de chengdu* 'to what extent'. It has been pointed out that the use of 到 *dao* 'to' to introduce the locative object is more common than the use of non-deictic directional complements [8] and faces less restrictions [5]. Though this observation is not part paper's focus, it might suggest that there might be a difference in the lexical items, 来 *lai* 'come' and 去 *qu* 'go', and this may also be one of the reasons behind the differences in the types of permitted word orders.

Table 2. Comparison of Word Orders across dialects and varieties. The comparison is made by putting SC and MC against the ones as summarised by Yiu [5].

	Wu	MC	SC	Fuqing	Hui'an	Chao'an	Cantonese
Simple directional complements: Self-agentive motion events							
$V_m + C_d + Loc$	*	*	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
$V_m + to + Loc + C_d$	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	*	*
Compound directional complements: Self-agentive motion events							
$V_m + C_{nd} + Loc + C_d$	?	✓	✓	*	*	*	*
$V_m + C_{nd} + C_d + Loc$	*	*	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
$C_{nd} + C_d + Loc$	-	*	✓	-	-	-	-
$C_{nd} + Loc + C_d$	-	✓	✓	-	-	-	-

Note: A '-' indicates that this construction is not identified in Yiu's paper [5].

4   Discussion

From the above comparisons, there are two significant observations. First, the word orders exhibited in SC is shown to be the most accommodating out of the seven dialects and varieties of Chinese compared, having permitted all of the word orders being compared. The most significant difference between SC and MC is that the deictic complement in SC can be followed by the locative object, similar to those of Cantonese and the Min dialects while this construction is not permitted in MC. Examples of this construction in the various dialects and varieties can be found in (4). Though it is unclear from the comparison if dialects also allow for the construction of "$C_{nd} + C_d + Loc$", it should be noted that this is a construction rarely found in MC.

(4)   Construction: $V + C_{nd} + C_d + Loc$

a. Cantonese [5]

佢爬咗上去山頂。

Keoi5   paa4   zo2   soeng5 heoi3   saan1   deng2.
s/he   climb   ASP   ascend   go   mountain top
'S/he climbed up to the top of the mountain.'

b. Min (Chao'an) [5]

伊爬起去山頂。

I33   pe?5   khi35   khɯ53   suã33   teŋ53.
s/he   climb   rise   go   mountain top
'S/he climbs up to the top of the mountain.'

c. SC

他们要跑出去外面。

tamen   yao   pao   chu   qu   waimian.
they   want   run   out   go   outside
'They want to run out (of this place).'

Second, it is observed that the manner verb can form a complete and grammatical construction with the deictic complement and locative object in SC, while this is also not permitted in MC. Again, this is similar to those in Cantonese and Min dialects, such as those seen in (5).

(5)   Construction: V + C_d + Loc
  a. Cantonese [5]
        行嚟学校
        haang4   lai4   hok6haau6
        walk   come   school
        'to walk to school'
  b. Min (Chao'an) [5]
        走来学校
        tsau35   lai213   hak2hau35
        run   come   school
        'to run to school'
  c. SC
        跑来carpark
        pao   lai   carpark
        run   come   carpark
        'run to the carpark'

This makes the classification of the typology of SC rather challenging. On the one hand, it is a variety of modern Mandarin Chinese, and shares many typological features with other varieties such as Mainland China Mandarin Chinese. On the other hand, due to the influence by Chinese dialects, SC has displayed properties of these dialects, and has even been shown to exhibit preference to these properties over those of modern Mandarin Chinese. While Yiu classified the dialects into strong and weak VO dialects depending on whether or not the locative object can come after the deictic complement, the present study thinks that SC cannot be considered as either (at least in terms of the expression of self-agentive motion events). This means that there should be a more narrowly defined method of representing the various dialects and varieties of Chinese. Hence, we suggest the continuum in (6) as a means to better reflect the differences between the various dialects and varieties when considering the word orders in self-agentive motion events.

(6)   MC→ SC, Wu → Fuqing, Hui'an → Chao'an, Cantonese

The arrangement of Chinese dialects appears to be consistent with Yiu's discussions when speaking of the relation between the geographical locations of these dialects in Mainland China and the number of northern features the dialects exhibits [5]. Wu, being the closest to the geographical location of MC in the North, is typologically closer to MC in terms of the expression of agentive motion events, while Chao'an and Cantonese are the furthest away, being situated in the southern parts of China, would be a lot less similar in this respect. In the establishment of this continuum, Fuqing and Hui'an has been classified separately from Chao'an as the former two

dialects differs slightly from Cantonese – Fuqing and Hui'an do not permit the construction "V_m + to + Loc + C_d", unlike Cantonese and Chao'an.

In the case of SC, it exists in between the MC and most of the other southern dialects (less Wu, which is grouped together with SC), given that it exhibits features from both sides of the continuum. The reason why Wu has been grouped together with SC is that Wu has exhibited properties more similar to MC than to other dialects, such as the ungrammaticality of the construction "V_m + C_d + Loc". However, Wu still maintains some differences, such as in the construction "V_m + C_{nd} + Loc + C_d", where the grammaticality is still circumstantial despite the heavy influence of MC on Wu.

5   Conclusion

In conclusion, in terms of self-agentive motion constructions, SC lies between MC and most of the southern dialects (Min and Yue), and exhibits properties from both extremes. Language contact has been observed to play a part in the formation of SC and dialects, such as Min and Yue, has influenced SC in its syntactical rules. A more specific classification, as compared to Yiu [5], has been suggested by the present paper, to account for the slight degree of variations between each dialect and variety of Chinese – such a classification would better reflect the relations of the different dialects and their differences.

We suggest that further studies in expressions of agentive motion events in these dialects and varieties of Chinese should be undertaken to address current gaps and gain a clearer picture of the exact strength of SC in relation to MC and other Chinese dialects. The usage of 到 *dao* 'to' should also be explored, as there seems to be varying usage of this preposition in motion event constructions [5], [8]. Such a study may help refine current notions about the positions of dialects and varieties of Chinese in the typology continuum on a larger scale and aid in the understanding of the Chinese languages as a whole.

Acknowledgment

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