A Corpus-Based Study of Adverbial Clauses in Mandarin Chinese Conversations:
A Preliminary Analysis

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Abstract

In conversation, adverbial clause subordination is most commonly achieved through temporal, conditional, concessive, and causal conjunctions, such as *dang* ('when'), *ruguo*('if'), *suiran* ('although'), *yinwei* ('because'), etc. in Mandarin Chinese. This study aims at exploring adverbial clauses in spoken Mandarin conversations on the basis of quantitative analysis. There were two-hour conversation database in this research. The adverbial clauses in our database were divided into (a) preposed clauses to their modified material with continuing intonation, (b) postposed clauses to their modified material with continuing intonation, and (c) postposed clauses to their modified material with final intonation (rising question intonation or final falling intonation). After an inspection of our data, we find that the temporal, conditional, and concessive clauses favor to occur before their modified material; and the causal ones, after their associated material. Our data show that causal clauses are fundamentally different from temporal, conditional, and concessive ones in their use.

1. Introduction

The study of the different types of adverbial clauses in the past has been done almost exclusively by logicians, who analyzed the relationship between the adverbial clause and the main clause in terms of truth value, material implication, presupposition, etc. This solely semantic analysis did not allow for notions such as organization and content of the discourse, communicative intent or pragmatic motivations of speaker and hearer. Since these notions did not become the concern of linguistics until recently, we still do not have a clear understanding of the behavior of the different types of adverbial clauses in discourse.

One of the most recent discourse analysis of different types of adverbial clauses is Chafe's ([2]). This study analyzes the adverbial clauses in spoken and written texts and suggests that adverbial clauses vary their functions with respect to two factors. One has to do with their position in relation to the main clause; the other has to do with how tightly the adverbial clause is bound to its main clause. Another work concerning this type of phenomenon is Ford's study on the distribution of adverbial clauses in American English conversations ([7]). She aims at defining the distribution of adverbial clauses in discourse. Especially her study analyzes the interactional factors that determine whether an adverbial clause will be placed before or after its main clause and concludes that preposed and postposed clauses with different intonation are performing different functions in discourse.

The above mentioned two studies offered illuminating insights into the behavior of different types of adverbial clauses. Following their models, this study is an attempt to investigate adverbial clauses in spoken Mandarin conversations on the basis of quantitative analysis.

2. Data and Methods

My corpus contains eleven naturally occurring face-to-face, two party, and multi-party conversations, totaling 123:43 minutes. They were taped via audio cassette and transcribed into intonation units (for details, see [5]). Clauses ending with a fall intonation were marked with a period. Short pauses between words not extending beyond .6 seconds were separated by two or three dots, and longer pauses were timed and indicated in parentheses in the transcript. Question marks indicated clause final rising intonation and brackets were used for overlapping between interlocuters. The markers introducing temporal, conditional, concessive, and causal clauses found in my data with their English counterparts were listed in Table 1:

Table 1. *Adverbial connectors found in the corpus*

Temporal	*dang ..., ... de shihou,*	'when'
	... zhiqian, ... yiqian,	'before'
	... zhihou, ... yihou,	'after'
	zicong ...,	'since'
	nashihou ...,	'at that time'
	yi ...,	'no sooner than'
Conditional	*ruguo ..., jiaru ..., ... de hua,*	'if'

	chufei ...,	'unless'
Concessive	*suiran ..., zongshi ...,*	'although'
	jishi ...,	'even though'
	buguan ...,	'despite'
Causal	*yinwei ..., youyu ...,*	'because'

The adverbial clauses in my database were also classified into three primary types, according to Ford's classification:

A. Initial Adverbial Clauses

(1) S: .. ta   natian   zhongyu you yi ge shijian, _
      3SG that day finally   have a CL time
    .. ta-   ta   keyi   yizhi   shui.\
      3SG 3SG can   all the time sleep
    .. shuo <Q wo   hao   xing Q> --
      say   1SG   very lucky
    .. shuo <Q wo   jintian hao   xingfu oh Q> .\
      say   1SG   today   very   lucky PRT
    @@
    ... shuijiao shihou,_
        sleeping while
    .. wo dou   buhui   chao ta.\
      I always will-not   disturb her   (C&S)
    "On that day, she, finally, had a period of long time to sleep.   She said
    'today I'm so lucky!' While she is sleeping, I will not disturb her."

B. Final Adverbial Clauses Following Continuing Intonation

(2) F: ... wo   shi   juede, _
      I   COP   feel
    .. zhege chashui   keneng   haishi=, _
      this   tea water probably   still
    .. yinwei, _
      because
    .. zhege yao   shao,_
      this   need   boiling
    .. yao   pao, _
      need   infusing
    .. yao   nage   ya, _
      need   that   PRT
    .. meitian   yiding   yao nong de shiqing ah.\   (F&M)
      everyday certainly must do DE   job   PRT
    "I think that making tea is still (to be included in this job), because it
    needs boiling, infusing, and the like.   It's a routine."

C. Final Adverbial Clauses Following Ending Intonation

(3) S: .. wo xiang, _
      I   think
    .. qishi   ta   ziji   bushi hen   xiang dao   bianyibu   qu.\
      actually she herself NEG very want PREP editing and translation section
    .. ruguo, _
      if
    .. yi   wo dui   tade   liaojie.\   (C&S)
      according to 1SG toward her understanding
    "I think that she actually doesn't want to work in the compilation and
    translation section, according to my understanding to her."

3. Findings and Results

There were 272 adverbial clauses in total: 151 initial adverbial clauses, making up 55% of

the adverbial clauses, and 96 final ones, making up 32%, as shown in Table 2.

Table 2. *Distribution of adverbial clauses by position and type in the corpus*

position \ type	Temporal	Conditional	Concessive	Causal	Totals
Initial	65 (84.4%)	50 (82%)	9 (81.8%)	27 (22%)	151 (55%)
Final	11 (14.3%)	4 (6.6%)	1 (9.1%)	80 (65%)	96 (32%)
Fragment	1 (1.3%)	7 (11.5%)	1 (9.1%)	16 (13%)	25 (13%)
Totals	77 (100%)	61 (100%)	11 (100%)	123 (100%)	272 (100%)

Of the initial adverbial clauses, 65 were temporal, 50 were conditional, 9 were concessive, and 27 were causal. Of the final adverbial clauses, 11 were temporal, 4 were conditional, 1 was concessive, and 80 were causal. Adverbial clauses without main clauses were primarily causal (N=13). This table also displays that there were few concessive clauses in my data. In addition, we can find that the adverbial clauses in our data appeared both before and after their linked clauses. However, among the clauses in question, temporal, conditional and concessive clauses preferred to occur before the material they modify, all accounting more than 80% of their cases respectively. By contrast, causal clauses tended to occur after the material they modify (65%).

All of the initial adverbial clauses ended in continuing intonation contours. These cases involved intonational as well as grammatical signals of more-to-come. Dissimilar to initial adverbial clauses in the corpus, which always end in continuing intonation, when adverbial clauses appear after their associated modified material, they may be connected to that material across continuing or ending intonation. This distinction between continuing and final intonation reflects speakers' decisions to signal that an utterance is not yet completed (continuing intonation), or that an utterance is possibly complete (final intonation). Since our final causal clauses had a large portion, we calculated the final adverbial clauses appearing in a continuing or ending intonation, as in Table 3.

Table 3. *Distribution of final adverbial clauses by intonation and type in the corpus*

Intonation	Temporal	Conditional	Concessive	Causal	Totals
Continuing	0	0	0	20 (25%)	20 (21%)
Ending	11	4	1	60 (75%)	76 (79%)
Totals	0	4	1	80 (100%)	96 (100%)

This table shows that there were few temporals, conditionals and concessives occurring after their linked clauses, but there was a majority of final causal adverbials following ending intonation. Twenty out of eighty, or 25%, of the final causals followed continuing intonation. Sixty out of eighty, or 75%, of the final causals followed ending intonation.

4. Discussion

In our data we find that temporal clauses are used to introduce time frames and encode shifts in time: shifts from a general or non-specific time to a more specific time reference, from one specific time to another, from one generic time to another, or from specific to generic. For example, in (1) the speaker shifts from a specific time to a generic time reference. While, conditional clauses are used to present options that follow from points reached in prior discourse (as in (4)), or to present contrasts to material presented in prior talk (manifested in (5), where the conditional cooccurred with the contrast marker *keshi* 'but').

    (4) G1: .. jiushi lai zhebian, _
            that is come here
    --> .. ruguo, _
            if
         .. ni yuanyi dehua, _
         2SG willing CONJ
         .. women keyi pei   ni yiqi   changge, _
         1PL   can accompany 2SG together sing
         .. ranhou women keyi yiqi   kan luyingdai, _
         then 2PL   can together watch video tapes

.. yiqi   ting   luyindai, _
   together listen   tapes
.. you   fenxiang de   shijian.\   (A&H)
   have sharing   DE   time
"To him/her who comes here, if you're willing, we can accompany you to sing songs together, to see video tapes together, or to listen to tapes to-gather."

(5) S: .. yi   Lujun de   gexing   ta ye bu   keneng   qu tao.\
        according to   Lujun DE character   3SG also NEG possible to escapes
    .. keshi, _
      but
--> .. ruguo, _
     if
    .. ni   jiao   ta   buyao jieyi, _
      2SG   ask 3SG NEG   mind
    .. na you   hen   nan.\   (C&S)
      that also very difficult
    "It's impossible for Lujun to escape (the situation). But, if you persuade her never to mind it, that will be difficult, too."

In all these cases, initial adverbial clauses form pivotal points in the development of talk and present explicit background for material that follows.

On the contrary, the adverbial clauses appearing after their associated clause only complete a unit of information without creating discourse-level links or shifts. When placed after a main clause but in continuing intonation, an adverbial clause presents new information elaborating the associated clause instead of providing a pivotal frame for what follows, as shown in (2). Different from the former, of which continuing intonation signals that there is more to come and the the present utterance is still in progress, the adverbial clauses that follow ending intonation, though displayed through conjunctions to be extensions of previous units, also stand for separate units in their own right ([7]:102), e.g.:

(6) L: .. na   pingchang nimen shibushi   chule   liaotian ah, _
        than   often   2PL   A-not-A   besides chatting PRT
    .. huoshi yanjiu gongke   zhiwai   ho, _
      or   study assignments in addition PRT
    .. shibushi haiyou ^changchangge.\
      A-non-A still   singing songs
--> ...yinwei,_
     because
    .. wo [kan],_
      I   see
  C1:   [^Chang]chang.\
       very often
  L: (0) haiyou   jita,_.
      and have guitar
   ..changchang shibushi?/
    often   A-not-A
  C1:..mm.\   (A&H)
    mm
  L: 'In addition to chatting and studying, do you sing songs very often? Because I [find] there's a guitar?'
  C1:   '[Very often.]'
  L: 'Very often, right?'
  C1:'Yeah.'

(7) C: .. ta   cong Meiguo huilai,_
    she from America come back
    ..<E counseling E>fangmian,_
    counseling   aspect
    ..ta   keyi   kaishi yung.\
    she can   begin apply

-->   ..yinwei,_
    because
    ..ta   benlai   chuguo   jiushi   nian   zhege.\   (C&S)
    she originally go abroad in order to study this

  C: 'Since she came back from U.S.. She wanted to take in counseling. Because
    it's her original purpose to study abroad.'

In example like these it would seem that the speaker had at first decided to end his/her statement after the clause.   Having produced a clause-final falling pitch at that point, he/she decided it would be better to add some account or elaboration as a separate comment.   As has been seen in the above, the most striking pattern that emerges from this last grouping is that causal clauses appear as separated, intonationally disconnected units much more often than do temporals, conditonals, and concessives.   In a word, these final causal clauses appear to serve a quite different function, being more in the nature of coordinated clauses, which comment on a cause, relevant to the preceding clause.

5. Conclusion

To conclude, in Chinese conversation, the prototypical use of a temporal, conditional or concessive clause is to prepose it before the material they link in conversation. Discourse-structuring functions are realized through initial adverbial clauses to introduce and form the background for associated modified material.   On the other hand, causal clauses are well-situated for appearing after the proposition, to be expanded upon, and for introducing background elaboration.

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