
RESEARCH ARTICLE

Mandarin Chinese Emphatic Operator in Denial: A Functional Discourse Grammar Analysis

Yassine Khaya

Ibn Tofail University, English Department, Kenitra Morocco

Corresponding Author: Yassine Khaya, **E-mail:** khaya.yassine@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

This study explores the unique linguistic mechanisms of Mandarin Chinese, a tonal language, in expressing illocutionary acts, specifically focusing on the act of denial. Central to our investigation is the specialized use of the particle "并" (bīng), which is posited to add emphasis in negation contexts, akin to the emphatic role of words like "actually" or "in fact" in English. Through the lens of Functional Discourse Grammar (FDG), this research examines how Mandarin Chinese leverages lexical items, such as "并" (bīng), over prosodic features like pitch and tone, to convey pragmatic emphasis. Our findings indicate that "并" (bīng) functions almost exclusively to strengthen denial, particularly in formal or written Mandarin, without carrying significant semantic content on its own. This specialized use underscores the adaptive strategies of tonal languages in maintaining clear lexical distinction while expressing nuanced illocutionary force. Additionally, the study highlights the limited pitch range available for intonation in tonal languages due to the necessity of distinguishing lexical tones, which further motivates the reliance on lexical means for expressing emphasis. This study contributes to the broader understanding of linguistic expression in tonal versus non-tonal languages and opens avenues for further research into the complex dynamics of language pragmatics.

KEYWORDS

Mandarin Chinese, Illocutionary acts, Negation emphasis, Functional Discourse Grammar (FDG), Tonal languages, Phonology and semantics

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1. Introduction

This paper investigates the distinctive use of the particle "并" (bīng) to emphasize denial in Mandarin Chinese, a tonal language where prosodic features and lexical items intertwine to express illocutionary acts. Unlike non-tonal languages, where intonation and stress predominantly convey pragmatic meanings, Mandarin Chinese potentially employs lexical strategies, such as specialized particles, for similar purposes. Through the analytical lens of Functional Discourse Grammar (Hence forth FDG), this study examines how "并" (bīng) functions within Mandarin's tonal system to emphasize negation, contributing to our understanding of linguistic strategies across tonal and non-tonal languages.

Structured into several key sections, the paper begins with a literature review on tonal languages and their phonemic features, followed by an exploration of negation in Mandarin and an introduction to FDG. The methodology outlines the hypothesis and objectives, framing the subsequent analysis of constructed examples of denial using "并" (bīng). The findings section discusses how this particle is used in formal contexts to add emphasis, contrasting with stress and pitch functions in non-tonal languages. The conclusion synthesises these insights, underscoring the significance of lexical particles in Mandarin's expression of illocutionary acts, while a final section on limitations suggests avenues for future research, including the need for corpus analysis and examination of spoken language.

2. Literature Review

2.1. A Background in Tonal Languages

In tonal languages, tone functions as a primary phonemic feature crucial for distinguishing between lexical or grammatical meanings, a characteristic distinct from non-tonal languages where tone or pitch variations are typically employed for expressing emotional or pragmatic content (Yip, 2002). These languages assign different pitches or pitch contours as inherent parts of words. For instance Duanmu (2007) states that, in Mandarin Chinese, the word "ma" can have different meanings based on its tone: mother [mā] (妈) with a high-level tone, or horse [mǎ] (马) with a falling-rising tone. Tonal languages also use tone to signal grammatical changes. In Yoruba, for example, variations in tone can indicate different tenses, aspects, or moods, where a change in tone alters the sentence's meaning rather than just a single word (Akinlabi & Liberman, 2001).

The interaction of tones within a sentence is pivotal in tonal languages. For example, the tone of a word changes in response to the tones of adjacent words. A popular case in point is found in Mandarin Chinese, where the word for 'not' [bù] (不) alters its tone from a falling tone to a high level tone when followed by another word with a falling tone, as the transformational rule below exhibits.

- falling → rising / __ falling

Contrasting with tonal languages, non-tonal languages like English primarily use stress and intonation patterns to convey pragmatic meanings, such as emphasis, emotion, or forming questions (Yip, 2002). For example, the English sentence "He is going?" becomes a question by simply altering the intonation pattern, without modifying lexical items or particles.

Understanding these nuances is essential for exploring how tonal languages might employ lexical items and particles differently for illocutionary purposes, compared to non-tonal languages. As A The tonal structure in these languages offers a unique framework where meaning expression is intricately intertwined with tonal pronunciation of words.

2.1.1 Pitch and Stress in Tonal Languages

Xu (1999) states that the primary role of pitch in tonal languages is to distinguish lexical meanings, but it also contributes to syntactic and pragmatic information conveyance, while stress plays a less central but still meaningful role.

Stress in tonal languages, often aligning with high or prominent tones, is used differently compared to non-tonal languages. For example, in Yoruba, stress typically falls on the high tone and can be employed to emphasize the focus of a sentence (Hyman & VanBik, 2004).

2.2. Negation in Mandarin Chinese

Negation in Mandarin Chinese is expressed in various ways, depending on the context, the aspect of the action, and the subtle illocutionary or pragmatic nuances involved. There many ways negation can be expressed in Mandarin Chinese. Below, this paper contents itself to presenting only the type of negation that would be later used in the analysis section.

- 没/没有 (méi/méiyǒu): This negator is used to indicate the absence of something or to negate past actions. For example, "我没去" (wǒ méi qù) means "I didn't go." 没有 can also mean not having something, as in "我没有钱" (wǒ méiyǒu qián) meaning "I don't have money."

It is worth noting that the use of negation in Mandarin is closely tied to the context and the speaker's intentions, and understanding these nuances is crucial for effective communication. The choice of negator can change the meaning and tone of a sentence significantly, reflecting the speaker's attitude, politeness, emphasis, and expectations.

2.3. Functional Discourse Grammar: Theoretical Background

FDG, originated from the work of Simon C. Dik during the 1970s. This theory views the structure of language from a typological perspective, prioritizing Discourse Acts as the central element of analysis. It evolved from extensive evaluations of its predecessor, Functional Grammar (FG), leading to its current form as FDG. The most recent iteration of the theory includes a Pragmatic/Interpersonal representation module, making FDG a part of a broader theory that covers verbal interaction, encompassing conceptual, contextual, and output components. What follows is a very brief overview (Hengeveld & Mackenzie, 2008) of the parts most crucial to the investigation at hand.

2.3.1. Interpersonal Level

The Interpersonal Level (IL) is the cornerstone for understanding communicative acts and intentions. It encompasses strategic decisions made by speakers to engage with their audience and convey meaning effectively within discourse contexts. It is

articulated through constructs such as the Move and Discourse Act, which serve as mechanisms for organizing communication and indicating the speaker's intent.

2.3.2. Representational Level

The Representational Level (RL) emerges as a pivotal framework for dissecting semantics, where the essence and content of linguistic expressions are organized. This level distinguishes itself by delving into the inherent meaning of words and constructions, meticulously abstracting from pragmatic applications to focus on semantic structure and coherence. Within this semantic domain, FDG delineates various classes—ranging from Propositional Content and Episodes to States-of-Affairs, Configurational and Lexical Properties, Individuals, and extending to Locations, Times, Manners, Reasons, and Quantities—each contributing uniquely to the construction and conveyance of coherent messages.

3. Methodology

3.1. Hypothesis:

In Chinese Mandarin, the illocution of Denial can be emphasised by using a specialized particle rather than pitch and tone.

3.2. Research Questions

The primary question guiding this study is:

1. Does being a tonal language influence Mandarin Chinese's reliance on lexical items, as opposed to prosodic features, to express illocutionary acts?"

3.3. Objectives:

1. To explore the use of the particle 并 (bìng) in Mandarin Chinese, particularly in the context of emphasizing negation.
2. To analyze these instances through the lens of FDG, focusing on how FDG accounts for and represents illocutionary acts in a tonal language context.
3. To contribute to the broader understanding of how tonal languages like Mandarin Chinese may differ from non-tonal languages in their strategies for expressing illocutions.

3.4. Theoretical Framework:

This study is anchored in the principles of FDG, a comprehensive and integrated theory developed for the understanding of the structure of language and its function in discourse. FDG's multi-layered approach to grammar provides an ideal framework for analyzing the interplay between lexical choice and prosodic features in the expression of illocutions.

3.5. Rationale for Using FDG

In the context of this study, FDG's comprehensive framework is instrumental for dissecting and understanding how Mandarin Chinese, as a tonal language, utilizes lexical items for modifying illocutionary acts. The theory's layered approach to grammar, which separates pragmatic function from grammatical form, allows for a nuanced analysis. This separation is crucial for understanding how lexical choices are made in Mandarin to achieve specific communicative purposes, particularly in the absence or alteration of prosodic features that are typically used in non-tonal languages.

3.6. Constructed Analysis Example

The analysis will peruse a set of constructed data, which is presented below:

The utterances that are analysed are derived from a conversation carried out between speaker A and B. The context is that of a Denial illocution, as it can be seen below:

A: 你踢了球。(Nǐ tī le qiú)

A: You kicked the ball.

In this case, speaker A makes the claim that B has performed an action. Speaker B can refute this claim using the utterance below:

B: 我没有踢球。(Wǒ méiyǒu tī qiú)

B: I did not kick the ball.

However, if speaker B wants to emphasize and stress on the fact that he or she did not kick the ball, the speaker will resort to using the particle 并 (bìng).

B: 我并没有踢球。(Wǒ bìng méiyǒu tī qiú.)

B: I did NOT kick the ball.

4. Results and Discussion

This section analysis the use of the Denial and Defiance illocutions in Mandarin Chinese using the FDG Framework. As stated earlier, only the Interpersonal Level and Representational level will be accounted for.

FDG Analysis of Denial

B : 我并没有踢球。(wǒ bìng méiyǒu tī qiú.)

B : I did NOT kick the ball.

IL: (M_i: [(A_i: [(emph F_i: DEN(F_i))(P_A)(P_S) (C_i: [(T_i) (R_i [+S, -A](R_i)) (+id R_e)](C_i))](A_i)) (M_i))

RL: (p_i: [(Neg ep_i: [(past e_i: (f_m: [(f_i: tī (f_i)) (1x_i))_A (1x_e: qiú (x_e))_U (f_m))](e_e) (e_i)](p_i))

ML: (Le₁: [(Cl₁: [(Np₁: wǒ (Np₁))_{Subj} (Gw₁: bìng: (Gw₁)) (Gw₂: méiyǒu: (Gw₂)) (Vp₁: tī(Vp₁)) (Np₂: qiú (Np₂))_{Obj} (Cl₁)) (Le₁))

The emphatic operator on the Denial illocution triggers the insertion of the lexical particle 并 (bìng) in the encoding phase at the Morphosyntactic level.

In Mandarin Chinese, "并" (bìng) is used to add emphasis to a Denial, particularly in formal or written contexts. This usage is somewhat akin in function to the English emphasis "actually" or "in fact" in Denied sentences. However, while expressions like "actually" or "in fact" are meaningful items that belong to the lexicon and can convey meaning as a standalone word, "并" (bìng) seems to be almost specialized in the function of emphasising Denial, and lacks semantic content when it's used by itself¹. Hence, the analysis explained that it is the operator that triggers its use, which is later reflected into the Morphosyntactic Level.

While stress in tonal languages may align with specific tones or be used for emphasis, its role is generally less central than in non-tonal languages. This aspect highlights the different strategies employed by tonal languages to convey emphasis or emotion (Jun, 2005).

The pitch range for intonation in tonal languages is typically more limited than in non-tonal languages, a restriction arising from the need to distinguish lexical tones. Research in this area explores how this limitation influences the expression of illocutionary force (Hyman, 2006). Mandarin Chinese opting to use a particle for a pragmatic emphasis is such a case.

5. Conclusion

This study embarked on an exploratory journey to understand the unique ways in which Mandarin Chinese, a tonal language, employs particles to enhance its expression of illocutionary acts, with a particular focus on the act of Denial. The investigation centred on the specialized use of the particle "并" (bìng) to emphasize Denial in Mandarin Chinese, analyzing its function through the lens of FDG and comparing these mechanisms with those of non-tonal languages.

The findings confirm the hypothesis that Mandarin Chinese, potentially, relies more heavily on lexical items, such as the particle "并" (bìng), to emphasize denial rather than prosodic features like pitch and tone. This particle, while almost devoid of semantic content when isolated, gains its functional significance through the interaction with the operator at the IL, marking a specialized emphasis on denial, particularly in formal or written contexts. This mechanism stands in contrast to the role of stress and intonation in non-tonal languages, which often carry the primary burden of emphasising or mitigating an illocutionary force.

Moreover, the study illuminated how the intrinsic properties of tonal languages, such as the need to maintain distinct lexical tones, limit the pitch range available for intonation, thereby influencing the strategies these languages employ to express illocutionary acts. This constraint likely contributes to the preference for lexical means, like the use of "并" (bìng), for pragmatic emphasis in Mandarin Chinese.

In conclusion, this research contributes to the broader understanding of tonal and non-tonal linguistic strategies for expressing illocutions. It underscores the significant role of particles in conveying nuanced illocutionary forces in Mandarin Chinese and highlights the intricate balance between tonal constraints and expressive needs in language use. Through this study, one can gain insight into the adaptability of language in meeting communicative demands.

It is crucial to acknowledge the limitations of this paper, particularly the reliance on constructed examples solely. Such examples, though illustrative, may not fully capture the particle's usage in natural contexts. A corpus analysis could provide more empirical evidence of "并" (bìng)'s actual use in authentic texts and spoken language, offering a more robust validation of the theoretical conclusions presented. Additionally, the focus on written language overlooks the dynamic realm of spoken communication, where prosodic features play a critical role, especially in tonal languages like Mandarin. An examination of spoken language, possibly through spoken language corpora and sociolinguistic interviews, could reveal variations in the use of "并" (bìng) influenced by

¹ The character "并" (bìng) in Mandarin Chinese can have multiple meanings depending on its context. Primarily, it is used to indicate "and" or "together with" when used to link two items or actions. It can also suggest a sense of combination or addition. In some contexts, "并" can be used to indicate "and also" or "in addition to."

conversational context, speaker intent, and the interplay between prosody and lexical emphasis. Expanding the research to include these aspects would not only address the study's limitations but also provide a more comprehensive understanding of illocutionary act expression in Mandarin, aligning with best practices in linguistic research.

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ORCID iD: 0000-0001-7927-1417

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