

When Linguistic Theory Meets Corpus Linguistics: How Are Multiple Adverbs Ordered in Mandarin Chinese?

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Abstract

When a string of adverbs is used in a sentence, there is usually a preferred order between them. This paper systematically examines adverbial strings from seven semantic classes. The goal is to investigate the linear order of adverbs in Mandarin Chinese, with particular reference to Cinque's (1999) proposal that there is a universal hierarchy for adverb ordering. Thirty-three patterns of sequential ordering of adverbs have been found in a corpus of written Chinese. It has been possible to derive a sequential order of adverbial strings: subject > the scope adverb *dou* > speaker-oriented adverb, time adverb > conjunctive adverb, scope adverb > degree adverb > manner adverb > predicate. In most of the clear cases, the ordering restrictions go in the direction predicted by Cinque's hierarchy. Yet there are also some cases which are not easy to conform to the hierarchy. It is shown that the present proposal of a universal hierarchy of adverb ordering seems to be too restrictive to account for the data and the hierarchy appears to be too selective. It is hoped that this paper contributes to the search for a more comprehensive account of sequential ordering of adverbs, at least, in the context of the Chinese language.

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