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THE CATEGORY OF TEMPORALITY IN THE MODERN CHINESE LANGUAGE: LINGUOCULTURAL ASPECT

Abstract

The article analyzes the views of a number of linguists and researchers on the mechanisms of fixation of the basic concepts of the temporal system in Chinese and the classification of individual fragments of the realization of temporal relations in the modern Chinese language. The paper examines the correlated conceptual and grammatical categories of “time” and “temporality” in the context of the Chinese linguistic worldview, with a particular focus on the concepts of cyclic and linear time. The study shows that both approaches to the perception of time impact the structural and semantic features of the Chinese language, reflecting deep cultural ideas about time and its role in people’s lives.

Considerable attention is paid to the linguistic elements that reflect the linear model of time, which is divided into movement along the horizontal and vertical axes. The emergence of contradictions in the perception of time on the horizontal axis caused by the existence of different models of time, emphasizes the need for further research. It is proposed to consider the anthropocentric model of the “front-back” organization of time movement and correlate it with the linear model of movement along the horizontal axis in order to determine the level of representation of each model in the temporal plane of the modern Chinese language using specific linguistic examples.

The analysis demonstrates the need for a fundamental study of the category of temporality in Ukrainian Chinese studies and a clear definition of the means and ways of its implementation. The study emphasizes that temporality in Chinese is a multifaceted grammatical category closely related to cultural and cognitive aspects, the study of which will contribute to a better understanding of not only the Chinese language but also the cultural representations and cognitive processes of native speakers.

Keywords: temporality, time, linear time, cyclical time, grammatical category, linguacultural aspect, the modern Chinese language.

Анотація

У статті проаналізовано погляди дослідників щодо механізмів фіксації китайською мовою базових понять темпоральної системи та класифікації окремих фрагментів реалізації темпоральних відношень у сучасній китайській мові. Розглянуто співвіднесені поняттєві й граматичні категорії “часу” й “темпоральності” в контексті мовної картини світу китайців, зважаючи на концепції циклічного та лінійного часу. Дослідження виявило, що обидва підходи до сприйняття часу впливають на структурні й семантичні особливості китайської мови, відображаючи глибокі культурні уявлення про час і його роль у житті людей. Значну увагу приділено мовним елементам, що відображають лінійну модель часу, яка поділяється на рух по горизонтальній і вертикальній осях. Виникнення протиріч у сприйнятті часу на горизонтальній осі, спричинених наявністю різних моделей часу, підкреслює необхідність подальших досліджень. Запропоновано розглянути антропоцентричну модель “передньозадньої” організації руху часу та співвіднести її з лінійною моделлю руху по горизонтальній осі, щоб на конкретних мовних прикладах визначити рівень представленості кожної моделі в темпоральній площині сучасної китайської мови.

Аналіз засвідчує необхідність фундаментального вивчення категорії темпоральності в українському китаєзнавстві та чіткого визначення засобів і способів її реалізації. Підкреслено, що темпоральність у китайській мові багатогранна, тісно пов’язана з культурними й когнітивними

аспектами граматичною категорією, вивчення якої сприятиме кращому розумінню не лише китайської мови, але й культурних уявлень і когнітивних процесів носіїв мови.

Ключові слова: темпоральність, лінійний час, циклічний час, граматична категорія, лінгвокультурний аспект, сучасна китайська мова.

Introduction. The category of temporality is a fundamental aspect of human communication at all stages of human society. In linguistics, temporality refers to the categories that allow us to express the time of actions, events or states in speech. In the modern Chinese language, temporality is a complex and multilayered temporal system that includes different levels of linguistic means, including grammatical, lexical, etc. The isolating nature of the Chinese language, namely the lack of morphological means, leads to the use of alternative means and ways of the realization of temporal relations. In view of the above, a thorough analysis of the category of temporality in the modern Chinese language, and its linguistic and cultural aspect in particular, is of great importance. Understanding the linguistic worldview of the Chinese people and how they perceive and process the information about time can simplify the perception and learning of the Chinese language, help determine the level of representation of temporal elements in the language and expand the existing fragmented works of researchers, which are characterized by ambiguity of opinions.

Analysis of the latest research and publications. The study of the concept of time and temporal relations has deep philosophical roots. Starting with antiquity, the first philosophers who significantly influenced the understanding of time were Democritus, Plato and Aristotle. Some aspects of the problem of studying the category of time were touched upon by representatives of medieval philosophy – Augustine of Hippo and Thomas Aquinas, philosophers of the Modern and Contemporary periods – Galileo Galilei and Isaac Newton, Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz and John Locke, David Hume and Immanuel Kant, Albert Einstein and Henri Bergson, Vladimir Vernadsky and Bertrand Russell (Bojko et al., 2017).

The recent decades' researches have been characterized by a resurgence of interest in the study of the relationship between space and time, with numerous works focusing on experimental, linguistic and gestural data (Ning Yu, 2012). Yu (2012) emphasizes this trend by referring to the work of such researchers as Bender et al. (2010), Casasanto (2008), Casasanto and Boroditsky (2008), Cooperrider and Núñez (2007, 2009) and others. These studies point to the metaphorical nature of this relationship as a widespread tendency across languages and cultures to conceptualize and express time in terms of space.

The latest scientific research focuses on the study of spatial relations, time concepts, and the structuring of space in different languages, including Chinese. Particular attention is paid to the concepts of spatial and temporal relations in the Chinese grammatical system, as well as to the degree of representation of these categories in the Chinese worldview and the means of the expression of spatial and temporal relations in modern Chinese, in particular. In Chinese studies, such linguists as Liu Shuxiang, Wang Li, Zhao Yuanren, Liu Yuehua, and Huang Shuying have touched upon the topic of temporal relations in their works, trying to find an original approach to classify and describe the grammatical system of the Chinese language (Yabchenko, 2021).

The problem of the implementation of temporal relations in the Chinese linguistic culture and the lack of clear correlation between such concepts as “time” and “temporality” remains controversial. It is worth noting that many studies currently discuss how the category of time is represented in Chinese, which means that this particular area remains

insufficiently analyzed, as there is no precise opinion on the relevant characteristics of this category (Sorokin et al., 2021). This conclusion forms the basis of our further analysis.

The aim of the article is to study the linguistic and cultural aspects of the implementation of the category of temporality in modern Chinese.

The objectives of the article are: 1) to highlight the main theoretical foundations of the study of the category of temporality in modern Chinese; 2) to clarify the essence of the concept of temporality and temporal relations in modern Chinese; 3) to investigate how temporal categories reflect Chinese cultural heritage, traditions and worldview, which will lay the foundation for further research.

The research methods involve the integrated application of general scientific methods (induction, deduction, analysis, synthesis, descriptive method) to assess the extent of exploration into the category of temporality within the modern Chinese language. Additionally, a variety of specific linguistic methods were employed. The structural method facilitated the identification of structural elements that express temporal relationships, while the functional method focused on delineating the primary functions of temporality. Furthermore, the linguocultural method was utilized to examine linguistic elements within the framework of the Chinese linguistic worldview.

A subject-centered frame. Romaniuk (2012) expresses an interesting idea that the categories of thinking (or conceptual categories) are reflected in grammatical categories and to some extent coincide or, on the contrary, differ from them. As an example, she cited the problem of the relationship between the grammatical category of *tense* and the category of real *time*, put forward by Jespersen (2013). The author's opinion is supported by an apt example, and we are also inclined to the position that grammatical *time* is correlated with real time. As Mirchenko (2004) noted, "those conceptual categories that acquire their syntactic or morphological form in the language become grammatical concepts" (ibid., p. 71). The same approach can be applied to the category of temporality.

In linguistics, the term "temporality" has been widely used since the middle of the 20th century, when the concepts of time and temporality became the object of active research in philosophy, semantics and cognitive sciences (Jaszczolt & de Saussure, 2013). At present, it is difficult to determine who was the author of the first definition of "temporality", but this idea has gradually developed within the framework of linguistic research on various linguistic categories related to time, in particular "Language, its nature, development and origin" (Jespersen, 2013 [1922]), "The Relation of Habitual Thought and Behaviour to Language" (Whorf, 1944 [1939]), "Problèmes de linguistique générale" (Benveniste, 1966) and others.

It should be noted that the definition of temporality is approached in different ways. For example, in her study, Plehutsa (2020) provides several interpretations of the concept of "temporality". Firstly, "temporality is the flow of events in time, a temporal characteristic that allows a person to distinguish between time periods and rhythms" (ibid., p.176). In this case, she defines temporality as a conceptual category that helps to understand the mechanisms of nature and human life, and the relationship between humans and the environment. The second interpretation defines temporality as a linguistic concept (grammatical category) and gives the following definition: "Temporality is a functional semantic field that includes grammatical, lexical and combined linguistic means used to express a corresponding semantic category" (ibid., p.176). "Velykyj tlumachnyj slovnyk suchasnoi ukrains'koi movy" gives the following definition: "*temporality*, gram. The category of time is a semantic category that covers all kinds of time meanings" (Busel, 2005, p.1440). At the same time, Romaniuk (2012) proposes to interpret "temporality" as a functional and semantic category that in its linguistic expression covers different types

of relation of certain situations to the moment of speech or other points on the time axis on the basis of signs of simultaneity, precedence or succession. She notes that she defines the category of temporality in this way because this category integrates various means of linguistic expression of time, such as grammatical, syntactic, etc.

As we share the opinions of the authors mentioned above, by comparing such conceptual and grammatical categories as “time” and “temporality”, we aim to find out in which way conceptual categories acquire their syntactic or morphological form in the language and become grammatical concepts.

Different cultures and philosophical traditions have different conceptions of time, including **linear** and **cyclic** time (Whorf, 1956; Lakoff & Johnson, 1980; Lévi-Strauss, 1962). In turn, when studying the category of temporality, linguists also distinguish such types of time as **linear** and **cyclic** time that underlie it. These conceptions of time influence the structural and semantic features of each language, reflecting deep cultural ideas about time and its role in people’s lives. This, in turn, proves the earlier point that mental categories can take on their syntactic or morphological form in language, becoming grammatical concepts.

The psychological structures of the human brain are linked to linear time, while the perception of time is based on the sense of natural cycles. Not being familiar with the Western concept of matter, the Chinese view of the universe is reflected as a consequence of various combinations of primary energy and a belief in the cyclical movement of reality in a circle. Thus, the concept of cyclical time is inherent in Chinese linguistic culture and is clearly evident in cultural practices and language in particular.

In order to fully reveal the linguistic and cultural aspect of the category of temporality in the modern Chinese language, it is first of all necessary to understand the Chinese perception of time. As previously noted, grammatical time is correlated with real time, and our perception of time acquires a grammatical category through language. Chinese psychologist Yang Guoshu (2004) observes that in Chinese culture, time is perceived not as **linear** but as **cyclical**, with neither beginning nor end. This is evidenced by the presence of an agricultural calendar that combines both lunar and solar calendars. Since agriculture had always been the leading activity of the Chinese ethnic group, there was a need to clearly identify the patterns of seasonal weather changes and their impact on crop cultivation and fieldwork, helped by an extensive system of seasons. This was manifested in the division of the year into 24 agricultural seasons (each lasting approximately 15 days). Moreover, each of the four seasons is further divided into 6 seasons.

According to traditional Chinese beliefs, the calendar was perceived as a sacred document and served as one of the symbols of the emperor’s authority. The accuracy of the calendar influenced the subjects’ rhythm lives and also affected the emperor’s reputation, as he was responsible for marking the beginning of each new month and the regulating agricultural activities. The division of the year was achieved by correlating the annual cycle with the opposition of Yin-Yang 阴阳 *yīnyáng*, where the beginning of Yang corresponds to the spring and summer periods, and the beginning of Yin corresponds to autumn and winter.

All major Chinese traditional holidays are celebrated according to the lunar calendar, starting with the arrival of spring (approximately January-February in the Gregorian calendar), thus emphasizing the **cyclical** nature of time: Spring Festival (Chinese New Year) 春节 *chūnjié*, Ancestor’s Day 清明节 *qīngmíngjié*, Dragon Boat Festival 端午节 *duānwǔjié*, Mid-Autumn Festival 中秋节 *zhōngqiūjié*.

The understanding of time as a *continuous* process is clearly evident in the ways and means by which the Chinese describe events, time and the recurrence of phenomena.

We can tentatively identify the following means and ways of implementing the cyclical manifestation of the category of temporality in the modern Chinese language:

- 1) **lexical:** words denoting cyclical concepts: 年 *nián* year, 月 *yuè* month, 日 *rì* day, 周 *zhōu* week, 四季 *sìjì* four seasons, 每年 *měinián* every year.
- 2) **grammatical:** aspectual markers 了 *le*、过 *guo*、着 *zhe*, which can indirectly express the semantics of time, while not being specialized temporal markers.
- 3) **phraseological expressions:** 日复一日 *rìfùyīrì* day after day; 年復一年 *niánfùyīnián* year after year.
- 4) **metaphorical expressions:** 花开花落 *huākāihuāluò* flowers bloom and fall, which symbolizes the natural cycle.

A different opinion is held by Chinese researcher Lan Chun (2000), who, referring to the works of other researchers (Whorf, 1956; Lakoff & Johnson, 1980; Yu, 1998), notes that the Chinese culture is more characterized by a **linear** model of time than a **cyclical** one.

Lan (2000) identifies two variants of time flow through space in the **linear** time model of the Chinese people language worldview. *The first variant* is the flow of time along the *horizontal axis*, *the second* – along the *vertical axis*. Thus, in her opinion, the *horizontal* movement of time is embodied in the coordinates of the TIME concept 前/后 (ahead/behind) and branches into two ways of such a movement.

In the first way, she describes the passage of time as the movement of an object along the *horizontal axis*. In this model, the past is the time that passed by a stationary observer, the present is in the same position as the observer, and the future is moving towards the observer (ibid.). This model can be illustrated as follows (Figure 1).

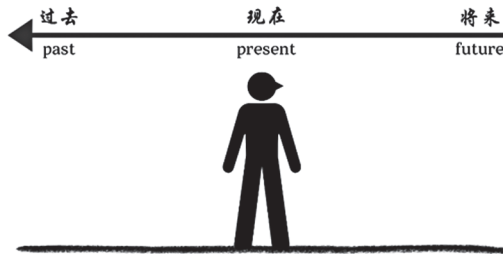


Fig. 1. Case 1: Time as moving object

The second way of *horizontal* time movement is described by Lan (2000) as the motion of the observer over a *horizontal* landscape. In this case, the position of the “times” relative to the observer will differ from the previous version in that the past is the time that has left behind by the moving observer, and the future is the time that is laying ahead of the observer. This model can be illustrated as follows (Figure 2).

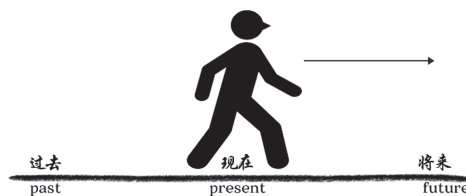


Figure 2 Case 2: Time as stationary landscape

Fig. 2. Time as stationary landscape

However, Lan (2000) emphasizes, that both methods form a coherent picture, since in both cases the future is in front of the observer, the past is behind, and the observer is the point of the reference. The coherence of these two models can be illustrated as follows (Figure 3).

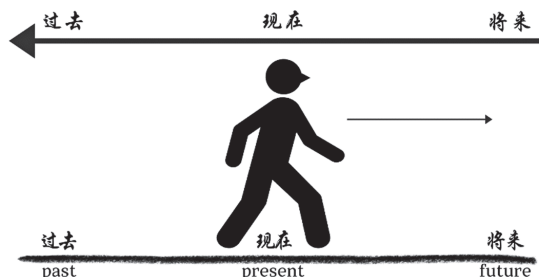


Fig. 3. The future is in front and the past is behind

If we consider the concept of time 前/后 (ahead/behind) on the example of the oppositional pair of words 前天 *qiántiān* *the day before yesterday* and 后天 *hòutiān* *the day after tomorrow*, we can conclude that in this case the movement of *linear* time along the *horizontal* axis should be interpreted as follows: the future is the time that has left behind by the observer, the past is the time that is laying ahead of the observer. However, we come across other opinions on the subject. For example, German linguist Radden (2011) believes that the Chinese view of the past as lying in front of the speaker and the future as behind is wrong. But, as Lan (2000) explains, the seeming contradiction between “*future in front of (observer)/past behind (observer)*” and “*earlier time before (later time)/later time after (earlier time)*” is the result of the adoption of different reference points on the one hand, and the peculiarities of **anthropocentric** “front-back” organization on the other. That is, moving objects are usually given a “front-to-back” orientation, so that the front is in the actual direction of movement.

The second variant of time movement, proposed by Lan (*ibid.*), is the movement of time along the *vertical* axis, embodied in the lexemes 上 (*top*) and 下 (*below*). According to this variant of time movement, the varieties of time are fixed points located along the *vertical* landscape, and the earlier (previous) time is above the coming time, i.e., the future is down and the past is up. The second variant of the movement of **linear** time along the vertical axis can be illustrated as follows (Figure 4).



Fig. 4. The future is below and the past is above

According to Radden (2011), **linear** movement along the *vertical* axis is the most common in Chinese. In addition, the linguistic fixation of previous time intervals, or those that will come later, can occur through the use of the body parts concepts. For example, the “beginning of the month” in Chinese is expressed as 月头 *yuètóu*, where 头 means *head*, *top*, but the “end of the month”, the last days of the month, is denoted as 月底 *yuèdǐ*, where 底 means *lower part*, *end*.

Studying how people perceive the passage of time along *horizontal* and *vertical* axes encourages a deeper analysis of the factors influencing these perceptions. American linguist Boroditsky (2011) identifies the direction of writing as one such factor. Those who read texts from left to right tend to conceptualize time in the same direction. Conversely, cultures with right-to-left writing traditions often perceive time accordingly.

The study of the passage of time along the *horizontal* and *vertical* axes in the minds of peoples encourages a more thorough analysis of the factors that influence such perceptions. The American linguist Boroditsky (ibid.) considers the direction of writing to be one of these factors. People who read texts from left to right tend to “locate” time in the same direction; conversely, people whose traditions require that texts be written from right to left tend to perceive time accordingly.

As noted earlier, Radden (2011) suggests that **linear** time movement along the *vertical* axis is prevalent in Chinese culture, possibly influenced by the traditional *vertical* direction of writing Chinese texts. Additionally, this concept may reflect the Chinese model of time, which is associated with the flow of the “mother river” of the Chinese ethnic group, the Yangtze.

However, as Fuhrman et al. (2011) pointed out, despite the fact that over the past century the direction of writing in mainland China became similar to that of Europe – *horizontal* text from left to right – many scholars believe that the Chinese ethnic group tends to conceptualize the passage of time from top to bottom and right to left, due to the traditional arrangement of Chinese texts.

Researcher Amanda Scott (1989) shares a similar opinion, providing examples of the use of spatial lexical units 上 *shàng*, *upper/previous* and 下 *xià*, *lower/further* in the temporal domain. She suggests that this may be linked to the Chinese writing system, which traditionally involves writing characters *vertically* from top to bottom. In this context, the upper position in the Chinese consciousness is associated by past events, while the lower position denotes future events. For instance: 上周 *shàngzhōu* “*upper week*”/*past week*, 下周 *xiàzhōu* “*lower week*”/*next week* illustrate this concept. Scott (ibid.) observes that such spatial and temporal mappings are influenced by the cultural values of Chinese speakers, a viewpoint that aligns with our own findings. While investigating the category of temporality in the Chinese language, Boroditsky (2001) conducted a series of surveys among the native speakers of the Chinese language regarding the use of spatial metaphors in temporal judgments. After analyzing the survey results, Boroditsky (ibid.) concluded that Chinese tend to favor the *vertical* model of time awareness. In contrast, Taiwanese linguist Jen-Yu Chen (2007) presents an opposing perspective. Referring to Boroditsky’s (ibid.) linguistic research, Chen (2007) acknowledges Boroditsky’s emphasis the tendency of Chinese speakers to use the *vertical* model of **linear** time movement in speech. However, as a native speaker, he questions the definitive nature of this assertion. Chen (ibid.) argues that during verbal expression, native Chinese speakers often employ the *horizontal* model of **linear** time movement to convey temporality, rather than the *vertical* one.

In studying temporal relations in the Chinese language through the lens of spatial and temporal representations, Lan (2000) provides several examples of these representations within the Chinese cultural worldview. Of particular note are social practices that are

influenced by the awareness of one's place among generations on an imaginary genealogical (family) tree.

Yu (1998) presents the following visualization of such a tree: the older generations (the ancestors) are positioned at the top of the tree, and looking down, one can see the younger generations (the descendants), represented at the bottom of the tree. Accordingly, heritage is passed down, but never up. This representation of temporal concepts aligns with the **linear** movement of time along the *vertical* 上/下 axis (*up/down*) and is, in our opinion, realised in the following examples: 上一代 *shàngyīdài* "generation up"/previous generation, 下一代 *xiàyīdài* "generation down"/next generation.

After analyzing the categories of "time" and "temporality", we concluded that these two concepts cannot be identified with each other. *Time* is one of the coordinates of the space-time system, while "temporality" is defined as a characteristic of time that describes the flow of events within this system. These categories take on their syntactic and morphological forms in language and become grammatical categories. The grammatical category of "temporality" encompasses all aspects of time and integrates various means of expressing it. Therefore, this category is pivotal for understanding the space-time system and the ways it is implemented in the language. We explored the perspectives of various authors on models of time that exist in the Chinese consciousness, as well as the ways they are reproduced in the language. Many of these perspectives piqued our interest and received our confirmation for further study. However, there are also opinions that may be questionable and may no longer reflect the contemporary Chinese worldview. This underscores the need for further research, both cognitive and psycholinguistic.

Conclusions and prospects for further research. Summing up the results of the analysis, one can observe the divergence and ambiguity among different views on the mechanism of establishing the fundamental concepts of the temporal system in Chinese and the classification of individual aspects of temporal relations in modern Chinese.

In view of the analysis of the correlated conceptual (mental) categories of "time" and "temporality" in the context of the Chinese worldview, we examine the inherent concepts of time in Chinese culture, specifically the notions of **cyclic** and **linear** time. These concepts influence the structural and semantic features of the Chinese language, reflecting deep cultural ideas about time and its role in people's lives. In turn, both variants are more or less popular in Chinese, and this opens up prospects for further research to determine the level of representation of linguistic units of the respective grammatical categories in accordance with different models of time. In our opinion, a more detailed study of linguistic elements reflecting the linear model, which in turn is divided into time movement along the *horizontal* and *vertical* axes, requires special attention.

Given the contradictions in the perception of time on the *horizontal* axis arising from the existence of different models of time, it would be appropriate in the future to consider the **anthropocentric** model of the "front-back" organization of time movement and correlate it with the **linear** model of time movement along the *horizontal* axis. Additionally, it would be beneficial to compare and determine the representation level of each model in the temporal framework of modern Chinese using specific linguistic means and methods of expression.

The analysis demonstrates the need for a fundamental study of the category of temporality in Ukrainian Chinese studies and a clear definition of the means and ways of its implementation in the modern Chinese language. Our study emphasizes that the category of temporality in Chinese is multifaceted and closely related to cultural and cognitive aspects. Investigating these aspects will contribute to a better understanding of the cultural representations and cognitive processes of native Chinese speakers.

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