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Apprehensive modal marker 别 *bie*^{35} 'don't' in Mandarin Chinese*

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1. Introduction

Since the seminal work by Lichtenberk (1995), cross-linguistic literature has identified *apprehensive expressions* as a valid grammatical category that encodes the modality of undesirable possibility, including works by Verstraete (2005), Schmidtke-Bode (2009: 129-144), Angelo and Schultze-Berndt (2016), Vuillermet (2018), and Smith-Dennis (2021). Evidence has also been presented in a few studies that apprehensive markers may share the identical or similar forms with negative imperatives (or prohibitives) (see e.g., Packendorf and Schalley 2007, Smith-Dennis 2021).

In Mandarin Chinese, the morpheme 别 *bie*^{35} 'don't' is commonly recognized as a negative imperative marker.[1,2] Expression (1) exemplifies this fundamental function of *bie*^{35}. That is, to take a verb phrase and form a prohibitive. This expression is intended to be a request or a command directed to the hearer, which is understood to be the subject of the expression and is omitted.

(1) *Bie*^{35} *da*^{51}*sheng*^{55} *shuo*^{55}*hua*^{51}!
don't be.loud speak
'Don't speak loudly!'

In addition to the canonical use as a negative imperative marker, *bie*^{35} is also found

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[1] The morpheme *bie*^{35} is commonly recognized as a phonological fusion of the negative morpheme *bu*^{51} 'not' and *yao*^{51} 'want, will' (Zhu 1982: 65, 206; Li and Thompson 1989: 458; Jiang 1991).

[2] The lexical category of *bie*^{35}is a topic that has been under debate. It is treated either as an auxiliary verb (Zhu 1982: 64) or as an adverb (Gao 2003; Shao and Luo 2004; Lü 1999: 83). For the purpose of the present paper, we focus on the functions of this morpheme and use the terms *negative imperative marker* and *apprehensive modal marker*.

in the expressions that convey a sense of conjecture made on the part of the speaker that an undesirable event will happen. This use of *bie*^{35} is illustrated by (2), which indicates the speaker's apprehension in the form of a warning.

(2) *Ni*^{214} *bie*^{35} *shuai*^{55} *zhe*^{0}.
you don't fall PFV[3]
'Be careful that you might fall.' (Literally: 'you don't fall [and get hurt].')
(Zhu 1982: 65)

Notably, the imperative use and the apprehensive use of *bie*^{35} can share the identical surface form "*bie*^{35}+ verbal expression". As shown by expression (3), what follows *bie*^{35} is the same string of words, including the verb *jie*^{35}*hun*^{55} 'be married (to)' and the Chinese morpheme *le*^{0}. With the same surface form, the expression can be interpreted in two ways, including a request that the hearer should not do something (prohibitive interpretation a.) and an expression of fear that something unwanted might have happened (apprehensive interpretation b.).

(3) *Bie*^{35} *jie*^{35}*hun*^{55} *le*^{0}.
don't marry LE
a. 'Don't get married.'
b. 'Let her not be married.' (Literally: '[I fear that s/he] might have been married.')
(cited in Shao and Luo 2004: 20; free translation is ours.)

In the previous literature, the apprehensive use of *bie*^{35} receives a brief description in the discussions by Zhu (1982: 65), Lü (1999: 83), and Shao and Luo (2004), whose focus, however, is the negative imperative *bie*^{35}. Unlike them, Gao (2003) explicitly considers *bie*^{35} 'don't' in expression (2) as an independent marker of apprehensional – epistemic modality, following Lichtenberk (1995). Despite their research attention to various linguistic characteristics of the apprehensive *bie*^{35} in Mandarin Chinese, why the two types of *bie*^{35} and their constructions behave in a contrastive way is still worth investigation. In this paper, we show that their array of differences follows from their distinct hierarchical positions in the clause (or sentence) in light of the Layered Structure of the Clause (LSC) envisaged by RRG (e.g., Van Valin and LaPolla 1997, Van Valin 2005).

The remainder of the paper is structured as follows. Section 2 introduces our research question. Section 3 discusses the presence of an actor in the event indicated by the post-*bie*^{35} expression. Section 4 analyzes the structural position of the actor argument with respect to the apprehensive *bie*^{35}. Section 5 discusses the constraints on the time of the event indicated by the post-*bie*^{35} expression. Section 6 concludes the paper.

[3] The abbreviations used in the paper are: CLF: classifier; CM: comparative marker; EXP: experiential aspect; NMLZ: nominalizer; GEN: genitive; PFV: perfect aspect; PL: plural; PROG: progressive aspect; SFP: sentence-final particle; SG: singular; SUB: subordinator.

2. Research question

A few studies have noted that the negative imperative *bie*^{35} and the apprehensive *bie*^{35} mark different types of verbs. For example, taking a lexicalist approach, Shao and Luo (2004) argue that the negative imperative *bie*^{35} is compatible with verbs that are characterized semantically as denoting actions that can be controlled by an actor, while the apprehensive *bie*^{35} is followed by the verbs that denote uncontrollable events. Though their analysis holds when expressions such as (1) and (2) are considered, expression (3) exists as a counterexample to this verb-centered approach, as the two distinct types of *bie*^{35} are followed by the same verb. More examples, such as (11)–(14) in Section 4, show that the apprehensive expressions marked by *bie*^{35} can be followed by transitive clauses, whose verbs indicate controllable actions or events.

Unlike Shao and Luo (2004), our observation of (3) suggests that the constituency of the expression marked by the negative imperative *bie*^{35} and the one marked by the apprehensive *bie*^{35} differs. The former is represented as [*bie*^{35}-verb]-*le*^{0}, while the latter is *bie*^{35}-[verb-*le*^{0}]. Correlating with these distinct structures, the negative imperative *bie*^{35} negates the action denoted by its following verb, and the sentence-final *le*^{0} does not contribute any aspectual meaning; contrastively, the apprehensive *bie*^{35} does not negate an action-denoting verb. Instead, its scope of function seems to be the constituent *jie*^{35}*hun*^{55} *le*^{0} 'have been married' formed by the verb and the perfect aspect marker *le*^{0}, which indicates that the married state has been reached and will continue.

Our observation of this particular example leads to a hypothesis that the negative imperative *bie*^{35} is a core-level operator and the apprehensive *bie*^{35} a clause-level operator within the RRG framework (Van Valin and LaPolla 1997, Van Valin 2005). Precisely, the negative imperative *bie*^{35} is a deontic modal marker, which marks modality of obligation (Palmer 2001: 70), and the apprehensive *bie*^{35} is an epistemic modality marker, which marks propositional modality (Palmer 2001: 24) or the speaker's epistemic commitment to the possibility of a situation (see e.g. Angelo and Schultze-Berndt 2016). In light of the LSC, the deontic modal marker operates at the core level, and the epistemic modal marker operates at the clause level. Related to this hypothesis, the present research question that we need to address is: in what way(s) does the apprehensive *bie*^{35} differ from the negative imperative *bie*^{35}?

In the following sections, we will show that correlating with their distinct positions in the LSC, the apprehensive *bie*^{35} and the negative imperative *bie*^{35} differ from each other in three aspects, including: a. whether the event indicated by the post-*bie*^{35} expression includes an actor (or *necessary presence of an actor*); b. structural position of the actor argument; c. constraints on the time of the event indicated by the post-*bie*^{35} components.

3. Necessary presence of an Actor

There is a contrast between the negative imperative *bie*^{35} expressions and the apprehensive *bie*^{35} expressions in the presence of an actor. We will show in this section that the former operates at a core, whose event description involves an actor argument, whereas the latter operates at a clause, which may or may not have an actor argument.

Zhu (1982: 205-206) states that the subject of Chinese imperatives can only be second-person (singular or plural) or first-person plural (inclusive), suggesting that the subject of imperatives must include at least the hearer. A similar opinion is held by Li and Thompson (1989: Chapter 14). In our case, as a core-level operator, the negative imperative *bie*^{35} has a scope of the core, whose canonical structure is *actor argument-verb(-patient argument)*. In terms of the function, the negative imperatives give instructions, requests, or commands to the hearer that s/he should not do something. That is to say, the prohibitives manifested by negative imperatives marked by *bie*^{35} require an actor, who must act as the speaker requests. Expression (1), repeated in (4) below, is directed to an actor who must stop speaking loudly, as requested by the speaker. This actor is understood to be the hearer *ni*^{214} 'you (singular)' or *ni*^{214}*men*^{35} 'you (plural)', whose presence in the syntax is not obligatory.

(4) *Bie*^{35} *da*^{51}*sheng*^{55} *shuo*^{55}*hua*^{51}*!*
don't be.loud speak
'Don't speak loudly.'

In line with Zhu's (1982) observation, when the actor argument is made explicit in the syntax of the negative imperatives marked by *bie*^{35}, it must be the second-person (singular or plural) or the first-person inclusive.[4] As illustrated by (5), the first-person singular pronoun *wo*^{214} 'I', the third-person pronouns *ta*^{55} 's/he' and *ta*^{55}*men*^{35} 'they', and the third-person nominal phrase *na*^{51}*xie*^{55} *ren*^{35} 'those people' cannot function as the actor of the negative imperative expression marked by *bie*^{35}.

(5) *Ni*^{214}*(men*^{35}*)/*wo*^{214}*/wo*^{214}*men*^{35}*/*ta*^{55}*(men*^{35}*)/*na*^{51}*xie*^{55}*ren*^{35}
2SG(PL)/1SG/1PL/3SG(PL)/those people
bie^{35} *da*^{51}*sheng*^{55} *shuo*^{55}*hua*^{51}*.*
don't be.loud speak

From the above, we see that the negative imperative *bie*^{35} sentences do not diverge from the common types of imperatives in Mandarin Chinese in terms of the presence of an actor and its person. That is, an actor is present in the event or action denoted by *bie*^{35}

[4] Li and Thompson (1989: 458-460) analyze a set of negative imperative *bie*^{35} expressions that seem to take the first- or third- person singular actor, superficially contradicting our observation made here. It should be noted that their analysis is made based on the sentences where negative imperative *bie*^{35} expressions are embedded in a main clause and form a part of a control structure. For example, in one of their examples that we repeat below, the imperative-like expression *wo*^{214} *bie*^{35} *da*^{214} *lan*^{35}*qiu*^{35} 'lit. I should not/don't play basketball.' is embedded in the main clause, whose verb is *ming*^{51}*ling*^{51} 'order'.
(i) **(Ta*^{55} *ming*^{51}*ling*^{51}*) wo*^{214} *bie*^{35} *da*^{214} *lan*^{35}*qiu*^{35}*.*
s/he order I don't play basketball
'S/he ordered me not to play basketball.'

imperatives. The person of the actor argument in *bie*^{35} imperatives is restricted to the second person (singular or plural) or the first-person plural (inclusive). The second-person actor argument is optional in the syntax of the negative imperatives marked by *bie*^{35}.

Behaving differently, the apprehensive marker *bie*^{35} operates at the clause, whose description of an event may not involve any actor. Take expression (2) to illustrate. It involves a potential undergoer *ni*^{214} 'you', who may unfortunately fall over. Other typical examples of this kind include those that indicate the occurrence of natural phenomena, such as *di*^{51}*zhen*^{51} 'earthquake' in (6) and *xia*^{51}*yu*^{214} 'rain' in (7), where no actors are involved (also see Gao 2003: 101).

(6) *Fang*^{35}*zi*^{0} *huang*^{51} *de*^{0} *na*^{51}*me*^{0} *li*^{51}*hai*^{51}*, bie*^{35} *di*^{51}*zhen*^{51} *le*^{0}.
house shake SUB like.that hard don't earthquake SFP
'The house shakes so hard! (I fear that) it is an earthquake.'
(cited in Shao and Luo 2004: 20)

(7) *(Di*^{51}*shang*^{51} *zhe*^{51}*me*^{0} *shi*^{55}*.) Bie*^{35} *gang*^{55} *xia*^{51} *guo*^{51} *yu*^{214} *ba*^{0}*!*
on.the.ground like.this be.wet don't just.now fall EXP rain SFP
'It is so wet on the ground. It might have rained just now.'

In the apprehensive expressions that involve an actor argument, this actor argument can be the first-, second-, or third- person, regardless of singularity or plurality. It can be seen in (8) that the apprehensive *bie*^{35} clause takes a wider range of actors than those taken by the negative imperatives shown in (5).

(8) *Wo*^{214}*(men*^{35}*)/ni*^{214}*(men*^{35}*)/ta*^{55}*(men*^{35}*)/lao*^{214}*nian*^{35}*ren*^{35}
1SG(PL)/2SG(PL)/3SG(PL)/senior.citizen
ke^{214} *bie*^{35} *shuai*^{55} *zhe*^{0}.
just don't fall PFV
'Be careful that I/we/you/s/he/they/the senior citizens might fall.'

Our observations made in the present section are summarized and presented in Table 1. The main difference between them lies in the first-person actor, the third-person actor, and the obligatory presence of an actor in the event semantics.

Person of Actor	Negative imperative *bie*^{35}	Apprehensive *bie*^{35}
1st person	plural (or inclusive) only	√
2nd person	√	√
3rd person	X	√
Necessary presence of an Actor	√	X

Table 1. Distinction in the actor between *bie*^{35} marked negative imperatives and apprehensives

4. Structural position of the Actor argument

We have discussed in earlier sections that the negative imperatives marked by *bie*^{35} require an actor in their semantics, who is deemed to act in the way requested by the speaker. If the actor must be present in the syntax, it must occur before the imperative marker *bie*^{35} and the remainder of the core, forming *[actor-bie*^{35}*...]*$_{CORE}$. As shown by expression (9), constructed based on (1), the second-person actor *ni*^{214}*men*^{35} 'you(plural)' can optionally occur before the negative imperative marker *bie*^{35} if explicitly expressed, and it should not occur after *bie*^{35}.

(9) *(Ni*^{214}*men*^{35}*)* *bie*^{35} *(*ni*^{214}*men*^{35}*)* *da*^{51}*sheng*^{55} *shuo*^{55}*hua*^{51}!
you.PL don't you.PL be.loud speak
'(You) don't speak so loudly.'

As mentioned above, the apprehensive expressions do not require an actor to occur in their semantics or syntax. For example, the sentence-initial pronoun *ni*^{214} 'you' in expression (2) is a potential undergoer that may be involved in the event of falling over (and getting hurt). If an event-related argument must be added to expression (3) with interpretation b, the role of the argument is better described as an undergoer as well, whose state has changed into that of being married. By uttering expression (10), constructed based on (3), the speaker estimates the marital situation of *na*^{51} *ge*^{51} *nü*^{214}*sheng*^{55} 'that girl', which must occur before the apprehensive *bie*^{35}. The speaker's estimation of the situation is reinforced by the sentence-final particle *ba*^{0}.

(10) *Na*^{53} *ge*^{51} *nü*^{214}*sheng*^{55} *bie*^{35} *jie*^{35}*hun*^{55} *le*^{0} *(ba*^{0}*)!*
that CLF girl don't get.married PFV SFP
'Let that girl not be married!'

A few more examples, such as (11) – (14), show that when present in the semantics and the syntax of the apprehensive expressions, the actors of the related event, including *ni*^{214} 'you', *ta*^{55} 'he', and *pai*^{51}*chu*^{55}*suo*^{214} 'police station', can follow the apprehensive marker *bie*^{35} after its presence in the sentence.

(11) *Bie*^{35} *dao*^{51} *lao*^{214} *le*^{0}
don't arrive be.old PFV
ni214 cai^{35} *fa*^{55}*xian*^{51} *zi*^{51}*ji yi*^{55}*wu*^{35}*suo*^{214}*you*^{214}*.*
you just realize self have.nothing
'(I fear that) you won't realize that you have nothing until too old.'

(12) *Kan*^{55} *hao*^{214} *ni*^{214}*men*^{35} *nan*^{35}*peng*^{35}*you*^{214} *de*^{0} *qian*^{35}*bao*^{55}*,*
watch be.good you.PL boyfriend GEN wallet
bie^{35} *ta*^{55} *you*^{51} *ba*^{214}*chi*^{35}*bu*^{35}*zhu*^{51} *mai*^{214} *xin*^{55} *tou*^{35}*kui*^{55}*.*
don't he again out.of.control buy new helmet'
'Mind your boyfriend's wallet. He might go out of control and buy a new helmet.'

(13) *Ni*^{214} *hai*^{35}*shi*^{51} *shen*^{51}*zhong* ^{51} *dian*^{214},
you might.as.well be.careful a.little
bie^{35} *ta*^{55} *you*^{51} *yu*^{51}*dao*^{51} *bi*^{214} *ni*^{214} *hao*^{214} *de*^{0},
don't he again meet CM you be.good NMLZ
bu^{35} *yao*^{51} *ni*^{214} *le*^{0}.
will.not want you SFP
'You'd better be careful. He might meet someone better than you again and dump you.'[5]

(14) *Jie*^{55}*fang*^{0} *shuo*^{55} *dian*^{214} *xian*^{35}*hua*^{51} *dao*^{51} *mei*^{35} *guan*^{55}*xi*^{0},
neighbors talk some gossip rather have.not matter
bie^{35} *hui*^{35}*tou*^{35} *pai*^{51}*chu*^{55}*suo*^{214} *zhao*^{214} *wo*^{214}*men*^{35} *jia*^{55} *qu*^{51}.
don't later police.station look.for we home go
'It does not matter that the neighbors gossip, I fear that later the police may get to us.'(*Wo*^{214} *shi*^{51} *ni*^{214} *ba*^{51}*ba*^{0}; cited in Shao and Luo 2004: 21)

Contrasting to the behavior of the undergoer listed in (2) and (10), as can be shown by (15)–(18), the actor listed above can also be placed before the apprehensive marker *bie*^{35} without affecting the acceptability of the sentence and its general meaning. For example, the apprehensive expression in (11)–(14) can be uttered alternatively in the form of (15)–(18) by placing the actor *ni*^{214} 'you', *ta*^{55} 'he', and *pai*^{51}*chu*^{55}*suo*^{214} 'police station' before the apprehensive marker *bie*^{35}.

(15) *Ni*^{214} *bie*^{35} *dao*^{51} *lao*^{214} *le*^{0}
you.SG don't arrive be.old PFV
cai^{35} *fa*^{55}*xian*^{51} *zi*^{51}*ji*^{214} *yi*^{55}*wu*^{35}*suo*^{214}*you*^{214}.
just realize self have.nothing

(16) ...*ta*^{55} *bie*^{35} *you*^{51} *ba*^{214}*chi*^{35}*bu*^{35}*zhu*^{51} *mai*^{214} *xin*^{55} *tou*^{35}*kui*^{55}.
he don't again out.of.control buy new helmet

(17) ...*ta*^{55} *bie*^{35} *you*^{51} *yu*^{51} *dao*^{51} *bi*^{214} *ni*^{214} *hao*^{214} *de*^{0},
he don't again meet arrive CM you be.good NMLZ
bu^{35} *yao*^{51} *ni*^{214} *le*^{0}.
not want you SFP

(18) ...*pai*^{51}*chu*^{55}*suo*^{214} *bie*^{35} *hui*^{35}*tou*^{35} *zhao*^{214} *wo*^{214}*men*^{35} *jia*^{55} *qu*^{51}.
police.station don't later look.for we home go

[5] Expression (12) is the heading of a video blog posted on the website of *Tencent Video*. Expression (13) is a reply message posted on *Baidu Zhidao*, an online Q and A platform in China.

From the above discussion, we can see that when the actor argument is realized in the syntax, it must occur before the negative imperative *bie*^{35}. Differently, in the apprehensive expressions, what occurs before the apprehensive marker *bie*^{35} can be either an undergoer or an actor, whose structural position with respect to the apprehensive marker *bie*^{35} seems to follow the pattern that the undergoer occurs before *bie*^{35}, whereas the actor can occur either before it or after it. However, it should be noted that our observation is made on a very small amount of data, and a more robust generalization should be generated when a large set of natural utterances is collected and thoroughly analyzed.

5. Temporality

Deontic modality is future-oriented (Narrog 2008). The negative imperative *bie*^{35} as a deontic modal marker occurs in prohibitive expressions that indicate the termination of an (ongoing) action or event from taking place in the future. For example, expression (1) can be uttered in the scenario that the speaker stops someone who is speaking loudly in the office from continuing to do so, or it can be uttered after someone speaks loudly in the office.

The range of temporal settings indicated by the apprehensive *bie*^{35} sentences is wider. It has been noticed by Gao (2003: 101) and Shao and Luo (2004: 20) that the action or event described by the apprehensive *bie*^{35} clause can be located temporally in the past, the present, or the near future. The apprehensive *bie*^{35} expression (7), which is repeated in (19), introduces the speaker's conjecture of a past event that it just rained. The apprehension-causing clause in expression (20) includes an event of rain that is hypothesized to be ongoing at the moment of speaking. Expression (21) includes a hypothesized event that the hearer will make the same mistake again in the future, if s/he cannot be more careful.

(19) *(Di*^{51}*shang*^{51} *zhe*^{51}*me*^{0} *shi*^{55}*.)* *Bie*^{35} *gang*^{55} *xia*^{51} *guo*^{51} *yu*^{214} *ba*^{0}!
on.the.ground like.this be.wet don't just.now fall EXP rain SFP
'It is so wet on the ground. It might have rained just now.'

(20) *Wo*^{214} *mei*^{35} *dai*^{51} *san*^{214}*,* *bie*^{35} *hai*^{35} *zai*^{51} *xia*^{51} *yu*^{214} *ba*^{0}!
I have.not bring umbrella don't still PROG fall rain SFP
'I didn't bring any umbrella. I fear that it might still be raining.'

(21) *Zi*^{214}*xi*^{51} *dian*^{214}*r! Bie*^{35} *zai*^{51} *nong*^{51} *cuo*^{51} *le*^{0}*.*
be.careful a.little don't again do be.wrong SFP
'Be more careful! I fear that (you) will make mistakes again.'

The wide range of temporal settings observed with the apprehension-causing situation is compatible with the general semantic meaning conveyed by the overall expressions. It only indicates an undesired situation hypothesized by the speaker, which is not necessarily anchored in a particular temporal point. This function is akin to the epistemic

marking. The distinction in temporality in the two types of expressions marked by *bie*^{35} is presented in Table 2.

Temporality of event	Negative imperative *bie*^{35}	Apprehensive *bie*^{35}
past	X	√
present	X	√
future	√	√

Table 2. Event's temporality in *bie*^{35}-marked negative imperative and apprehensive expressions

6. Conclusion

This study has examined the two distinct uses of the morpheme *bie*^{35} in Mandarin Chinese, i.e., as a negative imperative marker and as a marker of apprehensive-epistemic modality. By adopting the RRG framework and its Layered Structure of the Clause (LSC), we have demonstrated that the array of differences between them stems from their differing hierarchical positions within the LSC.

We have formed a hypothesis that the negative imperative *bie*^{35} operates at the core level in the LSC, as it is a deontic modal marker that marks requests directed to the hearer, instructing him/her to act as required by the speaker. In contrast, the apprehensive *bie*^{35} operates at the clause level as an epistemic modal marker, scoping over an entire proposition to convey the speaker's apprehension about an undesirable situation. The distinction made in terms of their position in the LSC can account for three sets of contrasting behaviors of the negative imperatives and the apprehensives, both marked by *bie*^{35}.

First, the negative imperative *bie*^{35} requires an actor in its event semantics, restricted typically to the second-person or the first-person (inclusive). The apprehensive *bie*^{35} imposes no such requirement, allowing clauses with actors of any person, undergoers, or to indicate events without an actor (e.g., in the cases of natural phenomena).

Secondly, with the negative imperative, any actor argument that is made explicit in the syntax must precede *bie*^{35}. With the apprehensive, the actor (when present) demonstrates flexible positions in the expressions, being able to occur either before or after the marker *bie*^{35}, which seems to be a characteristic consistent with its status as a clause-level operator.

Thirdly, the deontic and future-oriented nature of the negative imperative *bie*^{35} restricts the event that it modifies to a future or immediately ongoing action that can be prohibited. However, the epistemic apprehensive *bie*^{35} exhibits no such constraint, having its scope over propositions situated in the past, present, or future, reflecting the speaker's conjecture about a state of affairs.

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