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# An Analysis of "来 lái /去 qù " Errors in Chinese Directional Complements by Indonesian Students

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### **Keywords**

# **Abstract**

Chinese Directional Complements, Indonesian Learners, Error Analysis

Mandarin Chinese directional complements present a significant and welldocumented challenge for Indonesian learners. This study delves into the intricacies of this grammatical aspect, aiming to identify the specific difficulties encountered by Indonesian students and to propose effective pedagogical strategies. The research employs a mixed-methods approach, beginning with a comparative linguistic analysis of complement expression in both Mandarin Chinese and Indonesian to pinpoint potential areas of linguistic interference. Subsequently, a questionnaire is administered to Indonesian students learning Mandarin to gather empirical data on their comprehension and application of directional complements. Furthermore, a detailed error analysis is conducted on student-produced language samples, focusing specifically on the use of "来/去 (lái/qù) and other directional complement structures. The findings of this study illuminate the multifaceted reasons behind the observed errors, encompassing negative transfer from the learners' first language, individual learner variables such as learning styles and aptitude, environmental factors influencing language acquisition, and the potential inadequacies of current teaching materials and methodologies. Ultimately, this research culminates in the formulation of targeted teaching suggestions and practical methods designed to mitigate these challenges and enhance the learning experience for Indonesian students striving to master Chinese directional complements.

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#### INTRODUCTION

Mandarin Chinese, as one of the world's oldest and most developed languages, features a rich and complex grammatical system. Within Modern Chinese—used as the common language of the Han people and encompassing both Standard Mandarin (Putonghua) and various dialects—directional verb complements represent a distinctive grammatical feature. These complements, typically formed by combining main verbs with directional elements such as "未 (lái)" and "夫 (qù)," indicate the direction and orientation of actions relative to the speaker or listener.

For foreign learners, particularly Indonesians, mastering directional complements is a substantial challenge. Unlike Mandarin, Bahasa Indonesia lacks a comparable grammatical construction. While expressions of direction do exist in Indonesian, they do not convey the same spatial perspective distinctions as Mandarin. This conceptual and structural difference often leads to errors in usage, especially in sentences where direction must be explicitly aligned with the speaker's or listener's perspective.

Understanding and mastering directional complements is crucial for achieving communicative competence in Mandarin. These complements are frequently used in everyday communication, and their incorrect usage can hinder comprehension or even result in misunderstandings. Despite their importance, effective pedagogical strategies for teaching directional complements—especially to Indonesian learners—remain underdeveloped. This research, therefore, contributes significantly to the field of Teaching Chinese as a Foreign Language (TCFL), aiming to bridge this pedagogical gap and improve teaching practices.

Prior research on directional complements has been conducted extensively within the fields of Chinese linguistics and grammar (Li & Thompson, 1981; Lü Shuxiang, 1999). Studies have discussed the syntactic structure, classification (simple vs. compound complements), and semantic orientation of directional verbs (Shi, 2002). However, studies focusing on learner-specific challenges, particularly those faced by speakers of non-Sinitic languages such as Bahasa Indonesia, are limited.

Zhao (2016) and Wang (2018) observed that learners from Southeast Asia frequently confuse the use of "未" and "去," particularly in relation to sentence objects and movement direction. However, few studies directly compare Indonesian students learning Mandarin in Indonesia and those studying in China, or examine how proficiency level and learning environment impact error patterns. The current study seeks to fill this gap.

Observations show that Indonesian students—whether studying in Indonesia or in China—frequently make errors in using directional complements, especially in distinguishing between "来 (lái)" and "去 (qù)." For example, errors such as "\*我打算回去印尼 (\*wǒ dǎsuàn huíqù Yìnní)" instead of "我打算回印尼去 (wǒ dǎsuàn huí Yìnní qù)" are commonly made due to misunderstanding the relationship

between the complement and the object. These mistakes are often influenced by first-language interference, insufficient grammatical instruction, or conceptual misunderstanding.

Moreover, error patterns appear to vary across different learning environments and proficiency levels. Preliminary observations suggest that students studying in China may show fewer errors compared to those learning Mandarin in Indonesia. Other influencing factors include teacher proficiency, teaching methods, and exposure to authentic language input. 1. This research investigates the difficulties faced by Indonesian learners in mastering the use of the directional complements "未" and "去" in Mandarin Chinese. It aims to, 2. Analyze the most common types of errors made by Indonesian learners in the use of "未 (lái)" and "去 (qù)" across different proficiency levels.

#### **METHOD**

The research design and methodology form an integral part of this study. This research aims to understand the landscape of Mandarin Chinese language education in Makassar City, the specific circumstances of local Mandarin instruction, and to identify challenges within the teaching process. Subsequently, it will analyze these issues to propose potential solutions.

To effectively address these objectives, a multi-faceted approach incorporating various methodologies will be employed. These include a comprehensive literature review to establish a theoretical foundation, questionnaire surveys to gather quantitative data from Indonesian learners, semi-structured interviews to gain qualitative insights into learner perspectives, and classroom observations to understand the pedagogical practices in real-world settings. The author has undertaken a detailed linguistic corpus classification analysis of " $\ddagger$  (lái)" and " $\ddagger$  (qù)". Following this, relevant linguistic theories will be applied to provide a static description and explanation of their usage, integrating pragmatic, semantic, and cognitive perspectives throughout the research.

The quantitative component of this study utilizes descriptive statistical methods to classify and analyze the results of the questionnaires. Errors identified from the questionnaire responses are further analyzed through Error Analysis (EA), a qualitative approach that seeks to identify, describe, and explain learner errors (Corder, 1967; Ellis, 1994). Although EA often involves quantitative data collection, it is fundamentally qualitative in nature as it interprets data through a linguistic and cognitive lens. Furthermore, a descriptive analysis of the errors identified through the survey will be presented. Building upon prior research and leveraging a substantial linguistic corpus, this study will first re-categorize, synthesize, and summarize foundational knowledge on the subject. Subsequently, by considering the errors made by Indonesian students, the linguistic data will be further analyzed and interpreted. This error analysis, along with the investigation of its underlying causes, will integrate multiple dimensions, including semantics, syntax, and pragmatics, ultimately leading to the proposition of potential remedies.

The objective of pinpointing the most frequent error locations and patterns, coupled with a thorough analysis of these errors, is to assist future researchers in identifying effective strategies for instructing students on these patterns. Given the relevance of this topic to directional complements taught at the elementary and intermediate levels, the questionnaire survey will be administered to students who have studied Mandarin for a minimum of one year.

Moreover, the primary target demographic for this questionnaire is Indonesian students, particularly those who have either studied in Makassar or are currently studying in Nanchang. Consequently, it is anticipated that this questionnaire will enable Indonesian students to gain a clearer understanding of the nuances in the usage of Mandarin Chinese directional complements, while simultaneously empowering educators to develop more detailed and comprehensive teaching plans specifically tailored for Indonesian learners.

#### **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

# Expression of "来" (lái) in Indonesian:

The corresponding words and basic meanings of the Chinese word "来 (lái)" in Indonesian

Table 1. Expression of "来" (lái)

来 (datang)	The General Knowledge Dictionary of Indonesian (13th Edition, 1993) and the Great Dictionary of the Indonesian Language (1990)
1.	To arrive, reach a destination or still reaching a destination
2.	"To come from" or "From + (locative word) + come"
3.	Future, future tense or about to arrive
4.	Imminent
5.	Already arrived

From the table above, it can be seen that the directional meaning of the directional complement "来 (lái)" can indicate the movement of an object or person towards the speaker's or a reference point through an action. For example: V + \* (lái). Corresponding expressions in Chinese and Indonesian are illustrated below:

① 忽然一条小狗向我跑来。(Hūrán yī tiáo xiǎogǒu xiàng wǒ pǎo lái.) - Suddenly a little dog ran towards me.

印: Tiba-tiba seekor anjing berlari ke saya.

② 电影院已经坐满了人但是还不时有人进来。 (Diànyǐngyuàn yǐjīng zuò mǎn le rén dànshì hái bùshí yǒu rén jìn lái.) - The cinema was already full of people, but people were still coming in from time to time.

印: Di bioskop sudah penuh orang yang duduk tetapi, masih ada saja orang yang ingin masuk ke dalam.

③一天,老师博把鲁班叫来,说: "你该下山了"。(Yī tiān, lǎoshī Bó bǎ Lǔbān jiào lái, shuō: "Nǐ gāi xià shān le.") - One day, Teacher Bo called Luban over and said, "You should go down the mountain now."

印: Suatu hari, Luban laoshi memanggil saya, dan beliau berkata: kamu harus segera turun dari atas gunung.

Indonesian verbs have three types: verbs that can be used independently, verbs that can add prefixes, and verbs that cannot use prefixes. In Indonesian, the prefixes Ber- and Me- are used to express the meaning of " $\ddagger$  (lái)" or " $\ddagger$  (qù)". For example, in the sentences above, "berlari" and "memanggil" are respectively equivalent to the meaning of "lari + datang" (run + come) and "datang + panggil" (come + call).

The corresponding components in the Indonesian translations of the Chinese verb-complement structures expressing direction "跑来 (pǎo lái) - run towards," "进来 (jìn lái) - come in," and "叫来 (jiào lái) - call over" in the three examples above are: (1) berlari ke saya, (2) masuk ke dalam, and (3) memanggil saya. None of these use datang, which is the Indonesian equivalent of the Chinese directional complement "来 (lái)". Inserting the word datang in the above Indonesian sentences does not convey the meaning of direction; it only expresses the meaning of a general verb.

Most Indonesian verbs express direction by adding prefixes. For example: (1) 跑来 (pǎo lái) is translated as berlari. The basic verb is lari (run), and adding the prefix Ber- expresses the directional meaning of "未 (lái) - come". (2) 叫来 (jiào lái) is translated as memanggil. This involves adding a prefix and changing the form of the basic verb panggil (call) by adding the prefix Me- (In Indonesian, if the initial phoneme of the verb root to which the prefixes are attached is /b/, /p/, or /f/, its form will change. For example: Meng- + panggil --> Memanggil). Some Indonesian verbs cannot use prefixes, such as (2) 进来 (jìn lái) which is translated as masuk (enter). The way these verbs express directional meaning is by adding ke and the locative word dalam (inside) after the verb.

#### The expression of "去" in Indonesian:

The Chinese word "去" (qù), which means to go, corresponds to the following meanings in Indonesian.

**Table 2.** Expression of "去" (qù)

去 (pergi)	The General Knowledge Dictionary of Indonesian (13th Edition, 1993) and the Great Dictionary of the Indonesian Language (1990)
1.	"To go toward", to leave one place and go to another.
2.	To leave the starting point or to move farther away.

3.	To depart
4.	To die

From the table above In Mandarin, when used as a directional complement (趋向补语), "去" expresses movement of a person or object away from a starting point toward another target or destination. For example, in the structure: Verb + 去.

Below are examples of how this structure corresponds in Indonesian:

# Example 1

① A (on the phone): 喂,明天你能回来一下吗?

B: 能回去, 你在家等我吧。

# English Translation:

A: Hello, can you come home for a bit tomorrow?

B: Yes, I can come back. Wait for me at home.

#### Indonesian Translation:

A: Halo, besok kamu bisa pulang sebentar?

B: Bisa, kamu tunggu di rumah ya.

### Explanation:

The word "回去" literally means "to return there" (pulang ke sana). However, in the above example, the directional meaning of "去" (to there) is already implied in the Indonesian phrase "bisa pulang". So, there's no need to separately translate "去" as "ke sana". The meaning of movement is already conveyed through the context and verb choice.

### Example 2

② 艾墨说: "我的字典梦甜借去了。"

# English Translation:

Aimo said: "My dictionary has been borrowed by Mengtian."

#### Indonesian Translation:

Aimo berkata: "Kamus saya sudah dipinjam oleh Mengtian."

#### Explanation:

In Indonesian, verbs are often formed using prefixes like "meng-" (active voice) or "di-" (passive voice). In the above example, "借去" is translated as "dipinjam" (was borrowed). The root word is "pinjam" (borrow). Because the object (the dictionary) becomes the subject in the sentence, the passive form

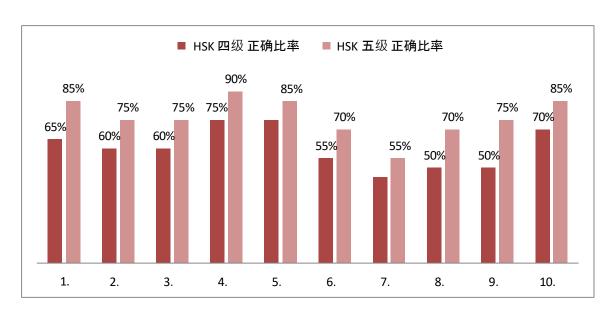
"dipinjam" is used. If the subject were the one performing the action, the prefix "meng-" would be used, as in "meminjam" (to borrow). However, since the sentence focuses on the object being borrowed, the correct form is "dipinjam".

# Response Accuracy on the Chinese Directional Complements "来" and "去"

The first major question consists of ten sub-items. These ten items require Indonesian students to choose between "来" (lái, "come") or "去" (qù, "go") to fill in the blanks. The purpose is to examine how Indonesian students use basic directional complements.

**Table 3.** Response Accuracy on the Chinese Directional Complements "来" and "去"

Question _	HSK level 4 (20 student)		HSK level 5 (20 student)	
	Correct answer	rate	Correct answer	rate
1.	13	65%	17	85%
2.	12	60%	15	75%
3.	12	60%	15	75%
4.	15	75%	18	90%
5.	15	75%	17	85%
6.	11	55%	14	70%
7.	9	45%	11	55%
8.	10	50%	14	70%
9.	10	50%	15	75%
10.	14	70%	17	85%



1: 拿一瓶水(来)Please get a bottle of water.

Indonesian: Tolong ambil sebotol air.

Sentence structure: 请 拿 一瓶 水

From the table, we can see that the correct answer rate for HSK Level 4 is only 65%, while HSK Level 5 is 85%. This is a simple directional complement sentence, and the prompt notes that the speaker is far from the water bottle. The action involves the listener leaving their position and moving toward the speaker, so the correct complement is "‡" (lái), not "‡" (qù).

B: 能回(去), 你在家等我吧。

Indonesian:

A: Halo, apakah hari Minggu kamu bisa pulang sebentar?

B: Bisa, tunggu saya di rumah ya.

Correct answer rates: HSK 4-60%, HSK 5-75%. Some students chose "回来" because its Indonesian equivalent "bisa pulang" seems appropriate. However, in Chinese, "回来" implies movement toward the speaker. Since Speaker A is asking the question, the action of "returning" is toward A, hence "来" is used. In B's reply, the action is from the speaker B's point of view moving toward A, so "回去" is also acceptable in this context, because it reflects B's position moving elsewhere.

3: 忽然一条小狗向我跑(来)。Suddenly, a dog ran toward me.

Indonesian: Tiba-tiba seekor anjing berlari menghampiri saya.

Correct answer rates: HSK 4-60%, HSK 5-75%. The sentence shows that the dog is moving toward the speaker's location, so "跑来" (run toward me) is the correct form. Here, "我" (me) is the object, but the movement direction is still toward the speaker, which justifies the use of "来".

4: 他朝图书馆的方向走(去)。He walked in the direction of the library.

Indonesian: Dia berjalan menuju perpustakaan.

Correct answer rates: HSK 4-75%, HSK 5-90%. This sentence expresses movement away from the speaker toward another location. In both Mandarin and Indonesian, the complement " $\pm$ " fits naturally, and most students answered correctly.

5: 你有什么困难可以说出(来)If you have any difficulties, feel free to speak them out.

Indonesian: Jika kamu punya masalah, bisa diungkapkan.

Correct answer rates: HSK 4 – 75%, HSK 5 – 85%. Many students are familiar with the phrase "说出来" (to speak out), and understand its usage well. However, they often don't know how to use "出去" in contrast. According to Zhao Xin and Li Ying (2012) in the Chinese Dictionary of Near-

Synonyms, the differences are:

a. "出来" is widely used and can follow verbs like 听 (listen), 看 (see), 查 (check), 打听 (inquire), expressing a certain result:

e.g. 我看出来了,阿里喜欢玛丽。(I can see that Ali likes Mary.)

b. "出来" also shows a completed action:

e.g. 老师的问题艾墨回答不出来。(Aimo couldn't answer the teacher's question.)

c. "出来" is often used with emotive verbs:

e.g. 弟弟看见了妈妈,哇的一声哭了出来。(The younger brother cried out when he saw his mother.)

d. "出去" refers to moving something from a smaller to a larger space:

e.g. 那些书他都卖出去了。(He sold all those books.)

6: 上个月他给妈妈寄回五百块钱(去)。Last month, he sent 500 yuan back to his mother.

Indonesian: Bulan lalu dia mengirimkan 500 RMB kepada mamanya.

Correct answer rates: HSK 4-55%, HSK 5-70%. This is a completed action with the time phrase "last month" indicating the past. The directional complement is a compound form:  $V + \Box + (object) + \pm$ , meaning the money was sent back to somewhere (away from speaker). "寄" (to send) directs the action toward another location, thus "去" is correct, not "来".

7: 走(来)了一个人。Someone came walking this way.

Indonesian: Sudah ada satu orang yang berjalan ke sini.

[The rest of the explanation is cut off in the user's message, but based on the sentence, the complement should be "来" since the person is coming toward the speaker.] In the sentence above, HSK Level 4 students had a correct rate of 45%, while HSK Level 5 students had 55%. Many Indonesian students answered with "去" instead of "来." However, when the verb in a sentence takes an agentive object, the directional complement must be "来" and cannot be "去," so "去" is not acceptable in this case. In Indonesian, the verb "走" (zǒu) corresponds to "berjalan," and it often carries the meaning of "berjalan ke sana" ("walk away from here"). Therefore, "走去" makes sense to Indonesian learners because it matches their concept of walking away from a point.

However, when translated into Indonesian, the original sentence should mean "berjalan kemari" ("walk toward here"). In Chinese, "berjalan kemari" directly translates as "走来." It is precisely this semantic mismatch between the two languages that leads to confusion among Indonesian students when choosing between "来" and "去."

8. 他终于醒过(来)了。He finally woke up.

Indonesian: Dia akhirnya sudah bangun!

In this sentence, HSK Level 4 students had a 50% correct rate, while HSK Level 5 students had a 70% correct rate. The core issue here is that both "过来" and "过去" express a change of state, which easily confuses Indonesian students. The author believes that "过来" more often indicates a recovery from an abnormal to a normal state, whereas "过去" typically refers to a change from a normal to an abnormal state. Based on this understanding, the correct expression in this context should be "醒过来了" (woke up/recovered) and not "醒过去了."

Moreover, the word "终于" (finally) in the sentence shows affirmation of the waking action, which reinforces the idea that the subject has returned from an abnormal to a normal state—thus, "来" should be used. However, many HSK Level 4 students still answered incorrectly. This may be because in Indonesian, the expression for a change in state would often be "sadar kembali" (wake up again or recover), and the verb "kembali" (return) corresponds more to "回来" in Chinese. In contrast, "过来" in Indonesian is often interpreted as a movement in direction rather than a change in state. This difference in interpretation contributes to students' mistakes in using "来" and "去."

9. 她病了,一天天瘦了下(去)。 She's been sick and is getting thinner day by day.

Indonesian: Dia sudah sakit, semakin hari semakin kurus.

In this sentence, HSK Level 4 students had a 50% correct rate, while HSK Level 5 students had 75%. The directional complement "下去" here expresses the continuation of an action or state. When combined with adjectives, it indicates a weakening or worsening trend in a state that has already occurred.

a."下来" were used instead, the sentence would suggest that a new state has emerged and begun to take effect. For example:

"请大家安静下来。" (Please quiet down) – this implies a new quiet state beginning and stabilizing.

In general:

"下来" expresses a state continuing from the past to the present.

"下去" expresses a state continuing from the present to the future.

Based on verb combinations and intended meanings:

"下去" is mostly used with verbs like "说、干、写、做、继续、进行" to show that the action will continue. These verbs are often preceded by words like "接着、再、又" (then, again).

Example: 他停了一下,又接着说下去。(He paused for a moment, then continued speaking.)

Using "下来" here would be incorrect.

b. "下来" is often used with verbs like "写、记、画、记录" to indicate the completion of an action, and the verb can often be followed by "了." It can also be used with adjectives like "黑、慢、安静、冷静" to indicate that a state has appeared and stabilized.

Example: 喝了几口水, 他慢慢冷静下来了。(After drinking some water, he gradually calmed down.) "下去" would be incorrect in such a sentence.

10. 不用的东西先寄回家(去)。Send the unused items back home first.

(The speaker is not at home; they are in another location.)

Indonesian: Barang yang tidak digunakan dikirim kembali ke rumah.

In this sentence, Indonesian HSK Level 4 students had a 70% correct rate, and HSK Level 5 students had 85%. This sentence is similar to the first one.

However, in this case, "去" must be used to indicate that the direction of movement is away from the speaker. Since the speaker is not currently at home, sending the items back home implies movement away from the speaker's current location, hence "去" is the correct directional complement.

Based on the data above, the most difficult questions are Question 6 and Question 9, as they had the highest number of errors among students. On the other hand, the easiest questions are Question 4, 5, and 10, as they had the highest percentage of correct answers. HSK Level 4 students made the most frequent errors, particularly in sentences involving complex directional complements such as "走来" (walk toward), "醒过来" (wake up), and "瘦下去" (become thinner). These errors were commonly caused by language transfer from the students' native language (Indonesian) and a lack of understanding of the semantic nuances of directional complements in Mandarin Chinese.

#### CONCLUSION

This study examined the usage of the directional complements "来" (lái, toward the speaker) and "去" (qù, away from the speaker) among Indonesian learners of Mandarin at HSK Levels 4 and 5. The analysis of ten sample sentences revealed notable trends in learner comprehension and usage, as well as systematic patterns of error linked to interference from Indonesian linguistic structures.

First, the overall correct response rates suggest a general improvement in accuracy from HSK Level 4

to HSK Level 5, indicating that learners' understanding of directional complements improves with increased proficiency. However, significant confusion remains, especially in contexts where movement direction must be inferred from pragmatic cues or implied speaker positions.

Several recurring issues were identified: Semantic interference from Indonesian: Learners often selected "去" in sentences where "来" was correct, due to the tendency in Indonesian to associate verbs like "berjalan" or "pulang" with movement away from the current speaker's point of view, even when the Chinese equivalent demands the use of "来."

Misunderstanding of abstract usage: In sentences like "他说出来" or "醒过来了," students struggled with recognizing "来" as a marker of state recovery or emergence, rather than simple physical direction. The dual role of complements like "过来" as markers of both direction and state change caused confusion. Difficulty distinguishing "下来" and "下去": Learners often failed to grasp the temporal and aspectual distinctions between these two complements. "下去" indicates continuation into the future, while "下来" signals the initiation or stabilization of a new state. Errors here reflect a lack of conceptual understanding rather than simple vocabulary gaps.

Over-reliance on literal translation: Students tended to interpret verbs and directions based on their Indonesian equivalents without fully considering Chinese syntactic or contextual conventions. For example, "berjalan ke sana" was mapped directly to "走去," even when the correct Chinese usage should have been "走来" based on the narrative point of view.

Despite these challenges, certain sentence types yielded high correct rates, particularly when the spatial direction was concrete and aligned clearly with Indonesian equivalents (e.g., 寄回家去). This suggests that explicit physical contexts are more accessible for learners than abstract or metaphorical uses. In summary, the findings demonstrate that Indonesian learners of Mandarin face predictable and systematic difficulties in mastering directional complements, especially in abstract or pragmatically complex contexts. Pedagogical approaches should place greater emphasis on:

Contrasting the semantic functions of "未" and "去" beyond physical movement, Highlighting their metaphorical and aspectual uses, Drawing learners' attention to differences in conceptual framing between Indonesian and Mandarin. Future instruction and materials development should integrate more comparative linguistic explanations and provide learners with guided practice in interpreting directionality based on discourse context rather than native language intuition alone.

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