

Deconstructing small clauses: The case of Mandarin Chinese

Why you cannot “elect John president” or “dye your hair black” in Chinese

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1. Introduction

Recently, Marejl & Matushansky (2015) and Bruening (2018) have demonstrated that a number of constructions so far analysed as involving small clauses (SCs) are in fact amenable to alternative analyses. Against this background, this talk takes up an early observation by Y.-H. Audrey Li (1985/1990), who stated the systematic lack of Chinese equivalents for English SCs with *nominal* predicates (compare (1) with (2a-b)):

- (1) Wǒmen xuǎn Zhāngsān *(dāng) zǒngtǒng. (Li 1985: 270)
1PL elect Zhangsan act.as president
'We elected Zhangsan to act as president.'
(2a) John *(is) president. (2b) We elected [sc John president].

Taking this as a starting point, Chinese will be shown to lack SCs altogether, with SC understood here in the original narrow sense (Stowell 1981) as an embedded, non-root context licensing the predicative function of an XP in a form unacceptable for the same XP when a predicate in a matrix/root context. In fact, in Chinese there are no non-root contexts where otherwise non-predicative XPs are licit as predicates; alleged SCs are nothing but translational equivalents of English SCs and involve completely different structures

Given that the window currently offered in the literature is much too limited, first of all the set of representative data needs to be established. This in turn requires discussion of very basic issues such as the repertoire of lexical categories in Chinese in order to make explicit and to correct tacit misconceptions with farreaching consequences. Chinese will also be shown to lack *exceptional case marking* (ECM) verbs (i.e. verbs selecting SC-complements), thus lending additional evidence to the claim defended here that Chinese has no SCs.

Roadmap

Part 2 presents a brief overview of the phenomena identified as SCs in English and of the different analyses proposed for SCs in the past, from Stowell (1981) over Bowers' (1993) PredP theory to the minimalist analysis proposed in Matushansky (2019).

Part 3 investigates which categories can serve as autonomous predicates in matrix contexts in Chinese and compares them with those allowed in secondary predicates, something previous studies claiming the existence of SCs have failed to do.

Part 4 turns to the issue of ECM verbs as one of the contexts *par excellence* for SCs and shows them not to exist in Chinese. It turns out that it was *inter alia* the misparsing of double object constructions and of sentences where the matrix verb selects a clausal complement that led to postulating SCs for Chinese (cf. Sybesma 1999, Tang Sze-Wing 1998, 2005; den Dikken & Singhapreecha 2004, Niina Zhang 2016).

Part 5 examines the consequences the lack of SCs in Chinese has for the analysis of matrix sentences with non-verbal predicates. It demonstrates that the current scenario where the copula and copula-like verbs such as *become*, *seem* etc. all select SCs with APs, NPs and AdPs as predicates (cf a.o. Partee 1986, Heycock 1992, Moro 1997) cannot be adopted for Chinese. Time permitting we offer some speculations on how to get a handle on non-verbal predication in Chinese.