



A dynamic account of verb doubling cleft construction in Chinese



Xiaolong Yang^a, Yicheng Wu^{b,*}

^aSchool of Foreign Languages, Zhejiang University of Finance and Economics, Hangzhou, China

^bCentre for the Study of Language and Cognition, Zhejiang University, Hangzhou 310028, China

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 20 January 2016

Received in revised form 2 August 2016

Accepted 19 August 2016

Keywords:

Verb doubling cleft construction

Topic

Focus

Parsing

Substitution

Ellipsis

ABSTRACT

In Mandarin Chinese, there exists a particular type of construction called “verb doubling cleft construction” (henceforth VDCC) like *Chi, (wo) shi chi-guo le, buguo...* (literally ‘As for eating, I have indeed eaten, but...’), where the two verbs act as a topic and a *verum* focus, respectively. Cheng and Vicente (2013) claim that VDCC shares the same internal syntax with regular clefts, based on Cheng (2008)’s proposal that (i) the copula *shi* ‘be’ takes a small clause, and (ii) the two verbs stand in an A-bar movement relation. In this paper, we present a dynamic account of VDCC within the framework of Dynamic Syntax (Kempson et al., 2001; Cann et al., 2005). Under a parsing-based analysis, the first verb is shown to be an elliptical expression which denotes some event established in previous discourse, and the second verb is also an elliptical expression which needs to recover its content based on the interpretation of the first verb in topic position.

© 2016 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

1. Introduction

In Mandarin Chinese, there exists a verb copying construction or verb doubling construction (Henceforth VCC), which involves a copy of the verb followed by an NP and a postverbal adverbial element denoting manner, duration or frequency (see Chao, 1968; Li and Thompson, 1981 inter alia), as shown in (1):

- (1) *Wo qi ma qi lei le.*
I ride horse ride tired LE
‘I rode a horse and I got tired.’

Recently, Cheng and Vicente (2013) have proposed that, interpretively, verb doubling in one specific construction may cause a topic/focus distinction, which is called a verb doubling cleft construction (Henceforth VDCC), as exemplified by (2):

- (2) Q: *Ni chi guo fan mei you?*
you eat EXP food not have
‘Have you eaten food already?’

Abbreviations: 2SG, second-person singular pronoun; 3SG, third-person singular pronoun; CL, classifier; EXP, experiential aspect marker; GENP, general preposition; LE, perfective aspect marker; NMZ, nominalizer; PL, plural; SHI, copula.

* Corresponding author. Centre for the Study of Language and Cognition, Main Teaching Building, Zhejiang University, Xi Xi Campus, Hangzhou 310028, China.

E-mail addresses: yreno@zju.edu.cn, wuyicheng@zju.edu.cn (Y. Wu).

<http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.langsci.2016.08.002>

0388-0001/© 2016 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

A: *Chi, (wo) shi chi guo le, buguo....*
 eat I SHI eat EXP LE but
 ‘As for eating, I have indeed eaten, but...’

According to Cheng and Vicente (2013), the first verb *chi* ‘eat’ in (2) can be construed as a topic and the second verb *chi* ‘eat’ a *verum* focus. In addition, they have further proposed that the two verbs stand in an A-bar movement relation. In this paper, we employ a parsing-based framework called Dynamic Syntax (Kempson et al., 2001; Cann et al., 2005) and demonstrate that the first verb is actually an event-denoting elliptical expression acting as topic. The copula *shi* ‘be’ is a predicate pro-form which appears to have the characteristic property of pronouns (see Wu, 2011). The interpretation of *shi* is crucially dependent on the local linguistic context, that is, the post- or pre-copular expression. The interpretation of the second verb is entirely dependent on the interpretation of the first verb. The central thesis of this paper is, then, that the account of VDCC in Mandarin Chinese should be couched in terms of semantic underspecification and pragmatic enrichment.

The paper is organized as follows. Section 2 presents a critical review of the analysis proposed by Cheng and Vicente (2013). Section 3 introduces the theoretical framework to be employed, viz., Dynamic Syntax. Section 4 presents a dynamic account of the construction at issue. A conclusion is made in section 5.

2. Previous analyses

To begin with, we should elucidate three basic concepts used in this paper, namely topic, comment and focus, especially *verum* focus. Topic and focus are notions normally related to how information is encoded in grammar. From the discursual perspective, topic is the given information, while focus is the new information which is prosodically marked by accentuation. Topic is normally understood as what a sentence is about (Chafe, 1976), or the entity anchoring the sentence to the previous discourse. It provides the hearer with not only the propositional content, but also clues on how to process the following information (van der Wal, 2015). Hence, topic and comment are usually in an aboutness relation. Hockett (1958: 201) defines their relation as “the speaker announces a topic and then says something about it.” Jacobs (2001) lists four dimensions of topic and comment: informational separation, predication, addressation and frame-setting. Topic usually specifies a domain to which the comment is restricted. Generally, focus can be classified into two types, namely information focus and contrastive focus. Information focus provides information predicated about the topic, whereas contrastive focus evokes a contrast with other entities in discourse. As regards *verum* focus, it mainly concerns or affirms the truth of the proposition expressed by a sentence. In other words, *verum* focus represents a case where nothing is new to discourse participants, except for the information representing a relevant state of affairs holding for a certain topic. It is a non-contrastive focus and a cross-linguistic phenomenon (see Gutzmann and Miró, 2011). During the course of communication, *verum* focus can bear with the emphasis on truth, as in *she DOES like apple*.

2.1. Cheng and Vicente (2013)’s analysis

Cheng and Vicente (2013) treat VDCC as having the same properties as regular clefts based on the analysis of cleft constructions laid out in Cheng (2008), with *shi* being construed as a copular morpheme (Cheng, 2008: 245). Following Stowell (1983)’s assumption that all copular sentences involve a small clause, Cheng (2008) states that the Mandarin copula *shi* also takes a small clause with a *pro* predicate, as shown in (3a) below. This *pro* predicate would then move to the left of the copular verb, rendering Chinese copular constructions equivalent to English *it is x* sentences:

- (3) a. *shi* [_{SC}SUBJECTXP][_{PRED}*pro*]
 b. [_{PRO}]_i*shi*[_{SC}SUBJECTXP][_t_i]

Cheng (2008: 245) then claims that “the focus of the cleft is the constituent that appears linearly to the immediate right of *shi*”, which is treated as a focus marker. Following Huang (1988), Cheng assumes that “elements that are in the pre-copular position are topicalized” (Cheng, 2008: 262).

In view of the assumptions above, VDCC in Cheng and Vicente (2013) is taken to exhibit the same distribution of topic and focus as regular cleft constructions containing *shi* in the sense that the first verb is interpreted as topic, whereas the second verb immediately following *shi* is construed as focus. Consider (2) again, repeated here as (4):

- (4) Q: *Ni chi guo fan mei you?*
 you eat EXP food not have
 ‘Have you eaten food already?’
 A: [_T*Chi*], [_T(*wo*)] *shi* [_F*chi*] *guo le, buguo....*
 Eat I SHI eat EXP LE but
 ‘As for eating, I have indeed eaten, but...’

Notice that, interpretively, the second verb is not a contrastive focus but a *verum* focus. Moreover, VDCC also triggers an adversative implicature lexicalized by appending *buguo* ‘but’. Under Cheng and Vicente (2013)’s analysis, the two verbs in VDCC stand in an A-bar movement chain:

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/7533881>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/7533881>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)