Bare and non-bare proper names in Chinese

Xu-Ping Li
Bar-Ilan University

1 Introduction

According to the Causal Theory of proper names, a proper name (hereinafter PN) has no descriptive content and it is a “rigid designator”, which denotes the same object in every possible world (Kripke 1972). This definition also applies to PNs in Chinese. It is argued that Chinese PNs are arguments, inherently of type $e$, and they are definite (Li 1999; Chierchia 1998). Concerning the semantics of PNs, Chierchia (1998) claims that Chinese PNs and bare nouns are both mapped onto arguments, but PNs denote (unique) individuals, of type $e$, and bare nouns denote kinds, of type $k$. In the perspective of syntax, Li (1999) argues that Chinese has no definite articles, but its nominals have a DP level. She further argues that along with demonstratives and pronouns, proper names are base-projected as the head of DP, as shown in (1).

(1) DP
   | D NumP
   | PN Num ClP
      | Cl NP

According to Li (1999) and Chierchia (1998), we do not expect that a PN can be modified by numeral classifiers. Syntactically, according to the structure given in (1), it is neither possible for Cl to cross the Num node to modify D, nor for PN to lower itself to N to be modified by Cl, assuming that head movement is leftward. Semantically, the denotation of bare nouns is modeled as a mass domain and the classifier has the atomization function from the mass domain to a set of atoms (Chierchia 1998). But PNs do not have a denotation in the mass domain, and they denote unique individuals. Therefore, it is neither necessary nor possible for classifiers to perform the atomization function to a proper name.

However, this expectation is not borne out. In Mandarin Chinese, we find many examples, in which the proper names are modified by numeral classifiers, in the form of [Num + Cl + PN]. We call this type of PNs non-bare PNs, in contrast with bare PNs, i.e., non-modified PNs. We will investigate the use of non-bare PNs in both argument (e.g., ba constructions) and predicate positions (e.g., existential clauses), as shown in (2).

(2) a. tamen ba ((yi) ge) Baoyu gaode shenhundiandao. [ba construction]
   they BA one-CL Baoyu make entranced
   ‘They swept Baoyu off his feet.’

   b. Zhongguo chu le *((yi) ge) Mao Zedong. [Existential clause]
   China appear PERF one CL Mao Zedong
   ‘In China appeared Mao Zedong.’
There are a few things to be noted. Firstly, only the numeral *yi* ‘one’ but not other cardinals can appear before the classifier *ge*, and the numeral *yi*, being phonologically weak, can be omitted, i.e., *yi* + *ge* = *ge*. Secondly, the NUM-CL cluster [yi + ge] is optional before proper names in *ba* constructions (2a), but obligatory in existential clauses (2b). Thirdly, the general classifier *ge* is the only appropriate classifier to modify proper names, not other specific classifiers, like *wei* (a honorific classifier for people) etc.

This paper addresses three related questions concerning bare PNs and non-bare PNs: (i) what are the semantic and pragmatic differences between bare and non-bare PNs? (ii) Given that the *ba* construction requires argumental NPs, but the existential construction requires predicative NPs, how can non-bare PNs accommodate themselves into these two different contexts? (iii) What is the function of the classifier before proper names?

The article is organized as follows. In section 2, we make some intuitive and empirical observations about non-bare PNs in the *ba* construction and in existentials. In section 3, we show the focus-sensitivity and related pragmatic features of non-bare PNs. Section 4 offers a semantic account of the differences between bare and non-bare PNs.

2 A pragmatic account of bare and non-bare PNs

2.1 Proper names in *ba* constructions

Modern Chinese is claimed to be an SVO language (Li & Thompson 1974; Huang 1982). But in some cases, the object can be moved into a preverbal position from its base-generated object position, but the preposed object must be marked by the object marker *ba*. This is the so-called *ba* construction. The syntactic metamorphosis is constrained at least by the following two unanimously agreed constraints: (i) the *ba* nominal must be definite, specific or generic; (ii) *ba* clauses express disposal or causative meaning to the entity denoted by the NP (cf. Li & Thompson 1981; Tsao 1987; Liu 1997 and others). These two properties indicate that the NP after *ba* is argumental.

The derivation from a normal SVO sentence into a *ba* construction is illustrated below:

(3) a. *Wo da le Lisi/tamen/liang ge liumang.* [S + V + O]
   I beat PERF Lisi/them/two CL hooligan(s)
   ‘I beat Lisi/them/two hooligans.’

   b. *Wo ba Lisi/tamen/*(na) liang ge liumang da le.* [S + O + V]
   I BA Lisi/them/those two CL hooligan(s) beat PERF
   ‘I beat Lisi/them/*(those) two hooligan(s).’

We restrict ourselves to the uses of proper names in *ba* constructions. Interestingly, we find that both bare and non-bare PNs are acceptable in the *ba* construction, as in (4).

(4) a. *zhi zhe yi ju, ba (ge) Jiangping hu le yi tiao*
   only this one utterance, BA CL Jiangping scare PERF one jump
   ‘Just this one utterance gave Jiang Ping a fright.’ [Lü 1944]

   b. *ba (yi ge) Xiren le-de hezhang nianfo*[Tao & Zhang 2000]
   BA one-CL Xiren happy fold-palms pray
   ‘(This) made Xiren so happy that she prayed to Buddha by folding palms.’
Previous researchers (Lü 1944; Tao & Zhang 2000; Sugimura 2002), treated \([ba + ge + PN]\) on a par with \([ba + Cl + N]\) in general. That means that they did not realize the semantic and syntactic problems pertaining to the combination of Cls and PNs we pointed out. They observe that \([ba + Cl + N]\) expresses some subjective feelings such as surprise or unexpectedness. We agree with them on the pragmatic inference of unexpectedness, but they did not explain how and where it comes from.

We propose that the individual denoted by the non-bare PN is associated with a certain characteristic property in the context, viz. the C-property, and that the C-property triggers the pragmatic inference of unexpectedness.

To figure out where the unexpectedness comes from, we will compare non-bare PNs with the bare counterparts. The proposition that ‘they conquered Troy’ can be expressed by bare and non-bare PNs in four different ways in Mandarin Chinese, as shown in (5).

(5) ‘They conquered Troy.’
   a. \(tamen gongpo le \) Te-Luo-Yi.
      They conquer Perf Troy
   b. \(tamen gongpo le ge \) Te-Luo-Yi.
      They conquer Perf Cl Troy
   c. \(tamen ba Te-Luo-Yi gongpo le.\)
      They BA Troy conquer PERF
   d. \(tamen ba ge Te-Luo-yi gongpo le.\)
      they BA Cl Troy conquer PERF

These four sentences differ from each other: (5a) makes the statement in a neutral tone that Troy was conquered. There is no presupposition or implicature involved. It is typically found in textbooks. In (5b), the speaker expresses some unexpectedness about the conquering of Troy. By saying (5c), the speaker presupposes that the individual Troy is known by the addressees, i.e., as a part of the background information, but the unexpectedness is not observed (unless stress falls onto the proper name). (5d) has the richest pragmatic information. The speaker not only presupposes that Troy is a known individual, but also implicates that Troy is not likely to be conquered.

These four sentences can be distinguished straightforwardly in terms of givenness and unexpectedness, as shown below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Post-V bare PN</th>
<th>Post-V non-bare PN</th>
<th>Pre-V bare PN</th>
<th>Pre-V non-bare PN</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Given</td>
<td>+/-</td>
<td>+/-</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unexpected</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>+</td>
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</table>

We learn at least two things from the above table. Firstly, the entities denoted by the \(ba\) NP are presupposed to be known, which is in accordance with Mei’s (1977) argument that “\(ba\) is a functional marker to separate presupposition from focus.” Secondly, non-bare PNs always trigger the effect of unexpectedness.

There are two things to be noted. Firstly, if the bare PN is stressed in (5a) and (5c), the effect of unexpectedness can also be observed, the same as their counterparts in (5b) and (5d). We know that the phonological stress in English is treated as a focus marker, comparable with the focus-sensitive element \(even\) (Rooth 1985, 1992). This suggests a possibility that the classifier \(ge\) in non-bare PNs might be a focus marker, comparable to \(even\) as well.
Secondly, non-bare PNs are not always able to induce implicatures successfully and an appropriate context is always required. As in (6a), we can easily get the implicature that it is highly unlikely that Tyson was defeated by the slightly-built Chinese guy Xu-Ping, and the non-bare PN is completely grammatical in this case. In contrast, in (6b), it is no surprise that Xu-Ping was defeated by Tyson and no implicature can be induced. It is really odd to use a non-bare PN here.

(6)  
a. *Xu-Ping ba ge Taishen da bai le.
   ‘Xu-Ping defeated (the world class boxer) Tyson.’

b. # Taishen ba ge Xu-Ping da bai le.
   ‘Tyson defeated Xu-Ping.’

This contrast implies that the pragmatic inferences induced by non-bare PNs are somehow constrained by some (semantic) factor. We suggest that the inducing of implicature is to be attributed to some characteristic property (C-property) associated with the individual. For example, in (6a), the property of being a world-class boxer is introduced to the individual Tyson, with which the implicature is induced that Tyson is unlikely to be defeated. Nevertheless, in (6b), the proper name cannot associate the individual with such a related property in the context of boxing competition, so we fail to get an implicature. This indicates that a characteristic property C-Property should be an inseparable semantic component of the semantics of non-bare PNs.

Before wrapping up this subsection, we make another argument that the implicature derived from non-bare proper names are “conventional implicatures” (Horn 1984; Potts 2005). From the examples in (5), we learn that the implicature is attributed to the classifier ge or the phonological stress. Besides, we know from (6) that if the contextual information is not appropriate, we cannot get the implicature. These two points show that this kind of implicature is detachable but not cancellable, so they are indeed “conventional implicatures”.

### 2.2 Proper names in existentials

Now we turn to the use of non-bare PNs as predicates in existential clauses (ECs). Among the four types of ECs identified by Huang (1987), he observes that the definiteness effect (DE) is strictly observed only with ECs with (dis)appearance verbs, like lai ‘come’, fasheng ‘happen’, dao ‘arrive’, si ‘die’, qu ‘go’. Accordingly, NPs following this type of verbs must be “weak” in the sense of Milsark (1977).

(7)  
a. zheli si-le yi-ge ren/xuduo ren/*ta/*na-ge ren/*mei-ge ren.
   here die-PERF one-CL man/many men/he/that-CL man/every-CL man
   ‘Here died one man/many men/*he/*that man/*every man.’

b. lai-le liang-ge ren/xuduo ren/*Lisi/*ta/*mei-ge ren/*mei-ge ren.
   come-PERF two-CL man/many ren/Lisi/he/that-CL man/every-CL man
   ‘Here come two men/many men/*Lisi/*he/that man/every man.’

As shown in (7), proper names, pronouns, and DPs like ‘every man’ are “strong” and argumental, so they are disallowed in the predicative position of ECs. The examples with proper names in (7) can be remedied by inserting ge before PNs (8). The sign “#” means that the sentence is grammatical but of low degree of acceptability pragmatically.
This contrast shows again in a clear way that bare and non-bare PNs behave differently. Specifically, bare PNs are “strong” DPs, and they are ruled out in ECs, but non-bare PNs are “weak” DPs, and they are ruled in in ECs.

The question arising is: why can the insertion of the classifier make the proper name acceptable in existential clauses? We argue that in existentials, the classifier has the type-shifting function to make PNs from being individual denoting to being property-denoting.

Firstly, the more well-known the individual is, the more acceptable it is to use a non-bare PN to refer to it. For example, even though the insertion of the classifier turns the ungrammatical sentence into a grammatical one in (8), such sentences are pragmatically less acceptable. We suggest that their low degree of pragmatic acceptance is related to what degree the individual denoted by the proper name is known by the audience. The proper name Lisi is like John Doe in English, and it has a meta-linguistic use as a placeholder name. Therefore, we cannot associate any salient properties related to that individual. If we change the proper name Lisi with Mao Zedong or LiuXiang, then we get an acceptable sentence as in (9). This is because it is easy to associate them with a certain characterizing property, say, Mao Zedong be associated with the property of being a representative of the Chinese leaders, and LiuXiang of being a representative of the Chinese hurdler.

Secondly, non-bare PNs in existentials can be modified by a secondary predicate and a prenominal modifier, which expresses explicitly the property associated with the non-bare PNs, as in (10a) and (10b).

Thirdly, the singular determiner [yi + ge] can introduce an apparently plural entity, whose atomic parts share some same salient property in the context.
If we assume non-bare PNs are individual-denoting, then the coordination of PNs in (11a) denotes two different individuals who bear the names LiuXiang and YaoMing respectively. But this cannot explain why the singular quantifier one + Cl can introduce a plural entity. Alternatively, we can assume that non-bare PNs denote properties, and the coordination of proper names can be seen as the instantiations of a certain property. Accordingly, (11a) is interpreted as: in China appear famous athletes, such as LiuXiang and Yao Ming. Predictably, only PNs denoting individuals that share the same salient property can be coordinated. In (11a), LiuXiang and Yao Ming share the property of being world famous Chinese athletes, so they can be coordinated to instantiate that property, but in (11b), the two PNs have different properties — LiuXiang has the property of being an athlete and Chao Yuenren of being a linguist. So it is not appropriate to coordinate these two PNs.

In view of the evidence just given, it seems quite plausible to argue that the non-bare PNs are property-denoting in existentials. In particular, we make the claim that the individual denoted by the non-bare PN instantiates a property of being a representative individual in a certain field or category.

This argument coincides with the claim made by McNally (1998). She argues that existentials predicate instantiations of a property. Existential clauses do not simply assert that some entity (entities) (dis)appear ((dis)appear), but, more crucially, that the entity (entities) expressed by the existential NP instantiates (instantiate) some property. For example, in the expression of ‘there was snow’, ‘there was’ is interpreted as an existential predicate, which introduces an instantiation of the property ‘snow’. It is formalized as: ‘is_instantiated(^snow(x))’, where the property ‘snow’ is instantiated iff some quantity of snow exists.

Existentials with non-bare PNs also have some conventional implicatures. In contrast with the unexpectedness in ba constructions, existentials with non-bare PNs implicate representativeness or prototypicality. For example, (8b) has the conventional implication that Mao Zedong is a prototypical Chinese leader or that LiuXiang is a prototypical Chinese hurdler. But it is impossible to get an implicature like ‘it is unexpected that Mao Zedong is a leader or it is unexpected that LiuXiang is a hurdler’.

To induce the conventional implication of prototypicality, it is a prerequisite that the individual referred to by non-bare PN be characterized with a C-property. We use (11a) to illustrate this. (11a) implicates that LiuXiang and YaoMing are the most representative Chinese athletes in the world. Such an implicature is induced successfully only if LiuXiang has the C-property of being a famous hurdler and Yao Ming has the C-property of being a famous basketball player. Meanwhile, the coordination of two C-properties should be able to express a more general property in the context, as being famous athletes.

3 Focus-sensitivity of non-bare PNs

In this section, we will address what the semantic contribution the classifier makes and how the classifier combines with the proper name in a compositional way. In addition, we will see how we can account for the differences between non-bare PNs in ba constructions and existentials.

3.1 Scale of likelihood

Recall the examples with non-bare PNs in normal SVO order and in ba constructions in (5), as repeated in (12). We argued previously that non-bare PNs in (12) implicate...
unexpectedness or contrastiveness and that the classifier ge is a focus marker, comparable with the phonological stress or the scalar additive even.

(12) ‘They conquered Troy.’
   a. *tamen gongpo le ge Te-Luo-Yi.
      They conquer PERF Cl Troy
   b. *tamen ba ge Te-Luo-Yi gei gongpo le.
      They BA Cl Troy give conquer PERF

As argued by Jackendoff as early as in 1972, focus denotes one particular value picked out of a set of alternative values. In the spirit of alternative semantics (Rooth 1985), we argue that the non-bare PN, as being focus-marked, denotes an alternative set related to the individual x and that the alternative propositions in the set are ranked along a certain scale, e.g., the scale of likelihood, in the context and that the one at the lowest end of the scale of likelihood is picked out.

Interestingly, we find that different sets of alternatives are denoted when the non-bare PN is located at different syntactic positions in the surface structure. For example, in (12a), the non-bare PN is in a base-generated object position, and we get an alternative set related to the individual Troy. We first can get a set of alternative individuals, say,

\{Troy, Caesarea, Akko\},

and they are ranked from weak to strong: Akko < Caesarea < Troy. The sentence with the non-bare PN can then be analyzed with a set of alternative propositions, say,

\{'They conquered Troy’, ‘They conquered Akko’, ‘They conquered Caesarea’\},

among which the proposition that ‘They conquered Troy’ is ranked lowest along the scale of likelihood, compared with the propositions ‘They conquered Akko’ or ‘They conquered Caesarea’. It thus induces the maximal effect of unexpectedness by saying that ‘They conquered ge Troy’.

In (12b), the non-bare PN is in a preverbal position, marked by a functional marker ba, where the alternative set denoted is related to the whole VP, i.e., the conquering of Troy. We first can an alternative set of properties, e.g.,

\{'conquered Troy’, ‘made a plan to attack Troy’, ‘broke into Troy’\}.

Along this line, the alternative set of proposition can be:

\{'They made a plan to attack Troy’, ‘They broke into Troy’, ‘They conquered Troy’\},

among which the proposition ‘They defeated Troy’ is ranked as the lowest end of the scale of likelihood with respect to the other two propositions.

Put in a different way, the focus item ge scopes over the NP in (12a), but over the whole VP in (12b). We can paraphrase (12a) as ‘They conquered even Troy’, and (12b) as ‘They even conquered Troy.’

In addition to the assertion expressed by (12), ba constructions with non-bare PNs also require a presupposition, as given in (13) (cf. Krifka 1995; Giannakidou 2002):

(13) a. \(\lambda P \exists x [\lambda Q [(x = dD \land P(x)) \land [Q(x) \neq P(x)]] \land
         \forall Q [Q(x) \neq P(x) \rightarrow \text{likelihood}(Q(x)) > \text{likelihood}(P(x))]]\)
b. $\lambda Q[[T eluoyi = Troy \land they conquered Troy] \land
\lbrack Q(x) \neq they conquered Troy\rbrack] \land
\forall Q[Q(T roy) \neq they conquered Troy \rightarrow$
\likelihood(Q(T roy)) > \likelihood(they conquered Troy)]

The question arising is this: Why does the scope of focus extend over to the whole VP, since we know that only the ba NP is focus-marked? Given that sentence-final position is a focus position in Chinese (Xu 2004), and preverbal positions are topic or secondary topic positions (Li & Thompson 1981), the syntactic movement of the ba NP from a base-generated object position to a preverbal position is accompanied with the shift of the information status of the NP from a focus position to a non-focal position, e.g., ‘secondary topic’. However, the insertion of the classifier helps the preposed proper name re-gain the focus status due to its focus sensitivity. In other words, the focus contributed by the classifier ge overrides the secondary-topic status assigned to the ba NP. In addition, the preposing of NP leaves the verb as the sentence final element, which receives focus as default. The focus on the NP from the classifier and the one on the verb (sentential-final element) can merge into a single focused element (merged focus), which makes it possible for the alternative set to be related to the whole VP.

3.2 Scale of prototypicality

Recall the example in (8b), where the existential clause has a non-bare PN. We argued before that non-bare PNs in existentials are also property-denoting and focus-marked. In particular, the focus element ge scopes over the NP, i.e., the proper name, and we thus get an alternative set related to the individual $x$.

(14) a. Zhongguo chule ge LiuXiang.
China appear PERF CL LiuXiang
‘In China appeared LiuXiang.’

As in (14), the non-bare PN $ge$ LiuXiang has a presupposed C-property of being a famous Chinese hurdler in the context. Since the PN is focus-marked, we can first get a set of alternative individuals related to LiuXiang, say, $\{LiuXiang, X, Y, Z\}$. In fact, the alternative members must be related to LiuXiang with the C-property, i.e., they must be members of the set denoted by Chinese famous hurdlers. Particularly, they can be ranked along the scale of fame, say, LiuXiang $> X > Y > Z$. That is, compared with the alternative members in the set, LiuXiang is the most famous Chinese hurdler.

The sentence (14) can accordingly be analyzed with alternative semantics. The existential with a non-bare PN has the proposition asserted as in (14) and the alternative propositions. The alternative set of propositions can be something like

$\{‘In China appeared LiuXiang‘, ‘In China appeared X‘, ‘In China appeared Y‘\}$

They stand in a relation of semantic strength to each other. We argue that the alternatives are ranked along the scale of prototypicality and the proposition on the highest end of a scale is picked out. In other words, the proposition that ‘In China appeared LiuXiang’ has the highest degree of prototypicality if people want to make a statement about who is a representative Chinese hurdler.

The following implicature is always required when the existential has a non-bare PN.
Now let us turn to the following question: Why is the non-bare PN in *ba* constructions associated with the lowest end of a scale, i.e., the scale of likelihood, while in existentials it is associated with the highest end of a scale, i.e., the scale of prototypicality? Frankly speaking, we have not come up with a good answer to this question yet. We simply assume that the different scales associated with non-bare PNs are related to the verbs they are used with and the constructions in which they appear. As is well noted, in *ba* constructions there is a causation relation between the subject (causer) and the *ba* NP (caused) and the entities denoted by *ba* NPs usually undergo some change. The scale of likelihood expresses the degree of the people’s expectation of the change or the causative event. However, the existential clause is not involved with any causative link. In contrast, it asserts the existence or (dis)appearance of individual(s) and expresses the instantiations of a certain property. We can only talk about how prototypical the individual is with regard to the property. The scale of prototypicality is thus more appropriate.

4 Semantics of bare and non-bare PNs

We argue that bare and non-bare PNs are characterized with distinctive semantics. In particular, bare PNs are individual-denoting and non-bare PNs are property-denoting.

According to the “rigid designator” approach to PNs (Kripke 1972; Chierchia 1998), I assume that bare proper names in Chinese are no different from proper names in other languages, and that they are all mapped to argumental type *e* and denote unique individuals in every possible world in a default way, as illustrated in (16).

(16) ||bare PN|| = d_D

For example, the bare PN in (5a) and (5c) denotes a uniquely identifiable individual bearing the name Troy. Given that *ba* constructions require argumental NPs to fill in the slot between *ba* and VP, they can be used as *ba* NP without any cost.

In contrast, the semantics of non-bare PNs is more complicated. On the one hand, like bare PNs, non-bare PNs also denote unique individuals. For example, in (5b) and (5d), *ge Te-Luo-Yi* has the same denotation as that of *Te-Luo-Yi*, which refers to the unique Turkish city that is called Troy. As in (17), the non-bare PN can be the antecedent of the pronoun *ta* ‘it’.

(17) *Tamen ba ge Te-Luo-Yi gongpo le. ta zai Tuerqi.*
They BA GE Troy conquer PERF it at Turkey
‘They conquered Troy. It’s in Turkey.’

On the other hand, non-bare PNs also denote some characterizing properties in certain contexts. With those presupposed C-properties, sentences with non-bare PNs carry different kinds of “conventional implicatures” in different constructions. We consider this kind of P-properties as a part of the semantics of non-bare PNs.

We argue that the a non-bare PN is property-denoting, i.e., it denotes the property of being an individual with a certain name and with a certain characteristic property in
In other words, the non-bare PN seems to come out as some sort of hybrid: neither truly individual denoting nor truly property denoting in the classical sense.

\[ (18) \quad \| \text{non-bare PN} \|_{M,w} = \lambda x [x = d_D \land \exists PP(x)], \] where \( P \) is a characterizing property.

Note that different hearers may get the same implicature by associating different properties with the individual. For example, in (5d), the speaker implicates that Troy is not likely to be conquered, but the hearers may associate different \( P \)-properties with Troy, such as Troy is a well-guarded fortress, there is a wise ruler in Troy, Troy has far more soldiers than the opponents, etc. But they can get the same implicature that it is unexpected that they conquered Troy.

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