

The adverbial harmony and object-fronting prominence In the NW Chinese Mandarins

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Typologically classified as a VO language, Chinese shows a considerable complexity concerning the actual ordering of verbs and objects. Three major paradigms are attested in Chinese languages as a whole, *ba*-O-V and O-V besides V-O. *Ba* has been regarded as either a preposition or an object marker (OM), with O being an oblique or a fronted object. O-V, with mere fronting of the object, is generally associated with topicalization which may result from pragmatic or discursal factors. In Standard Mandarin the three orderings may overlap in the case of transitive expressions:

(1) The tripartite argument structure in St.M

V-O			O-V			<i>Ba</i> - O-V			
刷	墙	了	墙	刷	了	把	墙	刷	了
<i>shua</i>	<i>qiang</i>	<i>le</i>	<i>qiang</i>	<i>shua</i>	<i>le</i>	<i>ba</i>	<i>qiang</i>	<i>shua</i>	<i>le</i>
paint	wall	PERF	wall	paint	PERF	ba	wall	paint	PERF

‘(Sb.) painted the wall’

It is observed that the *ba*-O-V varies significantly in terms of both areal distribution and grammatical parameters, e.g. telicity, agentivity and TAM property of verbs, and referentiality and animacy of the object nouns. Geographically, the *ba*-construction is more prominent in the Northwestern Mandarins than other areas. Firstly, NW Mandarins impose fewer syntactico-semantic restrictions on the use of *ba*-construction and at the same time more on the V-O ordering. Secondly, the VO-to-*ba*-OV transformation is unidirectional and obligatory when the verb is in perfective aspect and the object is definite or in bare form (DEM-N or N). Thirdly and most significantly, a bunch of V-O structures are ‘converted’ into the *ba*-V-O paradigm under the conditions which bears *no* connection with the prototypical semantic or syntactic natures such as telicity, referentiality, or verb-complement combination. To be specific, with certain adverbials merely added before the verb, the used-to-be V-O constructions can or must be transformed into *ba*-O-V. These preverbal adverbials are juxtaposed, flexible in order, and sometimes semantically unnecessary. They are composed of prepositional phrases (Prep-N) encoding various semantic roles, manner adverbs, quantificational adverbs.

(2) V-O only, NW Chinese

兀	喝	奶	呢
<i>uo</i> ⁵¹	<i>xuo</i> ²¹	<i>le</i> ⁵¹	<i>ni</i> ⁰
3SG	drink	milk	IMPERF

‘He is drinking milk.’

(3) *ba*-O-V only, with (expletive) adverbials added

兀	把	奶	硬 _{AD1}	跟-么 _{AD2}	往-下 _{AD3}	喝	呢
<i>uo</i> ⁵¹	<i>pa</i> ²¹	<i>le</i> ⁵¹	<i>niŋ</i> ⁵⁵	<i>ken</i> ²¹ - <i>mo</i> ⁵¹	<i>uaŋ</i> ⁵⁵ - <i>xa</i> ⁵⁵	<i>xuo</i> ²¹⁻⁵¹	<i>ni</i> ⁰
3SG	BA	milk	tenaciously	like-DEM	toward-underside	drink	IMPERF

‘He is drinking milk with effort.’

Just as is shown in (3) where VO is obligatorily transformed into *ba*-O-V, the prepositional phrase 往下 (toward-underside) proves superfluous since no action of swallowing show other direction,

and the manner PP 跟么 (like that) mostly occur without any reference to a certain manner, thus non-referential. The adverb 硬, though semantically not so empty, contributes nothing to what will facilitate a *ba*-O-V to occur in SM or other Chinese dialects. This strategy of mere juxtaposition of certain adverbials, sometimes even *without* any semantic or functional contributions, is referred to as *adverbial harmony*, and some of the semantically null PPs or adverbs as *expletive adverbials*. The Greenbergian's cognominal *harmony*, essentially a paradigmatic conception, is supposed to be necessary for the existence of some other *recessive* (not prominent) orderings (e.g. Rel-N as a recessive order may only occur when N-Postposition order also occurs). As a contrast, the adverbial harmony in NW Chinese are *syntagmatic* in nature, i.e. with one or more adverbials stacked before the verb, the *ba*-O-V structure may expand its inventory so as to accommodate imperfective verbs and even [Num-CI-N] NPs, the used-to-be typical conditions for VO only. Some of these floppily stacked PPs or manner adverbs are so expletive/dummy that they develop into modality-expressing terms, e.g. '给-人家' (*kej⁵⁵-nian²¹*, lit. 'for them'), could have nothing to do with beneficiary conducts and there could be no referent for *nian²¹* 人家, thus to be used as a term similar to a deontic modal marker. The present study also notices from this perspective that the dialogistically organized dialects, esp. NW Chinese, are widening the gap from the standard mandarin especially based on the written style.