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 discoursal factors. In Standard Mandarin the three orderings may overlap in the case of transitive expressions:

(1) The tripartite argument structure in St.M

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>V-O</th>
<th>O-V</th>
<th>Ba-O-V</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>shua</td>
<td>qiang</td>
<td>le</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>paint</td>
<td>wall</td>
<td>PERF</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ba</td>
<td>wall</td>
<td>paint</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ba</td>
<td>wall</td>
<td>paint</td>
</tr>
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<td>ba</td>
<td>wall</td>
<td>paint</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

‘(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
uo51 xuo21 le51 ni0
3SG drink milk IMPERF
‘He is drinking milk.’

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

兀 把 奶 硬 ao1 跟-么 ao2 往-下 ao3 喝 呢
uo51 pa21 le51 nij55 keng21-mo51 uaj55-xo55 xuo21-51 ni0
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-Cl-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’ (kei55-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 dialogically organized dialects, esp. NW Chinese, are widening the gap from the standard mandarin especially based on the written style.