

VERB GAPPING AND VP ELLIPSIS IN CHINESE*

Waltraud PAUL

Centre de Recherches linguistiques sur l'Asie Orientale
Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique

1. Introduction

There seems to be quite a consensus about the fact that Chinese, contrary to other languages like English, French etc. lacks the functional projection *Agreement Phrase*. Many scholars within the field of Chinese linguistics go a step further and take this as evidence for the non-existence of any overt movement of the verb to a higher functional category (cf. Huang 1993b, Tsai 1994).¹ The only movement allowed for the verb is that within an (extended) VP-shell (cf. Larson 1988), i.e. to empty V^o-positions. This assumption seems to get support from Johnson(1994) who analyses verb gapping in English as "across-the-board" movement of the verb to the functional head *Tense*^o rather than as an instance of deletion or ellipsis of the verb. On the basis of this analysis then, the alleged impossibility for the verb of moving to a position outside the VP is correlated with the apparent lack of verb gapping in Chinese.

In the present article, we will argue against this view and show that:

- 1) the examples provided as evidence for the lack of verb gapping in Chinese are insufficient, i.e. they do not represent the whole array of data to be taken into account for this issue;
- 2) there are verbless sentences in Chinese which have to be analysed as cases of verb gapping;
- 3) the movement of the verb to a functional category in overt syntax implied by Johnson's analysis exists in Chinese as well and cannot only be observed in verb gapping, but also in VP ellipsis;

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¹ Tsai(1994: 222) excludes this movement even for the level of *Logical Form* and bases this statement upon the lack of Case resistance effects in Chinese and the impossibility for Chinese subject indefinites to reconstruct at LF in order to benefit from \exists -closure (p. 218). As will be shown in the following, the conclusion from the lack of an AgrP projection to the lack of verb movement to a functional category above VP in Chinese is much too hasty.

4) consequently, the functional category dominating VP in Chinese can be lexically filled, i.e. it can be occupied by the verb and it is not correct to state that it remains always phonologically empty (as Ernst 1994 does).

2. Verb Gapping

2.1. *The data*

It is true that the Chinese equivalents of the standard verb gapping examples are unacceptable in Chinese:

- (1) Wo xihuan mao, ni *(xihuan) gou²
 1SG like cat 2SG like dog
 'I like cats, and you (like) dogs.'
- (2) Nanren chi mi, beiren *(chi) mian
 southerner eat rice northerner eat noodles
 'Southerners eat rice, and northerners (eat) noodles.'

But to conclude from the unacceptability of sentences like (1) and (2) to the statement that Chinese disallows verb gapping (a conclusion with rather far-reaching theoretical consequences) as for example Tsai(1994: 220-221) does on the basis of the unacceptability illustrated in (2), is much too hasty and does not do justice to the situation in Chinese. For as already pointed out by Li Meidu(1988), sentences where the object is a quantified NP rather than a bare noun do allow for the omission of the verb:³

² The following abbreviations are used in glossing examples: CL classifier; EXP experiential aspect; NEG negation; PERF perfective aspect; PL plural (e.g. 3PL = 3rd person plural); SG singular; SUB subordinator.

³ In fact, sometimes the verb may also be gapped in the presence of a modified or a generic NP (cf. (ii) - (iv) vs. (i)). Consequently, the surface filter: *N° Ø N° postulated by Li(1988: 97) which excludes the juxtaposition of bare nouns as the result of gapping does not correctly cover the data, either:

- (i) *Wo ai deguoren/mao/hongse-de hua, ta meiguoren/ma/ lanse-de hua
 1SG love German /cat/ red -SUB flower 3SG American /horse/blue -SUB flower
 'I like /Germans/cats/red flowers, and he Americans/horses/blue flowers.'
- (ii) ??Zhangsan xihuan gao-de / hong toufa-de nühai, Lisi ai -de / hei toufa -de nühai
 Zhangsan like tall-SUB / red hair -SUB girl Lisi short-SUB / black hair -SUB girl
 'Zhangsan likes tall girls/girls with red hair, and Lisi short girls/ girls with black hair.'
- (iii) ?Wo he cha, ta kafei (iv) ?Wo chi niurou, ta zhurou
 1SG drink tea 3SG coffee 1SG eat beef 3SG pork
 'I drink tea, and he coffee.' 'I eat beef, and he pork.'

- (3) Ta chi-le liang-wan fan, wo liang-wan zhou
 3SG eat-PERF 2 -bowl rice 1SG 2 -bowl gruel
 'He ate two bowls of rice, and I two bowls of gruel.'
- (4) Wo you san-bu qiche, ta san-liang zixingche
 1SG have 3 -CL car 3SG 3 -CL bicycle
 'I have three cars, and he three bicycles.'
- (5) Wo qing -le wu-ge xuesheng, ta wu-ge tongxue
 1SG invite-PERF 5 -CL student 3SG 5 -CL class-mate
 'I invited five students, and he five class-mates.'
- (6) You liang-jian cesuo; ni jin zhei-jian, wo nei-jian
 have 2 -CL toilet 2SG enter this-CL 1SG that-CL
 'There are two toilets; you go into this one, and I into that one.'

As shown in Paul(1994), the same phenomenon can be observed in the presence of complements of duration or frequency which - like objects - occupy the postverbal position:

- (7) Ta lai -guo wu-ci , wo yi-ci
 3SG come-EXP 5 -time 1SG 1 -time
 'He has been here five times, and I once.'
- (8) Ta xue -le yi-nian, wo san-nian
 3SG learn-PERF 1 -year 1SG 3 -year
 'He studied for one year, and I for three years.'

Furthermore, the verb may also be gapped in the presence of an NP like *san-ci lü* '3-times donkey' where the temporal complement *san-ci* '3-times' appears as a (pseudo) quantifier of the direct object:

- (9) Wo qi -guo san-ci ma , ta san-ci lü
 1SG ride-EXP 3 -time horse 3SG 3 -time donkey

shei shuo women mei qi -guo!
 who say 1PL NEG ride-EXP

'I have ridden on a horse 3 times, and he 3 times on a donkey; who dares to say we have never done that before!'

(For an attempt to explain the connection between the nature of the object NP and the possibility of verb gapping, which cannot be discussed here, cf. Paul 1994.) Since the best acceptability results are obtained with quantified NPs, the verb gapping examples used in this article will be exclusively of that type.

- (10) women jintian xiaowu dou mangde xie dongxi:
1PL today afternoon all busy write thing

wo xie -le san-ge xiaoshi-de wenzhang, ta san-ge xiaoshi-de baogao
1SG write-PERF 3 -CL hour -SUB article 3SG 3 -CL hour -SUB report

'This afternoon, we both have been very busy writing up things: I have written an article for three hours, and he for three hours a report.'

The acceptability of (9) and (10) for at least part of the native speakers provides evidence for an underlying verb in the second conjunct. For the restructuring of the temporal complement as an apparent quantifier of the direct object illustrated here is only possible within a verbal projection. Hence the unacceptability of an NP like *san-ge xiaoshi de wenzhang* anywhere else (e.g. in subject position), even if the immediately preceding linguistic context clearly indicates the temporal complement function of *san-ge xiaoshi* (cf. Paul 1988: ch. 6.1.):

- (11a) Ta xie -le [san-ge xiaoshi-de wenzhang]
3SG write-PERF 3 -CL hour -SUB article
'He wrote an article for three hours.'

- (11b) *[san-ge xiaoshi-de wenzhang] bu gou
3 -CL hour -SUB article NEG enough
'(An article of three hours is not enough.)'

In this section, we have extended the data basis and shown that contrary to the current opinion, verb gapping is possible in Chinese. It is, however, much more restricted than verb gapping e.g. in English.

In particular, it is only possible in a coordination with 'and', which in Chinese is expressed by the simple juxtaposition of the two clauses without any overt marking. In the case of 'or', an overt conjunction *haishi* is used, and verb gapping is completely ruled out then.

Furthermore, verb gapping is observed in the spoken language only, and it necessitates a maximum parallelism, i.e. a minimal contrast between the remnants.

Last, but not least the acceptability judgements show a certain degree of variation: among the native speakers consulted, those from North-East China only accept examples of the type illustrated in (7)-(8) with temporal complements, while speakers from regions further south (Jiangsu province and Taiwan) also judge sentences like (3)-(6) grammatical.⁴ The second group is again divided into those

⁴ If Ernst(1995) is right in claiming that - like arguments - complements of duration or frequency need Case, then the fact that some speakers only accept verb gapping in the presence of temporal complements cannot be interpreted as an instance of an argument/adjunct asymmetry. This is in fact the expected result, for temporal complements are the only type of "adjunct" which - like direct objects - must appear in postverbal position, and in that respect they behave like arguments (cf. Huang 1991 (class lectures, Linguistic Institute at Santa Cruz) who for this reason calls them *argumentals*).