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*Proceedings of the Sixteenth Annual Meeting of the Berkeley Linguistics Society* (1990), pp. 305-314

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## IS THERE OBJECT-TO-SUBJECT RAISING IN CHINESE?

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The comparison of similar linguistic phenomena across the world's languages has always been a resourceful means for the study of grammar. There is, however, no a priori guarantee that what appear to be similar are indeed sufficiently correspondent to justify the crosslinguistic comparison of structure. Sometimes it will turn out that apparently comparable phenomena are, under scrutiny, rather different in nature. The seeming resemblance between the raising structure in English and the alleged object-to-subject raising structure in Chinese is such a case.

### 1. The Object-to-Subject Raising Analysis

The process of object-to-subject raising is also known as tough-movement. It is usually associated with the standard theory of generative grammar, but it has attracted much attention in current linguistic studies with regard to language universals and the issue of empty categories in formal syntax (e.g. Comrie and Mathews 1989, Lasnik and Uriagereka 1988). The raising analysis is prompted by the fact that in certain English sentences, such as the one in (1a), the surface matrix subject does not bear any semantic relation to the matrix verb. As a matter of fact, the collocation of the surface subject and matrix verb is usually nonsensical or has a different interpretation, as in the case of (2).

(1) a. John is easy to please.

b. It is easy to please John.

(2) John is easy.

In terms of thematic relation, the surface subject in such a sentence is apparently the patient NP of the embedded verb. Sentence (1a) seems to have the same truth value as (1b) does. In the early days of generative transformational grammar, this generalization is captured by postulating the surface subject as the embedded object in deep structure. It is then moved to the surface subject position by an object-to-subject raising rule (Postal 1974). The movement is treated in a different manner in the current government-binding theory, but the crucial assumption remains the same, namely, the surface matrix subject is related to the embedded object position (Chomsky 1981, 1986).

What have inspired the object-to-subject raising analysis in Chinese are sentence pairs like (3) (from Li 1985) and (4), which are apparently parallel to the English pair in (1). The two sentences in such pairs seem to have the same truth value, and they have exactly the same constituents. The only difference is the order of these constituents. The (a) sentence in these pairs consists of a sentential subject and an adjectival predicate. In the corresponding (b) sentence, the verb of the subject clause

in (a) appears in the sentence final position. The adjectival predicate of (a) now occurs between the initial NP and the final verb of (b).

(3) a. [Chongfu      zheige      gushi] hen      nan.  
 repeat      this Cl.      story      very      difficult  
 'To repeat this story is very difficult.'

b. Zheige      gushi      hen      nan      chongfu.  
 this Cl.      story      very      difficult      repeat  
 'This story is very difficult to repeat.'

(4) a. [Anshi      wancheng      jihua]      bu      rongyi.  
 on time      complete      project      not      easy  
 'To complete the project on time is not easy.'

b. Jihua      bu      rongyi      anshi      wancheng.  
 project      not      easy      on time      complete  
 'The project is not easy to complete on time.'

According to the object-to-subject raising analysis, the sentence initial NP in the (b) sentence has become the surface subject, while the adjective phrase after it remains unchanged as the matrix predicate. In other words, the subject clause in the (a) sentence is now the embedded clause. This movement is triggered by the so-called raising verbs, namely, the adjective in the matrix predicate of the (a) sentences, which include keneng 'possible', hen nan 'very difficult' and rongyi 'easy'. How the movement is carried out differs from analysis to analysis. In Hou (1979), the (b) sentence is generated in the same deep structure as (a) is, i.e., with a subject clause. The object-to-subject raising rule postpones the VP of the subject clause and creates an embedded clause. In some other analysis, (e.g. Li 1985), the (b) sentence is generated with an embedded clause and an empty matrix subject position. The object of the embedded clause is then raised to become the matrix subject. If the embedded object is not raised, the whole embedded clause will surface as the subject.

As part of the parallel analysis, it has been claimed that the raising verbs, i.e., the adjectival predicates, only take nonfinite complement clause (Li 1985, Goodall 1983). Ungrammatical sentences like (5) and (6) (from Li 1985:129) are cited as evidence for this claim. The argument is that a nonfinite verb does not inflect. The unacceptable status of (5) is therefore caused by the aspect marker le attached to the embedded verb. It is a standard assumption of the government-binding theory that the subject position of a nonfinite clause cannot be filled by a lexical NP, because the NP there cannot get case and will not pass the Case Filter. The sentence in (6) is thus ungrammatical since the subject position of the embedded clause is filled with an NP.

(5) \*Zheige      gushi bu      rongyi chongfule.  
 this Cl.      story not      easy repeat Asp.  
 'This story is not easy to have repeated.'

(6) \*Zheige      gushi bu      rongyi [xuesheng      chongfu].  
 this Cl.      story not      easy student      repeat  
 'This story is not easy for the students to repeat.'

## 2. Problems Of The Raising Analysis

The parallel between the English raising structure and its alleged Chinese counterpart does not go any further. Upon careful examination, the Chinese raising structure turns out to have many unique properties of its own. A prominent one is that the one-to-one relationship between the two sentences in pairs like (3) is not always available. The sentence in (7a), for example, is related to the sentence in (4a) and the two have almost identical structure. There is, however, no counterpart for (7a) with a raised object. Neither (7b) nor (7c) is acceptable. The object NP of the subject clause is not inside any island. The object-to-subject raising rule simply fails to apply in this case.

(7) a. [Neng      wancheng      jihua]      bu      rongyi.  
       can      complete      project      not      easy  
       'To be able to complete the project on time is not easy.'

b. \*Jihua      neng bu      rongyi      anshi      wancheng.  
    project      can      not      easy      on time      complete

c. \*Jihua      bu      rongyi neng anshi      wancheng.  
    project      not      easy      can      on time      complete

Another unusual property of the alleged raising process in Chinese is that it seems to be able to raise an object across clause boundaries. In sentence (8a), the NP zheige jihua 'this project' is the object of an embedded clause inside the subject clause. In the corresponding (8b), the same NP occurs in the sentence initial position. Under the raising analysis, this NP would be considered as being raised from the embedded object position to the matrix subject position. This kind of 'super-raising' is rather peculiar in the sense that it is not allowed in English and other languages. The restriction on raising across clause boundaries is usually given as the explanation for why the English sentence in (9b) cannot be derived from (9a) (cf. Postal 1974). The object-to-subject raising in Chinese seems to differ from that of English in this respect.

(8) a. [Lijie      tamen weishenmo      bu      anshi  
       understand      they why      not      on time  
       wancheng      zheige      jihua]      bu      nan.  
       complete      this Cl.      project      not      difficult  
       'It is not difficult to understand why they do not  
       complete this project on time.'

- b. Zheige      jihua      bu      nan      lijie  
 this Cl.      project      not      difficult      understand  
tamen      weishenmo      bu      anshi      wancheng.  
 they      why      not      on time      complete  
 ‘As for this project, (one) has little difficulty in understanding  
 why they do not want to complete (it) on time.’

- (9) a. It is easy to see that John loves Mary.  
 b. \*Mary is easy to see that John loves.

The third unexpected property of the object-to-subject raising structure in Chinese is that the raising seems to be optional. Notice that the sentence initial NP in the (b) sentence of (3), (4) and (8) can always occur after the sentence final verb without changing the acceptability and interpretation of the sentence, as shown in (3c), (4c) and (8c) below. The NP in question is apparently not obliged to raise even when the sentence initial position is not occupied by any NP. This is in contrast with the English object-to-subject raising, which is obligatory in the sense that the matrix subject position has to be filled, otherwise the sentence will not be acceptable, as in the case of (1c).

- (1) c. \* Is easy to please John.

- (3) c. Hen      nan      chongfu      zheige      gushi.  
 very      difficult      repeat      this Cl.      story  
 ‘(It is) very difficult to repeat this story.’

- (4) c. Bu      rongyi      anshi      wancheng      jihua.  
 not      easy      on time      complete      project  
 ‘(It is) not easy to complete the project on time.’

- (8) c. Bu      nan      lijie      tamen      weishenmo  
 not      difficult      understand      they      why  
bu      anshi      wancheng      zheige      jihua.  
 not      on time      complete      this Cl.      plan  
 ‘(It is) not difficult to understand why they do not  
 complete this project on time.’

The most extraordinary feature of the alleged object-to-subject raising in Chinese is the dubious status of the raised object. According to the raising analysis, the sentence initial NP in (3b) and (4b) is the surface subject, even though it has the thematical role of patient of the embedded verb. A problem arises when the agent NP of the same verb is brought into consideration. The agent NP is not present in the data examined so far, but its absence is by no means obligatory. In a sentence like (3b), the agent NP of the embedded verb can occur legitimately in a position preceding the raising verb, either before the patient NP or after it, as in the case of

(3d) and (3e) respectively. The position of the patient NP is not a factor here. When it appears after the verb, the agent NP can still be present in a preverbal position, as in (3f) below.

(3) d. Wo zheige gushi hen nan chongfu.  
 I this Cl. story very difficult repeat  
 'I, this story, can hardly repeat.'

e. Zheige gushi wo hen nan chongfu.  
 this Cl. story I very difficult repeat  
 'This story, I can hardly repeat.'

f. Wo hen nan chongfu zheige gushi.  
 I very difficult repeat this Cl. story  
 'I can hardly repeat this story.'

It is generally agreed that when the agent NP and the patient NP of an active verb are both present in the same sentence, the agent NP, but not the patient NP, will assume the grammatical function of subject (Fillmore 1968, Keenan 1976). There is no obvious reason to consider (3d), (3e) and (3f) as exceptional cases. The contrast between (10a) and (10b) provides some additional evidence for the argument that the raised object in such sentences does not behave like a subject.

(10) a. \*[Zheige xiaotou], hen nan  
 this Cl. thief very difficult  
zai ziji, jia zhuadao.  
 at self home catch  
 'This thief is difficult to catch at his own home.'

b. [Zheige xiaotou], jingcha, hen nan  
 this Cl. thief police very difficult  
zai ziji<sub>ey/i</sub>, jia zhuadao.  
 at self home catch  
 'This thief, the policeman<sub>i</sub> can hardly  
 catch him at his<sub>i</sub> own home.'

Inside the locative prepositional phrase of (10a) and (10b), there is a reflexive ziji 'self'. The indexing and interpretation of (10b) shows that the anaphor can take as its antecedent the agent NP jingcha 'policeman', but not the patient NP xiaotou 'thief'. Even when the agent NP is absent, the sentence initial patient NP still cannot function as the antecedent of the anaphor, as shown by the unacceptable status of (10a). It is a well known fact that the anaphor ziji 'self' takes only a c-commanding subject as its antecedent (Tang 1988, Cole et al. 1990). The pattern in (10) indicates clearly that the agent NP is the subject, but the preverbal patient NP is not.

If the argument is correct that the preverbal patient NP in sentences like (3b) does not have the status of a subject, the object-to-subject raising analysis in Chinese will lose most of its validity. An alternative account has to be found for the sentence initial patient NP.

### 3. An Alternative Analysis

Recall that the one-to-one relation is not always available between the two sentences in pairs like (3a) and (3b), but a one-to-one relation can always be established between the two sentences in pairs like (3b) and (3c) (repeated below). It is possible that (3b) is syntactically related to (3c), and the apparent correspondence between (3a) and (3b) is just accidental. Given this observation, an alternative analysis is available.

- (3) a. [Chongfu      zheige              gushi] hen      nan.  
 repeat      this Cl.              story      very      difficult  
 'To repeat this story is difficult.'
- b. Zheige              gushi      hen      an                      chongfu.  
 this Cl.              story      very      difficult              repeat  
 'This story is difficult to repeat.'
- c. Hen      nan                      chongfu              zheige              gushi.  
 very      difficult              repeat              this Cl.              story  
 '(It is) very difficult to repeat this story.'

It is generally agreed that the unmarked position for the direct object of a Chinese transitive verb is after that verb, at least in the surface structure. The patient NP in (3c) is therefore in its basic position, and the one in (3b) is in a derived position. The proposal of this paper is that the patient NP in (3b) is in a topic position.

This alternative analysis provides a straightforward account for the phenomena discussed so far in this paper. Topicalization in Chinese is an optional process in that no NP will be forced to move to the sentence initial position on pure syntactic ground. It is therefore legitimate for a patient NP to either stay in its normal postverbal position or move to the sentence initial topic position, as in (3b) and (3c) respectively.

Under the topicalization analysis, the problematic super-raising in (8b) becomes a predicted result. Topicalization in Chinese is an unbounded process that can move an NP across boundaries of embedded clauses as long as no island violation is involved. It is therefore quite natural for the object of the embedded clause to move to the sentence initial topic position. The only adjustment is that (8b) is no longer analysed as syntactically related to (8a). It is now considered as a counterpart of the sentence in (8c).

- (8) b. Zheige      jihua bu      nan                      lijie  
 this Cl.      plan not      difficult                      understand  
tamen              weishenmo      bu      anshi                      wancheng.  
 they              why              not      on time                      complete  
 'As for this project, (one) has little difficulty to understand  
 why they do not complete (it) on time.'

- c. Bu      nan                      lijie                      tamen weishenmo  
 not      difficult                      understand                      they      why  
bu      anshi                      wancheng                      zheige                      jihua.  
 not      on time                      complete                      this Cl.                      project  
 '(One) has little difficulty to understand why they  
 do not complete the project on time.'

The simultaneous presence of the raised object and its agent NP has been the most serious challenge to the object-to-subject raising analysis. It poses no threat at all to the approach of this paper. The topic is usually considered as occupying a position outside the comment clause (S or IP), but not any position within the clause (Li and Thompson 1981, Chomsky 1981). When the patient NP of an active verb appears in the topic position, the subject position of the same verb will always be available for the agent NP to occur. It is quite common for a topicalized patient NP and its agent NP to cooccur, so that either (3d) or (3e) is normal.

Two issues have to be addressed here. One is the structure of sentences like (3d) (repeated below), where the patient NP occurs between the verb and the agent NP without any overt marker. This construction is rather common in Chinese, but is not well understood yet. A possible analysis is to treat the patient NP as a secondary topic (cf. Tsao 1977) or a focus NP. The agent NP will remain as the subject of the clause. The sentence will have a structural representation in the shape of (11a). Another possibility is to consider the patient NP as being topicalized first, and the agent NP being topicalized after it. This process will produce the structure of (11b). Either analysis is compatible with the approach in this paper.

- (3) d. Wo      zheige                      gushi hen      nan                      chongfu.  
 I      this Cl.                      story      very      difficult                      repeat  
 'I, this story, can hardly repeat.'

- (11) a.      NP<sub>subj</sub> [VP NP<sub>topic/focus</sub> [VP V t]]  
 b.      [S' NP<sub>topic1</sub> [S' NP<sub>topic2</sub> [S t<sub>1</sub> + V + t<sub>2</sub>]]]

The other issue is related to the agent NP in sentences like (3b) and (3c). Under the raising analysis, the so-called raising verb is the matrix verb in (3b), and the verb that subcategorizes for the patient NP is nonfinite so that it cannot take a lexical subject. The claim follows that the agent NP must not appear in the sentence. It has been shown in the previous section that the claim is counterfactual and the agent NP can always appear in the same sentence with the patient NP. The topicalization analysis of this paper has the advantage of not excluding the presence of agent NP,

but it does not provide any direct explanation for the phenomenon that the agent NP can be absent and that it cannot occur between the raising verb and the embedded verb in (3b).

The account for these facts is supplied by some independently motivated analyses. It has long been noticed that an argument in a Chinese sentence can always be realized as a zero form if it is related to an entity being discussed in the discourse, namely, the so-called discourse topic. When the zero form occurs in the subject position, it can also stand for a universal quantifier, i.e., the NP renheren 'anybody' (Tsao 1977, Li and Thompson 1981, Huang 1984). In other words, the subject position of any Chinese sentence can be filled with a zero form, and sentences like (3b) are only a subtype of empty subject clauses. They differ from the other zero subject sentences in that their object NP has been topicalized, but that distinction bears no consequence on the occurrence of zero subject.

As for the claim that no NP can occur between the raising verb and the embedded verb in sentences like (3b), the explanation is provided by the alleged raising verbs themselves. Notice that the claim is not an accurate generalization. Although an agent NP cannot occur between certain raising verbs and the embedded verb, it can do so in cases like (12b). Keneng 'possible' is said to be a typical raising verb (Hou 1979), but it obviously allows the agent NP of the alleged embedded verb to occur after it. Apparently, there are two types of raising verbs with regard to the position of the agent NP in question. This classification coincides with another well known distinction. It has been pointed out that what used to be called preverbal adverbs consist of two types, adverbs like keneng 'possibly' and modals like rongyi 'easy' (Lü et al. 1983). A Chinese modal can only occur between the subject and the VP of its own clause, while an adverb can usually occur either between the subject and the VP or in a sentence initial position.

(12) a. Zheige      gushi      keneng              tingguole.  
           this Cl.      story      possible              hear Asp.  
           'This story (one) possibly has heard.'

b. Zheige      gushi      keneng      ni      tingguole.  
           this Cl.      story      possible      you      hear Asp.  
           'This story, possibly you have heard.'

c. Zheige      gushi      ni      keneng              tingguo.  
           this Cl.      story      you      possible              hear Asp.  
           'This story, you possibly have heard.'

Given the topicalization analysis, the so-called raising verbs do not have to be treated as matrix verbs. They can be considered as adverbs and modals. The adverbs allow the subject NP to precede or follow it, as in (12), but the modals prohibit the subject from occurring after it.

Incidentally, the glossary usually given to sentences like (3b) is misleading. The sentence in (3b) should not be translated as 'The story is very difficult to repeat', but should be 'The story, (one) can hardly repeat it.'

#### 4. Conclusion

The main argument in this paper is that the alleged object-to-subject raising in Chinese is not comparable to its English counterpart with respect to structure. It is a case of topicalization.

With respect to function, however, there may be some similarity between the object-to-subject raising in English and the topicalization in Chinese. Topicalization is a means to emphasize a certain NP, by moving it to the sentence initial position. In a sense, the function of object-to-subject raising is also to emphasize an object NP, by raising it from an embedded position to the matrix subject position (Chafe 1976).

The process of topicalization is more general in the sense that it is not restricted to the movement of a particular NP. It could be speculated, then, that object-to-subject raising does not exist in Chinese because a more general process is always available to carry out the same function.

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