

A Reclassification of VP Ellipsis in Chinese Coordinate Sentences

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Abstract: VP ellipsis in Chinese came to be discussed in the latest thirty years and many researches have studied on this topic. The focus is whether Chinese VP ellipsis can be analyzed as English VP ellipsis. Strict and sloppy reading ambiguities, locality effects on sloppy reading as well as mixed readings are typical properties of English VP ellipsis and these properties can also be observed in Chinese VP ellipsis. We suggest that the dummy auxiliary *shi* ‘be’ and the modal verb such as *neng* ‘can’ should not occupy the same syntactic position because the dummy *shi* ‘be’ is base-generated in Aux, which is higher than the modal verb position Mod. We reclassify Chinese VP ellipsis into three categories and the three categories that we propose in the thesis include: the *shi* construction, the modal verb construction and the content verb construction. The *shi* construction and the modal verb construction belong to the functional VP ellipsis and the content verb construction belongs to the content VP ellipsis. We adopt the VP shell theory to analyze the derivation of the three categories of Chinese VP ellipsis. What the three categories share is that the vP of all the three categories rather than the VP is deleted in the PF component.

Introduction

The thesis is concerned with the reclassification of VP ellipsis constructions in Chinese coordinate sentences. VP ellipsis is a heated topic in the field of Generative Grammar.

Most of the researches focus on whether the null object construction (NOC) can be analyzed as the VP ellipsis in Chinese. However, there are few researches on the classification of Chinese VP ellipsis.

The purpose of the thesis is mainly to reclassify VP ellipsis constructions in Chinese and explain how the different categories of Chinese VP ellipsis are derived. Our research is conducted within the framework of Generative Grammar. The thesis is an attempt to reclassify Chinese VP ellipsis.

VP ellipsis and its Properties

(1) is a typical example of English VP ellipsis. The VP *likes her dress* is elided in the second clause. When the pronoun *her* is concerned, it has two interpretations (1a) and (1b).

(1) Betty likes her dress, and Lillian does [e], too.

a. Betty likes Betty’s dress, and Lillian likes Betty’s dress, too. (Strict reading)

b. Betty likes Betty’s dress, and Lillian likes Lillian’s dress, too. (Sloppy reading)

Besides strict and sloppy reading ambiguities, there is another typical property of English VP ellipsis, which is regarded as locality effects on sloppy reading. The example of English VP ellipsis is shown in (2).

(2) Betty saw her dress, and Zoe knew that Michelle did [e], too.

a. ‘Betty saw Betty’s dress, and Zoe knew that Michelle saw Betty’s dress, too.’ (Strict)

b. ‘Betty saw Betty’s dress, and Zoe knew that Michelle saw Michelle’s dress, too.’ (Local sloppy)

c. * ‘Betty saw Betty’s dress, and Zoe knew that Michelle saw Zoe’s dress, too.’ (Nonlocal)

sloppy)

(3) Betty said she hated her teacher, and Lillian did [e], too.

a. ‘Betty said Betty hated Betty’s teacher, and Lillian said Betty hated Betty’s teacher, too.’
(Strict, strict)

b. ‘Betty said Betty hated Betty’s teacher, and Lillian said Lillian hated Lillian’s teacher, too.’
(Sloppy, sloppy)

c. ‘Betty said Betty hated Betty’s teacher, and Lillian said Lillian hated Betty’s teacher, too.’
(Sloppy, strict)

d. * ‘Betty said Betty hated Betty’s teacher, and Lillian said Betty hated Lillian’s teacher, too.’
(Strict, sloppy)

From the above data, we conclude that English VP ellipsis shows three properties: strict and sloppy reading; locality effects on sloppy reading; mixed readings.

Literature review

Huang’s Proposal. Many Chinese scholars have studied Chinese VP ellipsis. Huang[1,2,3] claims that the NOC (null object construction) in Chinese, such as (4), can be treated analogously to English VP ellipsis such as (1). (4a) and (4b) are the two interpretations of sentence (4).

(4) Limeng xihuan tade qunzi, Zhangli ye xihuan [e].

Limeng like her dress Zhangli also like

‘Limeng likes her dress, and Zhangli does, too.’

a. ‘Limeng likes Limeng’s dress, and Zhangli likes Limeng’s dress.’

b. ‘Limeng likes Limeng’s dress, and Zhangli likes Zhangli’s dress.’

Huang argues that (4) has two characteristics, which can also be found in English VP ellipsis constructions, namely, strict and sloppy reading ambiguities and locality effects on sloppy reading. So he gets a conclusion that the NOC in Chinese is VP ellipsis in disguise. Huang also proposes that the repeated verb in the second clause of (4) can be analyzed as English VP ellipsis through V-Infl raising, which moves the repeated verb into an abstract Infl node. The elided part in the PF component is VP, but not the null object. Huang’s analysis is exemplified as in (5).

(5) Zhangli ye [...[V-to-Infl xihuan] [VP [V t] [NP e]]].

Xu’s Idea. Xu[4] claims that Huang’s analysis of the NOC in Chinese is not VP ellipsis. The genuine VP ellipsis in Chinese is the second clause with an occurrence of *shi* ‘be’ or the modal verb such as *neng* ‘can’, as is shown in (6):

(6) Ta neng qi che, wo ye neng/shi [e].

he can ride bike I also can/be

‘He can ride bike, and I can [e], too’

Zhang’s Analysis. Zhang[5] generalizes Huang’s proposal and Xu’s analysis and classifies Chinese VP ellipsis into two types: one is VP ellipsis which involves the NOC, as shown in (4) and the other is vP ellipsis which involves the linking verb *shi* ‘be’ or the modal verb such as *hui* ‘will’, *neng* ‘can’ and *gan* ‘dare’, as shown in (6). Zhang analyzes the two forms of the VP ellipsis in Chinese syntactically through the operation of V-v raising, as was adopted by Li[6].

(7) VP ellipsis: [IP Zhangli ye [...[V-to-v xihuan] [VP [V t] [NP e]]]].

(8) vP ellipsis: [IP Wo ye [I neng/shi [vP [V-to-v qi] [VP [V t] [NP e]]]].

Soh’s Observation. In Zhang [5], both the modal verb such as *neng* ‘can’ and the linking verb *shi* ‘be’, which belong to vP ellipsis, are both base-generated in Infl. However, Soh[7] holds the idea that *shi* ‘be’ is a dummy auxiliary and the dummy auxiliary *shi* ‘be’ and the modal verb such as *neng* ‘can’ do not occupy the same syntactic position. When the dummy auxiliary *shi* ‘be’ is preceded by the negative *bu*- ‘not’, ellipsis can no longer be licensed, as is shown in (9).

(9)a. * Ta xihuan Limeng, Wo bu-shi.

he like Limeng I not-be

‘He likes Limeng, I don’t.’

b.*Ta bu-xihuan Limeng, Wo ye bu-shi.

he not-like Limeng I also not-be

‘He doesn’t like Limeng, I don’t either.’

In contrast to the dummy auxiliary *shi* ‘be’, Soh finds that the negative *bu-* ‘not’ does not affect the modal verb such as *neng* ‘can’ to license ellipsis, as exemplified in (10).

(10) a. Ta neng qu, Wo bu-neng.

he can go I not-can

‘He can go, I can’t.’

b. Ta bu-neng qu, Wo ye bu-neng.

he not-can go I also not-can

‘He cannot go, I can’t either.’

Soh claims that the dummy auxiliary *shi* ‘be’ occupies a higher position than the modal verb. They do not occupy the same syntactic position, as is shown in (11).

(11) [TP T [AuxP Aux [NegP Neg [ModP Mod [vP v [VP V]]]]]].

Theoretical Background

VP Shell Theory. Chomsky[7,8] has been developing a revised approach that is referred to as the Minimalist Program, which is being elaborated. Radford[9] adopts the ideas that is put forward by Larson[10] and Chomsky[8]. He also assumes that VPs have a complex structure, comprising an inner VP core and an outer vP shell. In the light of Radford[9], the operation of V-to-v raising is to meet the requirement of case checking and tense agreement. Consider that the position of V must be ultimately governed by the Infl node so that it can obtain tense and agreement information and that case checking takes place between two adjacent elements.

PF Deletion. There are two important approaches to deal with VP ellipsis. One is the pro-form approach, according to which the missing VP is represented as some kind of silent pronoun whose semantic value is retrieved via a meaning recovery strategy similar to nominal anaphora resolution. The other is the LF structure approach, which posits full-fledged syntactic structures for the missing VP at the level of Logical Form (LF). A constituent begins its life in the derivation with fully represented structure, which is deleted in the phonological component but remain in tact at LF component[11, 12]. The other variant treats the missing material to be truly missing at the beginning but copied from its antecedent at LF[13].

In this thesis, we adopt the PF-deletion approach to analyze the three categories of Chinese VP ellipsis. The vP of the three categories of Chinese VP ellipsis can be deleted in the PF component after the movement is operated.

A Reclassification of VP Ellipsis in Chinese Coordinate Sentences

According to Soh[14], we reclassify Chinese VP ellipsis into three categories: the *shi* construction, the modal verb construction and the content verb construction. The *shi* construction and the modal verb construction belong to the functional VP ellipsis; and the content verb construction belongs to the content VP ellipsis. We adopt the VP shell theory to analyze and explain the derivation of the three Chinese VP ellipsis categories. What is elided in all the three categories in the PF component is the light vP rather than the matrix VP.

Table 1. The Reclassification of Chinese VP ellipsis

VP Ellipsis in Chinese	The Functional VP Ellipsis	The <i>Shi</i> Construction
		The Modal Verb Construction
	The Content VP Ellipsis	The Content Verb Construction

(12) The *Shi* Construction

Limeng xihuan tade qunzi, Zhangli ye shi [e], too.

Limeng like her dress Zhangli also does

‘Limeng likes her dress, and Zhangli does, too.’

(13) The Modal Verb Construction

Limeng neng qi tade zixingche, Zhangli ye neng [e], too.

Limeng can ride her bike Zhangli also can

‘Limeng can ride her bike, and Zhangli can, too.’

(14) The Content Verb Construction

Limeng xihuan tade qunzi, Zhangli ye xihuan [e].

Limeng likes her dress Zhangli also like

‘Limeng likes her dress, and Zhangli does, too.’

How are the three categories derived? We suggest that (i) the *shi* construction is generated through Aux-T movement; (ii) the modal verb construction is realized through Mod-Aux-T movement; (iii) the content verb construction is constructed after V-v-T movement. What the three categories share is that the elided part of all the three categories in PF component is the vP rather than the VP. Although the three categories of Chinese VP ellipsis can be obtained through different kinds of movement, what the three categories share is the deleted constituent in the PF component: it is the light vP rather than the VP.

Conclusion

Within the framework of Generative Grammar, the thesis tries to reclassify Chinese VP ellipsis. Different from Zhang[5], we reclassify the VP ellipsis in Chinese into three categories on the basis of Soh[7], who holds the idea that the dummy auxiliary *shi* ‘be’ and the modal verb such as *neng* ‘can’ do not occupy the same syntactic position and the dummy auxiliary *shi* ‘be’ occupies a higher position than the modal verb.

We propose that there are three categories of Chinese VP ellipsis: the *shi* construction, the modal verb construction and the content verb construction. The *shi* construction and the modal verb construction belong to the functional VP ellipsis and the content verb construction belongs to the content VP ellipsis.

We further adopt the VP shell theory to analyze the derivation of the three Chinese VP ellipsis categories. What the three categories share is the deleted constituent in PF component: it is the light vP rather than the VP.

We try to provide a unified analysis of Chinese VP ellipsis. Compared with other analyses, our suggestions can conclude more data, and keep in contact with the spirit of Economy Principle of Minimalist Program. However, there are still some residual problems. First, we are not clear about the syntactic position of “ye”. We claim that “ye” is semantic problem in this thesis. Second, we have not coped with VP ellipsis involving adjuncts. All of these issues are left for our future research.

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