A comparative study of Mandarin and Wenzhounese resultatives

Chen Xie (`chen.xie@ling-phil.ox.ac.uk`)
Faculty of Linguistic, Philology and Phonetics, University of Oxford

Resultative verb compounds (RVCs) in Mandarin and Wenzhounese both take the form V_1-V_2 but show considerable differences. The most conspicuous difference between Mandarin and Wenzhounese RVCs is that the latter only admit an OV word order (Pan, 1997), despite the canonical order in Wenzhounese being SVO.

The second disparity concerns reduplication. In Wenzhounese, reduplicating V_1 is common and productive. By contrast, reduplicating V_1 is highly restricted in Mandarin (Arcodia and Basciano, 2021: 179), so most sentences are marginal or ungrammatical. For example, *qiāo-qiāo-huài* 敲-敲-坏 'smash-RED-break' is ungrammatical in Mandarin but grammatical in Wenzhounese.

Thirdly, as Liu (2021: 75) observes, certain adverbs in Mandarin cannot modify RVCs (1). However, an equivalent sentence is grammatical in Wenzhounese.

(1)   衣服   很   晒-干   了   (*Mandarin; ✓Wenzhounese)
clothes very air-dry SFP
'The clothes are aired to a very dry state.'

The fourth difference pertains to the potential interpretation of resultatives (e.g., Liu and Feng, 2021). In Mandarin, a potential reading can be obtained by inserting the morpheme *de* 得 between V_1 and V_2. For example, *chī-de-bǎo* 'eat-*de*-full' means someone is able to get full via eating. In Wenzhounese, a functionally similar morpheme *le* intervenes V_1 and V_2. The differences in the potential structure are twofold. On the one hand, *de* is obligatory but *le* is optional. Therefore, the potential reading in (2) is available in Wenzhounese but not in Mandarin.

(2)   你   饭   吃-饱   吗? (*Mandarin; ✓Wenzhounese)
2SG meal eat-full Q
'Can you get full via eating the meal?'

On the other hand, potential structures in Wenzhounese are uniformly encoded with iambic stress, such that only V_2 retains its citation tone whereas V_1 and the optional *le* are realised with a neutral tone. By contrast, normal RVCs are either trochaic or iambic. Mandarin has no such distinction.

Based on these distinctions, I propose a formal analysis of RVCs within Lexical Functional Grammar (LFG), a lexicalist and modular framework that assumes strict segregation between syntax and the lexicon. I will show that despite their name, RVCs are actually phrases rather than lexically formed compounds (contra., e.g., Tan, 1991; Her, 2004). The head of these phrases, based on evidence from adverbial modification and aspect marking, is V_2. Furthermore, I will argue that the ostensible SOV order in Wenzhounese is actually TSV, with a sentence-initial topic. This surface order results from the obligatory passivisation of Wenzhounese RVCs, due to which their patient argument is promoted to the subject position.

References

Liu, J. (2021). *The syntax of V-V resultatives in Mandarin Chinese*. Springer, Singapore.

Liu, L. and Feng, S. (2021). Minimal word condition and the source of potential interpretation in V-*bu*-C. *Journal of Chinese Linguistics*, 49(1):40–70.

Pan, W. (1997). 温州方言的动词谓语句 [Verbal predicates in Wenzhou dialect]. In Li, R. and Zhang, S., editors, 动词谓语句 *[Verbal predicates]*, pages 58–75. Jinan University Press, Guangzhou.