

Interpreting Chinese resultatives: V-V compounds and V-de phrases

C.-T. James Huang
Harvard University and
National Taiwan Normal University

Abstract

Chinese resultatives come in two varieties, as V-V compounds or V-de phrases, in the cases where $V1=M$ and $V2=R$. A central question surrounding their interpretation concerns what $V2$ is predicated on—the subject, object, or something else. Early studies of Mandarin resultatives capitalized on the pattern resembling that of obligatory control: $V2$ predicates on the object if there is an object, otherwise on the subject, with limited exceptions. This control-theoretic account proved inadequate as a general theory in view of the patterns observed in English resultatives, which seemed to fall better under the Direct Object Restriction (DOR). Both the Chinese and English patterns seemed solid enough up to relevant details, so a parametric approach would seem appropriate, the question being what the source of parametric variation is, and how it derives the variation. Several accounts have been proposed with this and other questions in mind.

I will review the various considerations that support opposing accounts but will conclude with one that combines the ingredients of control theory and the (source of) DOR. Important considerations include the observation that Chinese not only has unergative resultatives (that violate the DOR) but also allows unergatives to be causativized in resultative environments. A joint solution to the puzzle favors treating all the apparent unergative resultatives as unaccusative. In turn, the possibility of an unergative $V1$ to occur in an unaccusative resultative (in Chinese but not in English) has to be attributed to a parametric difference in the projection of certain lexical features to syntax.