

Some Remarks to DOM in Chinese

Abstract:

This paper based on VanBergen2006. In the following I will try to test and to improve the assumption in this thesis. In the first part I will describe Van Bergen's hypothesis shortly; and then in the second part I will show some problems of DOM in Mandarin Chinese which conflicts with Van Bergen's assumption; in the third part I will try to illustrate some consideration which mean that ba-marking is not a typical DOM; and in the last part I will show a brief conclusion and the direction for my work in the future.

1. The assumption in VanBergen2006

VanBergen2006 is the first try (as far as I know) to find out a DOM-System in Mandarin Chinese. Dom in Mandarin Chinese exists only by the SOV-structure in the colloquial language. The author has investigated a question "to ba or not to ba", and has answered it with the claim that the differential use of ba-marking depends on both syntactic (word order) and semantic (animacy & definiteness) factors. Chinese DOM conflicts with Aissen's (2003) prediction that direct objects with high prominence are more susceptible to case marking than direct objects with low prominence: both the least prominent (inanimate/indef. non-specific) and the most prominent (human/pronoun) objects are obligatory ba-marked, but not every type of object in between. In the following I describe VanBergen's assumption tabularly:

Ba-marking	Pronoun	Proper Noun	Def.NP	Indef. NP (specific)	Indef. NP (non-specific)
Human/animate	+	+	+	+	+
inanimate	+	+	±	±	+

2. Problems

2.1. It is disputed under the Chinese linguists (Zhang,Jiqin 2000, Zhang,Bojiang 1999, Fu,Yuxian 1997), whether the ba-construction accepts a non-specific direct object. (I will not follow this point in this paper)

2.2. There is a set of sentences which doesn't match VanBergen's (2006) assumption, and all these sentences have a verb without a passive reading as predicate. S1 is a sentence that matches the VanBergen's hypothesis. Ba-marking is optional because the object is an inanimate definite NP. The sentence S2 has the same structure as S1, but in this fact ba-marking is obligatory, even though the object is inanimate and definite too.

S1. Wo (ba) shu kanwanle.

I BA book read-finish-PRT.

I have finished reading the book.

S2. Wo *(ba) shu kanlekan.

I BA book read-PRT-read.

I have taken a look at the book.

The only difference between both sentences is the type of predicate. *Kanwanle* in S1 has 2 readings, an active reading “finish reading sth.” and a passive “be read”, while *kanlekan* in S2 has only one active reading “take a look at sth.”.

To solve this problem I have introduced a third factor that the differential use of *ba* in mandarin Chinese depends on: the semantics of the predicates (whether they have a passive reading). This hypothesis is proven roughly through a questionnaire survey in the summer semester 2007.

3. Some advanced consideration to the second problem

As I showed in the last part, the differential use of *ba* depends on whether the predicate has an additional passive reading. Therefore we should ask the question: does *ba*-marking have the function to define one of the both readings? And actually, it does.

3.1. The SOV-sentences with *ba*-marking have only the active reading (S1 and S2), but the SOV-sentences without *ba*-marking become ambiguous (S3).

S3. Wo zuoye zuowanle.

I homework do-finish-PRT.

R1. [Wo] [zuoye] zuowanle.

I have finished the homework. (Active)

R2. [Wo zuoye] zuowanle.

My homework is finished. (Passive)

3.2. The both readings are not always equally prominent. In the interrogative sentence the passive reading is more prominent than the active.

S4. Ni zuoye zuowanle me?

You homework do-finish-PRT. inter. PRT.

R1. Is your homework finished?

??R2. Do you have finished the homework?

3.3. There is a set of contexts in which only the active reading is available. In these contexts *ba*-marking is always obligatory.

3.3.1 If the sentence has a predicate without passive reading → S2

3.3.2. As an answer to a question that emphasizes the active aspect

S5. What did you do yesterday?

-Wo *(ba) zuoye zuowanle.

I BA homework do-finish-PRT.

I have finished the homework. but *My homework is done.

3.3.3. If the sentence has a adverb that emphasizes the active aspect

S6. Zuotianwanshang wo (ba) zuoye zuowanle.
last night I BA homework do-finish-PRT

R1: I have finished the homework last night.

R2: My homework is done last night.

S7. **Henbuqingyuande** wo *(ba) zuoye zuowanle.
very loathly I BA homework do-finish-PRT.

I have finished the homework very loathly.

3.4. Ambiguity or implicature?

If the sentence S3 is really ambiguous, it should be acceptable in the context 3.3.2 and 3.3.3, but it can not. Therefore I will say that the sentence S3 is not ambiguous, and the active reading is so weak, that it seems much more to be an implicature. Actually, it can also pass the implicature-test:

S8. Wo zuoye zuowan le. Dan bushi wo ziji zuo de.
But NEG I self do PRT.

But I didn't do it in person.

*I have finished the homework, but I didn't do it in person.

My homework is done, but I didn't do it in person.

4. Conclusion (temporary)

- a. Ba is not a typical DOM. (in conflict with VanBergen2006)
- b. Ba signals that we have the **S ba O V[active]** feature. And the missing of ba results the **S V[passive]** structure.
- c. The active reading of the S V[passive] structure are derived by implicature.

Therefore the data set with VanBergen2006 and I have used as research basis is inappropriate, because a SOV-sentence without ba-marking is not a SOV-sentence anymore. And the result of questionnaire survey is meaningless too, because a sentence could be judged as "acceptable", but we don't know which reading is selected by the informant for his judgment.

- d. What a function has ba in Mandarin Chinese ?
- e. Is there new evidence for that Mandarin Chinese has a DOM-system?

The last two questions are my work in the future. And I will try to use the imperative SOV-sentence as my new research data, because the passive reading is naturally blocked by the semantics of imperative.