

Thematic Flexibility and “Analyticity”

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The goal of this presentation is two-fold.

First, it will demonstrate that the “adjunct-like” temporal, locative or instrumental noun phrase that immediately follows a verb in Chinese (the typical object position in this language), illustrated by (1a-c) below, behaves like the canonical object of a verb syntactically. Although such adjunct-like postverbal noun phrases (non-canonical objects) roughly correspond to preverbal prepositional phrases like (2a-c), non-canonical objects share with canonical objects distributional and grammatical properties related to movement, deletion and scope.

Secondly, it will show that the (im)possibilities for what can be non-canonical objects are similar to those for noun incorporation in Northern Iroquoian languages. Non-canonical objects in Chinese generally are of the types in (1a-c) and cannot be benefactives, comitatives or goals. The same possibilities and constraints are found in the pattern of noun incorporation – canonical objects can be incorporated to verbs, as well as temporal, locative and instrumental expressions, but not benefactives, comitatives or goals.

Such similarities between Chinese, a language that has little inflection and is relatively bare morphologically, and Northern Iroquoian languages, which exhibit much more morphological complexities, will provide a new perspective to the approaches to accounting for non-canonical objects in Chinese and the related issues on thematic flexibility.

- (1) a. ta xihuan zuo **baitian** -temporal
he like do daytime
'He likes to work in the daytime.'

- vs. zuo **shi**
do work - *shi* 'canonical object'
- b. ta xihuan chi **haohua canting**. -locative
he like eat fancy restaurant
'He likes to eat at fancy restaurants.'
- vs. chi **fan**
eat meal - *fan* 'canonical object'
- c. ta xihuan xie **zhe-zhi maobi**. -instrumental
he like write this-CL brush.pen
'He likes to write with this brush pen.'
- vs. xie **zi**
write word - *zi* 'canonical object'
- (2) a. ta xihuan **zai baitian** zuo shi.
he like at daytime do work
'He likes to work in the daytime.'
- b. ta xihuan **zai haohua canting** chi fan.
he like at fancy restaurant eat meal
'He likes to eat at fancy restaurants.'
- c. ta xihuan **yong zhe-zhi maobi** xie zi.
he like use this-CL brush.pen write word
'He likes to write with this brush pen.'