

# The Realization of the Objects of VO Verbal Compounds in Mandarin Chinese

Dewei CHE  
University of Vienna, Austria

## Abstract

VO verbal compounds (VOCs) are commonly treated as idioms in the sense that they have non-compositional meanings, i.e. we cannot put together the literal meaning of their individual parts. For example,

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| (1) a. <i>chi-cu</i><br>eat vinegar<br>'be jealous' | b. <i>chi-doufu</i><br>eat tofu<br>'to flirt'          |
| c. <i>jian-mian</i><br>see face<br>'to meet'        | d. <i>qiao-zhugang</i><br>hit bamboo<br>'to blackmail' |

There have been major questions about the issue of their wordhood in Chinese and other languages as VOCs do combine to form a 'word-like unit', but at the same time they exhibit some degree of separability between the two parts. Based on Her (1999), Zhuang et al. (2013) suggest that the Os in VOCs are referential, although in a metaphorical way. In this paper, I will establish the object status of these Os in VOCs through several tests: topicalization, modification, passivization, and question formation. Take modification for example. As observed by Her (1999), the O in a VOC can be modified in numerous ways as an object. The modifiers can be quantitative, adjective, temporal, determiner phrases and etc.

- (2) *women jian-guo liang-ci mian.*  
we see-PERF two-CL face  
'We've met twice.'
- (3) *ta zhuan chi nen doufu*  
s/he only eat tender tofu  
'S/he flirts with the young ones only.'
- (4) *zuotian de doufu hai mei chi gou ma?*  
yesterday DE tofu still not eat enough Q  
'Didn't you flirt enough yesterday?'
- (5) *ta peng-le zhe dingzi.*  
s/he bump-PERF this nail  
'S/he suffered this rejection.'

Another interesting phenomenon involving VOCs is that whenever they take an extra object, this object cannot be placed after the VOC (Zhuang et al. 2013). It can appear in two forms: 1) a possessive object between the V and the O whereby it becomes the possessor of the O; 2) a PP construction before the verb, as shown in (6) and (7).

- (6) a. *women mingtian jian Zhangsan de mian.* (Possessive)

we tomorrow see Zhangsan DE face  
'We'll meet Zhangsan tomorrow.'

b. *women mingtian he Zhangsan jian-mian.* (PP)  
we tomorrow with Zhangsan see face  
'We'll meet with Zhangsan tomorrow.'

(7) a. *chao Zhangsan de youyu* (Possessive)  
fry Zhangsan DE squid  
'fire Zhangsan'

b. *ba Zhangsan chao-youyu* (PP)  
BA Zhangsan fry squid  
'fire Zhangsan'

Some previous analyses have often run into problems mostly because they assign the wrong grammatical function to these objects in question. This paper provides a complex predicate analysis by adopting the ideas of Ahmed et al. (2012). For convenience of analysis, I am following Huang (1990) by using NP<sub>1</sub> to refer to the extra argument that renders the components of VOCs structurally discontinuous. The original O in the VOC is termed NP<sub>2</sub>. In current analysis, NP<sub>2</sub> contributes one further argument, namely, NP<sub>1</sub>. As part of the VOC, NP<sub>2</sub> is then encoded as an argument of the verb to form the complex predication which is referred to as top-level PRED (Ahmed et al. 2012). The description and analysis especially focus on double object realization of VOCs in Mandarin Chinese and thus provide a generalized account of the representation of their argument relations within the framework of Lexical-Functional Grammar (LFG). As pointed out by Nunberg et al. (1994: 510), 'positing a single underlying idiom which may be transformationally deformed is claimed to be not only parsimonious, but unavoidable'. As a result, idioms could be best analyzed by direct generation of surface structures within a framework like LFG.

**Key words:** idiom, double object, realization, argument, complex predicates

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