Preposed Objects in Mandarin Chinese: 
An Analysis of the BA-Construction in HPSG

Janna Lipenkova
Institut für Deutsche und Niederländische Philologie
Fachbereich Philosophie und Geisteswissenschaften
FU Berlin
e-Mail: janna.lipenkova@gmail.com

Chinese is basically an SVO-language. However, the speaker can make use of several constituent order variations in order to express particular pragmatic or semantic needs. There are multiple ways of changing the position of the direct object in a sentence, one of which is the placement of the object in a preverbal position under use of the particle ba3. This construction puts the emphasis on the direct object of the verb, which takes the semantic properties of a secondary topic. The sentence structure is changed from [Subj V (X) Obj (X)] to [Subj ba3 Obj (X) V (X)]. The construction interacts with other word order constraints in Chinese, such as the rule for object preposing which tells that the object must be placed in sentence-initial or preverbal position if the main verb is combined with elements like resultative complements, adverbs of degree etc..

The ba-construction has been argued to be one of the most controversial predicate constructions in Modern Chinese. The ba3-particle has no equivalent in English or other Indo-European languages, which might be one of the reasons why its grammatical status is still undefined: on the one hand, ba3 is being analysed as verb or preposition, bearing an independent semantic content and allowing a parallel to Chinese coverbs, which show both verbal and prepositional properties. Other researchers propose to treat ba3 as Case marker or functional head without an own meaning. I will propose an analysis of the ba-construction in the framework of HPSG based on the interaction of syntactic and semantic constraints which the use of ba3 posits on the compositional and semantic properties of the object NP and the following VP as well as on event structure, the distribution of aspectual roles and the lexical classes of verbs allowing for this construction.

References


