The Case of the Non-canonical Subjects in Chinese[1]

Manchun Dai
Beijing Foreign Studies University

This paper is an attempt to explain how non-canonical subjects are derived in Chinese sentences like "Wang Mian sile fuqin"(Lit. "Wang Mian died father", meaning "Wang Mian's father has died.") within the minimalist framework developed by Chomsky (1995, 2001, 2004, 2008). Following Schütze's (2001) conception of default case, the author argues that a Chinese DP bears a morphologically null default case if there is no case assigner licensing it structurally. The neutrality of case feature enables any DP closer to the case assigner to be assigned the case feature. Thus the DP which moves to occupy Spec-T is the one which is closer to T than the other nominal candidates within the same search domain.

1. The issue

The derivation of non-canonical subjects in Chinese such as in (1) has been a puzzle in linguistic studies of the Chinese language.

(1) Wang Mian sile   fuqin.
     Lit. Wang Mian die-ASP father
     "Wang Mian's father has died."

In a recent paper, Shen (2006) argues that (1) is generated as a result of the blending of (2)a and (3) rather than deriving from movement of [Wang Mian] from a lower position. In Shen's theory, "die" is a typical intransitive verb, suggesting that the meaning of "die" in (1) implies the suffering of losing something and the blending of both the transitive "diu" (meaning "lose" ; "diu" can also be used as an intransitive verb as shown by 2b) and intransitive "si"(meaning "die") results in the generation of the non-canonical structure illustrated in (1). Such an account, which is based on introducing the meaning of "diu" into "si" or the analogy of (1) to (2), is not well-grounded.

---

(2) a. Wang Mian diule mouwu. (transitive "diu")
Lit. Wang Mian lose-ASP something
"Wang Mian has lost something."
b. Wang Mian de mouwu diule. (intransitive "diu")
Lit. Wang Mian DE something lose-ASP
"Something of Wang Mian has been lost."
(3) Wang Mian de fuqin sile.
Lit. Wang Mian DE father die-ASP.
"Wang Mian's father has died."

Liu(2007) argues similarly, additionally suggesting that (1) could be analyzed as a case of a generalized existential construction in Chinese on analogy with English presentational constructions such as (4a-b).

(4) a. *Here* comes the bus.
b. *There* goes the audience.

The above accounts, however, ignore the fundamental differences between (1) and (2)/(4). First, "si" is an unaccusative verb, semantically and syntactically intransitive, and can be used without the meaning of "loss", such as exemplified in (5). The death of the enemy in (5)a is not a "loss" but some form of a "gain". The interpretation of (5)b is that "the death of the butcher Zhang won't result in people eating pork with bristles", implying neither loss or gain. The so-called blending of (2)a and (3) is not well justified on the basis of semantic and cognitive relations.

(5) a. diren sile.
Lit. enemy die-ASP
"The enemy has died."
b. sile Zhangtufu, bu chi hunmaozhu.
Lit. die-ASP Butcher Zhang, not eat pig with bristles
"We won't eat pork with bristles and all even when the butcher Zhang is dead"
(implying that somebody is not that important)

Second, (1) is not a presentational construction although it shares some mechanism in derivation, which is part of my focus in the present paper. It is misleading to say that "Wang Mian" and "fuqin" are two arguments in (1) because "si" is a one-place predicate. In English existential constructions like (6), only the postverbal DP is an argument. "There" or "here" in (4) and (6), which are sentences of inversion, is not analyzed as arguments. In (4), "go" and "come" are one-place predicates. "here" and "there" in (4) are locative expressions. "There" in (6), a true existential construction, is an expletive.

(6) *There* are many newcomers.

In this paper, the author attempts to explain the mechanism of the derivation of non-canonical subjects like (1) in Chinese within the framework of generative grammar rather than with recourse to semantic and cognitive conditions as suggested by Shen(2006).

2. The theoretical framework

This paper follows Chomsky's(2001, 2004, 2008) derivation by phase in assuming that syntactic objects are formed in only one way, by means of Merge. Lexical items (LI) are assemblies of features, which are taken to be atoms for further computation and the locus of parameters. The edge feature of an LI enables it to be merged. Chomsky divides Merge into external Merge (EM) and internal Merge(IM). It is suggested that EM serves to build the generalized argument structure and that IM expresses discourse-related and scopal properties.

It is proposed that the key to the analysis of the non-canonical subjects is the Case Filter (cf.Chomsky, 1981) which is assumed to be applicable to DPs in human language. The Case filter, as a principle of Universal Grammar, requires every noun phrase to bear case, which is independent of its morphological instantiation (Manzini & Savoia, 2008). That is, Case must be present as an abstract feature which is checked syntactically.

Schütze (2001) argues that the Case Filter is a purely configurational requirement and that a DP is structurally licensed if and only if it is in an appropriate surface position. In other words, some DPs (perhaps nonarguments) do not need structural licensing while certain DPs (perhaps all arguments) are obligatorily supplied with an uninterpretable case feature upon entering the Numeration as a way of implementing the Case Filter. Schütze (2001) proposes that DPs may be optionally supplied with morphological case features, making distinctions between Nominative, Accusative, Dative, and so forth. And only these features have a default, with crosslinguistic variation of the default form.

According to Schütze (2001), default case marking is reducible to parametric setting. The default case in rich case languages (i.e., Latin, German, Russian, etc.) is Nominative, while in poor case languages, it may be Nominative (i.e., Dutch, Swedish, etc.) or Accusative (i.e., English, Irish, Norwegian, etc.).

To be more exact, the default case is the default morphological case form of a DP in a syntactic context where there is no structural case assigner. Given that Schütze's evidence is based on the morphological realization of DPs, such a taxonomy does not cover the case facts of the Chinese language which has no morphological case marking at all. Arguably, the default case in Chinese is neither Nominative nor Accusative but null or neutral morphologically. The lack of morphological case marking in Chinese gives DPs

of the language greater freedom in occupying the subject positions (or object positions[2]). Any Chinese DP entering the derivation of a sentence has the freedom to be structurally licensed if it establishes an agreement relationship with the case assigner, T (or V in the case of objects).

Agreement relationships between the case assigner and the case assignee are established in the syntax on the basis of closest c-command (Chomsky 2000, 2001, 2004). Thus, the DP to occupy the subject position of a finite clause should be one that is closest to T. As Legate (2008:59) explains, when T is merged into the derivation, it probes down the tree for a DP with an unvalued Case feature. If one is found, T values the feature to Nominative.

According to this theory, the three lexical items "Wang Mian", "fuqin", and "sile" in (7) are three LIs with edge features to be externally merged in building the argument structure.

(7) Wang Mian sile   fuqin.
Lit. Wang Mian die-ASP father
    "Wang Mian's father has died."

It is reasonable to merge [DP fuqin] with [V sile] as the first-Merge because "si" is intransitive and the logical subject is "fuqin". Since the event of "fuqin sile" affects "Wang Mian" and there is a semantic relationship ("son" and "father") between "Wang Mian" and "fuqin", the second-Merge is the external Merge of [VP fuqin sile] with [DP Wang Mian], resulting in [VP Wang Mian [VP fuqin sile]].

How this VP results in the surface word order as observed in (7) requires a convincing account. Given that phases are defined as CP and v*P (where C involves left periphery, and "v*" is the functional head associated with full argument structure, transitive and experiencer constructions, and is one of several choices for v")(Chomsky, 2008:143), (7) is a one-phase derivation. When T is merged with vP and inherits its Agree feature from C, it serves as a probe derivatively. [Wang Mian] and [fuqin] are both in the search domain of the probe. What constrains the raising of [Wang Mian] is essential to the present analysis.

---

[2] The discussion of DPs in object positions is not my concern in this paper although it shares something in common. The examples below may illustrate the point.
  (1) Ta meitian   chi shitang.
      He every day eat   canteen (meaning " He has his meals in the canteen every day.")
  (2) Ta jingchang ma jie.
      He often   curse the street (literally meaning "He often curses on the street." The intended meaning is " He often calls people names in public.")

3. The derivation of Chinese non-canonical subjects

I propose that non-canonical subjects in Chinese are derived as a result of movement of nominals to Spec-T for feature checking and that the post-verbal DPs like that in (7) are nominals that are stranded in situ as a result of failure to raise. What constrains this derivation is the distance between T and the nominals in the same search domain. The following constraint, which is based on Chomsky's (1995: 297, 356) **Attract F**, a reformulation of minimality, determines which DP raises to Spec-T when there are several candidates competing for the same Case feature checking or syntactic position.

(8) **Distance Constraint**[3]
   a. Given two relevant nominal categories X and Y in the same search domain of Probe T, if X asymmetrically c-commands Y in the configuration [T…[X…Y]], then X is closer in distance to T than Y.
   b. It is the closer one that is structurally assigned the Nominative case and raises to check the D features of T.

The "Distance Constraint" derived from minimality can be extended from T to other Heads and plays a central role in determining the movement of a category that cannot skip another one of the same kind. It is also related to superiority, which is applied to analyses of multiple wh-questions such as in (9). The raising of "what" over "who" is illicit because "who" is superior to "what" in terms of distance or minimality.

(9) a. Who bought what?
    b. *What did who buy? (Boeckx & Hornstein, 2008)

Superiority only exists among categories with identical clusters of formal features, such as wh-phrases in (9). The extension of this notion to the analyses of nominals contributes to a better understanding of why Chinese nominals seem to occupy subject positions "freely".

It is generally assumed that DP, which is assigned the Accusative case by Verb, functions as object and that DP, which is assigned the Nominative case, functions as subject. Structural case features, not the thematic roles of DPs which may contribute to their argument structure, determine the syntactic positions of DPs. This suffices to explain why DPs which bear no Agent or Theme can occupy Spec-T as in (10). It seems both English and Chinese allow non-Agent subjects.

---

[3] We reformulate Attract F into the Distance Constraint because we intend to focus on the nominal candidates, not the head. The nominal candidates don't necessarily bear the same feature (such as case) since only the closest one is assigned the case feature structurally. The Distance Constraint differs from Superiority or Attract F in that the candidates in the latter two share the same formal features.

(10) a. ***There*** arrived a man from London.
    b. ***The boat*** sank.
    c. ***The car*** drives well.
    d. ***gebi***   zhuzhe Wangxiansheng
   Lit.next door live-ASP Mr Wang
  "Mr Wang lives at the next door."
    e. ***jiali*** laile   sange keren
   Lit. home come-ASP three guests
   "We have three guests at home."
    f. ***ta*** lanle   yixiang pingguo
   Lit. he rot-ASP one box apples
   "One box of his apples became rotten."
    g. ***zuotian*** sile   yitiao gou
   Lit. yesterday die-ASP a   dog
   "A dog died yesterday."

The Distance Constraint in (8) predicts that any nominal phrase closest to T is eligible to occupy Spec-T. In the case of two candidate nominals X and Y (nominals without structural case assignment) competing to be assigned Nominative by T, if X asymmetrically c-commands Y, it is closer to T and superior to Y. The strong version of (8) is that any nominal candidate closer to T, even if it is merged in adjunct positions such as Spec-V and Spec-v, is eligible to be assigned Nominative case.

However, when the closer nominal is headed by a preposition, it is no longer eligible for case assignment, as (11) shows. The reason is that the case feature of the DP has already been checked with the preposition and thus is inert.

(11) a. * ***zai zuotian*** sile yitiao gou ("zai"=at; compare with 10g)
     "A dog died yesterday."
   b. ****dao jiali*** laile sange keren   ("dao"=to; compare with 10e)
     "We have three guests at home"
   c. ****zai gebi*** zhuzhe Wangxiansheng ("zai"=at; compare with 10d)
     "Mr Wang lives at the next door."

"Zuotian", "jiali", and "gebi" are nominal adjuncts, which are merged in Spec-V as adjuncts[4] of time or location; structurally, they are higher than the logical subjects. Adjuncts, bearing edge features, are not merged as heads; instead, they specify HP (a head phrase such as VP, vP, or TP), adding semantic content to HP without changing its structural status. Such a position is in conformity with Chomsky (2008:141) with respect to internal Merge (IM) and external Merge(EM) as mechanisms designed to express

---

[4] Although nominals can be adjuncts of time and location, not all adjuncts in Chinese are nominals. The others may be adverbs headed by DE, PPs or even clauses.

semantic properties apart from generalized argument structure.

The remaining problems[5] we have to deal with are the case of DP that remains in situ and the syntactic relationship between "Wang Mian" and "fuqin". As mentioned in section 2, DPs that are not structurally licensed bear a default case. It is justifiable in assuming that the DP stranded in situ bears such a default case feature. In English, the default case is morphologically the same as Accusative, as shown in (12).

(12)　　a. It's ***me***.
　　　　b. There's ***us***.
　　　　c. A. I'll take a holiday. B. ***Me*** too. (ellipsis)
　　　　d. Me/*I, I like beans.　　　(topic)
　　　　e. The best athlete, her/*she, should win. (appositive)
　　　　f. Who's going to take care of him if not us/*we?
　　　　(examples d-f are from Schütze, 2001)

There is no evidence that the Accusative case can be assigned by any transitive verbal head in (12) unless one unreasonably insists that copula "be", existential "be", or a verbless head, if any, in (12)c, assigns Accusative. "Me" and "us" bear only default case features. (12)d and (12)e are good evidence that T can only license one DP.

It is argued that Chinese nominals, regardless of their syntactic status when merged (be it Complement, Specifier, or Adjunct), can be structurally assigned case features when they are minimally c-commanded by V (inheriting Agree feature from v*, according to Chomsky, 2008) or T (inheriting Agree feature from C). Case features are morphophonologically invisible in Chinese (while they are morphologically realized in some English pronominal expressions). Morphological invisibility does not mean non-existence of the abstract case which is structurally licensed. In Chinese, the default case is argued to be morphologically unmarked, just like Nominative and Accusative in this language. Thus what distinguishes a default case from Nominative or Accusative is not

---

[5] Actually there's another issue that is worthy of a note here. Although Chinese is assumed to be a pro-drop language, pro occupies the subject position only when it can be identified discoursally. When such a discoursal environment is not available, Spec-T must be occupied by DP. For example,

(1)　* si le　Wang Mian fuqin.
　　　die-ASP Wang Mian father
(2)　A: zheli　sile　shei?　B: sile　　Wang Mian fuqin.
　　　A: here die-ASP　who?　　B: die-ASP Wang Mian father
(3)　* mai le　　yi ben　shu.
　　　buy-ASP　a Classifier　book
(4)　A: ni　maile　　shenme?　B: maile　　yi ben　　shu.
　　　A: you buy-ASP　what?　　B: buy-ASP　a Classifier　book
　However, the constraint on the availability of pro is not a concern of this paper and it doesn't damage the logic of our reasoning about Chinese non-canonical subjects.

their morphological form but the syntactic position. It is the external Merge position of "Wang Mian" or "ta" in (13) that makes it possible for them to raise to occupy the subject position. However, the EM position is determined by the generalized argument structure. The logical subject is merged with V before the DP (i.e., possessor, location, or time, etc.) related to the event is introduced. However, when the logical subject DP fails to raise over the higher DP to be licensed structurally by T, it remains in situ, bearing a default case, the morphologically null case form.

The relationship between the logical subject DP and the higher DP is complicated, including possession between the two DPs, time or location of an event described by the sentence, or even manner of an action.

(13) a. Wang Mian sile   fuqin.
        Lit. Wang Mian die-ASP father
        "Wang Mian's father has died."
    b. *ta* lanle yixiang pingguo
        Lit. he rot one box apples
        "One box of his apples became rotten."

Let's look at the typical examples in (13). In (13)a or (13)b, the two DPs in each sentence are related semantically, which is usually explained as "possession". Although the two sentences are structurally identical, "possession" may not be the central explanation. In my analysis, the two sentences in (14) are derived identically. "Wang Mian" and "fuqin" can be introduced into derivation in the following two ways. One is that "Wang Mian" and "fuqin" are merged as DP, whether DE is strong (morphologically realized) or weak (not morphologically realized), resulting in (14). If D (DE) heads the phrase, then none of the elements contained in DP can be extracted because DP is an island. If DP moves, it is the whole phrase that moves because the head D checks features with T. The result of such a derivation is that Spec-T is occupied by the canonical subject.

(14) a. [DP Wang Mian fuqin] sile.
    b. [DP Wang Mian DE fuqin] sile.

The second possibility is that, as argued previously, "fuqin" is merged with V, forming VP and then "Wang Mian" is merged as adjunct, specifying the domain of VP, generating (13)a. "Wang Mian" merged as adjunct allows it to be topicalized after it raises to Spec-T, given that the Lexical Array contains the functional head C_{Topic}.

(13)b is identical to (13)a in derivation in that "ta" is introduced to specify "yixiang pingguo lanle". (15) and (16) demonstrate the derivation process, with some steps omitted. Lexical Array (Chomsky 2001), which used to be called Numeration (Chomsky, 1995), contains the LIs and functional heads for derivation.

(15) a. Lexical Array
   {Wang Mian, fuqin, si, le, C, T, v }
   Lit. {Wang Mian, father, die, ASP, C, T, v}
   b. [VP fuqin sile]
   Lit. [VP father die-ASP]
   c. [VP Wang Mian [VP fuqin sile]]
   Lit. [VP Wang Mian [VP father die-ASP]]
   d. [vP sile [VP Wang Mian [VP fuqin ~~sile~~]]]
   Lit. [vP die-ASP [VP Wang Mian [VP father ~~die ASP~~]]]
   e. [TP Wang Mian [vP sile [VP ~~Wang Mian~~ [VP fuqin ~~sile~~]]]]
   Lit. Wang Mian die-ASP father
   "Wang Mian's father has died."

(16) a. Lexical Array
   { ta,yixiang pingguo, lan,le, C,T,v}
   Lit. { he,a box of apples, rot, ASP, C,T,v}
   b. [VP [yixiang pingguo]lanle]
   Lit. [VP [a box of apples] rot-ASP]
   c. [VP [ta] [VP [yixiang pingguo]lanle]]
   Lit. [VP [ta] [VP [a box of apples] rot-ASP]]
   d. [vP lanle [VP [ta] [VP [yixiang pingguo] ~~lanle~~]]]
   Lit. [vP rot-ASP [VP [ta] [VP [a box of apples] ~~rot-ASP~~]]]
   e. [TP [ta] [vP lanle [VP ~~[ta]~~ [VP [yixiang pingguo] ~~lanle~~]]]]
   Lit. he rot a box of apples
   "One box of his apples became rotten."

(10)g, repeated as (17)a, is derived identically. "Zuotian" is a typical adjunct of time, merged or predicated with VP, indicating timing of the event. It is eligible to compete for case assignment just like "Wang Mian" in (15) or "ta" in (16).

(17) ***zuotian*** sile yitiao gou
   Lit. yesterday died a dog
   "A dog died yesterday."

Note that the derivation of (15) and (16) does not block further operation. For example, if the Lexical Array contains Topic, then (13)a may be extended to (18)a while a late merger of "Wang Mian" in topicalization results in (18)b.

(18) a. Wang Mian, *t* sile fuqin. (Topicalization of the subject)
   Lit. Wang Mian, die-ASP father
   "Wang Mian, his father has died."

b. Wang Mian,   fuqin sile.(Topicalization by late-merger of "Wang Mian")
    Lit. Wang Mian father die-ASP
    "Wang Mian, his father has died."

The difference between (18) a and (18)b is that the topicalization of the former is derived by means of movement (of the subject) and that the latter is derived by merging "Wang Mian" with [TP fuqin sile], which is "about" "Wang Mian" (cf. Xu & Langendoen, 1985; Shi, 2000; Hu & Pan, 2009). Both operations are allowed in Chinese topicalization, depending on the relationship between what is topicalized and the existing structure in forming Topic-Comment structures. This is demonstrated by (19). Reconstruction of (19)a is possible but that of (19)d is impossible although (19)b might be controversial. Reconstruction of (19)c or (19)d is not acceptable.

(19) a. zhebenshu, wo kanguo *t*.
        Lit. This book, I have read
        "This book, I have read."
    b. zhebenshu, wo xihuan (*t*) disanzhang.
        Lit. This book, I like   Chapter Three
        "This book, I like Chapter Three."
    c. zhe taoshu,   wo xihuan zhanzhengyuheping.
        Lit. This book series, I like   *War and Peace*
        "Among this book series, I like *War and Peace*."
    d. shuiguo, wo aichi pingguo.
        Lit. Fruits, I like apples
        "Among fruits, I like apples."

(20) shows that (18) are topicalized sentences and do not allow further operations while (13)a allows for further operations.

(20) a.*zuotian, Wang Mian, sile fuqin. (not allowing double Topicalization)
      (cf. Costa, 1997)
        Lit. yesterday, Wang Mian, die-ASP father
        "Yesterday, Wang Mian's father died."
    b. *zuotian, Wang Mian, fuqin sile.
        Lit. yesterday, Wang Mian, father die-ASP
        "Yesterday, Wang Mian's father died."
    c. zuotian, Wang Mian [sile fuqin]. (Topicalization of "zuotian")
        Lit. yesterday, Wang Mian die-ASP father
        "Yesterday, Wang Mian's father died."

d. zuotian, [Wang Mian fuqin] sile. (Topicalization of "zuotian")
  Lit. yesterday, Wang Mian father die-ASP
  "Yesterday, Wang Mian's father died."

(20)c is derived differently from (21)a in that "zuotian" is merged as Topic in (20)c while it is merged in Spec-v in (21)a, allowing it to compete for the subject position. The merger of "zuotian" in Spec-v results in two possible derivations, (21)a or (21)b, depending on whether "Wang Mian" and "fuqin" are merged in DP (as in (21)b), or separately (as in (21)a).

(21)a. [TopicP Wang Mian [TP zuotian [vP [z̶u̶o̶t̶i̶a̶n̶] sile fuqin]]]
  Lit. Wang Mian   yesterday   die-ASP father
  "Wang Mian's father died yesterday."
    b. [TP zuotian [vP [z̶u̶o̶t̶i̶a̶n̶] sile [VP s̶i̶l̶e̶ Wang Mian fuqin]]]
  Lit. yesterday   die-ASP   Wang Mian father
   "Yesterday, Wang Mian's father died."

Thus, "Wang Mian" may be introduced into derivation in three different ways, as summarized in (22).

(22) a. [Wang Mian] in Spec-V
    b.[Wang Mian] as Topic
    c.[DEP Wang Mian (DE) fuqin] (overt/covert DE)

To unify this account, I argue that "Wang Mian" is just like any other nominal expressions such as "zuotian", which supposedly functions as an adjunct and specifies VP, vP, or even TP (in Topicalization). Only "Wang Mian" in (22)a is free to compete for the subject position, responsible for (1) and (23)a. (22)b results in (23)b. (22)c result in (24), which has canonical subjects in Spec-T, because the head D of the complex DP checks features with T.

(23) a. Wang Mian,[TP W̶a̶n̶g̶ ̶M̶i̶a̶n̶ [vP sile [VP fuqin s̶i̶l̶e̶]]].
     (Topicalization of the subject)
     Lit. Wang Mian   die-ASP   father
     "Wang Mian, his father has died."
   b. Wang Mian [TP zuotian [vP z̶u̶o̶t̶i̶a̶n̶ sile [VP fuqin s̶i̶l̶e̶]]].
     (adjunct "zuotian" in Spec-v; "Wang Mian" merged as Topic)
     Lit. Wang Mian yesterday   die-ASP father
     "Wang Mian, his father died yesterday."

(24) a. [Wang Mian fuqin] sile.
      Lit. Wang Mian father die-ASP
      "Wang Mian's father has died."
   b. [Wang Mian DE fuqin] sile.
      Lit. Wang Mian 's father die-ASP
      "Wang Mian's father has died."

If we extend this analysis to other non-canonical subjects, we find that they are derived exactly in the same manner, as shown by (25). And the ungrammaticality of such sentences can be attributed to violation of the same constraint.

(25) a. [TP zuotian [vP sile [VP ~~zuotian~~ [VP yitiao gou ~~sile~~]]]]
      Lit. yesterday   die-ASP   a dog
      "A dog died yesterday."
   b. [TopicP zuotian [TP yitiaogou [vP sile[VP ~~yitiaogou sile~~]]]]
      Lit. Yesterday   a dog   die-ASP
      "Yesterday, a dog died."

(26) a. *[TP fuqin [vP Wang Mian [vP sile [VP ~~fuqin sile~~]]]]
      (violating distance constraint)
      Lit. father Wang Mian   die-ASP
      "Wang Mian's father has died" (such an interpretation is hard to obtain from the derivations in (23))
   b. *[TP fuqin [vP sile [VP Wang Mian ~~fuqin sile~~]]]. (violating distance constraint or DP island)
      Lit. father   die-ASP Wang Mian
      "Wang Mian's father has died"
   c.*[TP yitiaogou [vP zuotian [vP sile [VP ~~yitiaogou sile~~]]]] (violating distance constraint)
      Lit. a dog   yesterday   die-ASP
      "A dog died yesterday."
   d. *[TopicP yitiaogou,[TP ~~yitiaogou~~ [vP zuotian [vP sile [~~yitiaogou sile~~]]]] (violating distance constraint)
      Lit. a dog   yesterday   die-ASP
      "A dog died yesterday."

4. Concluding remarks

If the above analysis is correct, (1) or (13)a is structurally ambiguous in that "Wang Mian" is either topicalized in Spec-Topic or the subject in Spec-T. This explains why some researchers (for example, Shen, 2006) treat it as subject while others (cf. Pan and Han, 2005) analyze it as Topic. My analysis offers a unified explanation of (1) and

related constructions within the minimalist framework, particularly derivation by phase (Chomsky, 2001, 2008), in which main verbs raise to *v*, DPs raise to Spec-V to check Accusative case feature or to Spec-T to check Nominative case feature. The matrix verb V in (1) or related examples is unaccusative and takes no object. V is always merged with DP in base generation, forming VP.

The DP that follows the matrix verb in surface structure is the logical subject. It is sentence-final because it is stranded in situ for failing to raise to Spec-T. It fails to raise because a higher DP which c-commands it is closer to T and establishes probe-goal relationship with T. What determines this operation is the Distance Constraint in (8). Thus it is a natural consequence of derivation that the logical subject DP takes a sentence-final position. What occupies the structural subject position Spec-T is a nominal expression which happens to be closer to T and is thus capable of receiving Nominative case. The DPs that are not structurally licensed in case assignment take the default case form, which is morphologically null in Chinese. These DPs seem to be exempt from the Case Filter as strictly defined in Chomsky (1981) since there is no case assigner to license them in the course of derivation.

The above analysis can help explain why DPs which seem to be adjuncts of Time, Location, Possessor, etc., in Chinese can be in the structural subject position Spec-T, as evidenced by the examples in (27). The adverbial marker "DE" renders (27)d ungrammatical since [gaogaoxingxing DE] is not nominal in nature.

(27) a. *zuotian*   xia yu le   (Time)
        Lit. yesterday fall rain ASP
        "It rained yesterday."
   b. *qiangshang* gua le yifu   hua (Location)
        Lit. wall   hang ASP a Classifier painting
        "A painting is hung on the wall."

c. gaogaoxingxing shangban qu[6].   (Manner)
   Lit. happy   go to work
   "Go to work happily."
d. *gaogao xingxing DE shangban qu.
   Lit. happily   go to work

To sum up, the non-canonical subjects in Chinese sentences as demonstrated in this paper are derived as a result of movement of the closer nominal to T. "Wang Mian" in (1) and (18)a is the structural subject and "fuqin" is a stranded DP in situ, bearing only a default case. "Wang Mian" in (18)b is Topic, which is late merged with TP. The Distance Constraint in (8) predicts that any nominal which is closest to T is eligible to occupy Spec-T. This property of Chinese is the cause of diversified non-canonical subjects in Chinese sentences.

References

Boeckx, Cedric, and Norbert Hornstein. 2008. Superiority, reconstruction and islands. In Robert Freidin, Carlos P. Otero, & Maria L. Zubizarreta(eds.). *Foundational Issues in Linguistic Theory-Essays in honor of Jean-Roger Vergnaud.* Cambridge, MA.: The MIT Press. pp.197-225.

Chomsky, Noam. 1981. *Lectures on Government and Binding*. Dordrecht: Foris.

Chomsky, Noam. 1995. *The Minimalist Program*. Cambridge, MA.: The MIT Press.

Chosmky, Noam. 2001. Derivation by phase. In Michael Kentowicz(ed.). *Ken Hale: A life in Language*. Cambridge, MA.: The MIT Press.pp.1-52.

Chomsky, Noam. 2004. Beyond explanatory adequacy. In Adriana Belletti (ed.). *The Cartography of Syntactic Structures Vol.3, Structures and Beyond.* Oxford: Oxford University Press. pp.104-131.

Chomsky, Noam. 2008. On phases. In Robert Freidin, Carlos P. Otero, & Maria L. Zubizarreta(eds.). *Foundational Issues in Linguistic Theory-Essays in honor of Jean-*

---

[6] This is the first half of a longer saying "gaogaoxingxing shangban qu, pingpinganan huijia lai" (a couplet slogan literally meaning "Go to work happily and return home safely"), which is usually written or painted on a wall or at some conspicuous place so that people, especially people who drive to and from work, can see the saying clearly when they leave home for work, reminding them that they should drive carefully. In this saying, "gaogaoxingxing" is reduplication of "gaoxing"(happy or happiness). The addition of DE turns it into an adverb, which modifies VP. However, (27)d is not acceptable. The only way to make it acceptable is the insertion of a DP at Spec-T, generating "Dajia/women gaogaoxingxing DE shangban qu", where "dajia/women" means "everybody/we". The (un)grammaticality of (27)c and (27)d is not due to the presence or absence of the logical subject (which is missing in either sentence), but due to the adverbial marker DE. When DE is absent, Spec-T seems to be occupied by "gaogaoxingxing", morphologically resembling a nominal. When DE is present, Spec-T has to be filled in by the logical subject DP. This is some additional evidence that Chinese is not an arbitrarily pro-drop language.

Roger Vergnaud. Cambridge, MA.: The MIT Press. pp.133-166

Costa, João. 1997. On the behavior of adverbs in sentence-final context. *The Linguistic Review* 14:43-68.

Legate, Julie A. 2008. Morphological and abstract case. *Linguistic Inquiry* 39:55-101.

Liu, Xiaolin. 2007. Another account of the generation of "Wang Mian sile fuqin". *Zhongguo Yuwen* 5:440-443.

Manzini, M. Rita, & Leonardo M. Savoia. 2008. Uninterpretable features are incompatible in morphology with other minimalist postulates. In Robert Freidin, Carlos P. Otero, & Maria L. Zubizarreta(eds.). *Foundational Issues in Linguistic Theory-Essays in honor of Jean-Roger Vergnaud*. Cambridge, MA.: The MIT Press. pp. 43-72.

Pan, Haihua & Han Jingquan. 2005. Syntactic analysis of explicit unaccusative verb constructions. *Yuyan Yanjiu* 3:1-13.

Shen, Jiaxuan. 2006. The generation of "Wang Mian sile fuqin"—on blending in Chinese sentence making. *Zhongguo Yuwen* 4:291-300.

Schütze, Carson T. 2001. On the nature of default case. *Syntax* 4:205-238.

Xu, Liejiong & Terence Langendoen. 1985. Topic structures in Chinese. *Language* 61:1–27.