

2. PRELIMINARIES: V-O PHRASES OR V-O COMPOUNDS ?

Verb-object phrases (VOPs), the subject of my thesis, are often called verb-object compounds in sinological literature, i.e. they are treated as words. In the present chapter, I will first present the arguments which have led to this analysis of V-O phrases as V-O compounds; I then will justify my own analysis according to which they are, in fact, V-O phrases and finally, I will indicate some consequences following from this approach.

The main motivation for talking about V-O compounds instead of V-O phrases is of a semantic nature, i.e. it is based on the observation that in many cases the meaning of a VOP cannot be understood from the meanings of its components and that the VOP must therefore be listed in the lexicon.¹ Accordingly, kāi dāo 'to open knife' = 'to operate on' counts as a compound and is listed in the lexicon, contrary to kāi chuāng 'to open a window', for example, which need not be included in the lexicon. For the followers of this semantic approach (e.g. Lin Handa(1953: 6), Yong Yongquan(1957: 67) and Zhong Benkang (1955: 41-42)), the accessibility of these so-called compounds to different syntactic processes like the separability of the components (e.g. by an aspectual suffix on the verb or by a modifier of the object component) is without any relevance.

Even those Chinese linguists (like Lu Zhiwei(1964: 87), Chao (1968: 425) and Zhao Jinming(1984)) who - among other criteria -

¹ Cf. Richter(1969: 1.1.1.) for a more detailed description of the positions taken by Chinese linguists before 1964. Richter also points out very clearly that the decision for "phrase" or for "compound" depends in fact on adopting a grammatical or a semantic definition of the word.

do use separability as a test to decide upon the question of a V-0 compound or a V-0 phrase in the end rely on semantic considerations. Lu Zhiwei(1964: 87), for example, hesitates to call xiǎo xīn '(to be) small heart' = 'to be careful' a phrase because of the high degree of semantic cohesion between the components; but at the same time he states the separability of xiǎo xīn in xiǎo diǎnr xīn '(to be) small a little heart' = 'Be a bit careful'. Neither does the separability of shēng qì 'to produce air' = 'to be angry' as illustrated in shēng hái-zi-de qì 'to produce child-SUB air' = 'to be angry with the children' convince Zhao Jinming(1984: 20) to regard shēng qì as a V-0 phrase; according to his analysis, shēng qì is a V-0 compound, i.e. a word.

Lü Shuxiang(1979: 26, 31) is the only one among the Chinese linguists not to fall into this "trap" of the belief in an isomorphism between semantics and syntax (with semantics being the dominating part). Quite the contrary, he is completely aware of possible conflicts between syntactic structures and the semantic relations associated with them:

We are faced here with a contradiction between the grammar and the lexicon. From the point of view of the lexicon, shuì jiào ['to sleep sleep' = 'to sleep'], dǎ zhàng ['to beat battle' = 'to make war'] etc. can count as words; but from the point of view of the grammar, these combinations can only be considered as phrases.

(Lü Shuxiang 1979: 26; my translation, W.P.)

In the present thesis, we follow Lü Shuxiang's analysis: being separable by aspectual suffixes as well as by modifiers of the object component, the VOPs are phrases, and not compounds. Besides the ungrammaticality of the structure 'Subject verb inner object outer object' (*Yīsheng kāi dāo bìnggrén 'doctor open knife patient') which in itself should be enough evidence against the analysis of VOPs as compounds (a real V-0 compound

like chū-bǎn 'to produce - printing plate' = 'to publish' allowing its object to follow),² there are more arguments for an analysis of VOPs in terms of phrases, as pointed out convincingly by Huang(1984a).

Huang starts from the concept of "lexical integrity" which says that information concerning the internal structure of words is not accessible to syntactic rules. This idea was originally formulated by Jackendoff(1972) and is known as the "Lexical Integrity Hypothesis"(LIH):

(1) "No phrase-level rule may affect a proper subpart of a word."
(Huang 1984a: 60)

The LIH predicts for example that the conjunction reduction is unable to apply to the components of a word (see (2b)):

(2a) 火車跟汽車
[huo -che] gen [qi -che]
fire-vehicle and air-vehicle
train and car

(2b) *火跟汽車
[huo -gen qi -] che
fire and air vehicle

In the same way, the internal structure of a word is also inaccessible to interpretative rules, which explains why (3) is acceptable:

(3) 一塊綠色的黑板
yi-kuai lüse de hei -ban
1 -CL green SUB black-board
a green blackboard

(Huang 1984a: 61)

² Evidently, this argument is only valid if one accepts the Phrase Structure Condition(PSC) as one of the principles of Chinese syntax. The PSC will be discussed in detail in chapter 3.

With the LIH in mind, let us now examine the criteria which Chao(1968) proposes for the identification of V-O compounds (and which are basically the same as those suggested by Lu Zhiwei(1964)).

A V-O construction is considered to be a V-O compound if it satisfies at least one of the following five conditions:

- (i) one or both of the constituents being bound
- (ii) neutral tone in the object
- (iii) exocentricity of the construction as a whole
- (iv) lexicality (specialization) of meaning
- (v) inseparability of the constituents

(Chao 1968: 415; footnotes omitted)

According to Huang(1984a: 63), these conditions - except that of lexicality (iv) - can in fact be subsumed under the LIH. First, conditions (i) and (ii) can be reduced to condition (v), for in most cases elements carrying a neutral tone are not free, either, which amounts to saying that the components are not separable.³

Besides separability, Huang also adopts Chao's criterion of exocentricity for the identification of compounds. Like inseparability, exocentricity can be incorporated into the LIH: for an exocentric structure is only acceptable if it is not subject to

³ This is somewhat simplified, though, because the neutral tone is not obligatory in V-O compounds and can therefore not be used as a reliable criterion, as pointed out correctly by Chi(1983:3). Furthermore, there exist VOPs where one or both constituents are bound, but which nevertheless are separable. In fact, Huang himself cites an example of this type, i.e. the VOP yōu mò 'to tease' which is borrowed from English humour and which is separable: yōu tā yī-mò 'yōu 3SG 1-mò' = 'to tease him' (Huang1984a: 65).

But these critical remarks do not refute the validity of the LIH in Chinese.

the well-formedness condition demanding endocentricity for all phrasal structures. In fact, once a structure is marked as a word, it is exempt from this condition because its internal structure is no longer accessible to the endocentricity principle. Bǎng-tuǐ 'tie-leg' = 'legging' for example is a combination of a verb and a noun which results in a noun, thus violating the endocentricity principle. Once it is considered as a (compound) word, however, it is opaque to the endocentricity principle and the separability of its components is excluded. (Huang 1984a:63).

The VOPs examined in the present study obey the endocentricity principle of the \bar{X} -Theory: a phrase consisting of a verbal head and a noun results in a verb phrase. The status which Chao ascribes to the VOPs, however, is not very clear. At first sight, he seems to regard them as exocentric: "A V-O construction functions as a whole as an intransitive verb; when it behaves otherwise, it is an exocentric compound." (Chao 1968: 417). But this point of view can probably be explained by the fact that for Chao only those V-O compounds which admit their object in post-verbal position (and which therefore are also called V-O compounds in our terminology) count as transitive V-O compounds. In the section dealing with "Goals of V-O compounds" (p. 430) where he in fact examines V-O phrases he does not discuss the question of endocentricity or exocentricity, either.

As to the non-compositionality of meaning as identification criterion for compounds, I have already shown at the beginning of this chapter that it is not a valid criterion. But on the other hand, the specialization of meaning explains why VOPs like kāi dǎo 'to open knife' = 'to operate on' and kāi wánxiào 'to open joke' = 'to make fun of' are listed in the lexicon, contrary to kāi chuāng 'to open (a) window' for example.⁴

Thus, the VOPs appear in the lexicon for the same reason as idiomatic expressions like guà yángtóu, mài gǒuròu 'to hang sheep-head, to sell dogmeat' = 'to cheat' whose phrasal status is beyond doubt "in spite of" the non-compositionality of its meaning.

In order to avoid the situation where the comparison between VOPs and idiomatic expressions causes more problems than it solves, the fact has to be stressed that Chinese idiomatic expressions (including idiomatic VOPs) have much more freedom than idiomatic expressions in English, but it is the latter which have formed our ideas about the syntactic behaviour of idiomatic expressions in general (cf. Cheng 1983: 185; Herrfurth 1967).

The items examined in the present thesis are phrases whose meaning can be compositional or non-compositional. I hope to have shown convincingly that the choice between V-0 phrase and V-0 compound is more than a terminological game, for the phrasal status of VOPs helps explaining their behaviour which otherwise would remain mysterious, as for example the link between endocentricity and separability.

That Chao does not pay attention to these regularities is due to his inconsistent use of the terms 'phrase' and 'compound'. The VOP kāi dāo 'to open knife' = 'to operate on' for example is discussed in the section dealing with V-0 phrases (p. 319), whereas the VOP zhào xiàng 'to illuminate image' = 'to take a picture' appears among V-0 compounds (according to Chao's terminology, p. 430). Despite this terminological inconsistency,

4 As we will see in chapter 4.3., in fact all VOPs, including those with a compositional meaning, must be listed in the lexicon because the form the outer object of a given VOP will take is not predictable and must therefore be specified in the lexicon together with the VOP concerned.

Chao's grammar is the best source of information for the problems related to the VOPs.⁵

On the other hand, the lack of terminological precision practised by most of the Chinese linguists explains perhaps why the interpretation of VOPs as compounds had not been contested earlier; for while speaking about compounds, they have nevertheless continued to examine the syntactic behaviour of the components of these so-called compounds. In this context, it is even more surprising that Lü Shuxiang's analysis (cf. the beginning of this chapter) has not attracted due attention.

Though I disagree with the common opinion among Chinese linguists that items like kāi dāo 'to open knife' = 'to operate' are V-0 compounds, I do agree with them in calling the components of the VOP 'verb' and 'object', respectively. Although the relation between the verb and the noun in the VOP is not that between a verb and a patient (which seems to be considered as the prototypical relation between a verb and its object), to speak of verb-object phrases reflects the intuition that the postverbal position, i.e. the object position, is not limited to the object role. This "gap" between the object position and the object rôle is not limited to the VOPs, but the case of the VOPs is only a

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5 Chao's inconsistent analysis of kāi dāo and zhào xiàng is even more surprising as they mark their outer object in the same way, namely with gěi:

- (i) 給病人開刀
gei bingren kai dao
to/for sick:person open knife
to operate on a sick person
- (ii) 給大家照相
gei dajia zhao xiang
to/for everybody illuminate image
to take a picture of everybody

reflection of the situation in syntax.⁶ I therefore reject Chi's suggestion to substitute the term verb-noun phrase for verb-object phrase which according to him would be more appropriate for the variety of relations existing between the verb and the noun (Chi 1974, 1984).⁷ While attempting a more adequate description of the data, Chi in fact, obscures an important characteristic of the Chinese language.⁸

⁶ The complement of duration, for example, also occupies the object position (cf. chapter 3.2.).

⁷ According to Chi(1974: 87) zuò lǐbài 'to do worship' = 'to attend worship service in church' and bāng máng 'to help business' = 'to help' are examples of VOPs which do not show a relation verb-object: "... the relationship between the two constituents is not one of action and acted upon."

⁸ For lexical aspects of VOPs (like their productivity) cf. Chi's doctoral thesis (published in 1985) from which the cited articles (Chi 1983, 1984) have been extracted.