

Decomposing Existence: Evidence from Mandarin Chinese

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Developing the observations in Huang (1987) and Li (1996), we distinguish three types of Existential Sentences (ESs) based on *yǒu* ‘have’ in Mandarin Chinese. ES1 (1) and ES2 (2) occur in root contexts, whereas ES3 (3) occurs in certain embedded contexts such as in *rúguǒ* ‘if’-clauses. The noun phrase following *yǒu* ‘have’ is referred to as PIVOT, while the sequence following the pivot nominal as in (1b) and (3) is referred to as CODA.

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| (1) | a. | <i>yǒu</i> [_{pivot} <i>rén</i>].
have person
‘There are persons (here).’ | ES1 |
| | b. | <i>yǒu</i> [_{pivot} <i>xuéshēng</i>] [_{coda} <i>Zhāngsān hěn xǐhuān</i> _].
have student Zhangsān very like
‘There are students that Zhangsān likes.’ | |
| (2) | | <i>huìyì-shàng yǒu-zhe</i> [_{pivot} <i>měi-ge</i> <i>lǐngyù de yīshēng</i>]
convention-on have-DUR every-CLF field DE doctor
‘There was every field of doctor at the convention.’ | ES2 |
| (3) | | <i>rúguǒ yǒu-le</i> [_{pivot} <i>Zhāngsān</i>] [_{coda} <i>zhàogù Lǐsì</i>], <i>tā yíding mǎshàng</i>
if have-PERF Zhangsān care Lisi he certainly
<i>mǎshàng kěyǐ fùyuán</i> .
immediately can recover.
‘If there is Zhangsān taking care of Lisi, he can certainly recover immediately.’ | ES3 |

We observe that they differ in the following four properties: (i) ES1 and ES3 do not have an overt subject preceding *yǒu* ‘have’, whereas ES2 has an overt localiser phrase *huìyì-shàng* ‘convention on’ as subject; (ii) *yǒu* ‘have’ can be suffixed with an aspectual marker in ES2 and ES3, not in ES1; (iii) the pivot nominal, which follows *yǒu* ‘have’, must be indefinite in ES1 (1), whereas it can be a strongly quantified phrase ranging over properties in ES2 (cf. ‘every field of ...’ in (2), cf. Lumsden 1988, McNally 1998 for observations in English, Zamparelli 1995 for Italian), and can be a definite proper name in ES3 (3); (iv) as in (5), the obligatory presence of *rúguǒ* ‘if’ and *suīrán* ‘though’ to form an Ontological ES indicates that ES3 in embedded contexts can form an ontological existential (Milsark 1974), whereas ES1 in root contexts cannot do so. The observations are resumed in (4).

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|-----|-------------------------------------|--|----------------------------|-----|
| (4) | | ES1 | ES2 | ES3 |
| | i) Localiser phrase | no | yes | no |
| | ii) Aspectual markers | no | yes | yes |
| | iii) Property-denoting pivot(+coda) | no | yes | yes |
| | iv) Form an Ontological ES | no | yes | yes |
| (5) | a. | *(<i>rúguǒ</i>) <i>yǒu</i> (<i>yí-ge</i>)
if have one-CLF
‘If there is (one) god, ...’ | <i>shàndì</i> , ...
god | |

- b. *(suīrán) méi yǒu liù-tiáo tuǐ de māo, ...
 although NEG have six-CLF leg DE cat
 ‘Although there isn’t any six-legged cats, ...’ Ontological ESs (cf. Milsark 1974)

We argue that (i) *yǒu* ‘have’ can be merged under an Aspect head in ES1, or under V in ES2 and ES3 (pace Li 1996); (ii) in contrast with an overt localiser phrase in ES2, the subject of ES1 is a covert counterpart of English *it*, which can arguably encode the meaning of ‘here or now’ (cf. Carlson 1977) whereas the subject of ES3 is a covert counterpart of English *there*; (iii) with a coda, *yǒu* ‘have’ takes a CP as complement in which the pivot moves to Spec,CP (island effects, reconstruction for Condition C effect) in root contexts, while *yǒu* ‘have’ takes a VoiceP as complement in certain embedded contexts; (iv) while the complement of *yǒu* ‘have’ is interpreted as entities in ES1, the complement of *yǒu* ‘have’ is interpreted as property/kind in ES2 and ES3.

This study based on the data of Mandarin Chinese implicates that languages can build up existential constructions via different syntactic strategies made available by the grammar, and the existential semantics can be achieved by means of different compositional paths, cf. McNally (2016).

Keywords: Existential Sentences, Definiteness Restriction, Mandarin Chinese

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