

De-constructing small clauses: The case of Mandarin Chinese

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Chinese has NO small clauses

be it in the form of lexical projections with different category labels (à la Stowell 1981; Matushansky 2019) or as a uniform PredP (cf. Bowers 1993).

- No root vs non-root asymmetry for predicates:
If XP is not licit as an autonomous predicate in root clauses, then it is not licit as predicate in non-root clauses, either.
- Clausal projections in non-root contexts presented as alleged SCs in the literature are in fact full-fledged clauses acceptable on their own in matrix contexts.
- There are no ECM verbs in Chinese, either.

Predicative XPs in Chinese

[α pred] in root => [α pred] in non-root

Nominal projections: [-pred]

- require the copula *shì* ‘be’

(exception: NumPs [+pred])

Adjectives (intersective):

(i) Scalar adjectives: [+pred] (hence no copula)

(ii) Absolute adjectives: [-pred] require the copula *shì* ‘be’ + particle *de*

Prepositional Phrases: [-pred], irrespective of the copula *shì* ‘be’

(Chinese: *He is [with me].’)

Postpositional Phrases: [-pred], irrespective of the copula *shì* ‘be’

(Chinese: *This was [3 years ago].’)

The SC-proponents take surface order at face value and do not take into account the corresponding root-clause:

(1a) Wǒ rènwéi [tā fēicháng cōngmíng / tā bù cōngmíng].

1SG think 3SG very be.intelligent/ 3SG NEG be.intelligent

‘I think he is very intelligent/is not intelligent.’

(NOT: I consider [_{SC} him very/not intelligent].’)

(1b) Tā fēicháng cōngmíng / tā bù cōngmíng.

3SG very be.intelligent/ 3SG NEG be.intelligent

‘He is very intelligent/is not intelligent.’

The SC-proponents neglect absolute adjectives:

(2a) Wǒ rènwéi [tā de yáchǐ *(shì) jiǎ *(de)].

1SG think 3SG SUB tooth be artificial DE

‘I think his teeth are artificial.’

(NOT: ‘I consider [_{SC} his teeth as artificial].’)

(2b) Tā de yáchǐ *(shì) jiǎ *(de) / bù shì jiǎ de.

3SG SUB tooth be artificial DE / NEG be artificial DE

‘His teeth are (not) artificial.’

Rènwéi ‘think’ like *xiǎng* ‘think’, *shuō* ‘speak’ etc. selects a clausal complement:

(2c) Tā shuō/xiǎng/bù xiāngxìn/gàosù wǒ [_{compl.cl.} yáchǐ *(shì) jiǎ *(de)].

3SG say / think /NEG believe /tell 1SG tooth be artificial DE

‘He says/thinks/doesn’t believe/told me that the teeth are artificial.’

The copula may sometimes be optional in root contexts only.

This is the exact opposite of the expected SC-scenario:

*John *(is) a fool* vs *They consider* [_{SC} *John a fool*].

In addition, under negation the copula is always obligatory:

(3a) Tā Ø fǎguórén, wǒ Ø yīngguórén. (3b) Tā bù *(shì) fǎguórén.

3SG French 1SG English

3SG NEG be French

‘She is French, I am English.’

‘She is not French.’

(3b) Tā rènwéi /shuō/ gàosù wǒ [nǐ *(shì) / bù *(shì) fǎguórén].

3SG think / say / tell 1SG 2SG be / NEG be French

‘She thought/said/told me that you are / are not French.’

PostPs are [-pred], “even” in the presence of the copula *shì* ‘be’.

- (4a) *Fángzi (shì) [_{PostP} cónglín páng/ sān gōnglǐ wài].
house be forest near / 3 km beyond
(Intended: ‘The house is near the forest/ forest/more than three km away.’)
- (4b) *Zhè jiàn shì {zài /shì} [_{PostP} [sān nián] yǐqián] / [_{PostP} [sān tiān] yǐhòu].
this CL matter be.at/be 3 year ago 3 day later
(Intended: ‘This matter was three years ago/three days later.’)

Spatial PostPs can be selected by locative verbs such as *zài* ‘be (located) at’.

- (5a) Fángzi [_{vP} *(zài) [_{PostP} cónglín páng/ sān gōnglǐ wài]].
house be.at forest near / 3 km beyond
‘The house is near the forest/more than three km away.’
- (5b) Tā yǒu yī ge fángzi_i [_{sec.pred} PRO_i [_{vP} *(zài) [_{PostP} cónglín páng/ sān gōnglǐ wài]]].
3SG have 1 CL house be.at forest near / 3 km beyond
‘He has a house near the forest/more than three km away.’

PPs are [-pred], “even” in the presence of the copula *shì* ‘be’.

(6a) *Tā (shì) [_{PP} cóng Běijīng].

3SG be from Beijing

(Intended: ‘She is from Beijing.’)

(6b) *Tā (shì) [_{PP} hé wǒ].

3SG be with 1SG

(Intended: ‘He is with me.’)

(7a) *Tā yǒu sān ge xuéshēng_i [_{sec.pred} PRO_i shì [_{PP} cóng Běijīng]].

3SG have 3 CL student be from Beijing

(‘She has 3 students who are from Beijing.’)

(7b) *Wǒ yǒu yī ge péngyou_i [_{sec.pred} PRO_i shì [_{PP} hé yǐngxīng]].

3SG have 1 CL friend be with movie.star

(‘He has a friend who is with movie stars.’)

The complement position of ECM verbs is among the contexts *par excellence* for SCs:

(8a) I consider [_{SC} John/him [_{AdjP} very intelligent]/ [_{NP} a genius]].

(8b) I expect [_{SC} that sailor/him [_{PP} off my ship]].

However, the Chinese translations corresponding to (8a-b), often cited as illustrating ECM verbs with an SC complement (basically because showing the same linear order of the relevant lexical items) in fact simply involve verbs selecting a clausal complement (I) or ditransitive verbs (II).

(I) Verbs selecting a clausal complement, not ECM verbs

(9a) Wǒ rènwéi [_{compl.cl.} tā fēicháng cōngmíng].
1SG think 3SG very be.intelligent
'I think she is is very intelligent.'

(9b) *Wǒ bǎ tā rènwéi fēicháng cōngmíng.
1SG BA 3SG think very be.intelligent
(Intended: 'I consider her very intelligent.')

(9c) Wǒ rènwéi [_{compl.cl.} tā yǐqián yě *(shì) fǎguórén].
1SG think 3SG before also be French
'I think she was French before, too.'

(II) Ditransitive verbs, not ECM verbs

Ditransitive verbs have been misanalysed as ECM verbs + SC, although they only select NPs/DPs as second argument, no AdjPs nor AdpPs, as expected under an SC approach.

(10) Wǒmen jiào tā [DP Wáng laoshi]/*[AdjP fēicháng cōngmíng].

1PL call 3SG Wang teacher/ very be.intelligent

‘We call him Prof. Wang/*be very intelligent.’

(11) Dàjiā dōu bǎ tā dāng tiāncái/ *[AdjP fēicháng cōngmíng]

everybody all BA 3SG consider genius / very be.intelligent

‘Everybody considers him a genius/to be very intelligent.’

CONCLUSION: no SCs in Chinese

In Chinese, there is no root vs non-root asymmetry for predicates: If a category X is not licit as an autonomous predicate in matrix sentences, then it is not licit as predicate elsewhere, i.e. in non-root clauses, either. Furthermore, Chinese has no ECM verbs. Claims to the contrary in the literature are based on Chinese translations of English SCs and involve completely different structures. Given the lack of SCs in non-root contexts in Chinese, an analysis postulating SCs for non-verbal predication in matrix sentences does not seem to be warranted, either.

This at first sight radical claim concerning Chinese is not isolated, but can be seen as part of a more general trend which provides alternative analyses for phenomena so far analysed as SCs, thus reducing the scope of this construction (cf. Marelj & Matushansky 2015; Bruening 2018; Matushansky 2019). The universal nature of SCs is therefore challenged and should no longer bias crosslinguistic studies.