On Secondary Predication and Specificity in Mandarin Chinese

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In Mandarin Chinese, the Secondary Predication Construction (SPC) is characterized by a pivot nominal phrase, usually introduced by an existential verb, and followed by a secondary predicate. This construction has specific syntactic and semantic features: it is sensitive to subjacency, it shows no reconstruction effects (Zhang 2008), the pivot and the secondary predicate make up a constituent (Zhang 2008), and the pivot is interpreted as a specific indefinite (Huang 1987).

Building on the proposal in Tsai (1999), I claim that the secondary predication construction can be accounted for assuming a PredP (Bowers 1993), which hosts the pivot in its specifier position, and the secondary predicate in its complement position. The PredP is not an adjunct to the matrix VP, but its complement. Inside the secondary predicate, a CP, an operator moves to Spec of CP, creating a chain that is coindexed with the pivot nominal. In order to explain the specificity effect, I propose an account based on the notion of ‘perspective structure’ (Borschev & Partee 2002a, 2002b). The pivot DP needs to be interpreted as specific, because of the interaction of the requirements imposed by the existential portion of the sentence and those imposed by the declarative portion of it.

Key words: secondary predication, indefiniteness, specificity, existential verbs, perspective structure

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