NP interpretation and disposal variations among the Mandarin, Cantonese, and Shaoxing dialects

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Corresponding to the Ba construction (S Ba-OVC) in Mandarin, Cantonese prefers a strong SVCO word order, and the Shaoxing dialect adopts an SOVC variation. This paper makes a detailed cross-linguistic study on the structure and semantic interpretations of disposal NPs and highlights the role of the disposal NPs in the formation of disposal construction in the above three dialects. It suggests that the word order variations in disposal constructions among the Mandarin, Cantonese, and Shaoxing dialects result from the different options being adopted to make the object NPs conform to the so called definiteness constraint of a disposal NP, namely, definite, specific, or generic.

Keywords: NP interpretation, disposal variation, Mandarin, Cantonese, Shaoxing dialect

1. Introduction

Chinese Ba construction with its complex syntactic, semantic, and pragmatic properties, has been a frequently investigated topic in Chinese linguistics over the past decades (Lü 1990; Wang 1985; Hsueh 1987; Li 2006; among others). Cross-dialectally, it has been reported that Jeung construction is the corresponding Ba construction in Cantonese (Li 1993) and Zei construction in the Shaoxing dialect (Xu & Tao 1999). Such a conclusion, however, captures the native speakers' intuitions in neither Cantonese nor the Shaoxing dialect. Recently, some studies on Cantonese grammar have noted that the so-called corresponding Jeung construction in Cantonese appears less in casual conversation than in formal discourse, and a verb more literary in style tends to find itself more susceptible to the Jeung-mechanism than a colloquial form of the same meaning (Cheung 1992; Li 1993; Leung 2004; among others). Empirically, it is SVCO that is a natural and

common expression adopted to express a disposal meaning in Cantonese, as in sentences (3a) and (4a), while in Shaoxing dialect, it is SOVC, as in sentences (5a) and (6a).[1]

Mandarin:

(1) a. *Ni   ba   zhe-xie   fan   chi-wan   ba.*
 you BA this-CL(PL) rice eat-up   PART
 'Please eat up the rice.'

 b. *?Ni   chi-wan   zhe-xie   fan   ba.*
 you eat-up   this-CL(PL) rice PART
 'Please eat up the rice.'

(2) a. *Ni   ba   xiuzi   juan-gao   san-cun.*
 you BA sleeve roll-up   three-inch
 'Please roll up the sleeve by three inches.'

 b. **Ni   juan-gao   xiuzi   san-cun.*
 you roll-up   sleeve three-inch
 'Please roll up the sleeve by three inches.'

Cantonese:[2]

(3) a. 食 晒 啲　　飯 佢。
 Sik saa di   faan kuei.
 eat all CL(PL) rice it
 'Please eat up the rice.'

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1. A reviewer notes that examples of disposal construction all involve the imperative mood. However, they are two distinct phenomena in Chinese; although they have some features in common, not all Ba constructions have to be imperative. The imperative requires a second pronoun as the subject, while the disposal construction has no such restriction. Ba constructions, as in (i) below, are natural in Mandarin. Clearly, it is so both in Cantonese and the Shaoxing dialect, as indicated in (ii) and (iii).

(i) *Ta ba zhe-xie   fan   dou   chi-wan   le.*
 he BA this-CL(PL) rice all   eat-up   ASP
 'He ate up the rice.'

(ii) 伊 些　　飯 都 吃　　光　　哉。
 I^{33} seη^5 ve^{35} du^{33} tɕhieʔ^5 kuoŋ^{53} ze^{11}.
 he CL(PL) rice all   eat   up   PART
 'He ate up the rice.'

(iii) 佢 食 咗 晒 啲　　飯。
 Kuei sik zuo saa di   faan.
 he   eat ASP all CL(PL) rice
 'He ate up the rice.'

2. The data in Cantonese are recorded with the Jyutping system.

b.　ˀ將　　啲　　飯　食　晒　佢。
　　*Jeung　di　　faan　sik　saa　kuei.*³
　　JEUNG　CL(PL)　rice　eat　all　it
　　'Please eat up the rice.'

(4)　a.　撳　高　啲　　衫袖　　　三　　寸。
　　　Jip　gou　di　　saamjauh　saam　cyun.
　　　roll up　CL(PL)　sleeve　　three　inch
　　　'Roll up the sleeve by three inches.'

　　b.　ˀ將　　啲　　衫袖　　撳　高　三　　寸。
　　　Jeung　di　　saamjauh　jip　gou　saam　cyun.
　　　JEUNG　CL(PL)　sleeve　　roll up　three　inch
　　　'Rolled up the sleeve by three inches.'

Shaoxing dialect⁴

(5)　a.　儂　　些　　飯　都　吃吃　　　　伊　光。
　　　Noʔ²　seʔ⁵　　vẽ³⁵　du³³　tɕhieʔ⁵-tɕhieʔ⁵　i³³　kuoŋ⁵³.
　　　you　CL(PL)　rice　all　eat-eat　　　it　up
　　　'Please eat up the meal.'

　　b.　??儂　則　　些飯　　　都　吃光　　　　哉　　啊。⁵
　　　Noʔ²　tɕeʔ⁵　seʔ⁵-vẽ³⁵　　du³³　tɕhieʔ⁵-kuoŋ⁵³　ze¹¹　ha¹¹.
　　　you　ZEI　CL(PL)-rice　all　eat-up　　　PART　(for sure)
　　　'You ate up the rice.'

(6)　a.　儂　　袖口　　　　摞高　　噶　三　　寸。
　　　Noʔ²　ɕiu³³-khɤ³⁵　lo³³-kauʔ⁵³　keʔ²　sẽ³³　tshun⁵³.
　　　you　sleeve-mouth　roll-up　PART　three　inch
　　　'Please roll up the sleeve by about three inches.'

　　b.　*儂　　則　　個　袖口　　　　摞高　　嘞　三　　寸。
　　　Noʔ²　tɕeʔ⁵　keʔ⁵　ɕiu³³-khɤ³⁵　lo³³-kau⁵³　lɤʔ²　sẽ³³　tshun⁵³.
　　　you　ZEI　CL　sleeve-mouth　roll-up　ASP　three　inch
　　　'You rolled up the sleeve by three inches.'

3.　Here a question mark is used to mark when a sentence is unnatural to a native ear but not ungrammatical.

4.　The data in the Shaoxing dialect is recorded with the IPA system. I am grateful to Dr. Hong Ying for her generous help.

5.　In this sentence, a double question mark is used to indicate that the meaning of (5b) is far different from the normal expression.

Sentences (1a) and (2a) above indicate that a Ba construction must be used in Mandarin when two constituents, both the NP and Adverbial complements in Chinese sense, appear after the main verb at the same time. In contrast, there are no exact corresponding counterparts of Ba constructions in the Shaoxing dialect in most cases, as illustrated by the unacceptability of (5b) and (6b). More precisely, sentences with and without Zei in Shaoxing Dialect have different pragmatic meanings. For example, the exact interpretations of the former are that the speaker blamed the hearer, asking why he ate up the meal in (5b) and why he rolled up the sleeve in (6b), while sentences (a) express simple disposal meanings. However, native speakers will not use Zei as in sentences (5b) or (6b) above. With respect to the Cantonese, the above sentences (3–4) show us that Cantonese behaves exactly like what Cheung (1992: 298) observed that even when there is a choice, the dialect opts for the postverbal arrangement rather than the pre-transitive.

Such dialectal differences among the Mandarin, Cantonese, and Shaoxing dialects then raise many interesting questions, such as why Mandarin tends to use Ba constructions to express a disposal meaning, while Cantonese prefers a strong SVCO word order, and the Shaoxing dialect adopts an SOVC variation. In other words, why is there no overt operation needed to express the disposal meaning in Cantonese, but both object NP movement and inserted Ba marker are involved in Mandarin disposal expressions? Rather, in the Shaoxing dialect, only the object NP movement is required. In this paper, we contribute to understanding this puzzle by investigating the syntactic and semantic properties of disposal NPs among the Mandarin, Cantonese, and Shaoxing dialects, partially based on Chierchia's (1998) work on the typological types of noun phrases, as well as Cheng & Sybesma's studies (1999; 2005) on NP structures in Mandarin and Cantonese. We suggest that the key to understanding this puzzle lies in the nature of NP interpretation among the Mandarin, Cantonese, and Shaoxing dialects, which leads to different options being involved to satisfy the so-called definiteness constraint of a disposal NP.

The article is organized as follows. In § 2, we make a brief critical review of studies related to these issues. In § 3, we investigate in detail the data on disposal expressions from the Mandarin, Cantonese, and Shaoxing dialects and discuss the different interpretations of NPs among the three languages, particularly the indefinite and definite interpretations of bare nouns and [CL-N] phrases. We then in § 4 demonstrate our proposal to account for the dialectal variations on disposal expressions between the Mandarin/Shaoxing dialect type and the Cantonese type on one hand, and the Mandarin type and Shaoxing dialect type on the other, concentrating on the differences in NP structures and interpretations among these three dialects.

2.   Review

2.1   Phrase structure constraint (PSC) and Liu's (2000) word order classification

It is well-known that Mandarin Chinese is unable to accommodate two postverbal constituents in a single sentence, as ungrammaticality in sentences (7a–10a) below shows, which leads Huang (1982/1998) to propose a phrase structure constraint for Chinese. According to Huang, within a given sentence in Chinese, the head (the verb or VP) may branch to the left only one time on the lowest level of expansion, which thus rules out the sentences with double postverbal constituents, and other operations, such as verb reduplication, Ba transformation, passivization, topicalization, or object-preposing, are required to save the sentences, as shown in (7b–10b).

(7)   a.   *Wo qi   ma   de hen lei.
           I   ride horse till very tired
           'I rode a horse until I got very tired.'
      b.   Wo qi   ma   qi-de   hen lei.
           I   ride horse ride-till very tired
           'I rode a horse until I got very tired.'

(8)   a.   *Ta chang ge   de hen   hao-ting.
           he sing   song till very good-to.the.ear
           'He sings very well.'
      b.   Ta chang ge   chang-de hen   hao-ting.
           he sing   song sing-till very good-to.the.ear
           'He sings very well.'

(9)   a.   *Ta nian shu   le   san-ge   zhongtou.
           he read book ASP three-CL hour
           'He studied for three hours.'
      b.   Ta nian shu   nian le   san-ge   zhongtou.
           he read book read ASP three-CL hour
           'He studied for three hours.'

(10) a.   *Ta kai   che le   liang-ci.
           he drive car ASP two-times
           'He drove twice.'
      b.   Ta kai   che kai   le   liang-ci.
           he drive car drive ASP two-times
           'He drove twice.'   (Huang 1982/1998: 31–32)

Studies on Cantonese grammar, however, have shown that the Chinese Phrase Structure Constraint (PSC) does not hold in Cantonese, where more than one

postverbal constituent is always perfectly accommodated in a single sentence (Huang 1993; Li 1993; Zhou 1993; Luke 1998; Lee 2004; among many others). The data of sentences (a) in (11–13) below indicate that Cantonese abounds in different categories of postverbal elements, such as object NPs and quantificational and modal constituents, which are expected to appear preverbally in Mandarin, as shown by the corresponding counterparts of sentences (b) in (11–13).

(11)   a.   佢　食　埋　晒　呢　啲　　野。　　　　　　　　(Cantonese)
            *Kuei sik **mai saa** ni   di   ye.*
            s/he eat also all   that CL(PL) food
            'She/he has eaten all of this food as well.'　　　　　(Lee 2004: 68)
       b.   *Ta   ba **zhe-xie**   dongxi ye   **quanbu** chi le.*   (Mandarin)
            s/he BA this-CL(PL) thing   also   all   eat SFP
            'She/he has eaten all these things as well.'

(12)   a.   佢　食緊　　飯。　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　(Cantonese)
            *Kuei sik-**gen**   faan.*
            s/he eat-PROG rice
            'She/he is having her/his meal.'　　　　　　　　　(Lee 2004: 80)
       b.   *Ta   **zhengzai** chi fan.*   　　　　　　　　　　(Mandarin)
            he   now   eat rice
            'She/he is having her/his meal.'

(13)   a.   佢　著開　　件　紅色　　衫。　　　　　　　　　(Cantonese)
            *Kuei zoek-**hoi** gin hungsik saam.*
            s/he wear-HOI CL red   shirt
            'She/he is used to wearing a red shirt.'　　　　　　(Lee 2004: 81)
       b.   *Ta   **kaishi xiguan chuan** hongse de yifu.*   (Mandarin)
            s/he begin used.to wear   red   DE clothes
            'She/he is used to wearing a red shirt.'

As for the Shaoxing dialect, it demonstrates another interesting characteristic that is distinctive from both Mandarin and Cantonese. Like other Wu dialects, object NPs in the Shaoxing dialect are always preposed to a position between the subject and main verb; however, many other postverbal elements are involved in a single sentence. Consider the sentences in (11), for example. The patient object NP *ke$\mathit{\Omega}^2$ se$\mathit{\Omega}^5$ vẽ^{35}* 介些飯 'the rice' in Shaoxing dialect is subtopicalized, and the sentence thus shows an OV word order, patterning with other Wu dialects, which thus are labeled as subtopic prominent languages (Liu 2000).

(11)   c.   伊　　介　些　　飯　鞋　都　吃光　　　哉。
            I^{33} ke$\mathit{\Omega}^2$ se$\mathit{\Omega}^5$ vẽ^{35} ha^{34} du^{33} tɕhieʔ^5-kuoŋ^{53} ze^{11}.
            she/he these CL(PL) rice also all   eat-up   PART
            'She/he has eaten up all the rice as well.'   (Shaoxing dialect)

Liu (2000) proposed an attractive assumption to account for the above typological phenomena among the Mandarin, Cantonese, and Wu dialects as well as other Chinese dialects. It says that Cantonese is the strongest SVO language, and Mandarin is a moderate SVO one, while the Wu dialect is the weakest one (including the Shaoxing dialect as a sub-branch of the Northern Wu dialects). As a consequence, the Jeung construction that exhibits an SOV word order is non-productive in Cantonese, for Cantonese is the strongest SVO language. As to the Shaoxing dialect, an SOVC expression is supposed to be preferable because it is the weakest SVO language. Liu's above observation of the Cantonese, Mandarin, and Shaoxing dialects nevertheless roughly captures native speakers' intuition. Such a word order classification; however, it is still descriptive in nature, and the question why Cantonese is the strongest SVO language, but Mandarin a moderate one, and the Shaoxing dialect the weakest, remains unanswered.
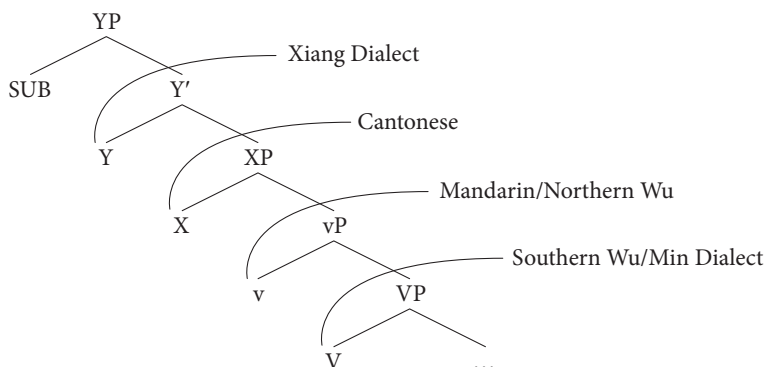
2.2   Tang's (2006) verb-raising analysis

Tang (2006) made an effort to provide a theoretical explanation for Liu's (2000) observation within the framework of Principles and Parameters. According to Tang (2006), these dialectal distinctions of word order among the Mandarin, Cantonese, and Wu dialects are uniformly a result of the differences in the verb-raising operations involved among these dialects. Tang (2006) also examined Min and Xiang dialects and claimed that the main verb in the above five dialects is motivated to move upward because of the aspectual marker and finally located at different positions in syntax, which results in the distinct word order variations among these dialects. In brief, verbs in the Southern Wu and Min dialects remain in the original lowest V position, and no verb movement is involved; therefore, these two dialects yield a strong SOV word order much more easily because there is little space left postverbally. In contrast, verbs in Mandarin are required to move higher to the little v position, which thus formulates a moderate SVO word order. As for Cantonese, however, the verb moves across the little v and is settled in another much higher functional position X, which relates with quantification and focus, as well as modal elements, etc. Cantonese hence is a strong SVO language compared with Mandarin. Verbs in the Xiang dialect are supposed to be located at the highest functional position Y, which leads the Xiang dialect to be the strongest SVO language among these Chinese dialects. This so-called verb-raising movement can be summarized in Schema 1 and Schema 2 below.

Schema 1.
Xiang dialect > Cantonese > Mandarin/Northern Wu > Southern Wu/Min dialect

Schema 2. In tree structure

Tang's (2006) verb-raising analysis of the typological differences among Chinese dialects, especially as to the issue of word order variations, sounds quite attractive. There are nevertheless some empirical and theoretical problems. Tang (2006) argued that languages in the same rank in the above schema demonstrate similar behaviors regarding the topicalization, grammaticalization of aspect markers, and function of classifiers and put Northern Wu and Mandarin in the same rank. However, the interpretation of [CL-N] in the Shaoxing dialect, which belongs to Northern Wu dialects and is shown in this paper, does not pattern with Mandarin but shares aspects with Cantonese. Differing from Tang's (2006) VP-based analysis, this paper thus will concentrate on the NP interpretation and explore in detail the relationship between NP interpretation and word order variations in the disposal expressions in the Cantonese, Mandarin, and Shaoxing dialects, which illustrates that the word order distinction in these three kinds of disposals is due to the different options being adopted to make the object NPs conform to the so-called constraint of a disposal NP: definite, specific, or generic (Li 2006).

3.   Distribution of disposal NPs

A great number of studies on the Ba construction have noted that a Ba-NP must be definite or specific because it has to do with the meaning of 'disposal' or 'affectedness' – the entity that is dealt with or affected needs to be specific (Li 2006). On the surface, however, the structure of NPs in disposal expressions among the Mandarin, Cantonese, and Shaoxing dialects seems to be quite different, as the following data show. Let us look at the distribution of bare NPs, classifier-N (CL-N), demonstrative NPs (Dem-CL-N) and numeral NPs (Num-CL-N) in the Mandarin, Cantonese, and Shaoxing dialect disposals.

Bare NP

Mandarin:

(14) *Qing   ni   ba diban ca   ganjing.*
please you BA floor wipe clean
'Please clean the floor.'

Cantonese:

(15) *唐該   你   抹   乾淨   地板   佢。
Ngoi   nei maat gonzing deihaa kuei.*
please you wipe clean   floor   it
'Please wipe clean the floor.'

Shaoxing dialect:

(16) 儂   地板   揩揩   伊 清爽。
Noʔ² di¹¹pē¹³ kha¹-¹kha³³ i¹¹ tɕhiŋ⁵³saŋ¹¹.
you   floor   wipe-wipe   it clean
'Please clean the floor.'

[CL-N]

Mandarin:[6]

(17) **Qing   ni   ba kuai diban ca   ganjing.*
please you BA CL   floor wipe clean
'Please clean the floor.'

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6. A reviewer noted that there seem to be exceptions to the claim that a CL-N expression is not allowed in the Ba construction in Mandarin, as the following data illustrate an occasion where the Ba construction with a CL-N disposal NP seems to be acceptable.

(i) 把 個 瓶子 打 碎   了
BA CL bottle beat broken PART
'broke the bottle'

Such usage, however, is very restricted in modern Chinese, and in most cases, sentences with a CL-N expression are unacceptable, as demonstrated by (17) above in the body of paper. According to Tao & Zhang (2000), the 'Ba-CL-N-V' construction appeared in early modern Chinese but is quite rare in modern standard Chinese, which is strictly restricted to appear in the oral context. Moreover, only singular classifiers are allowed in the construction, and sentences with plural classifiers are unacceptable, in contrast with other normal Ba constructions. For example:

(ii) *把 些   瓶子 打 碎   了
BA CL(PL) bottle beat broken PART
'broke the bottles'

(iii) *把 些   蛋糕 吃 了
BA CL(PL) cake eat PART
'ate the cakes'

Cantonese:

(18) 唔該　你　抹　　乾淨　　個　地板　　佢。
Ngoi　nei　maat gonzing go deihaa kuei.
Please you wipe clean　CL floor　it
'Please clean the floor.'

Shaoxing dialect:

(19) 儂　　塊　　地板　　揩揩　　　伊　清爽。
Noʔ² khue³³ di¹¹pẽ¹³ kha¹-¹kha³³ i¹¹ tɕhiŋ⁵³saŋ¹¹.
you　CL　floor　　wipe-wipe it　clean
'Please clean the floor.'

[Dem-(Num)-CL-N]

Mandarin:

(20) *Mafan　ni　bang　wo　ba　zhe-ben　shu　huan-gei　tushuguan.*
trouble you help　me BA this-CL　book return-give library
'Please help me return the book to the library.'

Cantonese:

(21) 唔該　你　同　　我　還番　　　呢本　　書　　昇　圖書館。
Ngoi　nei　tung ngo waanfaan　ni-bun syn　bei　tousyugun.
please you help me return　　this-CL book give library
'Please help me return the book to the library.'

Shaoxing dialect:

(22) 謝謝　　儂　介本　　書　　幫　我　還畀　　　圖書館。
zia¹¹zia¹¹ noʔ² kɤʔ²-pɤn³⁵ ɕy⁵³ paŋ¹¹ ŋo³⁵ huẽ¹¹-peʔ⁵ du¹¹ɕy³³kuĩ³⁵.
thank　　you this-CL　　book help　me　return-give library
'Please help me return the book to the library.'

[Num-CL-N]

Mandarin:

(23) *Mafan　ni　bang　me　ba　san-ben　shu　huan-gei　tushuguan.
trouble you help　me BA three-CL book return-give library
'Please help me return three books to the library.'

In the literature, the Ba construction with formally indefinite NP 'one-CL-N' is also arguable because of the nature of 'yi' in Chinese, which is ambiguous between a cardinal reading and article usage. According to Tao & Zhang (2000), the indefinite Ba construction with disposal NP 'one-CL-N', such as 'yi-ge-N', is a minor type in Modern standard Chinese with restricted grammatical functions (marking a generic proposition or introducing a trivial referent into discourse), and a generic interpretation nevertheless is an unmarked usage.

Cantonese:

(24) *唔該　你　同　我　還番　　三本　　書　畀　圖書館。
Ngoi   nei   tung ngo waanfaan sam-bun syn   bei   tousyugun.
please you help me   return   three-CL book give library
'Please help me return three books to the library.'

Shaoxing dialect:

(25) *謝謝　　儂　三本　　書　幫　我　還畀　　圖書館。
ʑia¹¹ʑia¹¹ noʔ² sẽ¹¹-pun³⁵ çy⁵³ paŋ¹¹ ŋo³⁵ huẽ¹¹-peʔ⁵ du¹¹çy³³kuĩ³⁵.
thank   you three-CL book help me   return-give library
'Please help me return three books to the library.'

The data above indicate that Mandarin demonstrative noun phrases ([Dem-(Num)-CL-N]) and numeral phrases ([Num-CL-N]) share the same pattern with the Cantonese and Shaoxing dialects. In brief, the demonstrative noun phrases in these three languages are allowed to serve as a disposal NP, but numeral phrases are uniformly ruled out as a disposal NP, as indicated in (23–25) above.

However, these three languages behave quite differently when the disposal NP is a bare NP or a classifier noun phrase ([CL-N]). Roughly, it is not abnormal in Mandarin that a bare NP surfaces as the Ba-NP, as in (14), while in Cantonese disposal, a bare NP is unacceptable, as in (15). Moreover, Cantonese native speakers prefer a classifier NP ([CL-N]) in daily conversations, although both the [CL-N] and [Dem(nei (呢)/go (嗰)/di (啲))-CL-N] serve acceptably in Cantonese as disposal NPs, as in (18) and (21). In contrast, a [CL-N] expression is completely excluded in Mandarin Ba constructions, as shown in (17). As to Shaoxing dialect, the disposal NPs are open to a Mandarin type: a bare NP, as in (16), or a Cantonese type: a classifier NP, as in (19). Such differences and similarities are summarized in Table 1 below.

Many interesting questions arise, such as why Mandarin allows a bare NP to surface as a disposal NP but not Cantonese, and why Cantonese native speakers prefer a [CL-N] expression in a disposal expression, which is unacceptable in Mandarin; and, moreover, why the Shaoxing dialect behaves so moderately compared with Mandarin or Cantonese. In other words, what connection is illustrated between word order variations and the structures and interpretation of disposal NPs among these three dialects?

Table 1. NP types in disposal expressions among Mandarin, Cantonese, and Shaoxing dialects

NP types Dialects	Bare NP	[CL-N]	[Dem-Num-CL-N]	[Num-CL-N][7]
Mandarin	√	×	√	×
Cantonese	×[8]	√	√	×
Shaoxing dialect	√	√	√	×

4. Our approach

In this section, we shall concentrate on the interpretation of bare NPs and classifier-noun phrases ([CL-N]s) in the Mandarin, Cantonese, and Shaoxing dialects and explore how such a distinction in NP interpretation leads to variation in the disposal expressions among these three Chinese dialects.

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7. According to Cheng & Sybesma (1999), the [Num-CL-N] expression in both Mandarin and Cantonese is indefinite, which is also true in the Shaoxing dialect. And a generally accepted opinion on the question of whether such a noun phrase can serve as a Ba-NP or not in Mandarin is that a bare [Num-CL-N] expression is not allowed in a Ba construction only when a specific interpretation is available by adding some modifier element, such as quantifier, focus, etc. (Li 2006). It seems also true in the Shaoxing dialect. Therefore, I set this issue aside here for simplicity's sake, because it will not affect my conclusion.

(i) *Qing ni ba san-zhi bi dou gei wo.* (Mandarin)
  please you BA three-CL pen all give me
  'Please give me all three pens.'

(ii) 儂　三支　　筆　都　畀　我。 (Shaoxing dialect)
  Noʔ² sẽ¹¹-tsɿ³³ pieʔ² tu³³ peʔ² ŋo³⁵.
  you three-CL pen all give me
  'Please give me all three pens.'

8. According to Cheung (1992), a preverbal bare NP with definite reading can serve as a Jeung-NP, behaving similarly to a bare NP in Ba construction in Mandarin. However, it is excluded in normal Cantonese disposal expression SVCO constructions (see Cheung 1992 for detailed discussion).

4.1 NP interpretation and disposal variations between the Mandarin-Shaoxing and Cantonese types

According to Cheng & Sybesma (1999), the interpretations of bare NPs in Cantonese and Mandarin are different. In detail, Mandarin bare NPs can be interpreted as indefinite/generic (26a) or definite (26b) in the postverbal position, and in preverbal position, they are restricted to being definite (29a) or generic (29b); indefinite is not allowed, as the English translation shows in (29a).[9] In contrast, a bare NP in Cantonese is unavailable to be interpreted as definite whenever it is preverbal (30a) or postverbal (27a), and the above corresponding counterparts of Mandarin data in Cantonese nevertheless are constructed with a [CL-N] expression, as shown in the next section below. Moving to the Shaoxing dialect, the situation seems much more complicated because superficially it looks similar to Mandarin, as sentences in (28) and (31) show. However, the Shaoxing dialect differs from Mandarin with respect to the interpretation of bare NPs in several aspects. First, a definite reading of a bare NP in the Shaoxing dialect is restricted to a preverbal position, as the contrasts between (28a–b) illustrate; second, the pragmatic function of preverbal object NPs in SOVC constructions differs between the Shaoxing dialect and Mandarin, which results in a Mandarin type and a Shaoxing dialect type of disposal, as described in §4.2 below.

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9.   Shen (2002), however, argues that preverbal BNP-subjects in sentences with verbal stage-level predicates, in fact, can always get indefinite readings if given the right context. For instance, the BNP-subject 'keren' below is indefinite in a situation in which the sentence is uttered by a parent to a child who is known to have a complex about guest:

(i)   *Keren lai   le,   kuai   duoqilai.*
       guest come   SFP, quickly hide
       'There came a guest. Quickly hide yourself.'

In this article, I agree with Cheng & Sybesma's (1999) opinion that preverbal bare NP in Mandarin admits definite and generic readings but not an indefinite object-level reading. In fact, I have a different judgment on the data, like Shen listed above. In my opinion, if the reference of 'keren' in question is not introduced in advance in the previous conversations or not shared between the parent and kid, a 'you' (there be) construction will be used, as the corresponding translation in English above illustrated:

(ii)   *You keren lai   le, kuai   duoqilai.*
        have guest come SFP, quickly hide
        'There came a guest, quickly hide yourself.'

Postverbal bare NP

Mandarin:[10]

(26) a. *Zhangsan xiang-qu mai shu.*   (generic/kind-level VP)
Zhangsan want-go buy book
'Zhangsan wants to go to buy a book/books.'

  b. *XiaoLi xi-wan   le   chuangdan.*   (definite/specific VP)
XiaoLi wash-finish ASP bed-sheet
'XiaoLi has finished washing the bedsheet.'

---

10. In this paper, we treat postverbal bare NPs in Mandarin as incorporated nominal, which are thematic arguments but not discourse referents (Farkas & de Swart 2003). Differing from non-postverbal bare NPs, the postverbal bare NP does not introduce a discourse referent, and parallel to the NP interpretation, it is the VP as a whole where the postverbal bare NP serves as the argument that could be interpreted as generic or (in)definite activity depending the context where it appears. One evidence comes from the inconsistency of postverbal bare NP and the so-called existential coda construction. Take the sentence (26b) re-written as (i) for instance:

(i) a. *XiaoLi xi-wan   le   chuang-dan.*   (definite/specific VP)
XiaoLi wash-finish ASP bed-sheet
'XiaoLi has finished washing the bedsheet.'

  b. **XiaoLi xi   le   chuang-dan hen angzang.*
XiaoLi wash ASP bed-sheet   very dirty
'The bedsheet(s) that XiaoLi washed was(ere) very dirty.'

  b'. *XiaoLi xi   le   yi-tiao chuang-dan hen angzang.*
XiaoLi wash ASP one-CL bed-sheet   very dirty
'The bedsheet that XiaoLi washed was very dirty.'

In the above sentence (i.a), the activity denoted by the VP is definite or specific as illustrated by the aspectual marker 'Le', the bare NP 'chuang-dan'(bed-sheet), however, does not introduce a discourse referent and cannot serve as the precedent of the secondary predicate in the existential coda construction. In contrast, a non-bare indefinite NP is perfect with the existential coda construction, as indicated in above sentence (i.b').

The Cantonese and Shaoxing dialects follow the same pattern when the VP as a whole denotes a kind-level activity, where a postverbal bare NP does not introduce a discourse referent. However, when the activity denoted by VP is definite or specific, a classifier must be inserted into the NP in Cantonese, and a classifier insertion or preposing of bare NP to the preverbal position is necessary in the Shaoxing dialect. For example:

(i) 张三   洗   咗   床   床鋪。   (definite/specific VP)
Zeongsaam sai   zuo cong cong-pou.
Zhangsan wash ASP CL   bed-sheet
'Zhangsan has finished washing the bedsheet.'

(iii) 张三，   (床)   床單   汰   清爽   東哉。
Tsaŋ¹¹sẽ³³, zaŋ¹¹ zaŋ¹¹-tẽ³⁵   da¹¹ tɕʰiŋ⁵³-saŋ¹¹ doŋ¹¹ze¹¹.
Zhangsan   CL   bed-sheet wash clean   PART (for confirm)
'Zhangsan has finished washing the bedsheet.'   (definite/specific VP)

Cantonese:
(27) a. 張三　　　想　去　買　　書。　　　　　(generic/kind-level VP)
　　　 Zeongsaam soeng huei maai syu.
　　　 Zhangsan　want　go　buy　book
　　　 'Zhangsan wants to buy a book/books.'

 b. *張三　　　洗　咗　床鋪。　　　　　(specific/definite VP)
　　　 Zeongsaam sai　zuo cong-pou.
　　　 Zhangsan　wash ASP bed-sheet
　　　 'Zhangsan has finished washing the bedsheet.'

Shaoxing dialect:
(28) a. 張三　　　想去　　　買　書。　　　(generic/kind-level VP)
　　　 Tsaŋ¹¹sẽ³³ ɕiaŋ³⁵-tɕhi³⁵ ma¹¹ ɕy⁵³.
　　　 Zhangsan　want-go　　buy　book
　　　 'Zhangsan wants to go to buy a book/books.'

 b. *張三，　　汰　清爽　　　床單　　東哉。 (definite/specific VP)
　　　 Tsaŋ¹¹sẽ³³, da¹¹ tɕhiŋ⁵³saŋ¹¹ zaŋ¹¹-tẽ³⁵ doŋ¹¹ze¹¹.
　　　 Zhangsan, wash clean　　bed-sheet PART (for confirm)
　　　 'Zhangsan has finished washing the bed-sheet'.

Preverbal bare NP

Mandarin:
(29) a. *Gou guo　le　malu.*　　　　　　　　(definite)
　　　 dog　across ASP road
　　　 'The/*a dog(s) went across the road.'

 b. *Gou ai　chi gutou.*　　　　　　　　(generic)
　　　 dog　love eat bone
　　　 'Dogs love to eat bones.'

Cantonese:
(30) a. *狗　過　咗　馬路。　　　　　　　(definite)
　　　 Gau gwo　zo　maalou.
　　　 dog across ASP road
　　　 'The dog went across the road.'

 b. 狗　鐘意　食　骨頭。　　　　　　(generic)
　　　 Gau zungji sik gwattau.
　　　 dog　like　　eat bone
　　　 'Dogs love to eat bones.'

Shaoxing dialect:

(31) a. 狗   馬路   過去   夯哉。   (definite)
$K\gamma^{35}$ $mo^{11}lu^{53}$ $ku^{33}t\varsigma hi^{11}$ $ha\eta^{11}ze^{11}$.
dog   road   across   ASP
'The dogs/the dog went across the road.'

b. 狗   歡喜   吃   骨頭。   (generic)
$K\gamma^{35}$ $fun^{33}\varsigma i^{11}$ $t\varsigma hie?^{5}$ $ku?^{2}d\gamma^{31}$.
dog   like   eat   bone
'Dogs love to eat bones.'

Furthermore, in regard to the distribution and interpretation of the [CL-N] expressions, the situation between Cantonese and Mandarin then shows another contrast. Cantonese can receive a definite/specific reading whenever the [CL-N] expression is in postverbal (33) or preverbal position (36); however, in Mandarin a [CL-N] expression is not allowed in the preverbal position, as in (35), and the interpretation is restricted to an indefinite/specific reading in the postverbal position, as in (32); while Shaoxing dialect in this case then behaves more like Cantonese, as the data (37) illustrate, in which the appearance of a classifier is optional, although its appearance is preferable.

Postverbal [CL-N]

Mandarin:

(32) *Zhangsan xiang-qu mai ben shu.*   (specific/indefinite)
Zhangsan want-go buy CL book
'Zhangsan wants to go to buy a/the book.'

Cantonese:

(33) 張三   想   去   買   本   書。   (indefinite/specific)
Zoengsaam soeng huei maai bun syu.
Zhangsan   want go   buy CL book
'Zhangsan wants to buy a book/books.'

Shaoxing dialect:

(34) 張三   想去   買   本   書。   (indefinite/specific)
$Tsa\eta^{11}s\bar{e}^{33}$ $\varsigma ia\eta^{33}$-$t\varsigma hi^{11}$ ma^{13} pun^{35} ςy^{53}.
Zhangsan want-go   buy CL   book
'Zhangsan wants to go to buy a/the book/books.'

Preverbal [CL-NP]

Mandarin:

(35) a. **Zhi gou guo   le   malu.*   (definite)
          CL dog across ASP road
          'The dog went across the road.'

      b. **Zhi gou ai   chi gutou.*   (definite)
          CL dog love eat bone
          'The dog loves bones.'

Cantonese:

(36) a. 隻 狗 過   咗 馬路。   (definite)
          Zek gau gwo   zo   maalou.
          CL dog across ASP road
          'The dog went across the road.'

      b. 隻 狗 鐘意 食 骨頭。   (definite)
          Zek gau zungji sik gwattau.
          CL dog like   eat bone
          'The dog loves to eat bones.'

Shaoxing dialect:

(37) a. 隻 狗 馬路   過過   哉。   (definite)
          Tseʔ⁵ kɤ³⁵ mo¹¹lu³¹ ku¹¹ku¹¹ ze¹¹.
          CL   dog road   across   ASP
          'The dog went across the road.'

      b. 隻 狗 歡喜   吃   骨頭。   (definite)
          Tseʔ⁵ kɤ³⁵ fun³³ɕi³⁵ tɕhieʔ⁵ kuʔ²dɤ³¹.
          CL   dog like   eat   bone
          'The dog loves to eat bones.'

To summarize, the Mandarin, Cantonese, and Shaoxing dialects behave distinctively from each other with respect to the interpretation of bare NPs and [CL-N] phrases, although the Cantonese and Shaoxing dialects share more in common, as demonstrated in Table 2 and Table 3.

Table 2. Bare NPs

	Dialects	Mandarin	Cantonese	Shaoxing dialect
Behaviors				
Definite	Pre-V	√	×	√
	Post-V	-------	×	×
Specific	Pre-V	√	×	√
	Post-V	--------	×	×
Generic	Pre-V	√	√	√
	Post-V	--------	--------	---------
Indefinite	Pre-V	×	×	×
	Post-V	--------	--------	---------

Table 3. [CL-N] expressions

Behaviors	Dialects	Mandarin	Cantonese	Shaoxing dialect
Definite	Pre-V	--------	√	√
	Post-V	×	√	√
Specific	Pre-V	--------	√	√
	Post-V	√	√	√
Generic	Pre-V	--------	×	×
	Post-V	×	×	×
Indefinite	Pre-V	--------	×	×
	Post-V	√	√	√

The data above show us that a [CL-N] expression in Cantonese is semantically definite/specific; similarly, a preverbal bare NP in Mandarin is always definite, specific, or generic, and in the Shaoxing dialect, both preverbal bare NP and [CL-N] expressions are definite, specific, or generic. Taking the well-known disposal NP constraint into consideration, it is safe for us to conclude that [CL-N] expressions in Cantonese, preverbal bare NPs in Mandarin, and both preverbal bare NP and [CL-N] expressions in the Shaoxing dialect are naturally acceptable to serve as a disposal NP because they are semantically strong NP in nature. To understand the relationship between the NP interpretation and word order variations of disposal expressions, we would like to discuss further how the above dialectal differences in definiteness are reflected in syntax among these three dialects.

Longobardi (1994) made a detailed observation comparing bare NPs and proper names in Romance languages and claimed that proper names in Romance languages are free to appear in lexically governed or ungoverned argument function without any determiner, whereas a singular countable head noun is not allowed to occur in the argumentative position without being introduced by an overt determiner, unless it is located in a lexically governed position. To account for these contrastive behaviors between proper names and bare NPs, Longobardi (1994) proposed a so-called N-to-D analysis, which says that there is a covert movement of N-to-D involved in proper names, which thus turns the proper names in Romance languages to be argumentative and available for interpretation as definite without any accompanying definite article. The N-to-D movement, however, is not allowed in the bare NPs, in which an overt determiner or lexical governor is necessarily required. Obviously, we can extend this so-called N-to-D analysis to explain the distribution of bare NPs in Mandarin; the preverbal bare NPs are always definite, as there is a covert N-to-D movement involved, where the N occupies the D position, and thus the NP as a whole turns out to be argumentative and definite. As for the postverbal bare NPs, as discussed earlier in the paper, they are incorporated with the VP as a whole (lexically governed by the verb) and unable to function as
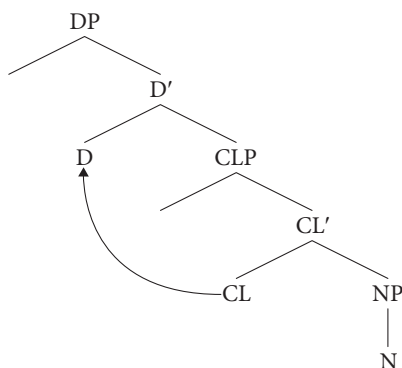
the precedents of pronouns in discourse (or serve as the thematic arguments in lexicon), following (Farkas & de Swart 2003). However, it is difficult to apply the N-to-D analysis to Cantonese [CL-N]s, which can be interpreted to be definite whenever they are located preverbally or postverbally. It is impossible to resort the definiteness of [CL-N] in Cantonese to the N-to-D movement because the head CL with an overt morphology blocks such a movement, where the N will come across the CL to the D position, as shown below:
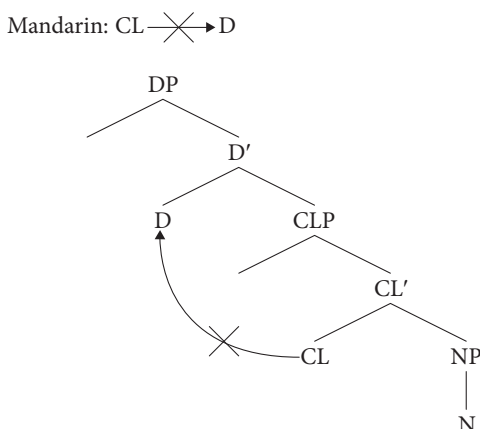
Cantonese: N ⟶✕⟶ D
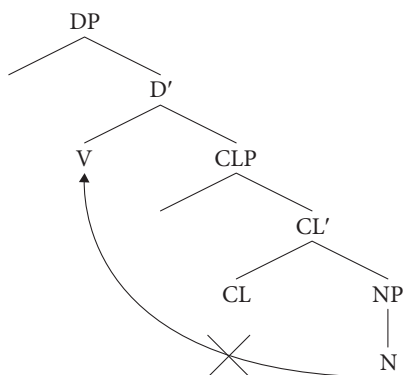
To account for the definiteness of [CL-N] in Cantonese as well as its distinct behavior in Cantonese and Mandarin, Cheng & Sybesma (1999) further proposed a CL-to-D analysis within the framework of Longobardi (1994). Based on the assumption that the derivation of a definite nominal involves a definite (D) operator, Cheng & Sybesma (1999) noted that the different definiteness between Mandarin and Cantonese as discussed above results from the different manifestations that the operator D may take. According to Cheng & Sybesma (1999), classifiers in Cantonese can move upward and finally occupy the D position, which, however, is never allowed in Mandarin. Such a distinction between these two types of language is demonstrated by the trees below.

Cantonese: CL ⟶ D

Mandarin: CL —✕→ D

```
                    DP
                   /  \
                      D′
                     /    \
                    D      CLP
                           /  \
                              CL′
                             /    \
                       ✕——CL      NP
                                   |
                                   N
```

Moreover, Cheng & Sybesma (1999) suggested that Mandarin bare NPs should not be pure bare NPs but [CL-N]s, which are always accompanied with covert classifiers. As to the definiteness of bare NPs, they assume that Mandarin thus mainly resorts to the iota operator 'τ' to derive a definite interpretation, which semantically functions as the definite article 'the' in English (Partee 1987). Wu & Bodomo (2009), however, showed a good amount of evidence that it is incorrect to equate the bare NP with [CL-N], the latter with an overt classifier pattern distinctive from bare NPs in Chinese, including Mandarin and Cantonese.

The main problem with Longobardi (1994) and Cheng & Sybesma (1999) is that both finally resort to a covert operation to derive a definite interpretation, which needs much convincing evidence to show its existence by careful examination. Unlike Longobardi (1994) and Cheng & Sybesma (1999), this paper suggests that concerning definiteness, expressing it overtly is favored over doing so covertly, following Chierchia (1998), and explores the definiteness marking in Cantonese, Mandarin, and Shaoxing dialects from a different point of view. As noted above, the interpretation of bare NPs in Mandarin is very sensitive to their positions in the surface structure, namely, a preverbal NP in Mandarin is always definite, specific, or generic, and a postverbal NP has incorporated use. Therefore, we argue against the so-called N-to-D analysis of Mandarin bare NPs and suggest that it should be the placement that is used to mark the definiteness in Chinese bare NPs; namely, the (in)definiteness of bare NPs in Mandarin is marked with the linear position where they are finally placed. Bare NPs are preposed in the preverbal position to express the definiteness, which accordingly can be viewed as a kind of overt syntactic operation to express definiteness in Mandarin, in addition to inserting a demonstrative and other ways. Taking the Cantonese and Shaoxing dialects into consideration, we would like to assume further that languages worldwide opt for expressing definiteness/specificity overtly by different means, by using a definite article, such as in English; or adding a classifier, such as in Cantonese;

or just preposing the object NP in a preverbal position, such as in the Mandarin and Shaoxing dialects. Bearing these in mind and returning to the disposal variations among the Mandarin, Cantonese, and Shaoxing dialects, it is much clearer to see that there are two corresponding ways of disposal expression formulation: a Mandarin-Shaoxing dialect type with disposal NP preposing, and a Cantonese type with a classifier inserting, as demonstrated in Table 4 below:

Table 4. Mandarin-Shaoxing dialect type vs. Cantonese type

Dialects	Mandarin-Shaoxing dialect	Cantonese
Options of definiteness expressing		
NP-Preposing	√	×
Classifier-inserting	×	√

4.2   SOV(C) and disposal variations in Mandarin and Shaoxing dialect type

The question why a disposal marker is needed in Mandarin but not in the Shaoxing dialect remains unanswered, although both dialects choose the same option of preposing the object NP preverbally to get a definite interpretation. In this section, based on Shyu's (2001) observation on Mandarin, I propose that it is the different pragmatic function of the object NP in SOVC constructions between the Shaoxing dialect and Mandarin that leads the two languages to adopt distinctive options to express a disposal meaning. Such different options between these two languages reflect different degrees of topicalization between the Shaoxing dialect and Mandarin: the Shaoxing dialect is a typical topic-prominent language, while Mandarin is a moderate one (Xu & Liu 1998).

Shyu (2001), following Kuroda (1972), claimed that the SOV in Mandarin, which behaves the same as the 'lian … dou' construction, is neither an object-scrambling construction nor a topic construction but a comparative focus construction. According to Shyu (2001), the OSV construction with stage-level predicate is free for a topic reading or contrastive reading, as in (38a) below, while the SOV construction, as in (38b) below, has no categorical judgment but only a thetic judgment and thus is a non-topicalized sentence.

Stage-level predicate
(38) a. *Fan,   Zhangsan,   chi-guo le.*   (OSV – topic or focus reading)
rice   Zhangsan   eat-ASP-ASP
'Zhangsan has eaten (rice).'
b. *Zhangsan,   fan,   chi-guo-le.*   (SOV – only a focus reading)
Zhangsan   rice   eat-ASP-ASP
'Zhangsan has eaten (rice).'

Moreover, in a generic sense, an individual-level predicate and SOV word order will be acceptable only when the predicate bears certain contrastive functions, such as to negate or emphasize, as in (39b′). Such a restriction, however, does not exist in OSV constructions, as the contrast on acceptability between sentences (a) and (b) in (39) illustrates. The above distinction between OSV and SOV constructions in Mandarin can be summarized as in Table 5 and Table 6 below.

Individual-level predicate
(39) a. *Zoumingqu, Zhangsan xihuan tan, dajia   ye   xihuan ting.*
      sonata   Zhangsan like   play everyone also like   listen
      'As for sonatas, Zhangsan likes to play them and everyone also likes to listen to them.'
   b. **Zhangsan zoumingqu xihuan tan, (dajia   ye   xihuan ting).*
      Zhangsan sonata   like   play everyone also like   listen
      'Zhangsan, sonatas, likes to play them and everyone also likes to listen to them.'
   b′. *Zhangsan zoumingqu bu xihuan tan.*
      Zhangsan sonata   not like   play
      'Zhangsan does not like to play sonatas.'

Table 5. Stage-level predicates

	OSV	SOV
Discourse (including emphatic) topic	OK (categorical judgment)	*
Focus	OK (thetic judgment)	OK

Table 6. Individual-level predicates (generic sentences) (Shyu 2001)

	OSV	SOV
Discourse (including emphatic) topic	OK (categorical judgment)	*
Focus	* (thetic judgment)	OK

According to Shyu, the post-subject object is used for emphasis (Shyu 1995; 2001), which suggests that SOV(C) in Mandarin is a contrastive focus construction.

Shyu's analysis to equate the thetic/categorical judgment with topic/focus interpretation, however, is not always correct even in Mandarin. More data in Mandarin show us no one-to-one corresponding relationship between a thetic/categorical judgment and topic/focus interpretation as Shyu claims. In other words, it is incorrect to say that an object NP perceived as substance leads to a categorical

judgment and thus is undoubtedly interpreted as a topic; otherwise, it is perceived as non-substance and leads to a thetic judgment and focus reading. Take the sentence in (40), for example.

(40) *Wo zhe-tiao yu   hen xihuan chi, na-tia   jiu   yibanban.*
      I   this-CL fish very like   eat that-CL then just.so.so
      'I like eating this fish very much, but as to that fish, just so-so.'

The definite NP *zhe-tiao yu* 'this fish' bears a contrastive focus, which, however, is perceived semantically as substance because it is referential. Therefore, an NP bearing a contrastive focus need not be necessarily perceived as non-substance or as substance. In this paper, I agree with Shyu's basic idea and treat SOV(C) constructions in Mandarin as normal contrastive focus expressions within the framework of alternative semantics, which says that focus indicates the presence of alternatives that are relevant for the interpretation of linguistic expressions (Rooth 1985, 1992; Krifka 1993; among others).

Interestingly, the approach to view SOVC as the normal contrastive focus construction cannot be simply extended to the Northern Wu dialects, such as the Shaoxing dialect. In fact, the SOV(C) construction in the Shaoxing dialect is ambiguous between topic and focus readings without any specific context. Empirically, however, a topic reading is the default one except when a contrastive constituent is presented overtly, as the following (41–42) demonstrate.

    Individual-level predicate
(41) 我   魚   老   歡喜   吃   咯。
    ηo^{35} $h\eta^{11}$ lo^{35} $fun^{11}\varsigma i^{11}$ $t\varsigma hie?^5$ $ko?^2$.
    I   fish very like   eat   PART
    'I like eating fish very much.'

Interpretations:

a. 我   魚   啊， 老   歡喜   吃   咯。   (topic reading)
    ηo^{35} $h\eta^{11}$ a^{53}, lo^{35} $fun^{11}\varsigma i^{11}$ $t\varsigma hie?^5$ $ko?^2$.
    I   fish PART very like   eat   PART
    'As to the fish, I like eating it very much.'

b. 我   魚   老   歡喜   吃   咯， *(肉   勿   奈   歡喜
    ηo^{35} $h\eta^{11}$ lo^{35} $fun^{11}\varsigma i^{11}$ $t\varsigma hie?^5$ $ko?^2$, *($n\varsigma iu?^2$ $v\gamma\eta^{21}$ $na?^2$ $fun^{11}\varsigma i^{11}$
    I   fish very like   eat   PART meat   not   very like
    吃)。   (contrastive focus reading)
    $t\varsigma hie?^5$).
    eat
    'I like eating fish very much, but don't like meat very well.'

Stage-level predicate

(42) 我　飯　吃　過　哉。
ηo^{35}　$v\tilde{e}^{35}$　$t\varepsilon hie\mathcal{P}^2$　ku^{11}　ze^{13}.
I　rice　eat　ASP(past)　PART
'I have eaten rice.'

Interpretations:

a. 我　飯　啊，　吃　過　哉。 (topic reading)
ηo^{35}　$v\tilde{e}^{35}$　a^{53}　$t\varepsilon hie\mathcal{P}^2$　ku^{11}　ze^{13}.
I　rice　PART　eat　ASP(past)　PART
'As to the rice, I have eaten.'

b. 我　飯　啊　吃　過　哉，　*(水果　嘸有　吃
ηo^{35}　$v\tilde{e}^{35}$　a^{53}　$t\varepsilon hie\mathcal{P}^2$　ku^{11}　ze^{13},　*($s\imath^{21}ku^{51}$　ηio^{21}　$t\varepsilon hie\mathcal{P}^2$
I　rice　PART　eat　ASP(past)　PART　fruit　not　eat
過　嘞)。 (contrastive focus reading)
ku^{21}　le^{21}).
ASP(past)　PART
'I have eaten the rice but not the fruit.'

The above sentences with stage- and individual-level predicates illustrate that a contrastive focus reading is much more difficult to be obtained in SOVC constructions of the Shaoxing dialect unless a contrastive alternate is listed; in contrast, a topic reading is easily available whether the predicate is stage-level or individual-level. Therefore, the SOVC word order is a naturally perfect option for a disposal expression in the Shaoxing dialect where the preverbal NP is semantically strong and undergoes a so-called subtopicalization when forming an SOVC construction, following the assumption that disposal NPs share topical properties (Tsao 1987). An overt disposal marker, however, is needed in Mandarin disposal constructions to distinguish the construction from a contrastive one because the SOVC construction in Mandarin is expected to express a contrastive meaning by default.

Dialectal distinction on disposal expressing between Mandarin type and Shaoxing dialect type thus can be summarized as in Table 7 below:

Table 7. Mandarin type vs. Shaoxing dialect type

Dialects	Mandarin	Shaoxing dialect
Options of disposal expressing		
NP-preposing	√	√
Disposal marker	√	×

5.   Conclusion

In this paper, I re-examine the disposal data among the Mandarin, Cantonese, and Shaoxing dialects in detail with special reference to the structures and inter-pretation of disposal NPs and propose that the dialectal differences in disposal expressions among these three languages result from different preferred options involved in disposal NPs to satisfy the so-called constraint of a disposal NP – defi-nite, specific, or generic. The options adopted in these three dialects, as mentioned above, can be summarized, as in Table 8.

Table 8. Disposal expressions among Cantonese, the Shaoxing dialect and Mandarin

Disposal variations	NP-preposing	Classifier-inserting	Disposal marker
Dialects			
Mandarin (S Ba-OVC)	√	×	√
Shaoxing dialect (SOVC)	√	×	×
Cantonese (SVCO)	×	√	×

Differing from previous studies on Chinese Disposal constructions, which nor-mally placed the focus on the syntax and semantics of VPs, this paper provides a cross-linguistic study on the structure and semantic interpretations of disposal NPs and highlights the role of the disposed NPs in the formation of disposal construc-tions in Mandarin, Cantonese, and Shaoxing Dialect.

Abbreviations

ASP	aspect marker
BA	ba 把
CL	classifier
[CL-N]	classifier+noun
CL(PL)	plural classifier
DE	de 的
[Dem-(Num)-CL-N]	demonstrative+(numeral)+classifier+noun
[Num-CL-N]	numeral+classifier+noun
PART	particle
PROG	progress marker
PSC	Phrase Structure Constraint
SFP	sentential final particle

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