



The Semantics and Pragmatics of Bare Noun Phrases in Chinese

汉语光杆名词词组语义及
语用特点研究

● 沈 园 著





The Semantics and Pragmatics of Bare Noun Phrases in Chinese

汉语光杆名词词组语义及
语用特点研究

● 沈 园 著

復旦大學 出版社

图书在版编目(CIP)数据

The Semantics and Pragmatics of Bare Noun Phrases in Chinese
汉语光杆名词词组语义及语用特点研究/沈园著. —上海:复旦大学出版社, 2005. 9

(复旦大学外国语言文学博士文库)

ISBN 7-309-04449-5

I. 汉… II. 沈… III. ①汉语—名词—语义学—研究—英文②汉语—名词—语用学—研究—英文 IV. H146.2

中国版本图书馆 CIP 数据核字(2005)第 027252 号

The Semantics and Pragmatics of Bare Noun Phrases in Chinese 汉语光杆名词词组语义及语用特点研究 沈园 著

出版发行 复旦大学出版社

上海市国权路 579 号 邮编:200433

86-21-65118853(发行部); 86-21-65109143(邮购)

fupnet@fudanpress.com http://www.fudanpress.com

责任编辑 计美娟

总编辑 高若海

出品人 贺圣遂

印刷 句容市排印厂
开本 850×1168 1/32
印张 7.5 插页 2
字数 198 千
版次 2005 年 9 月第一版第一次印刷
印数 1—2 100

书号 ISBN 7 - 309 - 04449 -5/H·876

定价 12.00 元

如有印装质量问题, 请向复旦大学出版社发行部调换。

版权所有 侵权必究

Preface

This book is the product of the research I undertook for my Ph.D. degree in the Dept. of Chinese, Translation & Linguistics at the City University of Hong Kong during 1997—2002. The discussion in this book is the same as in the original version of my dissertation, *The Semantics and Pragmatics of Bare Noun Phrases in Chinese*; minor revisions are made either to change styles or to make the text fit with the new format of this book. Findings of follow-up studies of bare noun phrases to the dissertation work could be seen in my paper “Another kind of ‘indefinite subjects’ in Chinese” (汉语中另一种“无定”主语) in *Research and Exploration of Grammar* (12) (《语法研究与探索(十二)》) published by Commercial Press, Beijing, 2003, which presents a clearer picture of the difference between the use and interpretation of bare noun phrase and indefinite noun phrase in the subject position in Chinese.

My interest in Chinese linguistics began when I entered the linguistic program of the City University of Hong Kong in 1997, where I was fortunate enough to study under a group of linguists who are very active in the international linguistic field and conduct research about a wide variety of languages and dia-

lects, with the major focus on Chinese. It is then that I began to delve into the similarities and differences in the working mechanisms of English and Chinese.

One thing we often take for granted about Chinese is how flexible it is in its use and interpretation, without so many formal constraints we often observe in many other languages. An example to illustrate the flexibility of Chinese is bare noun phrases. In Chinese we see bare noun phrases used more extensively than their counterparts in English. An important reason is that bare noun phrases in Chinese are “multifunctional”—bare noun phrases in Chinese can be used with definite, indefinite or generic interpretations and they overlap in use with various other nominal forms, i. e. pronominals, NPs headed by distal demonstratives and indefinite NPs. These special syntactic and semantic properties of bare noun phrases in Chinese, distinct from those of their counterparts in English, make the study of Chinese bare noun phrases a topic unique and hence extremely interesting to look at. Two questions naturally arise when we study bare noun phrases in Chinese: 1) How do we interpret bare noun phrases in particular contexts given that bare noun phrases in Chinese are multifunctional? 2) What are the constraints in the choice between bare noun phrases and other nominal forms in Chinese, whence comes the constraints and what is the nature of the constraints—these are some of the questions I try to address in the present book. Another purpose of the study is to consider, in the context of Chinese, the questions that have been raised in the study of bare noun phrases in other languages to see if bare noun phrases in different langua-

ges exhibit cross-linguistic similarities.

The study turns up many interesting facts about the use and interpretation of Chinese noun phrases which have virtually never been mentioned before in literature:

The interpretation of bare noun phrases in Chinese, like the case with English, is found to be constrained by the semantics of the predicate. The topic-comment structure as the dominating focus structure and the principle of relevance also play an important role when we determine the interpretation(s) of bare noun phrases.

Regarding the use of bare noun phrases in Chinese, comparison between bare noun phrases and pronominal anaphors and NPs headed by distal demonstratives has demonstrated that bare noun phrases are higher on the accessibility scale than pronominals and lower on the accessibility scale than NPs headed by distal demonstratives. Besides, pragmatic factors like the animacy/inanimacy dichotomy also bear on the choice between pronominals and bare noun phrases.

The choice between the bare noun phrase and another of its alternative forms, i. e. numerically quantified NPs is, again, semantic-pragmatic in nature, as illustrated by their use in progressive predicates, generic subject positions, mental attitude constructions, complex existential constructions and the object position of sentences with the aspect marker *le*. I take the use and nonuse of numeral classifiers in the above-mentioned contexts as the result of the interaction between the semantic requirements of the context and the distinct semantic features of bare noun phrases and numerically quantified noun phrases:

bare noun phrases are kind-referring in themselves while numerically quantified noun phrases are existentially quantified out of the lexicon, having a special individualizing effect. Apart from semantic factors, we also see the application of pragmatic principles to avoid redundancy in the choice between BNPs and numerically quantified NPs.

The findings about Chinese bare noun phrases suggest that the difference in grammatical systems between Chinese and English was too often underestimated in linguistic literature. Hopefully, the overall picture of the use and interpretation of bare noun phrases in Chinese presented in this book could help us achieve a better understanding of the different principles underlying the choice of nominal forms between English and Chinese: compared with English where syntactic and semantic factors play an important role, in Chinese it is semantic and pragmatic factors that determine the choice between nominal forms.

Acknowledgments

This book could not have been completed and see the light of day without the support and encouragement of many people. To the College of Foreign Languages & Literature of Fudan University and Fudan University Press who turned the publication of this book into a reality I would like to extend my heartfelt thanks.

This book grows out of my 2002 City University of Hong Kong Ph. D. dissertation on the semantics and pragmatics of bare noun phrases in Chinese. I owe a great debt to my supervisor, Prof. Xu Liejiong for his guidance and support during the writing of this dissertation. His insights from over forty years of research experience in linguistics, which he generously shared with me in one way or another, have been an invaluable treasure and an unfailing source of inspiration for me. I also benefit from discussions with the other three members of my qualifying committee: Dr Pan Haihua, Dr Randy LaPolla and Dr Chu Xiaoquan, who gave me many detailed comments and suggestions on earlier drafts of the present work.

There are two professors I should not fail to mention here, to whom the intellectual debts I owe go far beyond the limits of

the present work: Professor Henry Rosemont Jr., who introduced me into the exciting world of mathematical logic and the philosophy of language, and Professor Lu Gusun, who, notwithstanding his personal interest in the poetic function of language and his dedication to cultivate in us an aptitude for literary connoisseurship and aesthetic empathy, did not spare his effort in giving me his encouragement and substantial help to appreciate the more abstract aspect of the beauty of language.

As a Ph. D. student of the Department of Chinese, Translation & Linguistics I received a lot of help from the professors, visiting scholars and other members of the Department. In particular I would like to thank Dr Jenny Wong for making my life at Hong Kong colorful with karaokes and delicious noodles. I am also grateful to Dr Thomas Lee and Dr Pan Haihua for introducing me to linguistics and Hong Kong's best disco, letting me have a taste of the two different, but both exciting aspects of Hong Kong. Also, I would like to thank Dr Mary Erbaugh, Dr K. K. Sin, Dr Olivia Mok, Dr Cecilia Chan, Prof. Derek, Prof. Dai Qingxia, Prof. Zhang Huiying, Prof. Lin Maocan, Prof. Nin Chunyan, the staff at the general office of CTL, and all the individuals who have supported me one way or another and whose names I have failed to mention. Their friendship and support are acknowledged and appreciated.

I am no less indebted to my fellow students at the Department of Chinese, Translation & Linguistics and all the friends who have accompanied and supported me, in particular Hu Jianhua, Hua Dongfan, Peppina Lee, Liu Danqing, Xu Jiujiu, Wang Ling, Wu Qing, Wu qin'an, Patricia Man, Gong Qi,

Zhang Wanmin, Rudy, Queenie, Yang Chunyan, Felix, Yang Ying and Martin. Some of them have also been really good informants for me. I hope they were not driven crazy by my questions.

Parts of the present work were presented at the 11th North American Conference on Chinese Linguistics held at Harvard University, Boston, June 18—20, 1999, Postgraduate Research Forum on Language and Linguistics'99, Hong Kong, April 17—18, 1999, the 9th International Conference on Chinese Linguistics cum International Symposium on Chinese Language Teaching, Singapore, June 26—28, 2000, the First International Conference on Modern Chinese Grammar for the New Millennium (The Seventh Conference on Modern Chinese Grammar), Hong Kong, February 1—3, 2001, and two departmental seminars. I would like to thank the audience at the above-mentioned conferences and seminars for their interest in my papers and their helpful comments. Special thanks to Prof. Shi Dingxu, Dr Jiang Yan and Prof. Yuan Yulin for sharing their viewpoints with me. I'm also grateful to Dr Yang Suying, Prof. Dobrovie-Sorin and Prof. Huynoo Lee for kindly making their papers available for me.

Finally, my deepest thanks go to my parents and my younger brother for their love and support over the years. And to my husband, for his love, understanding and encouragement.

Table of contents

Preface	1
Acknowledgments	1
Chapter 1 Preliminaries	1
1.1 Introduction	1
1.2 Defining BNPs in Chinese	2
1.3 The extensive use of BNPs in Chinese	5
1.4 Problems	10
Chapter 2 The Semantics of BNPs	19
2.1 BNP interpretations in Chinese	20
2.2 The classification of predicates in English	26
2.2.1 The stage/individual distinction	27
2.2.2 Modifications of the stage/individual distinction	33
2.3 Predicate types and the interpretation of BNPs in Chinese	38
2.3.1 Li (1997)	38
2.3.2 BNPs in lexical generic sentences and habitual sentences	41

2.3.3	BNPs in episodic non-stative sentences	49
2.3.3.1	BNPs in intransitive episodic non-stative sentences	51
2.3.3.2	BNPs in transitive episodic non-stative sentences	64
2.3.4	BNPs in episodic stative sentences	66
2.3.5	The interpretation of BNP-objects in Chinese	72
2.3.6	The “definiteness” tendency	77
2.4	The count/mass distinction	80
Chapter 3	A Discourse Analysis of BNPs	96
3.1	Pronominals and BNPs	100
3.2	DemNPs and BNPs	111
3.2.1	The use of BNP anaphors and DemNP anaphors	111
3.2.1.1	BNP anaphors, DemNP anaphors and syntactic positions	113
3.2.1.2	Anaphoric encapsulation	118
3.2.1.3	Distance and the intervention of other topics	121
3.2.2	BNPs and DemNPs on the Accessibility Scale	127
3.3	PossNPs and BNPs	129
Chapter 4	BNPs and Numerically Quantified Noun Phrases	138
4.1	The interpretation of NQNPs in Chinese	139

4.2	The “conditioned” optionality in the use of numeral classifiers	141
4.3	BNPs vs. indefinite NPs in Chinese	
	progressive predicates	145
4.3.1	Liu (1994)’s account	145
4.3.2	My analysis	147
4.3.3	Difference between Chinese and English	153
4.3.4	Further clarifications	154
4.4	Indefinite NPs vs. BNPs as generic subjects	156
4.4.1	Defining generic-NP subjects	156
4.4.2	The use of indefinite NPs as generic subjects	157
4.4.3	An operator-variable account for indefinite NPs in English	162
4.4.4	A semantic-pragmatic account	164
4.5	Other BNP- and non-BNP constructions	171
4.5.1	Zhang(2000)	172
4.5.2	Reconsider Zhang’s BNP- and non-BNP constructions	176
4.6	Weak BNPs and the aspectual marker <i>le</i>	190
Chapter 5	Conclusion	201
	Bibliography	207
	Appendix: Chinese Examples in Chinese Characters	218

Chapter 1

Preliminaries

1.1 Introduction

Since Carlson (1977), bare noun phrases, as a special category of noun phrases, have been receiving much attention in the circle of linguistics (see also Gillon 1990, Diesing 1992, Condoravdi 1997, Glasbey 1998, to name a few). Most of the studies on bare noun phrases (which will henceforth be referred to as BNPs) have been confined to English, although we see Laca (1990) and Kim (1998) on Spanish BNPs, Verkuyl (1992) on Dutch BNPs, Lee (1995) on Korean BNPs, Geenhoven (1995) on BNPs in West Greenlandic, among others. The present study will explore BNPs in Chinese.

The study of BNPs in Chinese is a topic which has almost been left untouched in literature, the study, however, is significant in at least the following two aspects. On the one hand, due to the cross-linguistic similarity between BNPs, the study of BNPs in Chinese will face problems similar to those researchers encounter in their study of BNPs in English (as I would show in Chapter 2). Investigation into BNPs from the perspective of

Chinese, together with those conducted from the perspective of other languages, will shed new light on these problems, which, as Carlson suggests in his conclusions to *Reference to kinds in English*, “would prove to be of tremendous interest and importance” (Carlson 1977: 303). On the other hand, there is a unique aspect of Chinese BNPs that makes the study to be of particular interest, i. e. BNPs in Chinese have special syntactic and semantic properties distinct from those in English and many other languages (as I would reveal in Section 1.3 of this chapter and in Chapter 3 and Chapter 4 of this thesis), which makes the study of BNPs an issue more complicated and hence more interesting to look at in Chinese.

In the rest of this chapter, I will clarify what I mean by BNPs in Chinese, account for their frequent occurrences and set out to delimit the scope of the present study.

1.2 Defining BNPs in Chinese

The BNPs that Carlson (1977) and many others have studied in English are mostly bare plurals, i. e. noun phrases that exhibit a plural head noun, but not introduced by quantifiers, determiners, articles, numerals or specifiers. Examples of BNPs in English are cited in (1.1), (1.2) and (1.3) below (which are repetitions of Carlson (1977)'s examples (2a), (2d) and (2e)):

(1.1) Dogs are mammals.

(1.2) Bill threw rotten oranges into the garbage.

(1.3) Ants that go crazy at the sight of sugar ought to be sent away.

Although Carlson (1977) does not include mass terms in his discussion of English BNPs, he does mention in the last chapter of his dissertation that unquantified mass terms resemble unquantified bare plurals in a “remarkably parallel fashion”¹ (Carlson 1977: 293) and it is concluded that bare mass terms and bare plurals should be treated in a similar manner. Observation that bare plurals and bare mass terms have a lot in common is also made in Link (1983), Gillon (1992), etc.

BNPs in Chinese, however, should not be defined in the same way as BNPs in English, as BNPs in Chinese, among other things, are not morpho-syntactically inflected for plurality. To define BNPs in Chinese, first I will make it clear what I mean by bare nouns (BNs) in Chinese. Assuming that nouns can be distinguished from noun phrases in Chinese, ignoring unclear cases, I will define BNs in Chinese as lexical items of the syntactic category N. BNPs in Chinese include both BNs functioning as BNPs² and BNs expanded to include adjectival, prepositional or clausal modifiers. Examples of BNPs in Chinese are shown below in (1.4)—(1.7)³:

- (1.4) Guanjian shi, zhe duan shijian li, wode huodong
 key BE this CL time in my movement
 shoudao yangede xianzhi.
 receive strict restriction
 “The idea was, my movements were strictly limit-

ed just around this time.”

- (1.5) Ta zhuyidao tamende maoyan shang dou cha zhe
she notice their hat band on all insert ASP
baisede mingpian.

white card

“They all had white cards stuck in their hat bands,
she noticed.”

- (1.6) Sifangyuan zhouwei de deng jianjian liang qi.
quadrangle around DE light gradually light up
“The lights around the quadrangle started to come
on.”

- (1.7) Baoer gei wo de shoubiao bujian le.
Paul give me DE watch disappear SFP
“The wrist-watch Paul gave me is gone.”

Other maximal projections containing NPs, e. g. classifier phrases, determiner phrases, like those shown in (1.8) and (1.9) below, will be considered as non-BNPs:

- (1.8) Ta shou li jia zhe yi zhi xiangyan.
he hand in hold ASP one CL cigarette
“He was holding a cigarette in his hand.”

- (1.9) Wo yi tian dou mei kanjian na ge nüren le.
I one day all not see that CL woman SFP
“I hadn’t seen the woman all day.”