Ambiguity in the Affirmative/Negative 'V *U/BO* NP' Construction in Taiwanese Southern Min[*]

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This paper is aimed to describe and explain the ambiguity in the Taiwanese Southern Min V *u/bo* NP 'V have/not-have NP' construction. This structure, whether being affirmative or negative, induces two kinds of meanings which are referred to as generic and episodic readings. It is argued in this paper that syntactically the complex predicate V *u/bo* NP is a resultative compound based on Lin's (2001) light verb syntax analysis. Semantically the twofold interpretations are ascribed to the mechanism that individual-level (henceforth i-level) predicates and stage-level (henceforth s-level) predicates employ (Chierchia 1995). Through investigating the V *u/bo* NP construction from both syntactic and semantic points of views, we also hope to shed light on the syntax-semantics interface in language use.

1. Introduction

The affirmative/negative V *u/bo* NP 'V have/not-have NP' construction in Taiwanese Southern Min (henceforth TSM)[1] is ambiguous with respect to generic and episodic interpretations it imparts (c.f. 'potential modality' and 'existential aspect' in Cheng's (1997) words), as illustrated in (1) and (2), respectively[2].

(1)　Abing　　thak　u/bo　　　　　che.
　　　Abing　　read　have/not-have　books
　　　'Abing can/can not study well.'

(2)　Abing　chue　　　　u/bo　　　　sosi
　　　Abing　search-for　have/not-have　key
　　　'Abing found/failed to find the key.'

On the generic reading like (1), the sentence is associated with a potential property. It states that the agent *Abing* has or does not have the ability to study well. Unlike the generic sentences which indicate permanent states or truth, the episodic sentences refer to a completed event which as a consequence can occur periodically. As shown in (2), the agent *Abing* was searching for the key, and ended up having or not having the key at some reference time. In this case it is possible for *Abing* to do the searching-event repeatedly because each event intrinsically contains an end-point.

As a step toward a possible explanation for the ambiguity in the V *u/bo* NP construction I turn to their Mandarin Chinese counterparts, V-*de*/*bu*-V constructions, which have drawn much more attention in the literature following miscellaneous proposals (c.f. Tsai 2001, Wu 2004, among others). The Mandarin counterpart of sentence (1) is as follows[3]:

(3) Aming shu   du   de/bu lai.
     Aming books study   de/bu come
     'Aming can/can not study well.'

The English interpretation of both (1) and (3) unequivocally utilizes the modal element which appears to be inherent in the verb in the original sentences. Specifically, *de/bu* in Mandarin Chinese and *u/bo* in TSM alike are taken to be modal elements, whether in an explicit or implicit manner (see Tsai 2001 and Wu 2004 for Mandarin, Wang 2008 for TSM). This case seems to indicate that a convergent analysis of both postverbal modality and negation is promising for both languages. Nonetheless, in the other case that Taiwanese V *u/bo* NP conspicuously employs the episodic characteristic like (2), we find it left out in previous proposals and hence reconsideration of the status of *u/bo* is required.

Since the ambiguity problem of V *u/bo* NP in Taiwanese touches on the syntax-semantics interface, this paper will try to clarify both to which extent the semantics plays a role in determining the interpretation and how much the syntax has manipulated the configuration. Hence this paper tackles the ambiguity problem from two different angles. Syntactically this article argues for a resultative verbal complement analysis of *u/bo* following the idea of Cheng (1997), Huang (2003), Li (1996), Tang (1996), Teng (1992). It follows the framework of Lin's (2001) light verb analysis, which takes light verbs as

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3. The object *shu* 'books' in (3) is topicalized in a way about which the paper is not concerned in regard to the V-*de/bu*-V construction. There are two points to note here: the first one is that the Mandarin *Aming du de/bu lai shu* 'Aming can/can not study well' is not ungrammatical but may sometimes receive a question mark. When further taking into account the modern colloquial usage of V-*de/bu*-V we realize the whole V-*de/bu*-V NP configuration is just not as popular as it used to be in archaic Chinese, hence attributing this question mark to a historical account. The other point is that sentence (3) in effect has the same distributions with its TSM counterpart (1), as *Aming tshe thak u/bo* with the object topicalized as well is perfectly fine.

eventuality predicates that determine the eventualities of sentences. Semantically it sets out to take a closer look at the complex predicate V *u/bo* NP by examining its generic properties paralleling individual-level predicates and its episodic properties paralleling stage-level predicates. Based on Chierchia's (1995) approach, this paper shows that in V *u/bo* NP consturction the generic representation, which corresponds to the generalization of individual-level predicates, is ascribed to the generic operator which bounds a Davidonian argument ranging over occasions/eventualities. As for the V *u/bo* NP predicates which denote an episodic representation, it is claimed that there is no generic operator, hence the sentence gets the default episodic meaning.

   The remaining sections of this paper are organized as follows. Section 2 provides an overview of the morphological, syntactic, and semantic properties of the Taiwanese V *u/bo* NP construction. Section 3 demonstrates both the syntactic and semantic analyses of the V *u/bo* NP. Section 4 briefly offers a previous analysis. Section 5 concludes this article.

2. The Morphological, Semantic and Syntactic Properties of Taiwanese V *U/Bo* NP
2.1. Mophological Properties
   First of all, in this construction *u* and its negative counterpart *bo* have not lost their lexical meanings especially in generic sentences when we compare the sentences with their Mandarin counterparts, as illustrated in (4a) vs. (4b)[4].

(4) a. Abing khuann bo   jit-gi.   (Taiwanese)
    Abing read not-have Japanese
    'Abing does not understand Japanese.'

   b. Abing kan bu dong   riwen.   (Mandarin)
     Abing read not understand Japanese

In (4a), *bo* corresponds to *bu-dong* in (4b), meaning 'not understand'.
   In addition, verbs which denote 'disposing' meaning such as *be* 'sell', *chit* 'erase', and *tan* 'throw' are not compatible with the construction as in (5) unless what follows them pertain to quantity or quality as in (6) (Cheng 1997).

(5) *Abing chit bo   opang.
   Abing erase not-have blackboard
   Intended: 'Abing failed to clean any blackboard.'

(6) Abing chit bo   leng-te opang.
   Abing erase not-have two-Cl blackboard

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4. The abbreviations used in this paper are glossed as follows: Cl: classifier; Perf: perfective maker; POSS: possesive; Q: question marker; SPF: sentence final particle.

i) 'Abing failed to clean two blackboards.'
ii) 'Abing is not capable of cleaning two blackboards (,too much work for him).'

2.2. Semantic Properties

Semantically we look at the V *u/bo* NP construction from three different aspects. One is the event types of verbs preceding *u/*bo that are allowed to occur in the construction. The second aspect investigates the NP types which may affect the genericity of the sentences (Krifka et al. 1995). The final aspect demonstrates that the thematic roles in the subject positions are not restricted.

In the first place, the verbs preceding *u/bo* are restricted. The postverbal NPs are found only with accomplishment verbs, or activity verbs turned into accomplishments by the addition of the resultative portion *u/bo* (as in (7)-(8)). They are not acceptable with statives (Huang 2003), as in (9) and (10).

(7)   Abing   be   u   chai.
       Abing   buy   have   vegetable
       'Abing bought vegetables.'

(8)   Abing   than   bo   cinn.
       Abing   make   not-have   money
       'Abing can not make any money.'

(9)   *Abing   ai   bo   lang.
        Abing   love   not-have   person
        Intended: 'He does not love anyone.'

(10)   *Yi   sin   bo   kao.
         he   believe   not-have   religion
         Intended: 'He does not believe in any religion.'

Furthermore, it is demonstrated by Krifka et al. (1995) that kind-referring NPs (but not objects) render sentences generic. In the V *u/bo* NP construction this argument is born out, too. The kind-NPs in the subject position determine the genericity of sentences like (11)-(13), but kind-NPs in the object position do not show the characteristic like (14)-(16).

(11)   Tua-khoo lang   be   bo   sann.
        plump   people   buy   not-have   clothes
        'Plump people can not find suitable clothes to buy.'

(12)   Bai   hahau   co   bo   haksing.
        bad   school   get   not-have   students
            'Bad schools can not get any student.'

(13)   Phua-penn e   chiu-a   kam   senn   u   kue-ji?
        sick   POSS   tree   Q   produce   have   fruit
            'Can sick trees produce any fruit?'

(14)   Aying   be   bo   sui   sann.
        Aying   buy   not-have   beautiful   clothes
        i) 'Aying failed to buy any beautiful clothes.'
        ii) 'Aying can not buy any beautiful clothes that fit her.'

(15)   Abing kam   lia   u   tua-cia   hi-a?
        Abing Q   catch   have   big   fish
        i) 'Did Abing catch any big fish?'
        ii) 'Can Abing catch any big fish?'

(16)   Cit-king   hahau   co   bo   he   hakseng.
        this-Cl   school   get   not-have   good   student
        i) 'This school failed to get any good student (this year).'
        ii) 'This school (is too bad that it) can not get any good student.'

Moreover, the subjects which occur with the resultative verbal complements V *u/bo* NP have various thematic roles like (17)-(19).

(17)   Abing   chue   bo   sosi.   *(Agent)*
        Abing   search-for not-have   key
        'Abing failed to find the key.'

(18)   Cit-cia   yunn-a   thi   bo   monn.   *(Patient)*
        this-Cl   sheep   peel   not-have   wool
        'This sheep has no wool to peel.'

(19)   Cit-khu   chan   cing   u   mi-kiann.   *(Locative)*
        This-Cl   field   grow   have   thing
        'In this field things can grow well.'

Lin (2001) also gives us examples which indicate that Mandarin Chinese has the property of unselectiveness of subject and object, as illustrated in (20a-b) and (21a-b).

(20)　　*Unselectiveness of subject in Mandarin Chinese*
　　　　a.　Laozhang kai-le　　　yi-liang　tanke-che.　　　　*(Agentive)*
　　　　　　Laozhang drive-Perf　　one-Cl　　tank
　　　　　　'Laozheng drove a tank.'

　　　　b.　Gaosu-gonglu-shang　kai-zhe　　yi-pai　　　tanke-che. *(Existential)*
　　　　　　expressway-on　　　　　drive-ZHE　one-line　tank
　　　　　　'There is a line of tanks on the expressway.'

(21)　　*Unselectiveness of object in Mandarin Chinese*
　　　　a.　chi　niu-rou　mian　　　　　　　　　　　*(Theme/Patient)*
　　　　　　eat　beef　　　noodle
　　　　　　'eat beef noodle'

　　　　b.　chi　da-wan　　　　　　　　　　　　　　*(Instrument)*
　　　　　　eat　big-bowl
　　　　　　'use a big bowl to eat'

　　　　Hence in Taiwanese that the various thematic roles occurring in the subject position along with V *u/bo* NP construction is not a random case, but a general property as seen cross-dialectally in Chinese family.

2.3. Syntactic Properties

　　　　Although the syntactic distributions of V *u/bo* NP clearly state that it serves as a predicate of a clause, it is worth noting how the predicate behaves with respect to other syntactic elements in a sentence.

　　　　First, adverbs or other negation markers which indicate irrealis property can occur before *u* but not *bo*, as in (22a-d).

(22)　a.　I　chhoa　tih-be　　u　　　boo　　a.
　　　　　　he marry　almost　have　wife　SFP
　　　　　　'He is about to have a wife.'

　　　b.　I　　boo　choa　ia-be　　u　　　leh.
　　　　　　he　wife　marry　not-yet　have　SFP
　　　　　　'He has not been able to get a wife yet.'

　　　c.　Li　an-ne　　　tai-ci　co　be　　u.
　　　　　　you　this-way　thing　do　cannot　have
　　　　　　'In doing so, you cannot get anything done.'

    d.   Li   an-ne   tai-ci   co   ne-e   u?
        you   this-way   thing   do   how-can   have
        'In doing so, how can you get anything accomplished?'

<div align="right">(Cheng 1997: 213)</div>

Second, only in episodic sentences can the resultative verbal complement V *u/bo* take a suffix *tio* or *ka*, which refer to 'achieve'. When the postverbal NPs are bare NPs or definite NPs, *tio* is employed like (23a-b); when the postverbal NPs are quantifier NPs, *ka* is employed like (24a-b).

(23)   a.   Abing   pha   bo   tio   mang-a.
              Abing   hit   not-have   achieve   mosquito
              ' Abing failed to hit the mosquito.'

        b.   Abing   be   u   tio   hit-pun   che.
              Abing   buy   have   achieve   that-Cl   book
              'Abing bought the book.'

(24)   a.   Abing   cia   bo   ka   leng-wann   peng.
              Abing   eat   not-have   achieve   two-bowls   rice
              'Abing did not finish two bowls of rice.'

        b.   Cit-te   to-a   ce   bo   ka   cap-e   lang.
              this-Cl   table   sit   not-have   achieve   ten   person
              'There were less than ten people sitting at this table.'

3. The Analysis
3.1. The Syntax of V *U/Bo* NP Construction: A Comparative Analysis Between Mandarin Chinese and Taiwanese Southern Min

    In this section, we review the basic idea of Lin's (2001) light verb syntax in Mandarin Chinese and also take relevant analyses which help us shed light on the syntactic representation of Taiwanese V *u/bo* NP construction.

    Lin proposes that light verbs must have concrete thematic contents and serve substantial roles in the licensing of arguments and the construction of sentence structure. His main evidence comes from an interesting phenomena existing in Mandarin Chinese, which he calls unselectiveness of subject and object. The examples are already illustrated in (20-21), repeated here in (25-26) for readers' sake.

(25)   *Unselectiveness of subject in Mandarin Chinese*
        a.   Laozhang   kai-le   yi-liang   tanke-che.   *(Agentive)*
              Laozhang   drive-Perf   one-Cl   tank
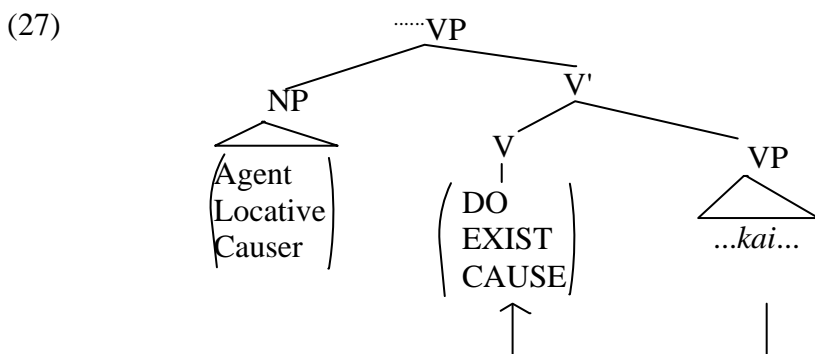   'Laozheng drove a tank.'

b. Gaosu-gonglu-shang kai-zhe yi-pai tanke-che. *(Existential)*
expressway-on drive-ZHE one-line tank
'There is a line of tanks on the expressway.'

c. Zhe-liang po-che kai-de wo xia-si le. *(Causative)*
this-Cl broken-car drive-DE I scare-dead SFP
'Driving this broken car made me scared to death.'

(26) *Unselectiveness of object in Mandarin Chinese*
a. chi niu-rou mian *(Theme/Patient)*
eat beef noodle
'eat beef noodle'

b. chi da-wan *(Instrument)*
eat big-bowl
'use a big bowl to eat'

c. chi guanzi *(Location)*
eat restaurant
'dine at some restaurant'

d. eat tou-tong *(Reason)*
eat head-ache
'eat for [curing] headache'

(Lin 2001: 117)

As argued by Lin, the examples in (25a-c) and (26a-d) illustrate certain important properties of verbs in Mandarin Chinese. In (25a-c), an action verb like *kai* 'drive' does not require an agentive external argument; its external argument can be a locative or a causer. These different subjects do not seem to fall within the selectional domain of the verb *kai* 'drive'. This kind of phenomena suggests that the subject of a Mandarin Chinese is not selected by the main verb, but is licensed by light verbs in Syntax. The same conclusion also holds for the object arguments. The structural analyses for (25a-c) are represented in the diagram (27) below, which will serve as our framework for the analysis of Taiwanese V *u/bo* NP construction.

(27)

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                    ·······VP
                 ╱          ╲
              NP              V'
          ╱──────╲        ╱      ╲
        ⎛Agent  ⎞       V         VP
        ⎜Locative⎟      │       ╱────╲
        ⎝Causer ⎠     ⎛DO  ⎞   ...kai...
                      ⎜EXIST⎟
                      ⎝CAUSE⎠
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In order to get a resultant state interpretation and also to capture the unselectiveness of subjects for the V *u/bo* NP compound, we adopt Lin's account and illustrate how his analysis also applies to the Taiwanese construction under discussion.

First we take a look at the example (28) below.

(28)   Se-cia   cun   lia   bo   hi-a.
       small-Cl   boat   catch   not-have   fish
       'People can not catch any fish in small boats.'

In (28), the subject *se-cia cun* 'small boats' is a locative rather than an agentive external argument which should be required by the action verb *lia* 'catch'. This indicates that Taiwanese share parallel features with Mandarin in respect of predication in syntax, and the phenomena are also already mentioned in examples (17-19).

Second, let us look at another examples, which will help clarify the resultative meaning that the V *u/bo* NP construction denotes.

(29)   a.   Abing   than   u   cinn.
            Abing   make   have   money
            'Abing succeeds in making (much) money.'

       b.   Abing   than   bo   cinn.
            'Abing fails to make any money.'

(30)   a.   Abing   chue   u   sosi.
            Abing   search-for have   key
            'Abing found/succeeded in finding the key.'

       b.   Abing   chue   bo   sosi.
   'Abing failed to find the key.'

In (29-30), *u/bo* play a role in the determination of whether a desired result is attained or not. Specifically, in (29b), *bo* does not serve to negate the whole event of 'Abing's making money' but to negate the agent's preferable resultant condition, that is, to obtain as much money as he can. The same interpretation holds true for (30b).

Here we provide the syntactic representations for V *u/bo* NP construction with respect to different thematic roles that subjects denote.

(31)   Subject as an *Agent*, e.g. *Cit-cia ke senn bo leng* 'This hen fails to lay any egg'.
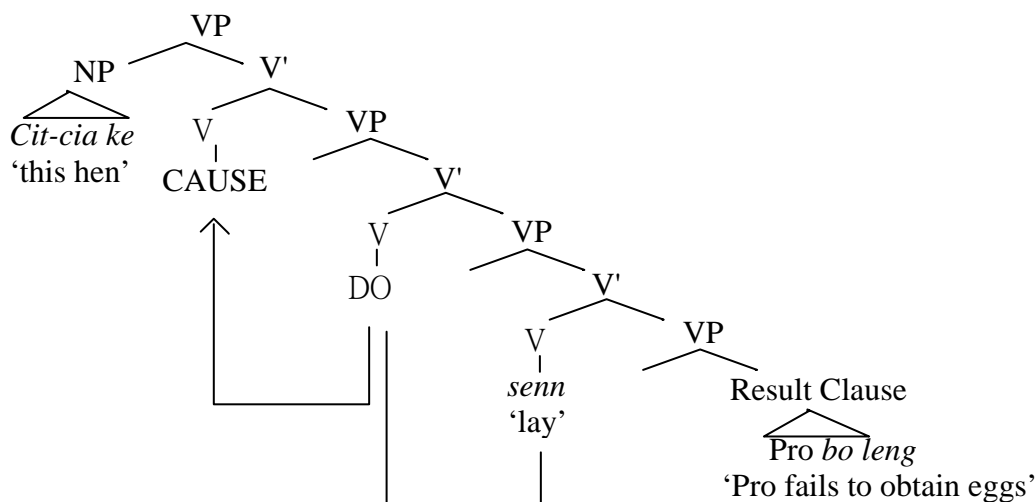
(32)   Subject as a *Patient*, e.g. *Cit-cia yunn-a thi   u monn* 'This sheep has (abudent) wool to be peeled'.
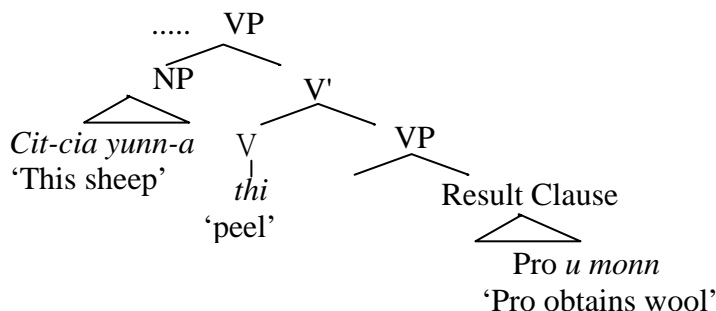
To sum up, in our analysis we take the V *u/bo* NP as a general type of the so-called resultative verb compounds (Huang & Li 1995) and demonstrate that it share the parallel syntactic structures which are proposed by Lin (2001).

3.2. The Semantic Analysis for Generic and Episodic Interpretations in V *U/Bo* NP

We will show that the genericity lying in the V *u/bo* NP construction can be explained by the properties of individual-level predicates and, following Chierchia (1995), we propose that Taiwanese V *u/bo* NP sentences with the generic reading also conform to a generic operator analysis.

To begin with, a list of relevant properties identified as criterial for the characterization of i-level predicates in V *u/bo* NP are offered in the following (33-35) statements and examples.

(33)   Stable stativity: I-level predicates denote a state that is 'transient' or 'stable' (Chierchia).

    a.   *Abing   cang/ting-ko-gue/cit-tang-cing   thak   bo   che.
           Abing   yesterday/last month/a year ago   read   not-have   book
           'Abing could not study well yesterday/last month/a year ago.'

    b.   Abing   cang/ting-ko-gue/cit-tang-cing   chue   bo
           Abing   yesterday/last month/a year ago   search   not-have
           in-ba-e   phue.
           his father's   letter
     'Abing failed to find out his father's letter yesterday/last month/a year ago.'

       Hence, the difference between a generic reading and an episodic reading manifests itself in the behavior of temporal adverbials.

(34)   Locatives: There are tight restrictions on the cooccurrence of i-level predicates and locative modifiers such as (a-b), whereas in s-level predicates there exist no such restrictions such as (c-d).

    a.   *Abing   ti chu   thiann u   enggi.
           Abing at home   listen   have English
           '??Abing can understand English at home.'

    b.   *Cit-kha   chu-khuan-a   ti taipak   be   bo   cinn.
           this-Cl bracelet   in Taipei   sell not-have   money
           'This bracelet can not be sold for any money at Taipei.'

    c.   Aying ti chai-chi-a   be   bo   sann.
           Aying in market   buy   not-have clothes
           'Aying failed to buy any clothes in the market.'

    d.   Abing ti tsu   hua bo   lang.
           Abing at home call not-have person
           'Abing failed to call to anyone at home.'

(35)   Kind-referring NPs in subject position: Taiwanese *i-level* predicates select the universal reading of kind-referring NPs in the subject position like (a-b), whereas *s-level* predicates can not, as illustrated in (c).

    a.   Pun-tuann-lang   cing bo   chai.
           lazy people   grow not-have   vegetable
           'Lazy people can not grow any vegetable.'

b. Bai-ha-hao   cio   bo   hak-sing.
    bad school   obtain   not-have   student
    'Bad schools can not obtain good students.'

c. ??Pun-tuann-lang   cue   bo   Abing.
    lazy people   find   not-have   Abing
    'Lazy people failed to find out where Abing was.'

Now we move on to the semantic analysis which serves to account for the ambiguity in V *u/bo* NP construction. (36) is our proposal:

(36)

a.   The generic sentences, which correspond to *i-level* predicates, inherently have a habitual morpheme which carries a feature [+Q] in the predicate. The feature requires the presence of **Gen** operator (Chierchia).

b.   In the episodic sentences, which correspond to *s-level* predicates, there is no [+Q] feature in the V *u/bo* NP predicate, hence no **Gen** operator is employed.

The basic structure of a V *u/bo* NP construction with respect to the generic reading is as follows, e.g. *Abing thiann-u enggi* 'Abing understands English'.

(37)
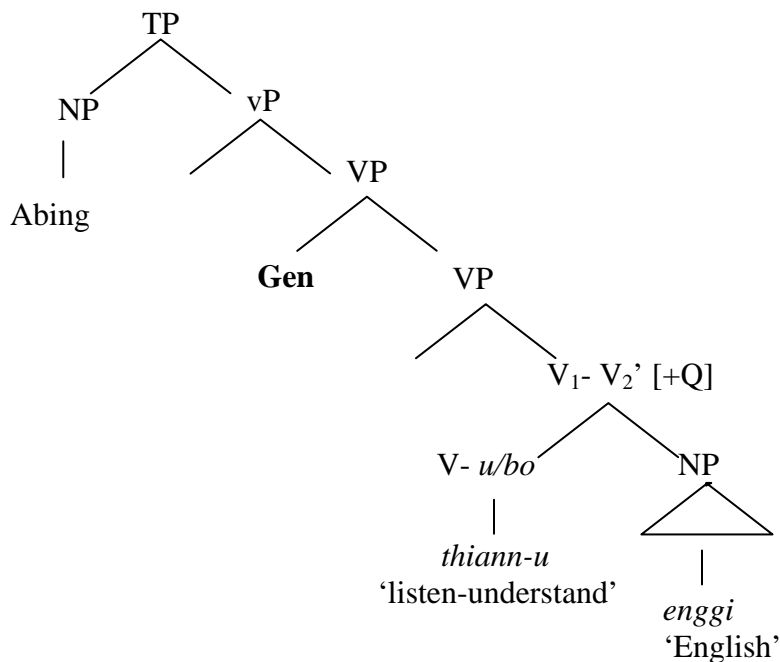
4. Previous Analysis: Wang's (2008) Account for Postverbal Negation in Taiwanese

  For expository purpose and limitations of this article, I simply review Wang's two essential arguments here. For a detailed discussion, readers are referred to her text. I argue against Wang's analysis by diminishing her two essential arguments. First, it is argued that there is a null head which represents a concept of achievement in the V *u/bo* NP construction, as in (38).

(38) Li-e che u/bo   Ø taoloo.
    Li-e find AFFIRM/NEG   job
    'Li-e is (un)able to find a job.'

  However, as the aforementioned examples (c.f. 23-24) show, *tio* or *ka* can occur in this position, too. This makes the null head proposal ad hoc in that she can not explain why the ACHIEVEMENT head can sometimes be null and sometimes visible.

  Second, she argues that the thematic role of the object in V *u/bo* NP should be GOAL because the NP can not be passivized, hence being impossible to take the PATIENT or THEME role. This generalization is incorrect. For one thing, the thematic roles are an endowment in the argument structure, and hence can not be justified by any transformational rule. For another, as we take a closer look at the passive sentences in both Mandarin and Taiwanese, we find out that it is not always the case that themes can be passivized, as in (39) for Mandarin and (40) for Taiwanese.

(39) a. Zhangsan chang-le yi-shou ge.
      Zhangsan sing-LE one-Cl song
      'Zhangsan sang a song.'

    a' *Yi-sou ge bei Zhangsan chang-le.   (PASSIVE)
      'A song was sang by Zhangsan.'

    b. Zhangsan zai chi fan.
      Zhangsan ZAI eat rice
      'Zhansan is eating the meal.'

    b.' *Fan bei Zhangsan zai chi.   (PASSIVE)
       'The meal is being eaten by Zhangsan.'

    c. Zhangsan song Li zhe-ben shu.
      Zhangsan give Li this-Cl book
      'Zhangsan gives Li this book.'

    c.' *Zhe ben shu bei Zhangsan song Li. (PASSIVE)
       'This book was given to Li by Zhangsan.'

(40)   a.   Abing   te   thak   hit-pun   ce.
                 Abing   TE   study   that-Cl   book
                 'Abing is studying that book.'

         a.'   *Hit-pun ce   te hoo Abing thak.   (PASSIVE)
               'That book is being studied by Abing.'

         b.   Abing   ca   peng   a.
                 Abing   eat   rice   SFP
               'Abing ate the meal.'

         b.' *Peng   hoo   Abing ca   a.   (PASSIVE)
               'The meal was eaten by Abing.'

       Therefore, Wang's analysis does not appear to be plausible. Here it is further suggested that the various behaviors of thematic roles in both the Mandarin V-*de/bu*-V construction and the Taiwanese V-*u/bo* NP construction might be attributed to the general properties of Mandarin resultative verbal complements, as already discussed a lot in the literature by Li (1990), Li and Huang (1994) and among others. For instance, one type of the resultative compounds can not be passivized as illustrated in (41).

(41)   a.   Zhangsan   he-zui-le   jiu.
                Zhangsan   drink-drunk-LE   wine
               'Zhangsan drank wine and got drunk.'

                                                          (L&H 1994)

         a.'   *Jiu bei Zhangsan   he-zui-le
               '*The wine was drunk by Zhangsan.'

5. Conclusion

       This paper has provided an overview of the affirmative/negative V *u/bo* NP construction in Taiwanese Southern Min by examining its semantic and syntactic properties. In order to account for various properties the construction accommodates, this article argues that the complex predicate V *u/bo* NP is a type of resultative verbal compounds and hence its parallel cross-dialectal properties can be accounted for by Lin's (2001) analysis in a general manner. It further argues that the generic and episodic interpretations induced in the construction in effect correspond to individual-level predicates and stage-level predicates, respectively. It is proposed that there is an inherent [+Q] feature in predicates denoting generic meanings, and a concomitant **Gen** operator in the sentence is to bind the argument ranging over eventualities. Having taken a closer look at V *u/bo* NP construction, we learn that the facts lying in the syntax-semantics interface can sometimes be blurred by the mingling of multiple aspects in language use; therefore, to adopt either aspect of analyses without considering the others is likely to lead to an arbitrary conclusion.

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