

Locative Inversion in Mandarin Chinese

Ming-Hao Jin
(Yanbian University)

Jin, Ming-Hao. (2015). Locative Inversion in Mandarin Chinese. *The Linguistic Association of Korea Journal* 23(4), 27-43. On the detailed analysis of Mandarin Chinese (MC) locative inversion constructions from the aspect markers of *le* and *zhe*, verbs, agent and postverbal NP, this paper attempts to explain EPP and Case realization of locative inversion in MC. It suggested that Cases for PP-subjects may be realized differently from language to language. Unlike other languages, the PP-subjects in MC do not arise from locative inversion like those in English, but are introduced directly by the light verbs EXIST and OCCUR in the subject position which are used to satisfy the Case of EPP. These light verbs EXIST and OCCUR are the Case realization in MC, and DP after V in locative inversion constructions has partitive Case in LF.

Key Words: Locative inversion, Mandarin Chinese (MC), EPP, EXIST, OCCUR

1. Introduction

In addition to the typical "NP1(PP)+V+NP2" word order of placement verbs, another noncanonical structure "NP_{Loc}+V+NP" can be applied in English:

- (1) a. A picture was hung on the wall.
b. On the wall was hung a picture. (PP+V+NP)

This "PP+V+NP" word order is a well-known construction named locative inversion as in (1b), which contrasts with the canonical word order illustrated in (1a), in which the locative expression is in the post-verbal position. According to Levin & Hovav (1995), there are three properties of locative

inversion construction. First, the "PP+V+NP" word order results from a shift with the change of positions between NP and PP from the original "NP+V+PP" word order. Second, the characteristic of this "PP+V+NP" word order lies in the presence of locative or directional PP in the preverbal position. Third, the property of verbs in this locative inversion construction must be intransitive, more precisely, unaccusative or passivized verbs. However, an unaccusative verb does not guarantee the application to locative inversion, since some unergative and transitive verbs also appear in this construction (Levin & Hovav, 1995).

Around the three properties of locative inversion construction mentioned above, studies on locative inversion construction can be classified into four main issues. They are: the properties and the movement mechanism of the PP (Bresnan, 1994; Collins, 1997; among others) the structural position of postverbal NP (Levin & Hovav, 1995; among others) the class of the verbs that can be used in this construction (Levin, 1993; Bresnan, 1994; among others) and discourse functions of this construction (Kim, 2000; Birner & Ward, 1994; among others) have been examined extensively.

Though Chinese locative inversion structure shares some similarities with English, it also has its own characteristics. First of all, not all the verbs in Chinese locative inversion match the argument structure proposed by Bresnan (1994). Secondly, the aspect markers *le* and *zhe* play an important role in locative inversion in MC. The focus of this paper is put on the characteristics of the subjecthood, and case mechanism in locative inversion in MC, with respect to the class of the verbs, aspect makers *le* and *zhe*, agent and postverbal NP of constructions, using English and Chinese data.

According to Kim's (2007) study, there are mainly two types of conflicting proposals for the subjecthood of the locative inversion constructions. First, the postverbal NP is a subject (Rochemant & Culicover, 1990), or an unaccusative object (Coopman, 1989; Levin, 1993). Second, the preposed locative PP is a subject (Jaworska, 1986), or a topic. Bresnan (1994) argued that the inverted PP is a topicalized subject. In other words, the fronted PP remains at the subject position on one level of derivation (a-structure in LFG) and then moves up to the topic position (c-structure in LFG) by using LFG model. By presenting shortcoming of Bresnan's (1994) assumption, Kim (2007) claimed that the

inverted locative phrase is just a subject that satisfies EPP, the preposition itself in the fronted PP is the Case realization, and DP after V in locative inversion constructions has partitive case in LF. In this paper, Kim's (2007) suggestions were adopted as the preposed locative PP-subjective hypothesis.

In section 2, general locative inversion constructions in English and Chinese were introduced. In section 3, the previous studies of locative inversion were discussed, focusing on the status of the subject in locative inversion constructions. In section 4, the subject and Case assignment mechanism in MC locative inversion constructions were discussed. Section 5 is the conclusion of this paper.

2. The Locative Inversion Construction in English and Chinese

According to Kim (2007), usually there are three different kinds of locative inversion construction in English:

- (2) a. A lamp was in the corner.
b. In the corner was a lamp.
- (3) a. My friend Rose was sitting among the guests.
b. Among the guests was sitting my friend Rose.
- (4) a. The tax collector came back to the village.
b. Back to the village came the tax collector.
- (5) a. Between six and seven suits her fine.
b. Under the chair is a nice place for the dog to sleep.
- (6) a. In these villages are likely to be found the best examples of this cuisine.
b. Between six and seven seems to suit her fine.

The first one is the "PP+V+NP" word order, as in (2b), (3b), and (4b), which results from switching the position of NP and PP from canonical word order "NP+V+PP". The second is the "PP+V" word order, which has a locative NP in the subject position without the postposed NP, as examples in (5a, 5b). The third one is the "PP+V-raising", as examples in (6a, 6b).

As a common phenomenon, locative inversion construction can be found in many other languages, such as Chichewa (Bresnen & Kanerva, 1992), and Chinese, etc. However, compared with the locative inversion constructions in English, those constructions in Mandarin Chinese have its unique characteristics. First, aspect markers *le* and *zhe* is obligatory in the construction as in example (7). Second, locative inversion is not exclusive to intransitive verbs, while transitive verbs can also be used as in example (8). Third, different aspect markers *zhe* and *le* may have different semantic meanings, as examples in (9a, 9b, 9c).

- (7) zai wo de pang bian zhan *zhe/le* yi wei lao ren
 At 1sg. GEN next to stand **DUR/PFV** one CLS old man
 'An old man stands next to me.'
- (8) qiang shang tie *zhe/le* yi fu hua
 wall on put **DUR/PFV** one CLS picture
 'A picture was put on the wall'
- (9) a. di shang tang *zhe/le* yi ge ren
 floor on lie **DUR/PFV** one CLS person
 'On the floor lied a person.'
- b. di shang tang *zhe* Tom
 floor on lie **DUR** Tom
 'On the floor lied Tom.'
- c. ???/* di shang tang *le* Tom
 floor on lie **PFV** Tom

As we can see from the examples above, the claim that all the verbs must be intransitive in locative inversion constructions is already questionable. Like many other languages, unaccusative verbs do frequently occur in Chinese locative inversion. However, unlike many other languages, transitive verbs can also be found. In addition, temporal aspect plays a significant role in locative inversion in Chinese. In the following section, detailed analysis will be carried out by illustrating aspect makers *le* and *zhe*, verbs, agent and postverbal NP. Special attention will be paid to the interactions with the aspect markers.

2.1. Aspect Markers *le* and *zhe*

A very striking characteristic of Chinese locative inversion is that aspect marker is obligatory in this construction. This is shown in the following examples:

- (10) zai chuang shang fang *zhe/le* yi ben shu
 at bed on put **DUR/PFV** one CLS book
 'On the bed was put a book.'
- (11) ???/*zai chuang shang fang yi ben shu
 at bed on put one CLS book

In example (10), either the durative marker *zhe* or the perfective marker *le* can occur. In example (11), the sentence sounds very odd (if not downright ungrammatical) without any co-occurring aspect marker, while English locative inversion does not seem to have this property. At the least, aspectual information, in the form of aspect markers or some aspectual inflections, is not overtly realized in this kind of construction in English.

2.2 Verbs in Locative Inversion

Verbs can be divided into two types according to their compatibility with different aspect markers. Consider the following examples:

- (12) zai wo de *dui-mian* zuo *le/zhe* yi ge ren
 at 1sg. GEN opposite sit PRF/DUR one CLS person
 'Opposite me sat a person.'
- (13) zuo shang *ke* *le/zhe* yi ge zi
 desk on carve PFV/DUR one CLS word
 'On the desk was carved a word.'
- (14) men kou *chu-xian* *le/*zhe* yi ge ren
 door mouth appear PFV/*DUR one CLS person
 'At the door appeared a person.'
- (15) jia li *lai* *le/*zhe* san ge ren
 home in come PFV/*DUR three cls PERSON
 'In our home came three men.'

For verbs, such as *zuo* 'sit' and *ke* 'carve' in (12) and (13), both the perfective

marker *le* and the durative marker *zhe* can occur in this construction. For verbs, such as *chu-xian* 'appear' and *lai* 'come' as in (14) and (15), only the perfective *le* can occur. Another point to be noted is that Chinese locative inversion seems to fail the unaccusative diagnostic. The verbs that can occur in this construction are not exclusively unaccusative ones. The transitive verbs (such as *ke* 'carve' in (13)) that occur in this construction are not passivized forms either. Consider the following example:

- (16) *qiang shang *bei John* xie *le/zhe* yi ge zi
 wall on by John write PFV/DUR one CLS word
 'On the wall was written a word by John.'

With the passive marker *bei* (which functions similar to the preposition *by* in English. It indicates a passive construction in Chinese), the agent (*John* in the example) cannot co-exist with *zhe* or *le*. Despite that, an agent is not totally incompatible with the location inversion construction. The possibility of a co-occurring agent is discussed in the next section.

2.3 Agent in Locative Inversion

The two aspect markers behave differently with respect to their compatibility with a non-passivized agent in the locative inversion construction. An agent can coexist with the perfective *le* but not with the durative resultative *zhe*. This is illustrated in the following examples:

- (17) qiang shang xie *le/zhe* yi ge zi
 wall on write PFV/DUR one CLS word
 'On the wall was written a word.'
- (18) qiang shang *John* xie *le/*zhe* yi ge zi
 wall on John write PFV/*DUR one CLS word
 'On the wall was written a word by John.'

Without an agent in example (17), both *le* and *zhe* can appear. The agent *John* cannot co-occur with *zhe* as shown in example (18).

2.4 Postverbal NP in Locative Inversion

There is a difference in the nature of the postverbal NP between the use of *le* and *zhe* in the construction. Consider the following examples:

- (19) *chuangshang tang le/zhe yi ge ren*
 bed on lie PFV/DUR one CLS person
 'On the bed lay a person.'
- (20) *chuangshang tang zhe John/ta*
 bed on lie DUR John/3sg.
 'On the bed was lying John.'
- (21) **chuang shang tang le John/ta*
 bed on lie PFV John/3sg.
 'On the bed was lying John/he.'

It is widely accepted that postverbal NP in locative inversion is always indefinite. However, this is not always the case in Chinese. While an indefinite NP usually exists in this construction, a definite postverbal NP can sometimes be found with the durative and resultative *zhe* (example (20)) but not with the perfective *le* (in example (21)).

There is a difference in the nature of the postverbal NP between *le* and *zhe*. The postverbal is restricted to an indefinite one with *le* whereas a definite NP can appear with *zhe*.

So far, it can be seen that there is a similarity in the types of verbs used in Chinese locative inversion and English locative inversion; that is, unaccusative and unergative verbs can appear in both constructions, but from the above examples, it can be known that locative inversions in MC are more complex. The two constructions in Chinese and English are crucially differ from each other. Moreover, transitive verbs used in MC, such as *ke* 'carve' (13) and *xie* 'write' (17) appear in their active form in the sentences by following aspect markers *le* and *zhe*.

The examples above in English and MC have shown that locative inversion in the two languages has similar structures, although their distribution and syntactic characteristics is different from each other.

3. The Previous Arguments on the subjecthood of the Locative Inversion Construction

Due to the mixed evidence for the status of the subject in the locative inversion constructions, three different kinds of analyses have been proposed by Kim (2007). The first analysis is the theme NP subject analysis (Rochemont & Culicover, 1990; Stowell, 1981; among others). In this analysis, the preverbal locative PP is a topic, and the postverbal NP is a subject. The formal derivation of this analysis can be sketched roughly as follows:

$$(22) \text{ [CP PP}_i \text{ [IP t}_j \text{ V t}_i \text{] NP}_j \text{]}$$

The second analysis is the locative PP subject analysis (Hoekstra & Nulder, 1990; Levin, 1986; among others). In this analysis, according to the verbs used in the locative inversion constructions, two different derivations can be sketched as follows: (cf. Levin & Havov, 1995)

(23) (if the verb is an unergative)

a. D-Structure: [IP e [I' I [VP NP [V' V PP]]]]

b. S-Structure: [IP PP_i [I' V_j + I [VP [VP tk [V' t_j t_i]] NP_k]]

(24) (if the verb is an unaccusative)

a. D-Structure: [IP e [I' I [VP [V' V NP PP]]]]

b. S-Structure: [IP PP_i [I' V_j + I [VP [VP [v' t_j tk t_i]] NP_k]]

The third analysis is expletive *there* or *pro* subject analysis (Coopmans, 1989; Bobaljik & Joans, 1996). The hypothesis states that there is a deleted *there* or *pro* in all locative inversion constructions.

$$(25) \text{ [CP PP}_i \text{ [IP pro [VP V t}_j \text{ t}_i \text{] NP]]}$$

The three analyzes above can explain certain problems successfully, like the verb agreement cases, raising phenomena, and case of PP in the initial of the sentences, respectively. However, some phenomena are left problematic, like how to explain tag question, agree and case mechanisms and the principle of

economics, etc.

In order to explain the mixed evidence, Bresnan (1994) and Jang (1996) proposed the topicalized PP subject hypothesis (TPSH). In other words, at the level where word order and surface categorial structure are represented, the locative PP is not a subject, but at the level where more abstract grammatical relations are presented, the inverted locative is a subject. Thus, Bresnan (1994) argued that movement occurs at the more abstract level, and then the PP moves up to the topic position. And, because the verb agrees with the nominal category inherently, it agrees with the theme NP as in the cases of the existential *there* construction. Differently from Bresnan, Jang (1996) argued that first locative PP moves up to [Spec, IP], thereby satisfying EPP, and ends up in [Spec, CP]. Although their theoretical backgrounds are different, the results of the PP movement are the same. Their analysis can be schematized as follows:

(26) [CP PP_i C [IP t_i' [VP t_j t_i]NP_j]]]

The problem of Bresnan's TPSH is that it fails to explain the second movement of the PP. However, Kim (2007) suggested a different explanation for the agreement in locative inversion constructions. He argues that the fronted PP is just a subject and the preposition itself in the fronted locative PP is the realization of Case and the verb Phi-Agrees with the PP. The P in the preposed PP suppresses the appearance of a Case marker in English, because both of them represent the same semantic role. Thus, in example (27b), but preposition phrase '*from eleven to one*' can be used as Object even though it doesn't have any case mark.

- (27) a. *Under the table* is a good place to hide.
 b. He had spent *from eleven to one* at his church.

In example (27a), *under* replaces the Case marker and the verb agrees with the PP, while in example (27b), *from* replaces the Case marker. The theme NP in locative inversion construction may have partitive Case in LF, as the NP (DP) in the existential *there* construction.

4. Subject and Case assignment in MC Locative Inversion Construction

PP-subject in noncanonical word order "PP+V+NP", in a general sense, is a "marked" subject in languages like English, as it is derived through locative inversion from its canonical word order "NP+V+PP", like the examples in section 2, (2)-(4). Here the examples are rewritten for convenience sake.

- (28) a. A lamp was in the corner.
 b. In the corner was a lamp.
- (29) a. My friend Rose was sitting among the guests.
 b. Among the guests was sitting my friend Rose.
- (30) a. The tax collector came back to the village.
 b. Back to the village came the tax collector.

Note that the locative subject in examples (28b), (29b), and (30b) can be "restored" back to its original canonical word order (28a), (29a), and (30a) respectively, which undergoes inversion to the subject position of the sentence from an internal locative position.

However, the locative subject in MC is special not only in its frequent use in the sentence structure, but also in its generation—it doesn't need to arise from an internal locative expression through inversion as in English, which undergoes inversion to the subject position of the sentence. It can be the subject of a MC sentence just like an agent or a theme expression.

According to Lin (2008), PP-subjects in MC sentences, on the other hand, are more varied and diversified. There are several kinds, which we call the "canonical" locative subject, the existential locative subject, the occurrence locative subject, and the agentive locative subject:

- (31) *The "canonical" locative subject*
 Jie-shang zhan-zhe yi-ge jingcha.
 street-on stand-DUR one-CL policeman
 'On the street stood a policeman.'

- (32) *Existential locative subject*
 Shui-li piao-zhe yi-kuai mutou.
 water-inside float-DUR one-CL wood
 'In the water is floating a piece of wood.'
- (33) *"Occurrence" locative subject*
 Women chunzi-li chen-le liang-sou chuan.
 our village-in sink-PERF two-CL boat
 'Two boats from our village sank.'
- (34) *"Agentive" locative subject*
 Zhangsan-de shou-li wo-zhe yi-ba shouqiang.
 Zhangsan's hand-in hold-DUR one-CL pistol
 'Zhangsan holds a pistol in his hand.'

These locative subjects are very different from those in English. First, many of the locative subjects in MC cannot be "restored" to a predicate-internal position; in fact, among the four kinds of locative subject above, only the "canonical" locative subject can be "restored" into the predicate.

- (35) Yi-ge jingcha zhan zai jie-shang.
 one-CL policeman stand at street-on
 'A policeman stood on the street.'
- (36) * Yi-kuai mutou piao zai shui-li.
 one-CL wood is floating at the water-in
- (37) * Liang-sao chuan chen zai women chunzi-li.
 two-CL boat sink at our village-in
- (38) * Wo-zhe yi-ba shouqiang zai Zhangsan-de shou-li.
 hold-DUR one-CL pistol at Zhangsan's hand-in

This indicates that the locative subjects in MC may not arise from inversion of an internal locative argument or adjunct. Second, as shown by the example (32) and (34), transitive verbs in MC can take a locative subject; this is not possible for English. Thus, the locative subjects in MC have their own peculiar properties that need special analysis. That is the MC exhibits locative inversion of the English kind, namely an internal locative argument rising to

the subject position. Li & Thompson (1981) also noted that there is a specific group of verbs in MC that can take locative subject. They call them "verbs of placement." See the following examples.

- (39) Zhangsan fang yi-ben shu zai zhuo-shang.
Zhangsan put one-CL book at table-on
'Zhangsan put a book on the table.'
- (40) Zhuo-shang fang-zhe yi-ben shu.
table-on put-DUR one-CL book
'A book was on the table.'
- (41) Zhangsan xie-le jige da zi zai qiang-shang.
Zhangsan write-PERF several big character at wall-on
'Zhangsan wrote several characters on the wall.'
- (42) Qiang-shang xie-zhe jige da zi.
wall-on write-DUR several big character
'Several big characters are on the wall.'

According to Li & Thompson (1981), verbs like *fang* 'put', *xie* 'write', and many more, such as *shui* 'sleep', *zhong* 'plant' and others, have an internal locative argument. These verbs can take a locative subject, as examples in (40) and (42), and this locative subject arises from the inversion of the internal locative argument. Further evidence was proposed by S. Huang (1982). After investigating compound verbs like *fei-man* 'fly-full', he suggested that they have an internal locative argument that may be raised to subject position. The following two sentences show that either the theme *mifeng* 'honeybee' or the locative *huayuan* 'garden' can be the subject of the sentence. S. Huang (1982) proposed that such verbs have two internal arguments but no external argument, and either one of the two internal arguments can be raised to subject position, resulting sentences as the examples in (43) and (44).

- (43) Mifeng fei-man-le huayuan.
honeybee fly-full-PERF garden
'Honeybees fill the garden flying.'

- (44) Huayuan fei-man-le mifeng.
 garden fly-full-PERF honeybee
 'The garden is full of honeybees flying.'

But such locative-inversion analysis cannot be the basis for a general treatment of the locative prominence of MC. They are problematic in one way or another. The verb *xie* 'write' is considered a verb of placement taking an internal locative argument by Li & Thompson (1981) because it can take a locative subject, as in example (42). However, it is conceptually difficult to accept that such verbs like *xie* 'write' (and many others) have an internal locative argument. Why does writing have anything to do with a location, other than it must happen somewhere? As to S. Huang's (1982) analysis, it is sufficient to point out that many compound verbs in MC can take a locative subject, without its sub-component having anything to do with space or location. The following one is an example with the compound verb *zhuang-si* 'hit and cause to die'.

- (45) Lu-bian zhuang-si-le san-zhi gou.
 road-side hit-dead-PERF three-CL dog
 'Three dogs were dead at the roadside being hit [by cars].'

Once again, there is no reason to assume that the compound verb *zhuang-si* 'hit and cause to die' has an internal locative argument. Any approach, therefore, that crucially relies on locative inversion for MC locative subjects cannot be successful.

The light verbs mentioned by Lin (2001) were adopted in this paper to analyze the locative subjects in MC. He postulated two light verbs that license locative PP in subjection in MC: EXIST and OCCUR verbs. He suggested that verbs in MC do not have argument of their own, much less locative argument. What appears to be locative inversion is in fact a base-generated locative expression in the Spec position of the VP projected by the light verbs EXIST or OCCUR, which then raises to the subject position of the sentence. See the following examples for illustration.

- (46) Jie-shang zhan-zhe yi-ge jingcha.
 street-on stand-DUR one-CL policeman
 'On the street stood a policeman.'
- (47) [IP on the street [*v*P *ti* EXIST [VP stood a policeman]]]
- (48) Shui-li piao-zhe yi-kuai mutou.
 water-inside float-DUR one-CL wood
 'In the water is floating a piece of wood.'
- (49) [IP in the water_{*i*} [*v*P *ti* EXIST [VP is floating a piece of wood]]]
- (50) Women chunzi-li chen-le liang-sao chuan.
 our village-in sink-PERF two-CL boat
 'Two boats from our village sank.'
- (51) [IP in our village_{*e*} [*v*P *ti* OCCUR [VP sank two boats]]]

If Lin's (2001) theory is correct, there is restriction on locative inversion in MC. The locative subject is introduced by the light verbs and has no association with any predicate-internal position. The PP in the preverbal position is just a subject that satisfies EPP so that there is no doubt that the nominal case of locative pp-subject in MC comes from those light verbs. The result of this analysis can reprove Kim' (2007) assumption that the case marking system for the element in the subject position of a sentence should be parameterized and also for its Case realization as well. This appears to be a desirable move, since it accounts for those locative subjects in MC that can not be "restored" back to a predicate-internal position. So locative subject in MC can get its nominal Case from light verbs EXIST and OCCUR. However, the postverbal NP (DP) after V in locative inversion constructions has partitive case in LF as the NP (DP) in existential *there* construction, including both indefinite and definite NP (DP).

Through the examples in (46)-(51) of "canonical"locative subject, the existential locative subject, and the occurrence locative subject can explain the existence of the light verbs EXIST and OCCUR, but whether this analysis can be applied to the agentive locative subject still remains a problem. Crucially, in the sentences with verbs EXIST or OCCUR, locative subjects can take non-durative/progressive aspect like the example in (33). But there is a restriction on the occurrence of agentive locative subject. The verb must be in

the durative or progressive aspect as in example (34), as reanalyzed in example (52). It seems an independent kind, different from the locative subjects introduced by the light verbs EXIST and OCCUR.

- (52) Zhangsan-de shou-li wo-zhe/*le yi-ba shouqiang.
 Zhangsan's hand-in hold-DUR/*PER one-CL pistol
 'Zhangsan holds a pistol in his hand.'

The other problem is whether this kind of light verbs EXIST and OCCUR exists in other languages' locative subjects. Further work should be carried out in these two aspects to verify its generalization.

5. Conclusion

This paper analyzed in details the MC locative inversion constructions on the basis of aspect markers of *le* and *zhe*, verbs, agent and postverbal NP, especially in accordance with previous studies on the subjectiveness of locative inversion in MC. The purpose of this paper is to explain EPP and Case realization in locative inversion in MC. It proposed that Cases for PP-subjects may be realized differently from language to language. Unlike other languages, the PP-subjects in MC do not arise from locative inversion like those in English. They are just the subjects in sentences, introduced by the light verbs EXIST and OCCUR directly in the subject position to satisfy EPP. The light verbs EXIST and OCCUR are the Case realization, and DP after V in locative inversion constructions has partitive case in LF so that Kim' (2007) suggestions are reproved. To prove and generalize the argument in this study, more extensive examples about locative inversion constructions in other languages need to be studied in order to confirm the universal existence of the light verbs EXIST and OCCUR.

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Ming-Hao, Jin

Department of English, Yanbian University

977 Gongyuan Road, Yanji 133002, Jilin Province, P. R. China

Phone: +86-433-273-2421

E-mail: jinminghao@ybu.edu.cn

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