

# The *Ba* Construction Revisited: Is *Ba* a Light Verb?

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## Abstract

As one of the most studied syntactic phenomena in modern Mandarin Chinese, the *Ba* construction has received continuous attention in Chinese syntax literature while its complex properties have excluded a clear analysis. Recently, the *Ba* has been proposed as either an overtly realized little verb (*v*) in the Verbal Shell structure or a functional head which takes the *v*P as its complement. Nevertheless, which proposal of the two is more appropriate for the *Ba* construction is still in question. The present paper analyzes the two constructions and proposes that the *Ba* is the head of a “*ba*P” which takes the *v*P as its complement. The paper first reviews the syntactic and semantic properties of the *Ba* construction and shows that in modern Mandarin Chinese, the *Ba* is unlikely to function as a verb. Then, the case checking procedure of the *Ba* construction is analyzed, which provides new supporting evidence for treating *Ba* as a functional head higher than *v*P. Finally, the “*ba*P” proposal is tested in the five major variants of the *Ba* construction. Based on the above analyses, the paper comes to the conclusion that the “*ba*P” structure better represents the various *Ba* sentences than the little verb proposal.

*Keywords: Ba construction, functional head, light verb, Verbal Shell*

## Introduction

Although the *Ba* construction is one of the most studied syntax phenomena in modern Mandarin Chinese, no analysis so far is able to provide satisfactory explanations for the *Ba* construction due to its complicated properties, which inspires continuous inquiries regarding this unique syntactic construction.

At first glance, the basic facts about the *Ba* construction are straightforward. As shown in sentence (1), it seems that the *Ba* serves as a preposition which forms a prepositional phrase (PP) followed by a noun phrase (NP). The syntactic structure of (1) can be presented as (2). This prepositional view of the *Ba* has been

proposed by several Chinese syntax papers in the Government and Binding (GB) approach (e.g. He, 1996; Li, 1985, 1990; Sun, 2006).

1) Wo **Ba** Na-Ge Huai-Dan Da-Le (我把那个坏蛋打了).

I **Ba** that bad-guy beat Le (perfect aspect marker)

“I have beaten that bad guy”.

2) [DP I [VP [PP *Ba* Huai-Dan] [V Da-Le]]]

However, the above analysis is problematic since some empirical evidence suggests that the *Ba* is not a theta-role assigner (e.g. Huang, Li, & Li, 2009; Liu, 1997; Sybesma, 1992; 1999). For instance, in sentence (3), the post-*Ba* NP seems to function as the subject of the following verb phrase (VP).

3) Na Si-Shou Ge **Ba** Wo Chang Lei-Le (那四首歌把我唱累了).

that four-Shou (plural number marker) song **Ba** I sing tired-Le (perfect aspect marker)

“I sang that four songs and I got tired”.

The modern study of the *Ba* construction can be traced back to the beginning of modern Chinese linguistics (e.g. Wang, 1954). Recent studies concerning it have been done from multiple perspectives, such as the GB approach (e.g. He, 1996; Li, 1985, 1990; Sun, 2006), the functional and cognitive approach (Bender, 2000; Dai, 2005; Zhou, 2005), as well as the recent Minimalism approach (Huang et al, 2009; Liu, 1997; Sybesma, 1992; 1999). These studies have highlighted various distributional properties of the *Ba* construction but also raised new research questions. Currently, these discussions regarding the *Ba* construction essentially focus on two issues: (1) the categorical status of the *Ba* (is it a lexical verb, a preposition, or a dummy Case assigner?) and (2) the syntactic operation of the *Ba* construction (which theory can fully account for the operation in the *Ba* construction?).

The present paper revisits two previous analyses of the *Ba* construction based on the Verbal Shell structure (Larson, 1988; Chomsky, 1993): the proposal of *Ba* as an overtly realized light verb (Sybesma, 1992; Dikken & Sybesma, 1998; Sybesma, 1999) and the proposal of *Ba* as a head of a *baP* which takes *vP* as its complement (Huang et al, 2009). By analyzing the case checking process of the *Ba* construction, the paper argues that the “*baP*” proposal may better account for the syntactic structure of *Ba* sentences.

# Literature Review

## Syntactic and Semantic Properties of the *Ba* Construction

At last two sub categories of the *Ba* construction have been identified by previous studies. Wang (1954) suggests the two types of the *Ba* construction are: (a) the “disposal” *Ba* sentence in which the animate subject does something to some entity, as in (4); and the “causative” *Ba* sentence in which the inanimate subject is the causer of the following event, as in (5). The two types are referred as “canonical” *Ba* sentence and “causative” *Ba* sentence in Sybesma (1999), respectively.

4) Xiao-Zhang *Ba* Hua-Ping Da-Po-Le (小张把花瓶打破了).

Xiao-Zhang (a person’s name) *Ba* vase break-Le (perfect aspect marker)  
“Xiao-Zhang has broken the vase”.

5) Mei Jiu *Ba* Wo He-Zhui-Le (美酒把我喝醉了).

good wine *Ba* I drunk Le (perfect aspect marker)  
“The good wine has made me drunk”.

Then, in Zhou (2005), the two categories of the *Ba* construction are further divided in five categories: the “canonical” *Ba*, which has three variants: (a) Subject-*Ba*-Object-VP-Le (perfect aspect marker), (b) Subject-(Adv.)-*Ba*-Object-(Adv.)-VP, (c) Subject-*Ba*-Direct Object-VP-Indirect Object and the “causative” *Ba*, which has two: (e) (Null sentential topic)-*Ba*-Subj-VP, (f) T (sentential topic)-*Ba*-Subject-VP.

Besides the basic syntactic variants of the *Ba* construction, its unique semantic properties have also been extensively discussed. One of the most significant features of the *Ba* construction is the semantic relationship between the NP following the *Ba* and the main verb of the clause. Three major restrictions in terms of semantic properties for the *Ba* construction have been suggested by previous studies (Bender, 2000; Huang et al, 2009; Li & Thompson 1997; Liu, 1997; Sun, 2006; and so on).

First, the NP following *Ba* should be in a resultant state, which means that it should be an “affectee” influenced by the main predicate. For instance, the status of the “Yao” (medication) in sentence (6) changes due to the main predicate “Chi-Le” (eat/take).

6) Wo **Ba** Yao Chi-Le (我把药吃了).

I **Ba** medication eat-Le (perfect aspect marker)

‘I take the medication.’

Second, the main predicate in the *Ba* construction should also indicate a change of state, as shown in (6). By contrast, predications such as perception verbs are generally not accepted in the *Ba* construction, as in (7).

7) \* Wo **Ba** Ta Kan-Jian Le (我把他看见了).

I **Ba** he see-Le (perfect aspect marker)

Intended meaning: “I have seen him”.

Finally, the *Ba* construction generally describes bounded events, and thus the progressive aspect is generally not accepted by the *Ba* construction. As in (8), the verb “drive” indicates no clear boundary and therefore it is unacceptable. In recent literature, Huang et al (2009) argue such restriction is not absolute. They provide an example of (9), which does have a “progressive” reading. Nevertheless, in most cases, events described in the *Ba* construction are bounded, which leads to the fact that the perfect aspect marker “Le” is frequently observed in the *Ba* construction.

8) \* Wo **Ba** Qi-Che Jia-Shi (我把汽车驾驶).

I **Ba** car drive

Intended meaning: ‘I drive the car’.

9) Wo **Ba** Shu Wang Shu-Fang Ban (我把书往书房搬).

I **Ba** book toward study carry

‘I carry the books toward the study’.

These semantic properties of the *Ba* construction are also analyzed by scholars in the lexical functional approach, and these studies propose the *Ba* construction as a structure indicating cognitive salience (e.g. Loar 2011; Ziegeler, 2000; Zhou 2005).

## Previous Syntactic Analyses of the *Ba* construction

Despite the less controversial status of the semantic properties of the *Ba* construction, the categorical status and the syntactic operation of the *Ba* construction are much more complicated. The word *Ba* is interpreted as a lexical verb which means “take” or “hold” in traditional Chinese (Bennett, 1981; Wang, 1954), as the traditional Chinese idiom phrase “*Ba-Jiu-Yan-Huan*” (把酒言欢),

which means “hold the wine (bowl) and talk happily”. Such usage can still be observed in some Chinese dialects, as in (10).

10) **Ba** Zhu Lan-Gan (把住栏杆)!

**Ba** (hold) firmly handrail

‘Hold the handrail firmly!’

Nevertheless, the *Ba* has lost most of its standard verbal and became “grammaticalized” properties in modern Mandarin Chinese (Sybesma, 1999; Zou, 1995; and so on). The *Ba* cannot pass several syntactic tests for verbs in Mandarin Chinese (Bender, 2000; Li and Thompson, 1981). (a) It cannot take aspect markers such as “Le (the perfect aspect marker)” “Zhe (the imperfective aspect marker)”. (b) Lexical verbs in Mandarin Chinese can be used as simplified answer for questions, such as in (11); by contrast, such structure is not allowed for the *Ba*, such as the example of (12). (c) The *Ba* cannot form an alternative V-not-V question in Mandarin Chinese (Chao, 1968; Li and Thompson, 1981), which is a typical property of lexical verbs in modern Mandarin Chinese. On the other hand, the argument (c) is not deterministic since some northern Mandarin dialects accepts the *Ba-Bu-Ba* (*Ba*-not-*Ba*) phrase, as discussed in Wu (1982). However, even when the phrase “*Ba-Bu-Ba*” is acceptable, a main verb is still required by the whole sentence. In that case, the *Ba* is unlikely to be interpreted as a lexical verb. Sentence (13) illustrates the argument (c), in which the “*Ba-Bu-Ba*” can be interpreted as a derivation of the main verb “V-not-V” structure.

11) Ni Chi Fan Le Ma (你吃饭了吗)?

you eat food Le (perfect aspect marker) ma (question marker)

‘Do you have eaten food?’

Wrong Response: \*“**Ba**-Le”

Correct Answer: “Chi-Le” (eat-Le).

12) Ni **Ba** Zuo-Ye Zuo Le Ma (你把作业做了吗)?

you **Ba** homework do-Le (perfect aspect marker) Ma (question marker)

‘Do you finish your homework?’

Wrong Response: \*“**Ba**-Le”

Correct Response: “Zuo-Le (Do-Le)”.

13) Ni **Ba-Bu-Ba** Qian Gei Wo (你把不把钱给我)?

you **Ba-Not-Ba** money give I

‘Do you give me the money?’

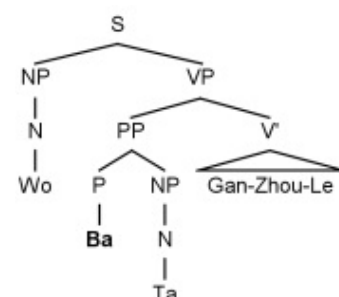
Alternative Structure: Ni **Ba** Qian **Gei-Bu-Gei** Wo (你把钱给不给我)?

Therefore, it can be concluded that the *Ba* is unlikely to be a verb in modern Mandarin Chinese. Previous studies in the GB approach have treated the *Ba* as a preposition which forms a prepositional phrase (PP) and takes the specifier position of the major VP. For instance, He (1996) gave the following analysis (14) for the *Ba* construction.

14) Wo **Ba** Ta Gan-Zou-Le (我把他赶走了).

I **Ba** he drive-away-Le (perfect aspect marker)

‘I have driven him away.’



Such preposition approach bears several

fundamental problems. If the *Ba* and the NP following it form a PP, then the *Ba* should be responsible for checking the post-*Ba* NP’s oblique case. As Huang et al (2009) showed, however, the post-*Ba* NP is more likely to form a constituent with the main verb of the clause, as in (15), the non-*Ba* structure of (14).

15) Wo Gan-Zou-Le Ta (我赶走了他).

I drive-away-Le (perfect aspect marker) he

“I have driven him away”.

Similarly to the preposition analysis of *Ba*, other early approaches has suggested the *Ba* as a lexical verb (Hashimoto, 1971), a case assigner (Huang, 1982), a head filling a base-generated functional category (Zou 1995), all of which bear some kind of empirical flaws. To summarize, despite the simple surface structure, the syntactic construction of the *Ba* sentences are very complicated and currently no agreement regarding its syntactic structure has been reached.

## Two Minimalism Approaches of the *Ba* construction

Recently, there are two influential analyses of the *Ba* construction in the minimalism approach. One is the “dummy filler” proposal by Sybesma (Sybesma, 1992; Dikken & Sybesma, 1998; Sybesma 1999), which argues that the *Ba* is an overtly realized light verb (*v*) in the Verbal Shell structure (Larson, 1988; Chomsky, 1993). As illustrated in (16), the *Ba* forms a causP and serves as the head of it, which takes the position of *v*P. The overt movement of the lexical verb “Gei” (give) to the *v* is blocked since the *Ba* still bears some verbal properties. On

the other hand, when there is no *Ba* insertion, the main verb adjoins to the *v* overtly and forms the normal order SVO sentence in Mandarin Chinese.

16) With *Ba*: [<sub>causP</sub> Subj[<sub>causP</sub> Caus (*ba*) [<sub>VP</sub> OBJ<sub>i</sub> [<sub>V'</sub> V [<sub>XP</sub> T<sub>i</sub> X]]]]]

Without *Ba*: [<sub>VP</sub> Subj[<sub>v'</sub> V<sub>i</sub> + *v* [<sub>VP</sub> T<sub>i</sub> [<sub>XP</sub> Obj X]]]]

(Proposed in Sybesma, 1992; Dikken & Sybesma, 1998; Sybesma 1999)

Alternatively, Huang et al (2009) provide another analysis that there is a “*baP*” taking the *vP* as its complement in the *Ba* construction, as in (17). The difference between the “dummy filler” proposal and the “*baP*” proposal is: in the “dummy filler” proposal, the *V* may adjoin to the *v* either overtly or covertly, depending on the appearance of *Ba* while in the “*baP*” approach the *V* always adjoins to the *v* overtly.

17) With *Ba*: [<sub>baP</sub> Subj[<sub>ba'</sub> *Ba*[<sub>VP</sub> Obj [<sub>v'</sub> T<sub>i</sub> + *v* [<sub>VP</sub> V<sub>i</sub> XP]]]]]

Without *Ba*: [<sub>VP</sub> Subj[<sub>v'</sub> V<sub>i</sub> + *v* [<sub>VP</sub> T<sub>i</sub> [<sub>XP</sub> Obj X]]]]

(Proposed in Huang et al, 2009)

Both the “dummy filler” and the “*baP*” approaches are able to account for most phenomena observed in the *Ba* construction, such as the SOV word order and the fact that the *Ba* is not a theta role assigner. So far, not many studies have been done to make comparison between the two theories. Although in Huang et al (2009) the distribution of adverbial phrases is used to argue against the “dummy filler” analysis, more empirical evidence is still needed to support their arguments. Furthermore, both approaches have not been tested in various variants of the *Ba* construction.

The current paper will focus on two research questions:

1. Which proposal can better account for the case check process of the *Ba* construction, the “dummy filler” or the “*baP*”?
2. Which proposal can better match the syntactic structures of the five *Ba* sentence variants as discussed in Zhou (2005)?

## The Present Analyses

### The Adverbial Phrase Placement in the *Ba* Construction

In Huang et al (2009), the adverbial phrase placement has been discussed as a fact against the “dummy filler” proposal. According to Huang et al (2009), since in *Ba* sentences the adverbial phrase can be placed either before the *Ba* or before

the main verb, as in (18a-b), the adverbial phrase is supposed to be able to adjoin to either the *v*-bar or the V-bar if the *Ba* is a light verb, as in (19a-b). However, when there is no *Ba* insertion in (20), (19b) becomes problematic since as the main verb overtly adjoins to the light verb, the adverbial phrase is left alone, which is not allowed in Mandarin Chinese. Thus Huang et al argue that the *Ba* must be higher than the *v*P, which allows the adverbial phrase adjoins to either the *ba*-bar or the *v*-bar, but not VP, as in (21).

18) a. Wo Zhi-Xi **Ba** Xing-Li Jian-Cha-Le (我仔细把行李检查了).

I carefully *Ba* luggage check Le (perfect aspect marker)

“I have carefully checked the luggage”.

b. Alternatively: Wo **Ba** Xing-Li Zhi-Xi Jian-Cha-Le(我把行李仔细检查了).

19) a. [<sub>VP</sub> Wo (Subj) [<sub>v'</sub> Zhi-Xi (Adv) [<sub>v'</sub> **Ba** (*v*) [<sub>VP</sub> Xing-Li (Obj) [<sub>v'</sub> Jian-Cha-Le (V)]]]]]]

b. [<sub>VP</sub> Wo (Subj) [<sub>v'</sub> **Ba** (*v*) [<sub>VP</sub> Xing-Li (Obj) [<sub>v'</sub> Zhi-Xi (Adv) [<sub>v'</sub> Jian-Cha-Le (V)]]]]]]

20) \* [<sub>VP</sub> Wo (Subj) [<sub>v'</sub> Jian-Cha-Le (V)<sub>i</sub>+*v* [<sub>VP</sub> Xing-Li (Obj) [<sub>v'</sub> Zhi-Xi (Adv) [<sub>v'</sub> T<sub>i</sub>]]]]]]

\* Wo Jian-Cha-Le Xing-Li Zhi-Xi

21) With *Ba*: [<sub>baP</sub> Subj[<sub>ba'</sub> (Adv.) [<sub>ba'</sub> **Ba**[<sub>VP</sub> Obj [<sub>v'</sub> (Adv.) [<sub>v'</sub> T<sub>i</sub> + *v* [<sub>VP</sub> V<sub>i</sub> XP]]]]]]]]

Without *Ba*: [<sub>VP</sub> Subj[<sub>v'</sub> (Adv.) [<sub>v'</sub> V<sub>i</sub> + *v* [<sub>VP</sub> T<sub>i</sub> [<sub>XP</sub> Obj X]]]]]]

Although the analysis by Huang et al (2009) is persuasive, it does not sufficiently prove the “dummy filler” proposal is wrong. There is an alternative approach to explain the adverbial placement in Mandarin Chinese. If we assume that adverbial phrases in Chinese can only adjoin to a lexical-filled head but not its trace, then, the problem in (19b) can be solved without introducing a new functional head, which seems more desirable from a minimalist perspective. Therefore, more empirical analyses are needed to prove the *Ba* is not a light verb.

## The Case Checking Process of the *Ba* Construction

Regarding case checking, in the minimalism approach, it is generally agreed that DPs move to the specifier positions of different heads to check their cases and receive theta roles, either overtly or covertly, as in the English SVO structure (22)



(Chomsky, 1993; Hornstein, Nunes, & Grohmann, 2005). To prevent the problem of minimality effects caused by the overlapping DP chains, Chomsky (1995) proposed the notion of *Minimal Domain* and *Equidistance*, explained in (23). The MinD and Equidistance allow Subject and Object move to their target specifier positions without causing minimality effects.

22) English Case Checking:

[<sub>TP</sub> SU [<sub>vP</sub> DO [<sub>v'</sub> T<sub>SU</sub> [<sub>v'</sub> v [<sub>VP</sub> V T<sub>DO</sub>]]]]]

SU=Subject, DO=Direct Object

23) *Minimal Domain*

The Minimal Domain of  $\alpha$ , or MinD ( $\alpha$ ), is the set of categories immediately contained or immediately dominated by projections of the head  $\alpha$ , excluding projections of  $\alpha$ .

*Equidistance*

If two positions  $\alpha$  and  $\beta$  are in the same MinD, they are equidistant from any other position.

Hornstein et al (2005, pp. 149-151)

Since Chinese is essentially a SVO language, it is expected that the case check process in Chinese should be similar to the process in English. Taking the simple sentence (24a) as an example, if the head T and the light verb ( $v$ ) were assumed to have similar case checking functions as they are in English, then the case checking process of (24a) would be like (24b).

24) a. Wo-Men Qu Xue-Xiao (我们去学校).

we go school

“We go to school”.

b. [<sub>TP</sub> Wo-Men<sub>i</sub> [<sub>T'</sub> T [<sub>vP</sub> Xue-Xiao [<sub>v'</sub> Wo-Men<sub>i</sub> [<sub>v'</sub> Qu<sub>t</sub> +v [<sub>VP</sub> Qu<sub>t</sub> Xue-Xiao<sub>p</sub>]]]]]]]

When the case checking process in (24b) applies to the *Ba* construction, the proposal of the “dummy filler” *Ba* becomes problematic. Since the direct object in *Ba* sentences is supposed to move overtly or covertly to the specifier of  $vP$  to check its accusative case, in either case it is impossible to move the direct object to the specifier of the VP in single object sentences, as in (25a). The only permissible situation for regarding *Ba* as a  $v$  is the ditransitive verb structure (25b), where both the direct object “Shu” (book) and the indirect object “Ta” (him) are supposed to move covertly to the Spec of  $vP$ .

25) a. Single Object: Wo **Ba** Ta Da-Le (我把他打了).

I **Ba** he hit-Le (perfect aspect marker)

“I have hit him”.

Case Checking: \* [TP Wo<sub>i</sub> [T' T [vP Ta<sub>p</sub> [v' (Wo)<sub>i</sub> [v' **Ba** [vP Da-Le<sub>t</sub> (Ta)<sub>p</sub>]]]]]]]]

b. Ditransitive Verb: Wo **Ba** Shu Gei Ta (我把书给他).

I **Ba** book give he

“I give the book to him”.

Case Checking:

[TP Wo<sub>i</sub> [T' T [vP (Ta)<sub>p</sub> [v' (Shu)<sub>t</sub> [v' (Wo)<sub>i</sub> [v' **Ba** [vP Shu<sub>t</sub> [v' Gei Ta<sub>p</sub>]]]]]]]]]]

By comparison, if the *Ba* is a functional head higher than the vP, as proposed by Huang et al (2009), the case checking of (24a-b) can work under the assumption that in the *Ba* construction, the direct object of the clause overtly moves to the Spec of vP, but the indirect object always move covertly, as shown in (26a-b). If the case checking process in Mandarin Chinese did resemble the English case checking procedure suggested by Chomsky (1995), then the “baP” proposal would be a better solution than the “dummy filler” proposal since it fits the case checking procedure without introducing new empirical problems.

26) a. Single Object: Wo **Ba** Ta Da-Le (我把他打了).

I **Ba** he hit-Le (perfect aspect marker)

“I have hit him”.

Case Checking: [baP Wo<sub>i</sub> [ba' **Ba** [vP Ta<sub>p</sub> [v' (Wo)<sub>i</sub> [v' Da-Le<sub>t</sub> + v [vP (Da-Le)<sub>t</sub> (Ta)<sub>p</sub>]]]]]]]]

b. Ditransitive Verb: Wo **Ba** Shu Gei Ta (我把书给他).

I **Ba** book give he

“I give the book to him”.

Case Checking:

[baP Wo<sub>i</sub> [ba' **Ba** [vP (Ta)<sub>p</sub> [v' Shu<sub>t</sub> [v' (Wo)<sub>i</sub> [v' Gei<sub>q</sub> + v [vP (Shu)<sub>t</sub> [v' (Gei)<sub>q</sub> Ta<sub>p</sub>]]]]]]]]]]

There is still remaining one problem: how can the *Ba* determines the overt movement of the direct object? Since the case checking relation is supposed to occur only between heads and their specifiers in the minimalism approach, one possible argument for the overt accusative case checking in *Ba* sentences may be that the insertion of *Ba* influences the status of vP and due to the semantic saliency requirement of the *Ba* construction, the vP checks the accusative overtly

rather than covertly. This explanation is also consistent with the fact that *Ba* and post-*Ba* phrase do not form a constituent. To summarize, the case-checking process of the *Ba* construction should be like (27):

27) [<sub>baP</sub> Subj<sub>i</sub> [<sub>ba'</sub> **Ba** [<sub>vP</sub> Obj<sub>p</sub> [<sub>v'</sub> (Subj)<sub>i</sub> [<sub>v'</sub> V<sub>t</sub> + v [<sub>VP</sub> (V)<sub>t</sub> (Obj)<sub>p</sub>]]]]]]]]]

### Testing the “baP” Proposal in Variants of *Ba* sentences

As discussed in the literature review section, there are at least five variants of the *Ba* construction. Therefore, it is necessary to test the validity of the “baP” proposal in all of the variants. For the three variants of the “Canonical” *Ba* sentences, the “baP” structure can appropriately describe their syntactic constructions since all the three variants have a SVO order, as shown in (28a-c).

28) a. Subject-*Ba*-Object-VP-Le (perfect aspect marker)

“Wo **Ba** Lun-Wen Wan-Cheng-Le”

I **Ba** thesis finish-Le

[<sub>baP</sub> Wo<sub>i</sub> [<sub>ba'</sub> **Ba** [<sub>vP</sub> Lun-Wen<sub>p</sub> [<sub>v'</sub> (Wo)<sub>i</sub> [<sub>v'</sub> Wan-Cheng<sub>t</sub> + v [<sub>VP</sub> (Wan-Cheng)<sub>t</sub> (Lun-Wen)<sub>p</sub>]]]]]]]]]

b. Subject-(Adv.)-*Ba*-Object-(Adv.)-VP

“Ta-Men Xiao-Xin-De **Ba** Qian Chang-Qi-Lai”

they carefully **Ba** money hide

[<sub>baP</sub> Ta-Men<sub>i</sub> [<sub>ba'</sub> Xiao-Xin-De [<sub>ba'</sub> **Ba** [<sub>vP</sub> Qian<sub>p</sub> [<sub>v'</sub> (Ta-Men)<sub>i</sub> [<sub>v'</sub> Chang-Qi-Lai<sub>t</sub> + v [<sub>VP</sub> (Chang-Qi-Lai)<sub>t</sub> (Qian)<sub>p</sub>]]]]]]]]]

c. Subject-*Ba*-Direct Object-VP-Indirect Object.

“Wo **Ba** Shu Gei Ta”

I **Ba** book give him

[<sub>baP</sub> Wo<sub>i</sub> [<sub>ba'</sub> **Ba** [<sub>vP</sub> (Ta)<sub>p</sub> [<sub>v'</sub> Shu<sub>t</sub> [<sub>v'</sub> (Wo)<sub>i</sub> [<sub>v'</sub> Gei<sub>q</sub> + v [<sub>VP</sub> (Shu)<sub>t</sub> [<sub>v'</sub> (Gei)<sub>q</sub> Ta<sub>p</sub>]]]]]]]]]

However, in the causative *Ba* sentence (3), re-cited here as (29), the above *Ba* analysis seems to be inappropriate since the post-*Ba* DP is likely to function as the subject of the main verb. The solution provided by Huang et al (2009) for this puzzle is that in such causative *Ba* sentences, *Ba* retains its verb properties and form a VP with the post-*Ba* DP and the subsequently takes the specifier position of the main VP, as illustrated in (30). However, this approach is problematic since it seems impossible for a VP to modify another VP.

29) Na Si-shou Ge **Ba** Wo Chang Lei-Le (那四首歌把我唱累了).

that four-Shou (plural marker) song **Ba** I sing tired-Le (perfect aspect

marker)

“I sang that four songs and I got tired”.

Possible structure: “those four songs make me sing and get tired”.

30) [<sub>VP</sub>[<sub>baP</sub> *Ba* Wo] [<sub>V'</sub> Chang-Lei-LE]

Another fact for the *Ba* construction in (29) is that this type of *Ba* sentences is very rare in modern Mandarin Chinese. As suggested by the *Ba* construction corpus in Zhou (2005), the majority of the *Ba* sentences are SOV sentences as in (28a-c). Then, if the *Ba* in causative *Ba* sentences is regarded as a special usage of the *Ba* construction, one possible argument for the syntactic structure in (29) is that in such sentences the *Ba* is a verb and the second verb (Chang-Lei, Sing-tired) in (29) is actually a CP modifying “Wo” (I), just as the usage of the English word “make” in (31a). (31b) is an illustration of (29) under this “verbal” analysis. This approach may account for the two variants of the causative *Ba* sentences. More empirical evidence, however, is required to justify this argument.

31) a. [<sub>TP</sub> the alcohol [<sub>T'</sub> present-tense [<sub>VP</sub> Makes [<sub>DP</sub> me<sub>i</sub> [<sub>CP</sub> PRO<sub>i</sub> feel dizzy]]]]]

b. [<sub>TP</sub> Na Si-Shou Ge [<sub>T'</sub> T [<sub>VP</sub> *Ba* [<sub>DP</sub> Wo<sub>i</sub> [<sub>CP</sub> PRO<sub>i</sub> Chang-Lei-Le]]]]]

## Conclusion and Further Study Directions

This paper reviews previous studies concerning the *Ba* construction and attempts to provide new evidence for the argument that in the *Ba* construction, the *Ba* is a functional head which takes the *vP* as its complement. Based on the fact that in the minimalism approach the light verb is responsible for checking accusative and dative cases, the proposal of *Ba* as an overtly realized light verb by Sybesma (1999) cannot adequately account for the case-checking process of *Ba* sentences. Thus the “baP” structure, as in (32), seems to be a more plausible argument. Adverbial phrases can be adjoined to either baP or *vP* and the *v* is the *Ba* construction is responsible for the overt movement of the main verb’s direct object.

32) [<sub>baP</sub> Subject [<sub>ba'</sub> *Ba* [<sub>vP</sub> DP [<sub>v'</sub> *v* [<sub>VP</sub> V XP]]]]]

Meanwhile, two problems are still remaining in respect to the “baP” structure. The fact that the “baP” structure is unable to appropriately explain the causative *Ba* sentences indicates that there may be three types of *Ba* existing in modern Mandarin Chinese. The first one is the lexical-*Ba* which is used like other

main predicates as in (10). The second one is the “grammaticalized” *Ba* in the “baP” structure. The third one is the semi-grammaticalized *Ba* which functions as the English verb “make” as in causative *Ba* sentence (29). Another unsolved empirical puzzle of the *Ba* construction is how the historical verbal *Ba* converts into its current usage. The current paper is unable to provide explanations for the two questions, which will be left for further research.

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