V-ge-N/AP construction and its interpretation in Mandarin Chinese

Background
Huang (1997, 2005 lecture note) addresses issues of syntax-semantics mismatches in Mandarin Chinese, such as (1). He suggests lexical decomposition and head movement for solution, illustrated in (2). Such apparent mismatches are due to the high analyticity of Modern Chinese. Huang also provides evidence from classifier selection, shown in (3), in which the classifier ge selects an event, not an individual entity. The purpose of this paper is to investigate the syntax and semantics of V-ge-N/AP construction in Mandarin, such as chi ge fan ‘eat CL meal’ and chi ge guoyin ‘eat CL contentedly’, shown in (4). In addition to the syntactic analysis, we refer to Rothstein (2004)’s secondary predication for a semantic account.

Problem
First, following Huang’s example (chui niu, and chui ge niu, but not chui tou niu as shown in (1)), we may predict the example chi fan ‘have a meal’ as well as chi ge fan but not chi dun fan, in which only CL ge is allowed. In fact, another CL dun ‘quantifier for a meal’ is also acceptable. However, the number marking distinguishes the two classifiers, chi yi/lian/san ge fan ‘eat one/two/three CL meal(s)’ is unacceptable but chi yi/lian/san dun fan is fine. Second, it is unusual for AP (even as deverbal nominal) as argument of CL ge, such as *yi ge guo yin ‘one CL content’. Third, it is no clear for the semantic difference between ge-with/-without phrases and what ge works in this construction.

Proposal
I propose ge is an atomic operator, binding an atomic nominalized event, illustrated in (5). (The complete sentence is in (4), for simplicity, only the embedded phrase contains such construction is considered. Here, Pro is analyzed as Lisi’)

The predicate chi ‘eating’ (=V2) together with guoyin ‘contentedly’ (=AP) is nominalized as argument in ClP. The AP is analyzed as subject-oriented depictive predicate. Instead of occupying classifier head, ge ‘CL’ appears as an atomic operator in the spec of ClP (Classifier Phrase). Then it forms the ClP ge chi guoyin ‘CL eating contentedly’. Above the ClP, there is a light verb, which means “make, proceed, execute” and behaves like a transitive verb. (Take ta as the subject and ClP as the object.) Since the light verb is phonetically null, it is thus marked by DO. The meaning is such that “he does (makes, executes...) an event of eating contentedly”. Then, because V1 “DO” and CL lack phonetic realization, V2 has to move cyclically. Thus, it brings forth the surface structure ta chi ge guoyin. The formation of ta chi ge fan is similar, differential in that fan ‘meal’ is the internal argument of chi ‘eat’.

In Chierchia (2008, lecture note), classifier forms atomic properties and #-morphology checks property atomicity. In Cheng & Sybesma (1999), ge is considered as a count classifier which takes a nominal argument and then names the unit denoted by the noun. Based on these analyses, we argue that, generally, a classifier selects a nominal argument and then is counted by the number. Since number marking is disallowed in V-ge-N/AP construction, ge is not a real generalized classifier. Moreover, if we compare V-ge with V-de construction, such as chi ge guo yin vs. chi de guo yin, both has subject-oriented depictive predication. The function of ge is to make an event atomic.

In addition, under Rothstein (2004)’s analysis, the Summing operation for subject-oriented depictive secondary predication (or SSUM) provides a semantic account for V-ge-N/AP is given in (6), which is true if there is an atomic event which is the sum of an event of his eating and his being contented where the eating event is time participant connected to the contented event. Moreover, if we compare V-ge with V-de construction, such as chi ge guo yin vs. chi de guo yin, both has subject-oriented depictive predication. Ge marks an event nominalized and atomic.

Remarks
In this paper, we examine the V-ge-N/AP construction, which is different from VN compound and VV compound. Ge is not a generalized classifier for that number marking is not allowed. Instead, ge is like an operator, which requires an event nominalized and atomic.
(1) Ta qu ta-de Beijing, wo hui wo-de Shanghai
He to his Beijing, I return my Shanghai
‘He went on with his going to Beijing, and I went on with my returning to Shanghai.’

(2) VP1
   NP Ta ‘he’ V’
      | GP
      V1 DO Spec ‘his’
         G [e] V2 NP
            ‘go’ Beijing

(3)a. Zhe-ge niu, wo juede ni shi chui de tai guohuo le.
This-CL cow, I feel you indeed blow DE too over LE
‘This cow, I feel you really have too much overblown.’
    (You have bluffed way too much this time.) (Huang 2005: 2.4)
    b. Zhe-tou niu, wo juede ni shi chui de tai guohuo le.
This-CL cow, I feel you indeed blow DE too over LE

Lisi want eat GE meal then leave
‘Lisi wants to have a meal and then to leave’
Lisi want eat GE contentedly then leave
‘Lisi wants to eat contentedly and then to leave’

(5) VP1
   NP Lisi V’
      | CIP
      V1 DO Spec ‘GE’
         Cl [e] VP2
            ‘guoyin’ ‘contentedly’
               V2 ‘chi’ ‘eat’

(6) \[\exists e_1 \exists e_2 [e =^5 (e_1 \cup e_2) \wedge \text{EAT}(e_1) \wedge \text{Ag}(e_1) \Rightarrow \text{LISI} \wedge \text{CONTENTED}(e_2) \wedge \text{Arg}(e_2) \Rightarrow \text{LISI}]\]

Selected References