

‘Again’ skipping in Mandarin Chinese: A syntactic approach

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1 Introduction

(1) *English* again

John wants to close the door **again**.

‘John wants to close the door, and ...

a. ‘He wanted to close the door before.’

[✓high reading]

b. ‘He closed the door before.’

[✓low reading]

The ambiguity of *again* is frequently analyzed as a structural one (Morgan 1969, Dowty 1979, von Stechow 1995, 1996, Beck & Johnson 2004, Beck 2005, Bale 2005, 2007):

- (2) a. *High attachment* → *high reading*
John [[wants to close the door] again].
- b. *Low attachment* → *low reading*
John wants to [[close the door] again].

Prediction of the structural account: if ‘again’ precedes the matrix verb, then ...

- High attachment is possible, but low attachment is not; and
- High reading is possible, but low reading is not.

This prediction is true in English ([Bale 2007](#)): (3) is infelicitous in a context in which John closed the door but did not want to do so.

(3) John **again** [wants to [close the door]]. [✓high reading, *low reading]

However, for Mandarin Chinese *you* ‘again’, this prediction is not true:

(4) John **you** [xiangyao [guanshang na shan men]].

John again want close that CLF door

‘John wants to close that door, and ...’

a. ‘He wanted to close that door before.’

[✓high reading]

b. ‘He closed that door before.’

[✓low reading]

This phenomenon challenges the structural account.

- I dub this phenomenon ‘*again*’ *skipping*.
- A similar effect is found in Italian with the prefix *ri-* ‘again’ (Cardinaletti 2003).

(5) *Overview of the proposal*

- a. The ambiguity of *you* is indeed structural (Xu 2012, 2016).
- b. *You* is base-generated low.
- c. *You* moves to a high position (to agree with the matrix aspect).
- d. *You* is interpreted low (by reconstruction).

Roadmap

ii. Distribution

iii. Analysis

iv. Evidence

v. Conclusion

2 Distribution

- *You* must surface preverbally (Xu 2012, 2016) (6).
- *You* cannot surface low in the embedded clause of ‘want’ (7).

(6) *John xiangyao guanshang na shan men **you**.
John want close that CLF door again
Intended: ‘John wants to close that door again.’

(7) *John xiangyao **you** guanshang na shan men.
John want again close that CLF door
Intended: ‘John wants to close that door again.’

- Question: Which verbs allow ‘again’ skipping?
- Answer: restructuring verbs.
 - Nonrestructuring embedding verbs do not allow ‘again’ skipping.
 - ‘Again’ skipping patterns with tests for restructuring verbs.

2.1 Restructuring verbs and nonrestructuring embedding verbs

There has been a lot of discussion about what restructuring verbs are (Rizzi 1982, Wurmbrand 1998, 2001, 2004, 2016, Cinque 1999, 2006, Cardinaletti & Shlonsky 2004, Matushansky 2006).

- This talk adopts Wurmbrand's (2004) view that restructuring verbs can take complements that are smaller than TPs.
- On the other hand, nonrestructuring embedding verbs take CP complements.

A verb that does not allow ‘again’ skipping is *renwei* ‘think’:

- (8) John_i **you** renwei [ta_i jiang guanshang na shan men].
John again think he will close that CLF door
‘John thinks that he will close that door, and ...’

a. ‘He thought that he would close that door before.’

[✓high reading]

b. *‘He closed that door before.’

[*low reading]

- (9) John_i renwei [ta_i jiang **you** guanshang na shan men].
John think he will again close that CLF door
‘John thinks that he will close that door, and he closed that door before.’

[✓low reading]

Here are more verbs and whether they allow ‘again’ skipping:

<i>dasuan</i> ‘intend’	✓		
<i>jihua</i> ‘plan’	✓		
<i>jueding</i> ‘decide’	✓		
<i>mingling</i> ‘order’	✓		
<i>quan</i> ‘urge’	✓		
<i>rang</i> ‘let’	✓	<i>renwei</i> ‘think’	*
<i>shefa</i> ‘try’	✓	<i>shuo</i> ‘say’	*
<i>tiyi</i> ‘propose’	✓	<i>xiangxin</i> ‘believe’	*
<i>tuijian</i> ‘recommend’	✓	<i>zhidao</i> ‘know’	*
<i>weixie</i> ‘threaten’	✓		
<i>xiangyao</i> ‘want’	✓		
<i>xuanze</i> ‘choose’	✓		
<i>yunxu</i> ‘allow’	✓		
<i>zhunbei</i> ‘prepare’	✓		

2.2 Tests for restructuring verbs

In Mandarin, a test for restructuring verbs is *aspect lowering*:

- (10) *Aspect lowering (e.g., C.-T. J. Huang 1989, Li 1990, Lin 2006, Grano 2015)*
In the context of restructuring control predicates, the experiential aspect appears low but receives a “high” matrix interpretation. (N. Huang 2018: 350)

Restructuring verbs allow aspect lowering (N. Huang 2018):

- (11) Zhangsan shefa [xiuli-**guo** zhe tai jiqi].
Zhangsan try repair-EXP this CLF machine
a. ‘Zhangsan has tried to repair this machine.’
b. *‘Zhangsan tries to have repaired this machine.’

(N. Huang 2018: 351)

Nonrestructuring embedding verbs do not allow aspect lowering (N. Huang 2018):

- (12) Zhangsan xiangxin [Lisi xiuli-**guo** zhe tai jiqi.]
Zhangsan believe Lisi repair-EXP this CLF machine
a. *‘Zhangsan has believed that Lisi repairs this machine.’
b. ‘Zhangsan believes that Lisi has repaired this machine.’

- Verbs that allow ‘again’ skipping allow aspect lowering.
- Verbs that do not allow ‘again’ skipping do not allow aspect lowering.

- (13) *N. Huang's (2018) tests for restructuring verbs*
- a. aspect lowering
 - b. object fronting
 - c. focus fronting
- (14) *C.-T. J. Huang's (2022) additional tests for restructuring verbs*
- a. 'before' collocation
 - b. verb copying
 - c. *suo* climbing
 - d. long distance passivization
 - e. 'again' skipping (citing [Liu 2021](#))

2.3 Takeaways from this section

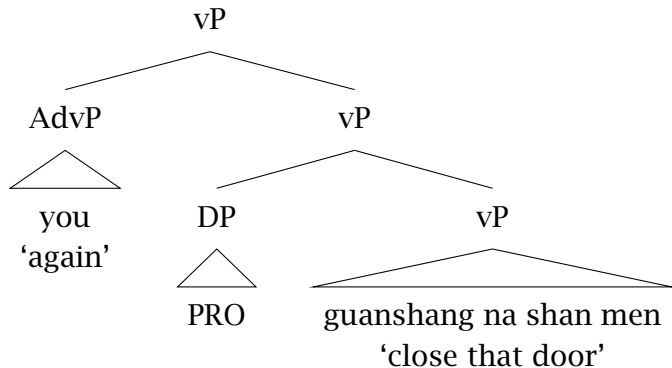
- There is a strong correlation between ‘again’ skipping and restructuring.
- ‘Again’ skipping is sensitive to locality.

3 Analysis

- Question: How is the low reading of *you* derived?
- Answer: by movement and reconstruction (cf. [Xu 2012, 2016](#)).
 - Where is *you* base-generated?
 - Why does *you* move?
 - How is *you* interpreted?

3.1 Where *you* is base-generated

- (15) a. matrix vP → high reading
b. embedded vP → low reading

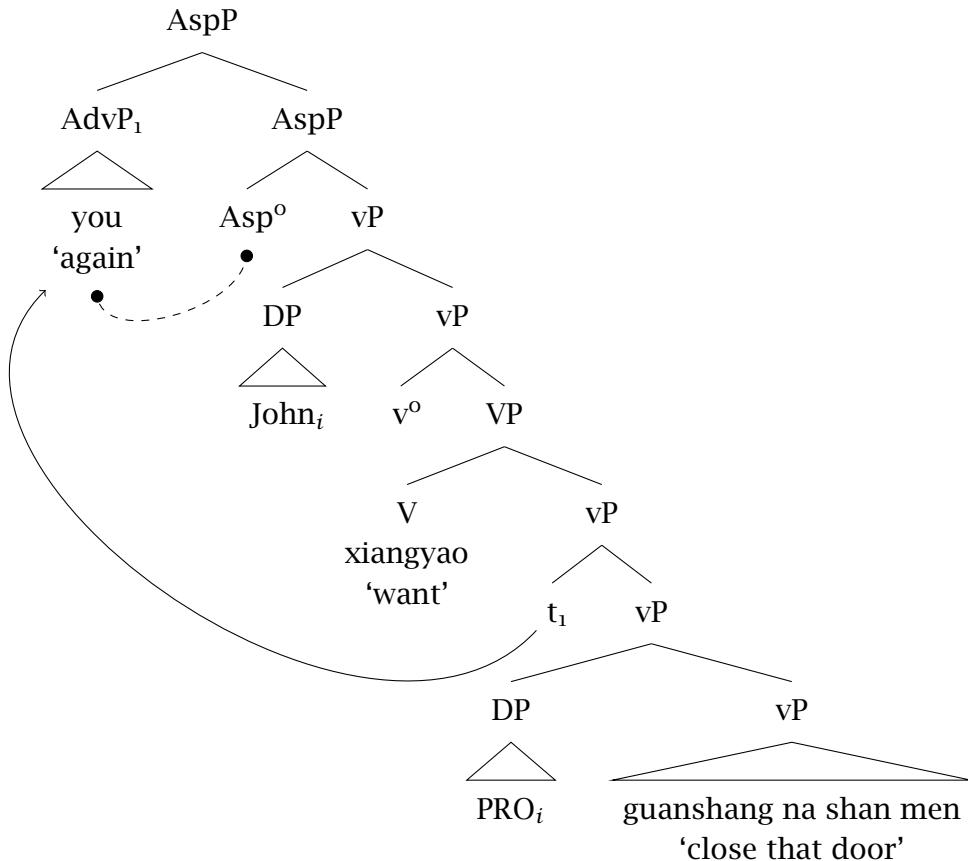


3.2 Why *you* moves

- *You* is base-generated with an unvalued aspect feature.
- This feature must be valued by the closest aspect probe via spec-head agreement.
- This requirement motivates *you* to move to the specifier position of the closest AspP (larger than vP but smaller than TP).
- Mandarin restructuring verbs can embed projections smaller than AspPs.

As in (16), *you*'s movement landing site is believed to be Spec-AspP because of (i) aspect lowering and (ii) Cinque's (1999) claim that Italian *di nuovo* 'again' surfaces in Spec-AspP.

(16)



- Restructuring verbs allow ‘again’ skipping when ...
 - The matrix verb does not embed an AspP;
 - There is no embedded aspect for *you* to agree with; and
 - *You* must move high to agree with the matrix aspect.
- Nonrestructuring embedding verbs disallow ‘again’ skipping because ...
 - The matrix verb embeds a projection that contains an AspP.
 - There is an embedded aspect for *you* to agree with.
 - *You* need not move high to agree with the matrix aspect.

3.3 How *you* is interpreted

It is interpreted in its base-generated position by reconstruction ([Lechner 1998](#)).

- In an ‘again’ skipping construction, *you* is base-generated in the embedded vP with an unvalued aspect feature that must be valued by the closest aspect probe.
- *You* moves and reconstructs.

4 Evidence

This section presents evidence that the movement and reconstruction analysis is on the right track.

4.1 Blocking effect of negation

You cannot scope below negation (Xu 2012, 2016):

- (17) John **you** meiyou guanshang na shan men.
John again not.PFV close that CLF door
'John did not close that door, and ...'
a. 'There had been another time when he did not close that door.'
b. *'He closed that door before.'
- (18) John **you** bu xiangyao [guanshang na shan men].
John again not want close that CLF door
'John does not want to close that door, and ...'
a. 'He did not want to close that door before.'
b. *'He wanted to close that door before.'
c. *'He closed that door before.'

Xu (2012, 2016) treats the blocking effect as a limitation on the movement of *you* due to Relativized Minimality (RM):

(19) *Paraphrased Relativized Minimality*

Moving *X* across *Y* is prohibited if *X* and *Y* have certain features in common.

(Rizzi 1990: 1, adapted)

(20) *Rizzi's (2001) examples of RM features*

- a. modifier (e.g., adverbials, including negation)
- b. quantificational (e.g., focus, negation, etc.)

- (21) *Xu's explanation*
- a. *You* is an adverbial.
 - b. Negation is an adverbial (e.g., [Li & Thompson 1981](#)).
 - c. Adverbials share the modifier feature.
 - d. RM prohibits moving an adverbial across another adverbial.

Here is an example that illustrates [Xu's](#) explanation:

- (22) *John **you**₁ meiyou **t**₁ guanshang na shan men.
John again not.PFV close that CLF door
Intended: 'John did not close that door, but he closed it before.'

4.2 Counterexamples to an RM explanation

Unlike English *again* (Bale 2007), *you* can skip PPs, which share the modifier feature:

(23) *Contexts*

- a. Alan met Esme at the park on a Tuesday. Next week, ...
- b. Alan met Esme at the park on a Monday. Next week, ...
- c. Alan met Esme at her house on a Monday. Next week, ...

(Bale 2007: 459, adapted)

(24) 'Alan met Esme again at the park on a Tuesday.'

- a. Alan zai Xingqi'er zai gongyuan **you** yudao-le Esme.
Alan at Tuesday at park again meet-PFV Esme
- b. Alan zai Xingqi'er **you**₁ zai gongyuan **t**₁ yudao-le Esme.
Alan at Tuesday again at park meet-PFV Esme
- c. Alan **you**₁ zai Xingqi'er zai gongyuan **t**₁ yudao-le Esme.
Alan again at Tuesday at park meet-PFV Esme

Moreover, *you* can skip a focus marker, which shares the quantificational feature:

(25) *Context*

Last week, I read the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*. This week, ...

(26) Wo **you**₁ zhi t₁ du-le Yiliyate.

I again only read-PFV *Iliad*

‘I only read the *Iliad* again.’

4.3 Positive polarity

- Alternative view: the blocking effect is a limitation on reconstruction instead.
- The source of this limitation is *you*'s positive polarity.

You cannot surface below negation:

- (27) *Meiyou ren **you** xiangyao guanshang na shan men.
no person again want close that CLF door
Intended: 'No one wants to close that door again.'

The previous example can be rescued in Szabolcsi's (2004) sense by double negation or by using another 'again':

- (28) a. Bu yiding meiyou ren **you** xiangyao guanshang na shan men.
not necessarily no person again want close that CLF door
'It is not necessarily the case that no one wants to close that door again.'
- b. Meiyou ren **zai** xiangyao guanshang na shan men.
no person again want close that CLF door
'No one wants to close that door again.'

5 Conclusion

Takeaways

- ‘Again’ skipping challenges the structural account for the ambiguity of ‘again’.
- To rescue the structural account, *you* is proposed to move and reconstruct.
- ‘Again’ skipping can be used as another test for Mandarin restructuring verbs (C.-T. J. Huang 2022), whose complement size can be smaller than AspP.
- Adverbs move.