

Focus on ‘again’ in Mandarin Chinese

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1 Introduction

Mandarin *you* ‘again’, like English *again* (a.o.: McCawley 1968, Morgan 1969, Dowty 1979, Beck & Johnson 2004, Bale 2005), is ambiguous between at least two possible readings (T. Xu 2012, 2016) (1-2).

- (1) a. *Repetitive context*
Yesterday, Xiaoming closed the door to his room. Today, ...
- b. *Restitutive context*
The door to Xiaoming’s room was installed closed. His mom opened it. Then, ...
- (2) Xiaoming you guanshang-le men. [✓(1a), ✓(1b)]
Xiaoming again close-PFV door
‘Xiaoming closed the door, and ...’
- a. ‘He closed the door before.’ *repetitive*
b. ‘The door was in a state of being closed before.’ *restitutive*

A new observation is that prosodic prominence plays a role in determining the possible readings of *you*. For example, if prosodic prominence is realized on *you*, its restitutive reading (2b) disappears (3).

- (3) *Prosodic prominence on ‘again’: Only repetitive reading possible*
- Xiaoming YOU guanshang-le men. [✓(1a), # (1b)]
Xiaoming again close-PFV door
‘Xiaoming closed the door, and ...’
- a. ‘He closed the door before.’ *repetitive*
b. *‘The door was in a state of being closed before.’ *restitutive*

In contrast, both possible readings remain intact if prosodic prominence is realized on the verb.

- (4) *Prosodic prominence on the verb: Both readings possible*
- Xiaoming you GUANshang-le men. [✓(1a), ✓(1b)]
Xiaoming again close-PFV door
‘Xiaoming closed the door, and ...’
- a. ‘He closed the door before.’ *repetitive*
b. ‘The door was in a state of being closed before.’ *restitutive*

(5) *Overview of the proposal*

The restitutive reading disappears in (3) because ...

- a. Prosodic prominence is realized on ‘again’;
- b. ‘Again’ is focused;
- c. The prejacent is not focused;
- d. The prejacent must be GIVEN; and
- e. Only the repetitive reading is possible.

Roadmap

- ii. Data
- iii. Analysis
- iv. Kutchi Gujarati *pacho* ‘again’
- v. Conclusion

2 Data

2.1 ‘Again’ preceding restructuring verbs (‘again’ skipping)

Liu (2021, to appear) and Huang (2022) report that in a restructuring construction, *you* preceding the matrix verb has a three-way ambiguity (6).

- (6) Xiaoming you xiang [guanshang na shan men].
 Xiaoming again want close that CLF door
 ‘Xiaoming wants to close that door, and ...’
- | | |
|---|-----------------------------|
| a. ‘He wanted to close that door before.’ | <i>matrix repetitive</i> |
| b. ‘He closed that door before.’ | <i>embedded repetitive</i> |
| c. ‘That door was in a state of being closed before.’ | <i>embedded restitutive</i> |

When prosodic prominence is realized on *you*, *you* must take the widest scope (7).

- (7) Xiaoming YOU xiang [guanshang na shan men].
 Xiaoming again want close that CLF door
 ‘Xiaoming wants to close that door, and ...’
- | | |
|--|-----------------------------|
| a. ‘He wanted to close that door before.’ | <i>matrix repetitive</i> |
| b. *‘He closed that door before.’ | <i>embedded repetitive</i> |
| c. *‘That door was in a state of being closed before.’ | <i>embedded restitutive</i> |

2.2 ‘Again’ preceding adverbial adjuncts

Liu (2021, to appear) also observes that *you* preceding adverbial adjuncts may or may not take scope over them: (8) is felicitous in all three contexts (adapted from Bale 2007) in (9).

- (8) Xiaoming you zai Xingqi'er zai gongyuan yudao-le Xiaohong.
Xiaoming again at Tuesday at park meet-PFV Xiaohong
'Xiaoming met Xiaohong again at the park on a Tuesday.'
- (9) a. *Context 1: Park and Tuesday*
Last week, Xiaoming met Xiaohong at the park on a Tuesday. This week, ...
b. *Context 2: Park but not Tuesday*
Last week, Xiaoming met Xiaohong at the park on a Monday. This week, ...
c. *Context 3: Not park and not Tuesday*
Last week, Xiaoming met Xiaohong at school on a Monday. This week, ...

However, if *you* bears prosodic prominence, it must take scope over the adverbial adjuncts it precedes: (10) is felicitous only in (11a).

- (10) Xiaoming YOU zai Xingqi'er zai gongyuan yudao-le Xiaohong.
Xiaoming again at Tuesday at park meet-PFV Xiaohong
'Xiaoming met Xiaohong at the park on a Tuesday again.'
- (11) a. *Context 1: Park and Tuesday*
Last week, Xiaoming met Xiaohong at the park on a Tuesday. This week, ...
b. *Context 2: Park but not Tuesday*
~~Last week, Xiaoming met Xiaohong at the park on a Monday. This week, ...~~
c. *Context 3: Not park and not Tuesday*
~~Last week, Xiaoming met Xiaohong at school on a Monday. This week, ...~~

2.3 Crosslinguistic observations

- Focus on ‘again’ forces ‘again’ to take the widest scope in Mandarin.
- Similar effects are found in other languages.

- (12) *Cantonese: No prosodic prominence on ‘again’*
Keoi jau zoeng fuk coeng jau-faan baak.
he again DISP CLF wall paint-again white
'He painted the wall white, and ...

- a. 'He painted the wall white before.'
b. 'The wall was white before.'

repetitive

restitutive

(Ka-Fai Yip, pers. comm.)

(13) *Cantonese: Prosodic prominence on ‘again’*

Keoi JAU zoeng fuk coeng jau-faan baak.
 he again DISP CLF wall paint-again white
 ‘He painted the wall white, and ...’

a. ‘He painted the wall white before.’

repetitive

b. *‘The wall was white before.’

restitutive

(Ka-Fai Yip, pers. comm.)

(14) *English*

a. Otto opened the door again.

repetitive/restitutive

b. Otto opened the door aGAIN.

repetitive only

(Beck 2006: 3-4)

3 Analysis

3.1 Phonology-semantics interface

Prosodic prominence is a key marker of focus in Mandarin (a.o.: Y. Xu 1999, Chen & Gussenhoven 2008, Yan & Calhoun 2019): an utterance is felicitous only if prosodic prominence is realized on a constituent that offers new information (15-16).

(15) *Shui guanshang-le chuanguhu?*

who close-PFV window

‘Who closed the window?’

(Yan & Calhoun 2019: 2)

a. *Customer* would be new information.

b. *Window* would NOT be new information.

(16) a. *Prosodic prominence on new information*

[GUKE]_F guanshang-le chuanguhu.

customer close-PFV window

‘The customer closed the window.’

b. *Prosodic prominence on old information: Infelicitous utterance*

#Guke guanshang-le [CHUANGhu]_F.

customer close-PFV window

‘The customer closed the window.’

(Yan & Calhoun 2019: 2)

3.2 Semantics-pragmatics interface

(17) *Existential F-closure*

The existential F-closure of ϕ is $\exists X: \phi$, where X recursively replaces an F-marked constituent in ϕ .
 (Patel-Grosz & Beck 2019: 30)

(18) *Examples of existential F-closure*

- a. Existential F-closure of “[Xiaoming]_F closed the door”:
 $\exists x: x$ closed that door.
- b. Existential F-closure of “Xiaoming closed [the door]_F”:
 $\exists y: \text{Xiaoming closed } y$.
- c. Existential F-closure of “Xiaoming [close]_{F-d} the door”:
 $\exists P: \text{Xiaoming } P\text{-ed the door}$.
- d. Existential F-closure of “Xiaoming closed the door [again]_F”:
 Xiaoming closed the door.

(19) An utterance *U* is GIVEN *iff* it has a salient antecedent *A* such that ...

- a. If *U* is of type *e*, *A* and *U* corefer;
- b. Otherwise, *A* entails the existential F-closure of *U* modulo $\exists$ -type shifting, which existentially closes all open argument slots of *U*.

(Schwarzschild 1999: 151)

A paraphrase of (19) is this: (i) an individual is GIVEN *iff* it is in the context; and (ii) a constituent that does not denote an individual is GIVEN *iff* its existential F-closure is entailed by the context.

(20) *Repetitive context (1a)*

Yesterday, Xiaoming closed the door to his room. Today, ...

(21) *What are GIVEN in (20)*

- a. Xiaoming
- b. the door
- c. Xiaoming closed the door
- d. $\exists x: x$ closed the door.
- e. $\exists y: \text{Xiaoming closed } y$.
- f. ...

(22) GIVENness

If a constituent is not F-marked, it must be GIVEN.

(Schwarzschild 1999: 155)

3.3 Prosodic prominence on ‘again’

- (23) Xiaoming [YOU]_F guanshang-le men.
 Xiaoming again close-PFV door
 ‘Xiaoming closed the door again.’

- (24) a. *Repetitive context/repetitive presupposition of (23)*
 Xiaoming closed the door.
 b. *Restitutive context/restitutive presupposition of (23)*
 The door was in a state of being closed.
 c. *Existential F-closure of (23)*
 Xiaoming closed the door.

In (24a), (24c) is GIVEN, but in (24b), it is not. The loss of the restitutive reading is thus explained.

- (25) *Interim summary*
 Prosodic prominence on ‘again’ → focus on ‘again’ → no focus on its prejacent → GIVENNESS of the prejacent → repetitive reading only.

3.4 Prosodic prominence on the verb

- (26) Xiaoming you [GUANshang]_F-le men.
 Xiaoming again close-PFV door
 ‘Xiaoming closed the door again.’

The existential F-closure of (26) is not necessarily entailed by a restitutive context. (26) would be wrongly predicted to be infelicitous in (1b), copied below in (28).

- (27) *Existential F-closure of (26)*
 $\exists P$: Xiaoming P-ed the door.

- (28) *Restitutive context*
 The door to Xiaoming’s room was installed closed. His mom opened it. Then, ...

Kabagema-Bilan, López Jiménez & Truckenbrodt (2011) report that in dual focus conditions in Mandarin, only the second of the two foci shows phonetic f_0 effects, while the first focus shows fewer or no such effects.

- (29) a. Shui tou shui de wo?
 who steal who POSS nest
 ‘Who stole whose nest?’
 b. [Maomi]_F tou [WUYA]_F de wo.
 cat steal crow POSS nest
 ‘The cat stole the crow’s nest.’
 (Kabagema-Bilan, López Jiménez & Truckenbrodt 2011: 1903, adapted)

I argue that in a restitutive context, in order for an utterance to be felicitous, when prosodic prominence is realized on the verb, the subject is inaudibly focused.

- (30) [Xiaoming]_F you [GUANshang]_F-le men.
 Xiaoming again close-PFV door
 ‘Xiaoming closed the door again.’

- a. *Restitutive context/restitutive presupposition of (30)*
 The door was in a state of being closed.
 b. *Existential F-closure of (30)*
 $\exists x, P: x$ P-ed the door. (Someone did something to the door.)

The restitutive context (30a) entails (30b). Since the door had been in a state of being closed, in order for it to be possible for Xiaoming to close the door again, there must have been an event in between in which someone opened the door (cf. [Kamp & Rossdeutscher 1994](#), [Jäger & Blutner 2000](#), [Fabricius-Hansen 2001](#), [Pedersen 2015](#)).

4 Kutchi Gujarati *pacho* ‘again’

Kutchi Gujarati *pacho* ‘again’ is ambiguous between repetitive and counterdirectional (cf. Mandarin *huiqu* ‘back’ and English *back*) readings, and its ambiguity is sensitive to word order ([Patel-Grosz & Beck 2014, 2019](#)).

- (31) a. *Repetitive context*
 Yesterday, Raj hit Khimji. Today, ...
 b. *Counterdirectional context*
 Yesterday, Khimji hit Raj. Today, ...
- (32) a. *S-O-pacho-V: Repetitive reading only*
 raj khimji-ne pach-o mar-y-o.
 Raj Khimji-ACC again-MSG hit-PFV-MSG
 ‘Raj hit Khimji again.’ (Patel-Grosz & Beck 2019: 36)
 b. *S-pacho-O-V: Counterdirectional reading only*
 raj pach-o khimji-ne mar-y-o.
 Raj again-MSG Khimji-ACC hit-PFV-MSG
 ‘Raj hit Khimji back.’ (Patel-Grosz & Beck 2019: 36)

[Patel-Grosz & Beck \(2014, 2019\)](#) have presented independent evidence that in Kutchi Gujarati, ...

- Focus is not marked by prosodic prominence, but by syntactic position.
- The immediately preverbal position attracts a focused constituent.

- (33) *Repetitive reading*
 raj khimji-ne [pach-o]_F mar-y-o.
 Raj Khimji-ACC again-MSG hit-PFV-MSG
 ‘Raj hit Khimji again.’ (Patel-Grosz & Beck 2019: 36)

- a. *Repetitive context/repetitive presupposition of (33)*
Raj hit Khimji.
- b. *Existential F-closure of (33)*
Raj hit Khimji.

Patel-Grosz & Beck (2014, 2019) have presented independent evidence that in Kutchi Gujarati, if an utterance has multiple focused constituents, only the lowest one gets attracted to the immediately preverbal position.

(34) *Counterdirectional reading*

[raj]_F pach-o [khimji-ne]_F mar-y-o.
Raj again-MSG Khimji-ACC hit-PFV-MSG
'Raj hit Khimji back.'

(Patel-Grosz & Beck 2019: 36)

- a. *Counterdirectional context*
Khimji hit Raj.
- b. *Existential F-closure of (34)*
 $\exists x, y: x \text{ hit } y$.

If the subject were not focused, the resulting existential F-closure, " $\exists y: \text{Raj hit } y$ " would not be entailed by the counterdirectional context.

5 Conclusion

Takeaways

- A correlation among prosodic prominence, focus and GIVENNESS in Mandarin is established.
- This correlation is used to account for the crosslinguistic effect of prosodic prominence on the ambiguity of 'again'.

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