

Pseudogapping parameters*

Yuyang Liu
Yale University

Tommy Tsz-Ming Lee
City University of Hong Kong

1 Introduction

This talk concerns *gapping* and *pseudogapping* (PG) (Levin 1979):

(1) *English*

a. *Gapping*

John **should eat** three apples, and Mary [~~should eat~~] four oranges.

b. *PG*

John should **eat** three apples, and Mary should [**eat**] four oranges.

Chinese languages have constructions resembling gapping and PG (Wei 2008):¹

(2) *Mandarin*

a. *Gapping-like construction*

Zhangsan **yinggai chi** san ge pingguo. Lisi Δ si ge juzi.

Zhangsan should eat three CLF apple Lisi four CLF orange

'Zhangsan **should eat** three apples. Lisi [**should eat**] four oranges.'

(Tang 2001: 202, with 'should' added)

b. *PG-like construction*

Zhangsan yinggai **chi** san ge pingguo. Lisi yinggai Δ si ge juzi.

Zhangsan should eat three CLF apple Lisi should four CLF orange

'Zhangsan should **eat** three apples. Lisi should [**eat**] four oranges.'

(3) *Cantonese*

a. *Gapping-like construction*

Zoengsaam **jinggoi sik** saam go pinggwo. Leisei Δ sei go caang.

Zoengsaam should eat three CLF apple Leisei four CLF orange

'Zoengsaam **should eat** three apples. Leisei [**should eat**] four oranges.'

b. *PG-like construction*

Zoengsaam jinggoi **sik** saam go pinggwo. Leisei jinggoi Δ sei go caang.

Zoengsaam should eat three CLF apple Leisei should four CLF orange

'Zoengsaam should **eat** three apples. Leisei should [**eat**] four oranges.'

* We thank Athulya Aravind, Veneeta Dayal, Daniel Hole, Kyle Johnson, Alexander Wimmer, Jim Wood, Kai Fai Yip, Raffaella Zanuttini, and four anonymous LSA reviewers for invaluable discussion and feedback. All errors are our own.

¹ Glossing abbreviations follow the Leipzig Glossing Rules with this addition: SFP = sentence-final particle.

We advance the view in (4).²

(4) *First part of the proposal*

- a. Chinese gapping-like construction $\neq$ English gapping.
- b. Chinese PG-like construction $\neq$ English PG.
- c. Chinese gapping-like construction = Chinese PG-like construction = empty verb.
- d. Chinese does not allow a movement plus deletion derivation of gapping and PG.

With regard to the function of the empty verb, we propose that it is a pair-list copula in the sense of Li 2025, albeit phonologically null:

$$(5) \llbracket \emptyset_{\text{pair-list}} \rrbracket^c = [\lambda y. \lambda x. f^c(x) = y]$$

English PG is typically understood to involve moving the remnant (Move-R) followed by VP ellipsis (VPE) (e.g., Jayaseelan 1990):

(6) *Derivation of English PG*

John should **eat** three apples, and Mary should [four oranges]_i [~~eat t_i~~].



The diagram shows a horizontal arrow pointing from the ellipsis site [eat t_i] back to the remnant [four oranges]_i, indicating the movement of the remnant.

If the view in (4) is true, then as a language that allows Move-R and VPE, Chinese raises a question of why it does not allow two mechanisms combined:

- (7) How is it the case that the following three claims hold simultaneously?
- a. English allows PG, composed of Move-R and VPE; while
 - b. Chinese allows Move-R and VPE, but
 - c. Chinese disallows PG.

In response to this question, we propose (8).

(8) *Second part of the proposal*

The availability of PG in a language results from a conspiracy of multiple “parametric” settings, which include:

- a. the availability of VPE;
- b. the availability and type of Move-R; and
- c. the [E] feature specification of Foc⁰.

² From this point onward, everything stated for Mandarin applies equally to Cantonese, and we use *Chinese* to refer to both languages. To save time, Cantonese examples are not provided in the main text but can be found in Appendix A.

Roadmap

- ii. Move-R plus deletion vs. empty verb
- iii. Phonologically null pair-list copula
- iv. PG typology
- v. Conclusion

2 Move-R plus deletion vs. empty verb

While PG is typically understood to involve Move-R followed by VPE, gapping has received multiple analyses:

- (9) *Large conjunct and Move-R plus deletion* (e.g., [Depiante 2000](#), [Boone 2014](#))
 John **should eat** three apples, and Mary₁ [four oranges]₂ [_{TP} t₁ ~~should eat~~ t₂].
- (10) *Small conjunct and Move-R plus deletion* (e.g., [Coppock 2001](#), [Lin 2002](#))
 John₁ **should** [_{XP} [_{VP} t₁ **eat** three apples]], and [_{XP} Mary₂ [four oranges]₃ [_{VP} t₂ ~~eat~~ t₃]].
- (11) *Small conjunct and ATB verb movement* (e.g., [Johnson 1994, 2009](#), [Tang 2001](#))
 John₁ **should eat**₂ [_{VP} t₁ t₂ three apples], and [_{VP} Mary t₂ four oranges].
- (12) *In-situ and selective spellout* (e.g., [Broekhuis 2018](#))
 John **should eat** three apples, and Mary [_{TP} ~~should eat~~ [four oranges]_F].
- This talk focuses on the Move-R plus deletion analyses (9–10), but the data may pose challenges for extending the other analyses to Chinese as well.
 - In what follows, we present three groups of data that distinguish between the following two kinds of analyses of Chinese gapping-like and PG-like constructions.
- (13) a. *Move-R plus deletion*
 Lisi (should) [four CLF orange]₁ [_{eat} t₁]. (cf. [Cao 2014](#), [Ye 2024](#))
- b. *Empty verb*
 Lisi (should) ∅_{pair-list} four CLF orange. (cf. [Tang 2001](#))

2.1 Adjunct exclusion

English VPE and PG omit verbal adjuncts:

(14) *English VPE*

- a. Mary hasn't **secretly dated** Bill, but Sue has [~~secretly dated~~ Bill], #though not secretly.
- b. John should **quietly eat three apples**, and Mary should [~~quietly eat three apples~~], too.

(15) *English PG*

- a. Mary hasn't **secretly dated** Bill, but Sue has [~~secretly dated~~] John, #though not secretly. (Jayaseelan 1990: 64, adapted)
- b. John should **quietly eat** three apples, and Mary should [~~quietly eat~~] four oranges.

Chinese VPE also omits verbal adjuncts:

(16) *Mandarin VPE*

Zhangsan yinggai **manman** chi san ge pingguo. Lisi ye yinggai Δ.
 Zhangsan should slowly eat three CLF apple Lisi also should
 'Zhangsan should **slowly eat three apples**. Lisi should [**slowly eat three apples**], too.'

However, Chinese gapping-like and PG-like constructions do not omit adjuncts:

(17) a. *Mandarin gapping-like construction*

Zhangsan yinggai **manman** chi san ge pingguo.
 Zhangsan should slowly eat three CLF apple
 Lisi Δ si ge juzi.
 Lisi four CLF orange

'Zhangsan **should slowly eat** three apples.
 Lisi [**should (*slowly) eat**] four oranges.'

b. *Mandarin PG-like construction*

Zhangsan yinggai **manman** chi san ge pingguo.
 Zhangsan should slowly eat three CLF apple
 Lisi yinggai Δ si ge juzi.
 Lisi should four CLF orange
 'Zhangsan should **slowly eat** three apples.
 Lisi should [**(*slowly) eat**] four oranges.'

(18) Zhangsan keyi yikouqi **zuo** wushi ge fuwocheng.

Zhangsan can in.one.go do fifty CLF push.up
 Lisi keyi Δ yibai ge, buguo zhongjian yao xiuxi yi xia.
 Lisi can one.hundred CLF but in.between need take.a.break one time
 'Zhangsan can **do** fifty push-ups in one go.
 Lisi can [**do**] one hundred, but he needs to take a break in between.'

2.2 Resultative suffixes

Verbs with resultative suffixes *-de* (19) or *-dao* can be deleted.

- (19) (Zhe zhi wu,) Zhangsan (keyi) **tiao-de** hen haokan,
 this CLF dance Zhangsan can dance-RES very beautiful
 er Lisi que (keyi) Δ hen nankan.
 and Lisi however can very ugly
 ‘(This dance,) Zhangsan **dances/can dance** very beautifully,
 but Lisi [**dances**]/[**can dance**] in a very ugly manner.’

However, resultative complements cannot move to a preverbal position:³

- (20) *Zhangsan [hen haokan]₁ (keyi) tiao-de t₁.
 Zhangsan very beautiful can dance-RES
 Intended: ‘Zhangsan dances/can dance very beautifully.’

2.3 PG-like construction–licensing heads

Modals, some preverbal aspects (21a), and control verbs (21b) license VPE in Chinese (e.g., Lee & Pan 2024).

- (21) a. *Mandarin preverbal aspect: ✓VPE*
 Zhangsan you **manman chi san ge pingguo**. Lisi ye you Δ .
 Zhangsan PFV slowly eat three CLF apple Lisi also PFV
 ‘Zhangsan **slowly ate three apples**. Lisi did [**slowly eat three apples**], too.’
- b. *Mandarin control verb: ✓VPE*
 Zhangsan xiang **manman chi san ge pingguo**.
 Zhangsan want slowly eat three CLF apple
 Lisi ye xiang Δ .
 Lisi also want
 ‘Zhangsan wants to **slowly eat three apples**.
 Lisi wants to [**slowly eat three apples**], too.’

A preverbal aspect does not allow Move-R to the preverbal position within its complement (22a), but a control verb does (22b).

³ We do not consider this a knock-down argument, as we need to allow movements exclusive to ellipsis contexts for English PG anyway.

(22) a. *Mandarin preverbal aspect: ✗Move-R*

*Zhangsan you [san ge pingguo]_i manman chi t_i.
 Zhangsan PFV three CLF apple slowly eat
 Intended: 'Zhangsan slowly ate three apples.'

b. *Mandarin control verb: ✓Move-R*

Zhangsan xiang [san ge pingguo]_i manman chi t_i.
 Zhangsan want three CLF apple slowly eat
 'Zhangsan wants to slowly eat three apples.'

- One might expect control verbs to allow PG(-like constructions), but not preverbal aspects.
- The prediction is borne out for preverbal aspects, but not control verbs, which turn out to disallow PG-like constructions:

(23) *Mandarin control verb: ✗PG-like construction*

Zhangsan xiang (**manman**) **chi** san ge pingguo.
 Zhangsan want slowly eat three CLF apple
 (*Lisi xiang Δ si ge juzi.)
 Lisi want four CLF orange
 'Zhangsan wants to (**slowly**) **eat** three apples.
 (*Lisi wants to [(**slowly**) **eat**] four oranges.)'

Moreover, some other modals like *neng* 'can' do not allow PG-like constructions, either:

(24) *Mandarin neng 'can': ✗PG-like construction*

Zhangsan neng (**manman**) chi san ge pingguo.
 Zhangsan can slowly eat three CLF apple
 (*Lisi neng Δ si ge juzi.)
 Lisi can four CLF orange
 'Zhangsan can (**slowly**) **eat** three apples.
 (*Lisi can [(**slowly**) **eat**] four oranges.)'

(25) a. Zhangsan yinggai **chi** san wan. Lisi yinggai Δ wu wan.

Zhangsan should eat three bowl Lisi should five bowl
 'Zhangsan should **eat** three bowls (of rice). Lisi should [**eat**] five bowls (of rice).'

(Wei 2008: 82)

b. Zhangsan neng **chi** san wan. (*Lisi neng Δ wu wan.)

Zhangsan can eat three bowl Lisi can five bowl
 'Zhangsan can **eat** three bowls (of rice). (*Lisi can [**eat**] five bowls (of rice).)

(cf. Ye 2024)

	‘Should’/keyi ‘can’	Neng ‘can’	Control verb	Pre-V Asp
VPE	✓	✓	✓	✓
Move-R	✓	✓	✓	✗
PG-like construction	✓	✗	✗	✗

Table 1 Chinese VPE-licensing heads

3 Phonologically null pair-list copula

A phonologically null copula naturally captures the observations in the table. Modals like ‘should’ and *keyi* ‘can’ contrast with control verbs, preverbal aspects, and modals like *neng* ‘can’ in whether they can be immediately followed by a copula:

- (26) a. *‘Should’: ✓ Copula*
 Zhangsan yinggai shi chi san ge pingguo.
 Zhangsan should COP eat three CLF apple
 ‘Zhangsan should eat three apples.’
- b. *Neng ‘can’, control verb, or preverbal aspect: ✗ Copula*
 *Zhangsan neng/xiang/you shi chi san ge pingguo.
 Zhangsan can want PFV COP eat three CLF apple
 Intended: ‘Zhangsan can eat/wants to eat/ate three apples.’

As for the semantics of the copula, we suggest Li’s (2025) pair-list copula:

$$(27) \llbracket \text{shi}_{\text{pair-list}} \rrbracket^c = [\lambda y. \lambda x. f^c(x) = y] \quad (\text{Li 2025: 44})$$

This copula is originally proposed for its use in pair-list answers (cf. Dayal 2002, 2016):

- (28) Na ge laoshi jiao na men ke?
 which CLF teacher teach which CLF class
 ‘Which teacher teaches which class?’ (Li 2025: 2)
- a. Zhang laoshi jiao Yingwen. Li laoshi jiao shuxue.
 Zhang teacher teach English Li teacher teach math
 ‘Teacher Zhang teaches English. Teacher Li teaches Math.’
- b. Zhang laoshi shi Yingwen. Li laoshi shi shuxue.
 Zhang teacher COP English Li teacher COP math
 ‘Teacher Zhang teaches English. Teacher Li teaches Math.’ (Li 2025: 2)

4 PG typology

- The analysis proposed in sections 2 and 3 is in favor of the position that Chinese does not allow PG.

- This section aims to provide an account for why Chinese might lack PG, while it does allow Move-R and VPE.

4.1 Japanese PG

- Japanese is argued to allow PG, alongside verb raising out of the ellipsis site (Kim 1997, Funakoshi 2016, Tanaka & Hayashi 2018).
- Evidence includes the recoverability of VP adjuncts (29), similar to English VPE.

(29) *Japanese*

John-wa NYU-ni-wa **han-toshi ryūgaku** su-ru-ga,
 John-TOP NYU-at-TOP half-year study.abroad do-NPST-but
 MIT-ni-wa Δ shi-na-i.
 MIT-at-TOP do-NEG-NPST
 ‘John will **study abroad for half a year** at NYU,
 but he won’t [**study abroad for half a year**] at MIT.’ (Tanaka & Hayashi 2018: 5)

- We adopt Johnson’s (2008) view that Move-R in English PG is overt QR and attribute the lack of English-style PG in Chinese to its lack of overt QR (at least for nominals, cf. Lee 2022).
- We adopt Tanaka & Hayashi’s (2018) view that Japanese Move-R is focus movement (30) and discuss why Chinese disallows Japanese-style PG in the next subsection.

(30) *Derivation of Japanese PG*

[TP [FocP MIT-at-TOP₁ {VP t₁ half-year study.abroad t₂}] do₂-NEG-NPST]

4.2 FocP licensing parameter

The absence of Japanese-style PG in Chinese can be accounted for by Lee’s (2023) FocP licensing parameter (31), assuming that focus movement lands in a FocP that takes the VP to be elided as its complement.

(31) *FocP licensing parameter proposed in Lee 2023*

- | | |
|--|-----------------|
| a. A FocP is only licensed by a covert complement. | <i>Japanese</i> |
| b. A FocP is only licensed by an overt complement. | <i>Chinese</i> |

This can be implemented as a distinction in the feature specification of focus heads.

- Japanese Foc^o must bear [E], whereas Chinese Foc^o must not.
- Since Chinese Foc^o does not bear [E], it cannot elide its complement after Move-R.

- the (un)availability of focus movement; and
- whether Foc^0 bears [E].

Their interaction is illustrated in the table that follows, where empty cells indicate that the settings do not impact PG's availability.

Type (example)	I (English)	II (Japanese)	III (Chinese)	IV	V
VPE	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗
Move-R	✓overt QR	✓focus movement	✓focus movement	✗	
Foc^0 with [E]		✓	✗		
PG	✓	✓	✗	✗	✗

Table 2 PG parameters

5 Conclusion

Takeaways

- Chinese gapping-like and PG-like constructions are not derived by Move-R plus deletion but by an empty pair-list copula.
- Chinese lacks English-style PG because it disallows overt QR, and it lacks Japanese-style PG because its Foc^0 must not bear [E].

A Cantonese data

(36) Cantonese VPE

a. 'Should': OK

Zoengsaam jinggoi maanmaan sik saam go pinggwo.

Zoengsaam should slowly eat three CLF apple

Leisei dou jinggoi Δ.

Leisei also should

'Zoengsaam should **slowly eat three apples**.

Leisei should [**slowly eat three apples**], too.'

b. Control verb: Also OK

Zoengsaam soeng maanmaan sik saam go pinggwo.

Zoengsaam want slowly eat three CLF apple

Leisei dou soeng Δ.

Leisei also want

'Zoengsaam wants to **slowly eat three apples**.

Leisei wants to [**slowly eat three apples**], too.'

(37) *Cantonese PG-like construction*

a. *'Should': OK*

Zoengsaam jinggoi **sik** saam go pinggwo. Leisei jinggoi Δ sei go pinggwo.
Zoengsaam should eat three CLF apple Leisei should four CLF apple
'Zoengsaam should **eat** three apples. Leisei should [**eat**] four apples.'

b. *Control verb: **

Zoengsaam soeng **sik** saam go pinggwo. (*Leisei soeng Δ sei go pinggwo.)
Zoengsaam want eat three CLF apple Leisei want four CLF apple
'Zoengsaam wants to **eat** three apples. (*Leisei wants to [**eat**] four apples.)'

(38) *Cantonese copula*

a. *'Should': OK*

Zoengsaam jinggoi hai sik saam go pinggwo.
Zoengsaam should COP eat three CLF apple
'Zoengsaam should eat three apples.'

b. *Control verb: **

*Zoengsaam soeng hai sik saam go pinggwo.
Zoengsaam want COP eat three CLF apple
Intended: 'Zoengsaam wants to eat three apples.'

(39) *Cantonese RD*

a. *Focus without RD: OK*

Zinghai ngo maai-zo ni bun syu zaa3.
only 1SG buy-PFV this CLF book SFP
'Only I bought this book.'

b. *No focus in RD: OK*

Maai-zo ni bun syu zaa3 ngo.
buy-PFV this CLF book SFP 1SG
'I bought this book.'

c. *Focus in RD: **

*Maai-zo ni bun syu zaa3 zinghai ngo.
buy-PFV this CLF book SFP only 1SG
Intended: 'Only I bought this book.'

(Lee 2023: 467)

References

- Boone, Enrico. 2014. *The syntax and licensing of Gapping and Fragments*. Leiden: Leiden University dissertation.
- Broekhuis, Hans. 2018. The syntax of Dutch gapping. *Linguistics in the Netherlands* 35. 19–33. <https://doi.org/10.1075/avt.00002.bro>.

- Cao, Yu. 2014. *The syntax and semantics of gapping-like ellipsis in Chinese*. Hong Kong: City University of Hong Kong MA thesis.
- Coppock, Elizabeth. 2001. Gapping: In defense of deletion. *Chicago Linguistic Society (CLS)* 37(1). 133–148.
- Dayal, Veneeta. 2002. Single-pair versus multiple-pair answers: *Wh* -in-situ and scope. *Linguistic Inquiry* 33(3). 512–520. <https://doi.org/10.1162/ling.2002.33.3.512>.
- Dayal, Veneeta. 2016. *Questions*. New York: Oxford University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199281268.001.0001>.
- Depiante, Marcela. 2000. *The syntax of deep and surface anaphora: A study of null complement anaphora and stripping/bare argument ellipsis*. Storrs, CT: University of Connecticut dissertation.
- Funakoshi, Kenshi. 2016. Verb-stranding verb phrase ellipsis in Japanese. *Journal of East Asian Linguistics* 25(2). 113–142. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10831-016-9143-8>.
- Jayaseelan, Karattuparambil Achuthan. 1990. Incomplete VP Deletion and Gapping. *Linguistic Analysis* 20(1–2). 64–81.
- Johnson, Kyle. 1994. Bridging the gap. Ms., University of Massachusetts, Amherst.
- Johnson, Kyle. 2008. The view of QR from ellipsis. In Kyle Johnson (ed.), *Topics in Ellipsis*, 69–94. New York: Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511487033.004>.
- Johnson, Kyle. 2009. Gapping is not (VP-) ellipsis. *Linguistic Inquiry* 40(2). 289–328. <https://doi.org/10.1162/ling.2009.40.2.289>.
- Kim, Jeong-Seok. 1997. *Syntactic focus movement and ellipsis: A minimalist approach*. Storrs, CT: University of Connecticut dissertation.
- Lee, Tommy Tsz-Ming. 2022. *Towards the unity of movement: Implications from verb movement in Cantonese*. Los Angeles: University of Southern California dissertation. <https://doi.org/10.25549/usctheses-oUC111373667>.
- Lee, Tommy Tsz-Ming. 2023. *Last but not least: A comparative perspective on right dislocation in Alasha Mongolian*. *Journal of East Asian Linguistics* 32(4). 459–495. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10831-023-09266-6>.
- Lee, Tommy Tsz-Ming & Victor Junnan Pan. 2024. Licensing VP movement and ellipsis in Mandarin and Cantonese. *West Coast Conference on Formal Linguistics (WCCFL)* 40. 192–201.
- Levin, Nancy Sue. 1979. *Main-verb ellipsis in spoken English*. Columbus, OH: Ohio State University dissertation.
- Li, Yen-Hui Audrey. 2025. The syntax, semantics, and pragmatics of a peculiar copula. Paper presented at the 2025 International Conference on Formal Linguistics, Guangdong University of Foreign Studies, 8–9 November.
- Lin, Vivian I-Wen. 2002. *Coordination and sharing at the interfaces*. Cambridge, MA: Massachusetts Institute of Technology dissertation.
- Nakagawa, Natsuko, Yoshihiko Asao & Naonori Nagaya. 2008. Information structure and intonation of right-dislocation sentences in Japanese. *Kyoto University Linguistic Research* 27. 1–22. <https://doi.org/10.14989/73228>.

- Tanaka, Hideharu & Shintaro Hayashi. 2018. Pseudogapping in Japanese. *Japanese/Korean Linguistics* 25.
- Tang, Sze-Wing. 2001. The (non-)existence of gapping in Chinese and its implications for the theory of gapping. *Journal of East Asian Linguistics* 10(3). 201–224. <https://doi.org/10.1023/A:1011250802691>.
- Wei, Ting-Chi. 2008. Cong Ying Han duibi fenxi tan Hanyu kongque jieyou zhi leixing [Pattern of gapping in Mandarin Chinese]. *Hua Yuwen Jiaoxue Yanjiu [Journal of Chinese Language Teaching]* 5(1). 67–85.
- Ye, Kuang. 2024. Bu he luoji “shi” zi ju: Zhun kongque de shijiao [A pseudo-gapping approach to the illogical *shi* ‘be’ construction in Chinese]. *Shijie Hanyu Jiaoxue [Chinese Teaching in the World]* 38(3). 71–86. <https://doi.org/10.13724/j.cnki.ctiw.2024.03.007>.
- Yip, Ka-Fai. 2025. A unified biclausal approach to right dislocation in Chinese. *Journal of East Asian Linguistics* 34(4). 631–674. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10831-025-09307-2>.

Yuyang Liu
Department of Linguistics
Yale University
37 Hillhouse Ave
New Haven, CT 06511
yuyang.liu@yale.edu

Tommy Tsz-Ming Lee
Department of Linguistics and Translation
City University of Hong Kong
83 Tat Chee Ave
Hong Kong
tszmlee@cityu.edu.hk