Reconsideration on verb-echo answers in Chinese
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This paper reconsiders Simpson (2014, 2015) and Liu (2014) verb-raising analyses of verb echo answers to yes-no questions (hereafter, VEA) in Chinese, finding that their analyses ignore issues relating to the role of le2 in VEA, adverbial echo answer, and multiple verb-echo answer. This paper proposes a hybrid VEA analysis involving two derivations: (i) V-to-v movement, VP deletion, and pro subject and (ii) focus movement and IP/TP deletion. The former is based on Erlewine’s (2016) le2 analysis and V-to-v movement in Chinese (Huang 1991, 1994b, c, 1997a, b; Tang 1998, 2001) and the latter on Simpson’s focus sensitive analysis.

Holmberg (2001, 2016) claims that VEA is a reduced structure derived from a fully-fledged sentence by V-raising to C domain (SpecCP) and by deleting IP/TP (cf. Merchant 2004). Along this line, excluding the possibility of pro-form analysis (Huang 1984, 1987; Li 2014), Simpson (2014) argues that affirmative VEA in Chinese is also a reduced form of a regular sentence via V-to-C domain movement and deletion, much similar to VEA in Korean, but dissimilar to Vietnamese and Finnish in disallowing adverbial short answers. Liu (2014) follows Simpson’s trend but is characterized by V-to-C raising and by repairing the offensive traces via deletion when the verb is extracted out of vP. However, both analyses ignore some empirical issues.

First, Simpson (2014) and Liu (2014) both ignore the fact that the presence of le2 affects the grammaticality of VEA in (1) and (2). Simpson argues that the VEA in (3) is ineligible due to the intervention effect caused by the narrowly-focused adverb in the process of V-to-C domain (SpecCP) raising (Law 2006). However, we find that when le2 is attached, the questions inquire the truth value of whether the situation has changed; the VEA becomes legitimate in (2A) and (4A). The blocking effect cannot explain why (1A) is unacceptable.

Zhangsan read Q Intended: ‘Yes.’
‘Does Zhangsan read?’

(2) Q: Zhangsan nianshu le ma? A: nian le.
Zhangsan read LE Q Intended: ‘Yes.’
‘Has Zhangsan read?’

(3) Q: ni yanlide zebei ta ma? A: *zebei.
you severely scold him Q Intended: ‘Yes.’
‘Do you scold him severely?’

(4) Q: ni yanlide zebei ta le ma? A: zebei le.
you severely scold him LE Q Intended: ‘Yes.’
‘Have you scolded him severely?’

Second, both analyses haven’t considered the possibility of multiple verb-echo answers. Without le2, VEA is impossible in (5), but when le2 is attached, either single or multiple VEA is allowed.

(5) Q: ni kaishi xue fayu le ma? A: kaishi (xue) le.
you start learn French LE Q Intended: ‘Yes.’
‘Have you started to learn French?’

Third, Simpson (2014) does not recognize the legitimacy of adverbial echo answer in Chinese by arguing that [+Affirmative] at C cannot match adverbs. Simpson only mentions that the raising of the verb tiaowu ‘dance’ to C-domain fails due to the blocking of the narrowly-focused adverb changchang ‘often’ at LF. Yet we find that a narrowly-focused adverb can serve as an echo
answer in (6), setting the truth value of whether he often dances.
  Zhaengsan often dance Q dance/often
  ‘Does Zhaengsan often dance?’
  Intended: ‘Yes.’

Our proposal is that Chinese echo answers can be classified into two types: (i) V-to-v type and (ii) focus sensitive type. First, the grammatical difference between (1)/(3) and (2)/(4) lies in the presence/absence of le2. Given Erlewine (2016), le2 is a low sentential final particle (SFP) locating between TP and vP (cf. Shen 2004), heading a SFPP on the right, encoding a change of state or unexpected assertion (Soh 2009). We argue that the verb nian ‘read’ in (2A) undergoes V-to-v movement prior to VP ellipsis as in (7). Thanks to the V-to-v movement and VP deletion, the subject of the VEA is de facto a null pro, which can optionally be pronounced. Thus, a reduced structure [pro V le2] is derived. In (4), since le2 takes scope over the entire sentence, it can force the scope of the adverb yanlide to be limited within the verbal domain in (8). The V zhebei ‘scold’ raises to v, crossing the narrowly-focused adverb. VP deletion, licensed by v, is applied, giving rise to [pro V le2]. The pro can also be pronounced.

(7) A: [CP [IP pro [SFPP[VP nian, [zhebei]] le2]]. (ta nian le.)
  read: book LE he read LE
(8) A: [CP [IP pro [SFPP[VP zhebei, [VP yanlide, [zhebei]] le2]]] (wo zhebei le.)
  scold severely him LE I scold LE

Accordingly, the single or multiple VEA in (5), encoding the change of state, involves three steps: (i) V-to-v movement, (ii) matrix VP or embedded VP deletion and (iii) covert subject in (9).

(9) A: [CP [IP pro[SFPP[VP kaishi, [zhebei, [wo kaishi (xue) le2]]. (wo kaishi (xue) le2).
  begin learn French LE I start learn LE

Second, Simpson’s focus sensitive analysis is tenable in dealing with adverbial echo answer in (6), not encoding a change of state (le2). That is, the narrowly-focused adverbs can be raised to C-domain prior to IP/TP deletion, yielding an adverbial echo answer, similar to Vietnamese. The entire IP including subject is deleted, so changchang ‘often’ is a legitimate short answer, not *ta changchang ‘he often’ in (10). In contrast to (3), the focused adverb hen yanli ‘severely’ in (11) can be a short answer via being raised to SpecCP and IP/TP deletion. The phrasal adverbial with hen ‘very’ shows that it is XP, not X, that can A’-move to C-domain (SpecCP).

(10) A: [CP changchang, [IP Zhaengsan [taiowu]]].
(11) Q: ni hen yanli zhebei ta ma? A: hen yanli.
  very severe scold him Q very severe

Now the unacceptable (1A) can be clarified. The bare activity verb nian ‘read’ cannot raise to SpecCP to be focus sensitive type; lacking le2, it is not a change of state type, either. Yet Simpson (2014) notes that certain bare VEA are licit, e.g. Q: ni xi-yan ma? ‘Do you smoke?’ A: xi ‘Yes.’ In this case, the native speakers prefer a one-syllable bare verb. We assume there is a covert lower SFP head encoding habitual meaning; V-to-v raising is implemented prior to VP deletion. Contrastively, adjectives, denoting individual property and taking degree modifier hen ‘very’ or suffix –de, can be seen as a focus type, undergoing focus movement to SpecCP, e.g. Q: zhe duo hua hong-de ma? ‘Is this flower red?’ A: hong-de. ‘Red (Yes)’.