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Chinese dummy and not so dummy objects in typological perspective

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Abstract

According to several descriptions, in Chinese a group of verbs require the expression of an object even when they appear in unergative constructions. This semantically empty object is dubbed as *dummy object*. Interestingly, the same phenomenon is also observed in a few intransitive verbs (and in particular *zǒulù* "walk" and *pǎobù* "run"). In this paper I analyze dummy objects framing them in the broader issue of transitivity, with the purpose of identifying the characteristics of the verbs requiring them and the reasons why Chinese needs them. In doing so, I treat separately transitive and intransitive verbs, since they constitute rather different phenomena. In particular, the supposed dummy objects observed in motion verbs should not be considered dummy, and maybe neither should they be considered objects. A typological perspective allows recognizing that dummy objects are not a proper sub-class of verbs in an intra-linguistic perspective, but constitute another strategy performing the same function of deletion of an indefinite object.

Keywords: transitivity, Chinese, indefinite object deletion, word formation, motion verbs.

1. *Preliminaries*[1]

Several grammatical descriptions – in English and Italian (Dalsecco, 1973: 125; Abbiati, 1998: 31; Yip and Rimmington, 2004: 90; Ross and Ma, 2006: 78) – notice that Modern Standard Chinese shows a group of transitive verbs characterized by the necessity to be accompanied by a non-referential object even when they appear in unergative constructions. So, if in English and Italian – as in many other languages – we are allowed to say *I don't like to eat* ("Non mi piace mangiare"), in Chinese we are compelled to add to the verb a generic, semantically empty object:

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[1]   Abbreviations: AP: antipassive; CL: classifier; CS: change of state; DC: degree complement; DE: nominal modification (possessive, adjective, relative); INT: interrogative; PFV: perfective.

(1) *wǒ* *bù* ài   *chī* **(fàn)*
     1sg not like eat   rice[2]
     "I don't like to eat."
     (example from Cheng and Sybesma, 1998: 81)

Moreover and even more peculiarly, the phenomenon of insertion of an empty object seems to regard also a few verbs that in other languages are intransitive, like *walk* ("camminare") and *run* ("correre"): the first is translated in Chinese as *zǒulù* "walk (road)" and the second as *pǎobù* "run (step)".

The empty object is variously labeled as 'generic complement', 'default object' or 'apparent object' in operating grammars, while the more theoretical approaches refer to it as *dummy object*[3].

The phenomenon has been analyzed from different points of view (Cheng and Sybesma, 1998; Badan, 2013; Tieu, 2007). I would like to frame it in the more general issue of transitivity, which I reckon can help explaining some apparently peculiar behaviors and suggesting that the so-called phenomenon of dummy objects is not a special characteristic of Chinese, but the result of the attempt to map some lexical peculiarity of English and Italian to Chinese.

A broad perspective on transitivity will also call into questions issues of telicity, antipassivity, patterns of word formation and more general considerations on the category of object.

The paper is organized as follows: I will first introduce the phenomenon (§2), then analyze separately the two groups of transitive (§3) and 'intransitive' (§4) verbs that show it. I will finally draw some conclusions (§5).

2. *Verbs appearing with a dummy object*

By definition, a dummy object is an (often monosyllabic) object that needs to follow a monosyllabic verb if a true object (or another complement) is not present, but that does not appear if a true object (or another complement) is expressed. Semantically, the dummy object coincides with the

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[2]   The empty object is glossed as "rice" as a reflex of its original meaning, but it usually does not convey reference to rice itself. In fact, the form has undergone a partial desemantization and conveys in compounds a more generic meaning: *wǎn* "evening" + *fàn* "rice" > *wǎnfàn* "dinner"; *fàn* "rice" + *guǎn* "building" > *fànguǎn* "restaurant". A more specific word for "rice" – and a compound itself – is *mǐfàn*.

[3]   *Falso oggetto* in Italian.

supposed prototypical object of each verb: obviously, such prototypicity can be culturally biased, as clear from the example "eat (rice)". According to its definition, the extension of the phenomenon is rather limited. Verbs that need a dummy object are the following[4]:

(2) *chīfàn* "eat (rice)",
　　chànggē "sing (song)",
　　dúshū "study (book)",
　　hē dōngxī "drink (thing)",
　　huàhuà(r) "paint (picture)",
　　jiāoshū "teach (book)",
　　kànshū "read (book)",
　　pǎobù "run (step)",
　　shuōhuà "speak (speech)",
　　xiězì "write (character)",
　　zǒulù "walk (road)".

Since I am comparing Chinese – besides English – to Italian, reference to some lexical peculiarities of the verbs listed in (2) should be made. In Italian, the absence/presence of the object may also be related to the difference between *individual-level* and *stage-level* predications (Carlson, 1977). For example, when it appears without an object, *bere* may have the meaning of "being addicted to alcohol" (individual-level), besides that of "drinking something" (stage-level). Similarly, *cantare* may have the individual-level interpretation of "being a singer". Nonetheless, the possibility to appear without the object does not necessarily lead to an individual-level predication: as clearly shown by Ježek (2003), the disambiguation between individual-level and stage-level predication only depends on the context (see also Cennamo, 2011). In the present paper, I will consider the phenomenon of *indefinite object deletion* (cf. §3), that is the removal of the object to realize a unergative construction (*to allude to the event itself*, as in Cennamo, 2011), not related to the interpretation of the verb as an individual-level predication.

Going back to the Chinese data, it should first be noticed that in some of the previous analyses of the dummy object phenomenon, other verbs are

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[4]　The list includes, of all the forms described as dummy objects in the literature, those that properly fit the definition. Cf. the following for other forms that are sometimes wrongly described as dummy objects. Of course, the list cannot be considered exhaustive.

described as being part of the same group, like for example *bānjiā* "move (house), to move house", *kāichē* "open (vehicle), to drive", *liūbīng* "slide (ice), to ice-skate", *huáxué* "slip (snow), to ski", *shuìjiào* "sleep (sleep), to sleep". The structure of these verbs is indeed superficially comparable to that of the verbs listed in (2), consisting in a monosyllabic verb followed by a monosyllabic noun; nevertheless, they represent rather different phenomena. As mentioned, one of the defining characteristics of the verbs in (2) is that the dummy object cannot appear in a sentence if a real object does, as may be seen in (3):

(3) *wǒ*   měitiān   kàn   *(*shū)*   rìbào
     1sg   every.day   see   *book   newspaper
     "Every day I read (*book) the newspaper."

This happens because the dummy object syntactically behaves as a true object, filling the object slot. In other words, verb and dummy object, although tightly bound, syntactically behave as two independent words. From a semantic point of view, this means that the object gives no contribution to the verbal meaning, which is entirely stored in the verb and not in the verb-object sequence. Precisely, this is also the reason why the generic object is referred to as 'dummy': because it does not give any semantic contribution to the meaning of the verb-object phrase.

The same does not hold true for other verbs like, for example, *bānjiā* "move (house), to move house" or *liūbīng* "slide (ice), to ice-skate". If it appears without the 'object' *jiā* "house", the verb *bān* "to move" is not necessarily brought back to the meaning of "moving house": such sense is highly idiomatic of the entire verb-object unit. In fact, with a different object the same verb can get a completely different meaning: for example *bān dōngxī* (move thing) means "to move things", without any reference to real-estate relocation. In the same way, without the object *chē* "car", the verb *kāi* does not necessarily mean "to drive", but "to open", like for example in *kāimén* "open the door". Without the object *bīng* "ice", the verb *liū* "to slide" does not mean "to ice-skate", but simply "to slide", like in *liūjiāng* "slide (reins), to bolt".

In the case of *shuìjiào* "sleep (sleep), to sleep", the object cannot be considered dummy simply because it is the only one that the verb can govern: in other words, you cannot *shuì* "to sleep" anything else than *jiào* "sleep". *Jiào* is similar to a *cognate* object (Halliday, 1967; Jespersen, 1972; Jones, 1988; Lazard, 1994) in being the nominal correspondent of a semantically intran-

sitive verb, even if it appears more frequently – and in more unmarked contexts – than most cognate objects in other languages.

Examples like *bānjiā* "to move house", *shuìjiào* "to sleep" or *kāichē* "to drive" are part of the group of *líhécí* "separable words". *Líhécí* are 'compound' forms, typically formed by a monosyllabic verb and a bound nominal morpheme, characterized by the separability of the two components in sentences. Let us consider the following examples:

(4) a.   *tā*   *gāng*   *bān*   *le*   *jiā*
         3sg   just   move   PFV   home
         "She just moved house."

     b.   *shuì*   *ge*   *hǎo*   *jiào*
         sleep   CL   good   sleep
         "Sleep well."

     c.   *kāi*   *yī*   *ge*   *xiǎoshí*   *de*   *chē*
         open   one   CL   hour   DE   car
         "Drive one hour."

As may be seen in the examples, even if verb and object are separable, they *semantically* act like a compound: the meaning of the target word is the result of the contribution of both the verbal and the nominal part. For this reason, these objects cannot be considered dummy.

In the case of *shùijiào* "to sleep", as mentioned, the nominal part of the *líhécí* semantically qualifies as a cognate object, and in no way can it be compared to a true object liable to paradigmatic substitution. As a further proof of the fact that the verb *shuì* does not need any dummy object, it can be observed that it can easily appear is isolation:

(5) *měitiān*   *shuì*   *8 ge*   *xiǎoshí* *zhēnde*   *jiànkāng*   *ma?*
    every.day   sleep   8 CL   hour   really   healthy   INT
    "Is it really healthy to sleep 8 hours a day?"

In sum, *líhécí* "separable words" should not be confused with verbs requesting a dummy object because they have the semantics of compounds. Vice versa, dummy objects (cf. (2)) are true objects and stand in a paradigmatic relationship with other objects, by which they can be replaced without any influence on the verb meaning.

3. *The transitivity of "eat"*

Having identified the boundaries of the phenomenon, let me briefly examine the syntactic and semantic properties of the verbs which appear with a dummy object, excluding for a moment the two 'intransitives' *zǒulù* "walk" and *pǎobù* "run", which will be considered later. The verbs in (2) can appear:

–   with a true object (6),
–   with a degree complement[5] introduced by particle *de* DC and no object (7),
–   with a resultative complement[6] and no object (8),
–   with the dummy object (9), or
–   without any complement or object (10), getting a very specific reading.

(6)   *wǒ   xiǎng   chī   shuǐguǒ*
     1sg think   eat   fruit
     "I would like to eat fruit."

(7)   *(Bǎojiālìyà   rén)   wǎncān shí,   yībān   chī   de   bù   duō*
     (Bulgaria   person) dinner time, normally eat DC not   much
     "(Bulgarians) normally do not eat a lot for dinner."

(8)   *nǐ   chībǎo   le   ma?*
     2sg eat.full PFV INT?
     "Are you full?"

(9)   *wǒ   xǐhuan   chīfàn*
     1sg like   eat.rice
     "I like to eat."

(10) *wǒ   chī le*
     1sg eat PFV
     "I ate it."

The sentence in (10), where the verb appears without any complement, gets a *pro*-object reading: it is necessarily interpreted as referred to a specific

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[5]   *Degree complements* are a complement of the Chinese grammar. They add a specification about an adjective or verb; they immediately follow the modified element and they are introduced by particle *de* DC. Ex. *shuō* "to speak" > *shuō de hěn kuài* (to speak DC very fast) "to speak very fast".

[6]   Another complement of the Chinese grammar, so-called *resultative complements* describe the result of the action expressed by a verb; they consist typically of a verb which immediately follows the modified one. Ex. *kàn* "to look" > *kànjiàn* (to look to see) "to see".

object previously expressed or that can clearly inferred by the context, and it must accordingly be translated as "I ate *it*".

As for the other examples, it may be noted that, from a semantic point of view, the only instance of true transitivity is that exemplified in (6), characterized by the presence of a real object, while the presence of a dummy object (9) or of another complement (7-8) qualifies the verb as an unergative predicate.

Since the presence of the dummy object correlates with a change in transitivity, it is reasonable to suppose that the phenomenon may be analyzed as an alternation between *activity* e *active accomplishment*, following a pattern identified by Van Valin (cf. Van Valin and La Polla, 1997: 99; Van Valin, 2005: 44; see also Cennamo, 2003 for a development). Active accomplishments are defined as activity predicates rendered telic by a change of state. According to Van Valin, active accomplishments may involve verbs of motion or verbs of consumption and creation, leading to an alternation with activities: *He ate a plate of spaghetti in 10 minutes* is an active accomplishment, while *He ate spaghetti for 10 minutes* is an activity. *He walked to the park in 10 minutes* is an active accomplishment, while *He walked in the park for 10 minutes* is an activity.

In order to recognize this pattern in the alternation between true and dummy objects, aspectual features need to be taken into consideration: the verbs followed by true objects (true transitives) should appear in telic constructions, while the verbs followed by dummy objects should appear in atelic constructions. However, this prediction is not met: both the form *chīfàn* (with dummy object) and the verb accompanied by a true object can be atelic – as in (6) and (9) – or telic – as in the following examples, where two different structures for the expression of telic predicates are represented –:

(11) *wǒ   yòng   10 fēnzhōng   chīfàn*
    1sg   use   10 minute   eat.rice
    "I eat in ten minutes."

(12) *wǒ   yòng   10 fēnzhōng   chī   zǎofàn*
    1sg   use   10 minute   eat   breakfast
    "I eat breakfast in ten minutes."

(13) *wǒ   chī   10 fēnzhōng   de   fàn*
    1sg   eat   10 minute   DE   rice
    "I eat in ten minutes."

(14) *wǒ   chī   10   fēnzhōng   de   zǎocān*
     1sg eat   10   minute   DE   breakfast
     "I eat breakfast in ten minutes."

Examples (11) and (13) include the dummy object *fàn* "rice", while (12) and (14) include the true object "breakfast". The examples show that both the structure present in (11) and (12) and the one present in (13) and (14) allow for dummy and true objects with no distinctions.

Instead, the verb accompanied by a resultative complement (as in (8)) is always telic, while the verb followed by a degree complement (7) is always atelic. Therefore, it is clear that the expression of patterns of transitivity is not related to the presence or absence of the dummy object. As a matter of fact, the only feature that seems to distinguish the verbs that need a dummy object from other transitive verbs is that the former cannot appear without an object of some kind. However, is it true that other transitive verbs can appear without an object?

In normal language usage, fully transitive verbs do not usually appear without an object: see, for example, the following examples from English:

a.   * He is breaking.
b.   * He is cutting.
c.   * He is killing.

That some transitive verbs may also appear *without* any object stands as an exception in most languages. Interestingly, the phenomenon of *indefinite object deletion* typically regards a small subset of the verbs of a language, which includes the verbs of ingestion (Næss, 2007: 54). This particular behaviour of the verbs of ingestion is due to the fact that they are characterized by a peculiar kind of transitivity. In spite of being sometimes used to exemplify the prototype of transitivity, verbs like "to eat" and "to drink" lack one of the most important features of high transitivity: the unaffectedness of the subject (Hopper and Thompson, 1980: 252). The verbs of ingestion, and other transitives like "to learn", "to see", "to put on", and "to wear" (Haspelmath, 1994), do indeed affect the object, but have also a strong effect on the subject. In fact, it was further noticed that these verbs also admit resultative uses (Siller-Runggaldier, 2003). For these reasons, they may show grammatical phenomena related to their reduced transitivity, like, precisely, indefinite object deletion. All the transitive verbs listed in (2) are characterized by the

affectedness of the agent, and are therefore liable to indefinite object dele-
tion in English and Italian.

Under this point of view, the fact that Chinese does not show indefinite
object deletion would distinguish it from many languages which instead do,
but would also represent a deep internal coherence. In fact, Chinese makes
no exception in requesting the presence of the object in most transitive sen-
tences. For example, a highly transitive verb like *shā* "to kill" is not accept-
able without an object unless it gets a *pro*-object reading, exactly like any of
the verbs in (2) when they appear without their dummy object (cf. (10)):

(15) *tā   shā   le*
     3sg   kill   PFV
     "(S)he killed him/her." *"(S)he killed."

It should now be clear that the collection of verbs presented in (2) does
not constitute a proper sub-class of verbs in an intra-linguistic perspective, but
it only gets meaning when we compare Chinese to languages that show the
phenomenon of indefinite object deletion. For example, if in English the verb
paint was not allowed to appear without an object – like in *I am good at paint-*
ing – we would not notice that Ch. *huà* "paint" requests a dummy object, but
would interpret it as a compound formed with a cognate object (*huà(r)* "pic-
ture"). At least, the 'class of dummy objects' in Chinese is no more significant
than the class of the verbs accepting indefinite object deletion in English and
Italian, and can find no other definition than a semantic one. Verbs that need
a dummy object and verbs that allow indefinite object deletion are character-
ized by a reduced transitivity, ascribable to their strong effect on the subject.

Developing this last hint, and taking a totally different point of view,
the two apparently opposite phenomena of indefinite object deletion and
dummy objects can be joined into one single linguistic strategy. A recent
typological investigation on *antipassives* (Sansò, forthcoming) has recon-
sidered these constructions showing that they can be interpreted as a func-
tional category. In traditional analyses, antipassive is a diathesis value typi-
cal of ergative languages, consisting in a formally intransitive construction
(with only one argument) involving verbs that can also occur in transitive
constructions. In antipassive constructions, the patient can be expressed as
an oblique or suppressed. Crucially, antipassive constructions are about the
removal of a true object, which is the function performed by both indefinite
object deletion and dummy objects.

Among the different strategies for the realization of the antipassive, Sansò has identified morphemes that can be tracked back to generic/indefinite nouns filling the object slot. For example, in Bantawa, a Kiranti (Sino-Tibetan) language, the free marker *kʰa* is found in object position when the object is considered not relevant:

(16) *han   kʰa   mok-ŋa*
    now   AP   hit-1sg
    "Now I shall start hit/start hitting around."
    (Doornenbal, 2009: 225-226, quoted by Sansò, forthcoming)

The Bantawa marker *kʰa* also works as an indefinite pronoun, and can probably be traced back to an indefinite noun. In a way, such marker can be compared to the grammaticalization of a 'universal' dummy object, one that works with every verb: in functional perspective, this antipassive marker and dummy objects share the same function. Analogously, indefinite object deletion can be seen as an *unmarked* antipassive strategy. In this perspective, dummy objects and indefinite object deletion appear as two different strategies for the realization of the same linguistic task: the removal of the object of a transitive verb.

Finally, it is useful to observe – if only marginally – that the tendency of Chinese to widely request the expression of the objects may be related to the fact that these objects do not express all the features of transitivity obligatory in other languages. In fact, the expression of the category of definiteness is non-systematic on Chinese nouns, and a non-definite noun results in a non-individuated object, producing a construction characterized by a lower grade of transitivity, according to Hopper and Thompson (1980: 252).

4. *The transitivity of "walk"*

My analysis has so far excluded the two motion verbs *zǒulù* "walk" and *pǎobù* "run", typically included in the lists of dummy objects, because they represent a completely different phenomenon. If in the case of the verbs examined up to now the question was why couldn't they appear without any object, in the case of "walk" and "run" the puzzle is why can they take any object at all. Moreover, one may wonder what the possible 'true' objects of *zǒu* "walk" and *pǎo* "run" are.

In fact, motion verbs like "walk" and "run" are often realized as intransitives in languages because they supposedly involve only one participant. According to Hopper and Thompson (1980: 252), the presence of at least two participants is the first requirement of the transitive construction. According to De Lancey (1994: 61), the involvement of two participants is one of the most important features of prototypical transitivity because it corresponds to the separability of the phases of cause and effect in the action.

However, it is legitimate to suppose that motion verbs may also be conceptualized as events involving not only the "mover". In fact, a motion event can be described as a Figure or Trajector (the "mover") performing a dislocation through a Landmark (or Ground, or Locative), generally represented by a Source and/or a Goal (Talmy, 1985), which would result in the involvement of up to four participants. Accordingly, Source and Goal, and even the Locative – what Halliday (1967/68: 58) labelled as *Range* – may be considered to be part of the argument structure of the verb (cf. for example Nikitina, 2009). This is particularly evident in some motion verbs, for example En. *leave* and It. *raggiungere* "reach" where respectively the Source and the Goal are conceptualized not as adjuncts but as arguments – being necessary, and not optional, to the meaning of the verb –.

As it happens in the just mentioned examples, these Source and Goal arguments can easily be coded as direct object: cf. *leave the country* and *raggiungere casa* "reach home". The fact that something that does not represent a semantic Patient can be expressed as a direct object is observed in many languages of the world, because the morpho-syntactic structure used to represent prototypical actions, involving an Agent and a Patient, is often extended to less prototypical actions, or even to non-actions (Halliday, 1967: 40; Lazard, 2003: 13).

In general, as it is clear for English, the obligatory expression of a Source or of a Goal tends to be typical of *direction verbs* and *deictic verbs* more than *manner of motion verbs*, like "walk" or "run". However, whether motion concepts map to the same types of verbs across languages is still a debated question (Rissman, 2013).

It is also worth noting that, even in the case they have only one participant, in comparison to other intransitives motion verbs show some features of transitivity: they are actions and they are volitional. It is reasonable to imagine that these features legitimate the extension to motion verbs of a morpho-syntactic structure typical to actions: so, in English we are allowed to *walk the road* or *run a marathon*. In these cases the presence of an object

often, but not always, coincides with a shift to telicity of a normally atelic predicate, thus confirming the close connection between telicity and transitivity.

Similarly to the just mentioned examples from English, in Chinese it is normal for motion verbs to govern direct objects. This is true of the two general deictic verbs, *qù* "to go" and *lái* "to come", of the direction verbs, *chū* "to exit", *jìn* "to enter", *shàng* "to go up", *xià* "to go down", *huí* "to go back", *guò* "to cross", *qǐ* "to rise", and of many manner of motion verbs, like *pá* "to climb", *qí* "to ride", *táo* "to escape".

What kinds of argument are realized as direct object of these verbs? Motion verbs can sometimes govern Patients (as in *qí zìxíngchē* "ride a bike"), but as easily predictable usually the objects represent Goals or Sources, as in *lái Běijīng* "come to Beijing" or *táo jiā* "flee from home, flee home".

The transitivity of the motion verbs and the representation of Sources and Goals as direct objects may be a proof in favor of the hypothesis that in Chinese Sources or Goals can be part of the argument structure of motion verbs. However, against this claim it should be noticed that this kind of 'locative' objects do not share the whole of the grammatical behaviours of the transitive objects. Crucially, for instance, motion sentences cannot be passivized:

(17) *jīròu   chī   le*
     chicken   eat   PFV
     "The chicken was eaten."

(18) * *Běijīng   lái   le*
     Beijing   come   PFV
     *"Beijing was come."

Consistently, it may not be the case that Sources and Goals are represented as direct objects because they are part of the argument structure of the motion verbs, but because Chinese allows the presence of non-argumental nouns in transitive-like structures.

Let us consider, for instance, some of the 'true objects' that can be governed by the motion verbs which allegedly can govern dummy objects: *zǒu* "walk" and *pǎo* "run":

(19) *Zǒu bǐ* (pen) "write rapidly"
     Zǒu dào (road) "walk"

Zǒu diàn (electricity) "leak electricity"
Zǒu diào (tone) "be out-of-tune"
Zǒu fēng (wind) "leak a secret"
Zǒu mén (door) "enter by the door"
Zǒu huǒ (fire) "have a short circuit"
Zǒu qì (air) "release air"
Zǒu shǎi (colour) "fade"
Zǒu shuǐ (water) "leak water"
Zǒu tí (topic) "stray from the subject"
Zǒu wèi (flavour) "not right in flavour"
Zǒu xíng (shape) "get out of shape"

(20) *Pǎo chē* (vehicle) "work as a train conductor"
Pǎo cìliào (material) run to collect material"
Pǎo diàn (electricity) "leak electricity"
Pǎo jiānghú (rivers and lakes) "make a living as an itinerant artist"
Pǎo lóngtào (bit role) "play a bit role"
Pǎo mǎ (horse) "ride (fast) a horse"
Pǎo mǎlāsōng (marathon) "run a marathon"
Pǎo mǎtou (wharf) "travel for business"
Pǎo mǎimai (enterprise) "chase after business"
Pǎo shāngdiàn (shop) "run from one shop to another"

Many of the objects that may follow *zǒu* "walk" and *pǎo* "run" definitely do not represent Sources nor Goals. In most of the above mentioned cases, the combination of the motion verb with a noun leads to a non-compositional meaning, in which the semantic interpretation of the verb can only vaguely be derived from the original one. More than true [verb + object] phrases, these sequences are comparable to (metaphorical) multiword verbs or extended support verbs like En. *run a business*, where the noun is not analyzable as a Source or a Goal of the original motion verb. In an intra-linguistic perspective, such constructions are much closer to the *líhécí* "separable words" examined in §3, than to actual [verb + object] phrases.

As for the 'dummy objects' which supposedly appear in combination with *zǒu* "walk" and *pǎo* "run", *lù* "road" and *bù* "step", I would argue that they are not dummy at all.

As seen before, dummy objects should show two main features: they should be present whenever the true object is missing, and they should not give any semantic contribution to the verb meaning. Both these conditions are not met as far as *pǎobù* "run (step)" and *zǒulù* "walk (road)" are involved.

Firstly, *păo* can appear without any objects in a variety of contexts (cf. also Cheng and Sybesma, 1998):

(21) *wŏ   de   gŏu păo   le*
     1sg   DE   dog run   CS
     "My dog has run away."

(22) *bié   păo,   mànmàn   zŏu*
     NEG   run,   slowly   walk
     "Don't run, walk slowly."

(23) *wŏ   xiànzài mĕitiān   jiānchí păo   yī   ge   xiăoshí*
     1sg   now   every.day persist run   one   CL   hour
     "Now I persist in running one hour every day."

In the second place, the presence of the nominal element *bù* "step" confers to *păo* "run" the slightly specialized meaning of "running adopting an established posture" (definition from the *Xiandai hanyu cidian* "Dictionary of modern Chinese", my translation), which in the everyday language often coincides with "to jog":

(24) *mĕitiān   zăoshang păo yī   ge   xiăoshí de* bù   *kĕyĭ jiănféi   ma?*
     every.day   morning   run one   CL   hour   DE step can lose.weight INT
     "Jogging one hour every morning can let me lose weight?"

Păobù, more than being a 'generic' version of *păo*, seems to be a more specialized form, realizing a pure manner verb. *Păobù* can be admitted in a less broad variety of contexts than *păo* "run" alone, usually taking, for example, human subjects. If it can sometimes be acceptable when the subject is an animal (for example, there are many occurrences in the web of *lièbào păobù* "the cheetah runs"), it is excluded when the subject is – for example – a car, or another vehicle.

It should further be noticed that, as may be seen in (24), even without the object *bù*, *păo* "run" can appear in the meaning of "to jog, to run for sport". It is therefore clear that *păo* is the more generic verb, while the meaning of *păobù* can be considered to be included in it: as a consequence, *bù* cannot be in any sense considered as a dummy object.

Analogously, *zŏulù* does not seem to be a 'generic' version of *zŏu* "walk", but a more specialized way of walking. According to the *Xiandai hanyu cidian*, *zŏu* refers to "the alternate moving forward of the feet of a person or

animal", which can be extended to the proceeding of vehicles, boats, etc. In other senses, *zǒu* "walk" can express the emerging of a tendency, the actions of leaving, going away or dying, of maintaining relationships, of crossing (doors, for example), of showing leaks (of water or other substances), of changing or losing the original characteristics.

According to the same dictionary, *zǒulù*, which only accepts human subjects, indicates *zài dìshang zǒu*, that is a kind of *zǒu* made on the earth (*zài dìshang*). In common usage, *zǒu* proves to be more frequent than *zǒulù*, especially in the unaccusative meaning of "leaving, going away". For example, in the very small spoken corpus formed by the dialogues of the movie "Shower"[7], *zǒu* appears 23 times without *lù* (including one time in the resultative form *zǒubùdong* "can't walk") and only one time in the supposedly generic form with *lù*:

(25) *tāmen zǒu le   hěn yuán hěn yuán de lù*
    3sg.PL walk PFV very far   very far   DE road
    "They walked very, very far."
    (Shower)

It seems clear that *bù* and *lù* should not be considered as dummy objects: firstly because they give some semantic contribution to the verb (the semantic specification of "jogging" vs. a more generic "running" in the case of *pǎo*, and a specific, typically human way of "walking" vs. a more generic – not necessarily human and on foot – motion verb in the case of *zǒu*). Secondly and more importantly, these verbs can easily appear without any object, differently from the transitive verbs examined in §3.

5. *Conclusion*

The alleged phenomenon of dummy object insertion in Modern Standard Chinese is recurrent in grammatical descriptions and, accordingly, in Chinese language classes. However, questions arise when trying to investigate it with the purpose of framing it in more general theoretic settings. The first problem regards the boundaries of the phenomenon, which are frequently wrongly extended to include some compounds better described as

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[7]   *Xǐzǎo* "Shower", by Zhang Yang (1999).

líhécí "separable words". *Líhécí* are a type of word characterized by syntactic interruptability and semantic compositionality: even if they syntactically behave as phrases, they semantically behave as compounds. Thus, they are extremely different from regular [verb + object] phrases, be it the object true or dummy.

Another question regards the linguistic function of dummy objects constructions. In this respect, it was proven that the presence of a dummy object is not related to the expression of patterns of telicity, as Van Valin's analysis of the alternation between active accomplishments and activities may suggest. It was further suggested that the idea of verbs requiring a dummy object as a peculiarity of Chinese[8] is a misconception, since a typologically framed analysis proves that the phenomenon only derives from the comparison with languages characterized by the feature of indefinite object deletion, not necessarily more frequent (in this paper English and Italian were considered). In fact, the semantically transitive verbs that need a dummy object are those which, by virtue of a reduced transitivity, in some languages allow indefinite object deletion.

In an even broader typological perspective, dummy objects and indefinite object deletion appear as only two of the several possible strategies for removing the object of a transitive verb when it is deemed unnecessary: a phenomenon that can be functionally labeled as antipassive. The tendency of keeping a generic object instead of deleting it can be put in relationship with some non-prototypical features of Chinese objects linked to reduced transitivity, and namely indefiniteness and non-individuation.

It was shown that the semantically intransitive verbs that supposedly need a dummy object (namely "run" and "walk") constitute a rather different phenomenon. Firstly, they do not actually *need* any object. Secondly, the presence of the alleged dummy objects "step" and "road" is not completely 'dummy', but slightly changes the meaning of the verbs, thus qualifying as a process of semantic composition, which also applies to several different 'objects'. These [verb + 'object'] sequences are better analyzed as metaphorical multiword verbs or extended support verbs. In fact, in these cases the original motion meaning of the verb is often partially or totally lost and substituted by a metaphorical or extended meaning, in whose construction the 'object' plays a crucial role.

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[8]   And few other languages like Ewe (West-African) and Kobon (Indo-Pacific) (Badan, 2013).

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