Why pseudogapping does occur in some languages but does not in others*

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1 Introduction

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

(1) *English*

a. *Gapping*
John **ate** three apples, and Mary **[ate]** four oranges.

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

It is widely assumed that Chinese languages do not allow gapping or PG (Tang 2001):

(2) *Mandarin*

a. Zhangsan xihuan pingguo. (*Lisi Δ juzi.)
Zhangsan like apple Lisi orange
'Zhangsan likes apples. (*Lisi **[likes]** oranges.)' (Tang 2001: 1)

b. Zhangsan yinggai xihuan pingguo. (*Lisi yinggai Δ juzi.)
Zhangsan should like apple Lisi orange
'Zhangsan should like apples. (*Lisi should **[like]** oranges.)'

Later work, however, observes constructions resembling gapping and PG (Wei 2008):[1]

(3) *Mandarin*

a. *Gapping-like construction (GLC)*
Zhangsan **chi-le** san ge pingguo. Lisi Δ si ge (pingguo).
Zhangsan eat-PFV three CLF apple Lisi four CLF apple
'Zhangsan **ate** three apples. Lisi **[ate]** four (apples).' (M.-D. Li 1988: 97, adapted)

b. *PG-like construction (PLC)*
Zhangsan yinggai **chi** san ge pingguo. Lisi yinggai Δ si ge (pingguo).
Zhangsan should eat three CLF apple Lisi should four CLF apple
'Zhangsan should **eat** three apples. Lisi should **[eat]** four (apples).'

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

(4) *Cantonese*

a. *GLC*
Zoengsaam **sik-zo** saam go pinggwo. Leisei Δ sei go (pinggwo).
Zoengsaam eat-PFV three CLF apple Leisei four CLF apple
'Zoengsaam **ate** three apples. Leisei **[ate]** four (apples).'

b. *PLC*
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).'

We argue that Chinese GLCs/PLCs are not true gapping/PG and advance the views in (5).[2]

(5) *First part of the proposal*

a. Chinese GLC ≠ English gapping.
b. Chinese PLC ≠ English PG.
c. Chinese GLC = Chinese PLC = phonologically null copula.
d. Chinese does not allow a movement plus deletion derivation of gapping and PG.

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]$_1$ ~~[**eat** t$_1$]~~.

If the view in (5) 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 Foc^0.

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 copula

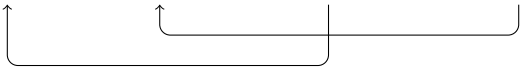
iv. PG typology

v. Conclusion

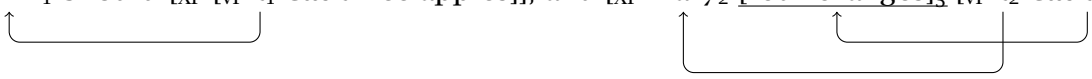
2 Move-R plus deletion vs. empty verb

While PG is typically understood to involve Move-R followed by VPE (cf. Agbayani & Zoerner 2004), 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 Mary$_1$ [four oranges]$_2$ ~~[$_{TP}$ t$_1$ **should eat** t$_2$]~~.



(10) *Small conjunct and Move-R plus deletion (e.g., Coppock 2001, Lin 2002)*
John$_1$ **should** [$_{XP}$ [$_{vP}$ t$_1$ **eat** three apples]], and [$_{XP}$ Mary$_2$ [four oranges]$_3$ ~~[$_{vP}$ t$_2$ **eat** t$_3$]~~.

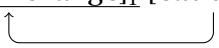


(11) *Small conjunct and ATB verb movement (e.g., Johnson 1994, 2009, Tang 2001)*
John$_1$ **should eat**$_2$ [$_{vP}$ t$_1$ t$_2$ three apples], and [$_{vP}$ Mary t$_2$ four oranges].

(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 four groups of data that distinguish between the following two kinds of analyses of Chinese GLCs and PLCs.

(13) a. *Move-R plus deletion*
Lisi (should) [four CLF orange]$_1$ ~~[eat t$_1$]~~. (cf. Cao 2014, Ye 2024)



b. *Empty verb*
Lisi (should) $\varnothing_V$ four CLF orange. (cf. Tang 2001)

2.1 Antecedent licensing

With rich contextual information, Chinese allows verb gaps without an overt antecedent:

(14) a. Zhangsan san ge pingguo. (Lisi Δ si ge.)
Zhangsan three CLF apple Lisi four CLF
'Zhangsan **[bought, ate, etc.]** three apples. (Lisi **[bought, ate, etc.]** four.)'
(Tang 2001: 205, adapted)

b. Zhangsan yinggai san ge pingguo. (Lisi yinggai Δ si ge.)
Zhangsan should three CLF apple Lisi should four CLF
'Zhangsan should **[buy, eat, etc.]** three apples. (Lisi should **[buy, eat, etc.]** four.)'

2.2 Adjunct exlusion

English VPE and PG omit verbal adjuncts:

(15) *English VPE*

a. Mary hasn't ***secretly*** **dated Bill**, but Sue has **[~~*secretly* dated Bill~~]**, #though not secretly. (Jayaseelan 1990: 12, adapted)

b. John should ***quietly*** **eat three apples**, and Mary should **[~~*quietly* eat three apples~~]**, too.

(16) *English PG*

a. Mary hasn't ***secretly*** **dated** Bill, but Sue has **[~~*secretly* dated~~]** John, #though not secretly.

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

Chinese VPE also omits verbal adjuncts, but Chinese PLC does not:

(17) *Mandarin VPE*
Zhangsan yinggai ***manman*** **chi san ge pingguo**,
Zhangsan should slowly eat three CLF apple
danshi Lisi$_i$ bu yinggai Δ. (Ta$_i$ yinggai kuai yi dian.)
but Lisi not should 3SG should fast one bit
'Zhangsan should ***slowly*** **eat three apples**,
but Lisi$_i$ shouldn't **[*slowly* eat three apples]**. (He$_i$ should eat faster.)'

(18) *Mandarin PLC*
Zhangsan yinggai ***manman*** chi san ge pingguo,
Zhangsan should slowly eat three CLF apple
danshi Lisi$_i$ bu yinggai Δ si ge. (#Ta$_i$ yinggai kuai yi dian.)
but Lisi not should four CLF 3SG should fast one bit
'Zhangsan should ***slowly*** **eat** three apples,
but Lisi$_i$ should not **[**(*__slowly__**) eat]** four. (#He$_i$ should eat faster.)'

2.3 Resultative complements

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.'

Yet, resultative complements cannot move to a preverbal position:

(20) *Zhangsan [hen haokan]$_1$ (keyi) tiao-de t_1.
Zhangsan very beautiful can dance-RES
Intended: 'Zhangsan dances/can dance very beautifully.'

2.4 PLC-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).

(22) a. *Mandarin preverbal aspect: ✗Move-R*
*Zhangsan you [san ge pingguo]$_1$ manman chi t_1.
Zhangsan PFV three CLF apple slowly eat
Intended: 'Zhangsan is slowly eating three apples.'

b. *Mandarin control verb: ✓Move-R*
Zhangsan xiang [san ge pingguo]$_1$ manman chi t_1.
Zhangsan want three CLF apple slowly eat
'Zhangsan wants to slowly eat three apples.'

One might predict control verbs to allow PLC, but not preverbal aspects. This is born out for preverbal aspects, but not for control verbs, which turn out to disallow PLC:

(23) *Mandarin control verb: ✗PLC*
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 PLC, either:

(24) *Mandarin* neng *'can': ✗PLC*
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).'
(Ye 2024: 331)

	'Should'/*keyi* 'can'	*Neng* 'can'	Control verb	Pre-V Asp
VPE	✓	✓	✓	✓
Move-R	✓	✓	✓	✗
PLC	✓	✗	✗	✗

Table 1 Chinese VPE-licensing heads

3 Phonologically null copula

A phonologically null copula naturally captures the observations summarized in the table.

3.1 Modals vs. control verbs

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'/*keyi *'can': ✓Copula*
Zhangsan yinggai/keyi shi (chi) san ge pingguo.
Zhangsan should can 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.'

We suggest a connection between our phonologically null copula and Y.-H. A. Li's (2025) pair-list copula, originally proposed for its use in pair-list answers (cf. Dayal 2002, 2016):

(27) Na ge laoshi jiao na men ke?
which CLF teacher teach which CLF class
'Which teacher teaches which class?' (Y.-H. A. 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.' (Y.-H. A. Li 2025: 2)

3.2 Further prediction

Our account correctly predicts that a Chinese special 'how' question, which licenses the copula, also licenses PLC, even with a non-PLC-licensing head (Ka-Fai Yip, pers. comm.):

(28) (Lian) Zhangsan (dou) neng chi si ge pingguo,
even Zhangsan all can eat four CLF apple
Lisi zenme bu neng (shi) (chi) san ge (pingguo)?
Lisi how not can COP eat three CLF apple
'(Even) Zhangsan can eat four apples, how can Lisi not eat three (apples)?'

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-TOP$_1$ [$_{VP}$ ~~t$_1$ half-year study.abroad t$_2$~~]] do$_2$-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. *Japanese*
b. A FocP is only licensed by an overt complement. *Chinese*

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

- Japanese Foc^0 must bear [E], whereas Chinese Foc^0 must not.
- Since Chinese Foc^0 does not bear [E], it cannot elide its complement after Move-R.

(32) *Chinese Foc^0 complement unelidable ⇝ ✗PG*
*want [$_{FocP}$ [this cup milk]$_1$ ~~[$_{VP}$ slowly drink t$_1$]~~]

- This distinction in Foc^0's feature specification is independently motivated by the observation that right dislocation (RD) of focused constituents is allowed in Japanese (33) but not in Chinese (34).
- We can treat RD of focused constituents as involving movement of the dislocated element to FocP followed by ellipsis in the second conjunct (35) under a biclausal analysis à la Yip 2025 a.o.

(33) *Japanese*
Kaet-te ki-ta yo inu-dake-wa.
return-and come-PST SFP dog-only-TOP
'Only the dog came back.' (Nakagawa, Asao & Nagaya 2008: 5)

(34) *Chinese*

a. *Focus without RD: OK*
Zhiyou wo mai-le zhe ben shu la.
only 1SG buy-PFV this CLF book SFP
'Only I bought this book.'

b. *No focus in RD: OK*
Mai-le zhe ben shu la wo.
buy-PFV this CLF book SFP 1SG
'I bought this book.'

c. *Focus in RD: **
*Mai-le zhe ben shu la zhiyou wo.
buy-PFV this CLF book SFP only 1SG
Intended: 'Only I bought this book.' (Lee 2023: 467, translated into Mandarin)

(35) *Chinese Foc^0 complement unelidable ⇝ ✗focus in RD*
*[$_{TP}$ ~~[only 1SG]~~ buy-PFV this CLF book SFP] [$_{FocP}$ [only 1SG]$_1$ ~~[$_{TP}$ t$_1$ buy-PFV this CLF book SFP]~~]

4.3 Full proposal

We argue that the (un)availability of PG in a language results from the interaction of multiple syntactic factors, including:

- the (un)availability of VPE;
- the (un)availability of overt QR;

- the (un)availability of focus movement; and
- whether Foc^{o} 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^{o} with [E]		✓	✗		
PG	✓	✓	✗	✗	✗

Table 2 PG parameters

5 Conclusion

Takeaway messages

- Chinese GLCs and PLCs are not derived by Move-R plus deletion but by a phonologically null copula.
- Chinese lacks English-style PG because it disallows overt QR, and it lacks Japanese-style PG because its Foc^{o} 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 PLC*

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 postverbal 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)

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