

## Covert category change in isolating languages: the case of modern Chinese\*

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### Introduction

In Zhu (1985), Chinese is characterized as a language in which there is no correspondence between grammatical categories and grammatical functions (GC-GF correspondence hereafter). In Chinese, according to Zhu, the subject (or the object) does not have to be a NP or the predicate a VP. He uses the following examples to show that in Chinese a subject can be a VP and a predicate can be a NP.

- (1) “VP” subject  
 kǎi mótuō róngyì.  
 operate moped easy  
 ‘Operat(ing) mopeds is easy.’
- (2) “NP” predicate  
 zhègè rén huáng tóufa.  
 this person blond hair  
 ‘This person (is) blond-haired.’

We may speculate that there is an invisible derivational morpheme in Chinese that deverbalizes the subject “VP” in (1) and verbalizes the predicate “NP” in (2). However, if the GC-GF correspondence is not a language universal, as is suggested by Zhu’s claim that there is no such correspondence in Chinese, any GC would be able to undertake any GF. Then why does a phrase need to undergo category conversion before joining others to form a sentence?

In section 1, I will show that the verb in a subject “VP” is nonfinite, although it takes the same form a finite verb does. In Chinese the distinction between finite and nonfinite verbs is syntactic rather than morphological. A finite verb and its complement (including its object, predicative, and complement) have a special head-final word order under a certain semantic condition. In contrast, a nonfinite verb and its complement have only the normal head-initial word order regardless of any