

## *The syntactic structure analysis of the phrase "blow his horn"*

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**Abstract:** The syntactic structure exemplified by phrases such as "blow his horn" is a common phenomenon in everyday Modern Chinese discourse. This study, focusing on such structures, employs Cuervo's (2003) analytical framework of the APPL theory to delve into their syntactic properties. Moreover, it thoroughly delineates the semantic attributes, structural genesis, and the relationship between the VP and "Him" within this category. By introducing the hypothesis of "APPL semantic light verbs," it conjectures successfully, thereby explaining why structures like "play a joke on him" share the feature of [EXPERIENCE] expression. Findings suggest a consistent underlying generation pattern for the "blow his horn" structures, with variations in their manifestation attributable to differences in their generation and spelling-out mechanisms. This uniform interpretive capability underscores the systematic and holistic explanatory power of the "blow his horn" structures. To comprehensively depict such characteristics, structural comparisons are conducted to corroborate linguistic phenomena, elucidate structural conundrums, and showcase the superiority of the APPL semantic light verb hypothesis, thereby extending the applicability of the APPL analytical framework to a broader range of Chinese structures.

In contemporary Mandarin Chinese, structures akin to "blow his horn" are commonplace in everyday discourse. While superficially comprised of a verb, "him", and a noun, their particularity lies in the optional presence of a numeral preceding the noun. This distinctive feature grants flexibility; the numeral may either appear or be omitted. Illustratively:

- a. to cause him trouble
- b. to offer him a favor for sale
- c. to take three dollars from him
- d. to deceive him out of five hundred dollars
- e. blow his horn
- f. to spit a mouthful of saliva at him
- g. to ask him for ten yuan in change

In our analysis, we opt to congregate such structures, which not only exhibit formal similarities but also share close semantic ties. Within these constructions, the semantic attenuation of "him" is palpable, engendering two plausible interpretations. One interpretation suggests that "him" undergoes activities such as "blowing the horn or "causing trouble". Remarkably, the presence or absence of a numeral preceding the noun in these constructions does not affect their grammatical

validity. Within the framework of Cuervo's (2003) APPL analysis, this paper delves into the syntactic and semantic attributes, as well as the generative intricacies of structures akin to "blow his horn", striving to elucidate various linguistic phenomena <sup>[1]</sup>.

## 1. Theoretical Framework

Cuervo (2003) employed sentences containing dative nouns as primary linguistic data in Spanish. Building upon previous scholarship, Cuervo further investigated the APPL analysis and its application. The Cuervo APPL analysis method integrates the strengths and essences of various analytical approaches, studying ditransitive structures in Spanish. Additionally, Cuervo proposed the AFF-APPL hypothesis <sup>[2]</sup>, elucidating three types of APPL (Low-APPL, AFF-APPL, High-APPL) and their interpretations. Low-APPL categorizes into "Recipient," "Source," and "Possessor," represented by "To," "From," and "At," respectively. High-APPL delineates "Experiencer" and "Benef," signifying the relationship between the APPL head and vP. AFF-APPL expresses the relationship between two events, with several verbs provided as examples. Given the diversity of Spanish forms, Cuervo (2003) emphasized the significance of indirect object cliticization in comprehending Spanish ditransitive structures. By focusing on Spanish cliticization, Cuervo employed the APPL analysis as theoretical support, delving into the interactive relationships between clitic forms within ditransitive structures. Concurrently, Cuervo embraced insights from contemporary linguistic research on the syntax-semantics interface (Hale & Keyser, 1993; Borer, 1994; Marantz, 1997; Travis, 2000), developing her own theoretical framework. In summary, the theory posits three types of central heads related to arguments: introducing event light verbs (little v) representing actions, changes, and states (vDO, vGO, and vBE), introducing external arguments (Voice and various APPL), and expressing lexical roots. Each little v can either constitute a single event independently or combine with another to form a compound event, as illustrated in Table 1:

Table 1: Classification Table of Light Verb Compound Combinations

Possible combinations	Types of complex events	Examples
vDO+vDO	CAUSATIVES	make wash,make laugh
vDO+vGO	CAUSATIVES	make grow,make fall
vDO+vBE	CAUSATIVES	break,burn,close
vDO+vBE	INCHOATIVES	INTR.break,burn,close

The Cuervo APPL analysis method presents distinct advantages in understanding the Chinese language, conducting English-Chinese comparisons, and uncovering linguistic phenomena. Building upon this framework, this paper undertakes a syntactic and semantic analysis of structures akin to "blow his horn" in Chinese. Grounded in the Cuervo APPL analysis, it delves into the unified mechanisms underlying these structures and elucidates their simplicity and uniformity <sup>[3]</sup>.

## 2. Generation of Structures like "blow his horn"

### 2.1 Analysis of Structures like "blow his horn"

In example (1), within structures resembling "blow his horn", the semantic attenuation of "him" is palpable. Furthermore, these structures harbor dual potential interpretations. One interpretation suggests that "him" is engaged in activities such as "blowing the horn" or "causing trouble". It becomes imperative to reanalyze such Chinese structures employing the APPL applicative analysis method. A representative structure is exemplified as follows in Figure(1):

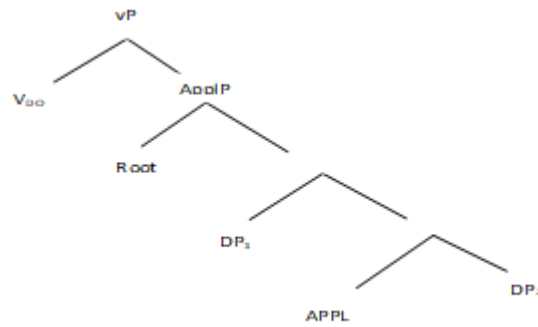


Figure 1: We toot his horn.

We dissect structures akin to "blow his horn" into formats exemplified as in Figure(2). Subsequently, we shall expound upon syntactic and semantic attributes surrounding two main facets: the non-obligatory nature of DP2 numeral nouns and the relationship between VP<sup>2</sup> and "Ta" ("him").

Let's first examine the naked noun phrase constraint revised (2):

(2)The Naked Noun Phrase Constraint Revised:

An unmodified common noun cannot be the subject of a predicate under conditions of normal stress and intonation.

(Excerpted from Cuervo, 2003)

As depicted in (2),"a horn" does not occupy the position of an internal subject but rather that of a complement. According to the "Subject Constraint Principle," this position can be either a DP or an NP. By employing the "Subject Constraint Principle" in this manner, we can account for the linguistic phenomenon whereby the numeral in "horn" is non-obligatory in structures like example (1) "blow his horn". This is reformulated as example(3):

- |   |                       |
|---|-----------------------|
| (3) a. to cause him trouble                   | to trouble him        |
| b. to sell him a favor                        | to sell him favor     |
| c. to take three dollars from him             | to take his money     |
| d. to deceive him out of five hundred dollars | to deceive him money  |
| e. blow his horn                              | to blow his horn      |
| f. to spit a mouthful of saliva at him        | to spit saliva at him |
| g. to ask him for ten yuan in change          | to ask him for change |

Taking (4g) as an example, we can say "we ask him for change", "we asked him for change, or express it as "we asked him for ten yuan in change". This variability arises from "change" serving as a complement in the structure, thus allowing for its appearance in either NP or DP form without affecting the legitimacy of the structure's expression.

## 2.2 Relationship between VP and "him"

Previously, we have discussed that structures like "blow his horn" involve an APPL component, which serves as a semantic light verb expressing a certain meaning. Here, we tentatively refer to it as an "[EXPERIENCE]" sense <sup>[4]</sup>. Building upon this notion, we naturally proceed with the following hypothesis as in (4):

(4) Hypothesis of the "[EXPERIENCE]" Light Verb

V<sub>EXPERIENCE</sub> is a semantic/lexical light verb that selects DP<sub>2</sub> as its complement and permits an APPL argument. In the Spec-APPLP position, it allows for an "experiencer" (EXPERIENCER) DP<sub>1</sub> argument, followed by the selection of VP as its complement, expressing that the "experiencer" undergoes an [EXPERIENCE] of a particular VP event. In other words, the "experiencer" as an

individual experiences an [EXPERIENCE] of a certain event or activity.

Thus, structures like "blow his horn" can be represented as in Figure (2):

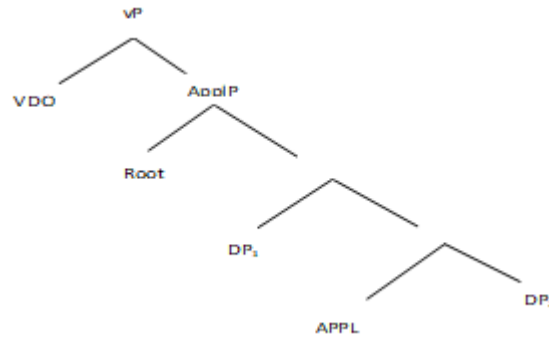


Figure 2: Blow his horn

In the Spec-APPL position, an argument role for "him" is allowed as the APPL argument, concurrently selecting a VP expressing an event as its complement. Within the structure, the VP event represents an [EXPERIENCE] of "him", who serves as the "experiencer" (EXPERIENCER). Crucially, "him" is the entity upon which the event occurs: if the event happens to "X," then "X" is what we refer to as the "experiencer" (EXPERIENCER). Furthermore, the "him" in the structure can be replaced by "Zhang San", as exemplified in Figure (3):

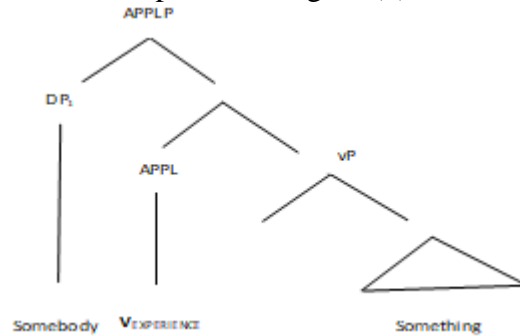


Figure 3: Somebody Vexperience something

Through our analysis of structures like "blow his horn", we have proposed a conjecture regarding the APPL expressing the "[EXPERIENCE]" sense and analyzed the relationship between VP and "him" as the "[EXPERIENCE]" experiencer. We have provided a detailed exposition of the syntactic and semantic attributes of the APPL component within the relevant structures of "blow his horn". In essence, the APPL component in structures such as "blow his horn" functions as a semantic light verb expressing the "[EXPERIENCE]" sense. Positioned in the Spec-APPLP position, it permits an argument role for the "EXPERIENCER" and selects a VP expressing an event as its complement. Next, we will employ the "APPL semantic light verb hypothesis" to elucidate and analyze related structures, such as "play a joke on him".

### 2.3 Syntactic Identity of "blow his horn" and "play a joke on him"

Through our analysis of structures like "blow his horn", we have posited the hypothesis of APPL expressing the "[EXPERIENCE]" sense. This section primarily focuses on employing APPL [EXPERIENCE] expression to elucidate the structural form represented by "play a joke on him". From the perspective of these structures' manifestation, they both consist of a verb followed by "Ta" ("him") and a noun. However, the peculiarity lies in the fact that the verb preceding these structures and the noun following them can either be separated or form a cohesive phrase <sup>[5]</sup>, as illustrated in

example(5):

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| a. play a joke on him                     | b. to knock three times on his bamboo pole |
| c. to keep him in suspense with a silence | d. to stab him once                        |

As demonstrated in (5), the verbs therein can denote an action or event experience by "him", such as "to play a joke on," "to knock on the bamboo pole," "to keep in suspense with a silence," "to stab once," and so forth. Moreover, these structures do not inherently denote possessive relationships between the two noun phrases, nor do they imply a transfer of possessive relationships between the two noun phrases. Now, let's analyze structures like "play a joke on him" in Chinese using the APPL analysis method, as depicted in Figure (4):

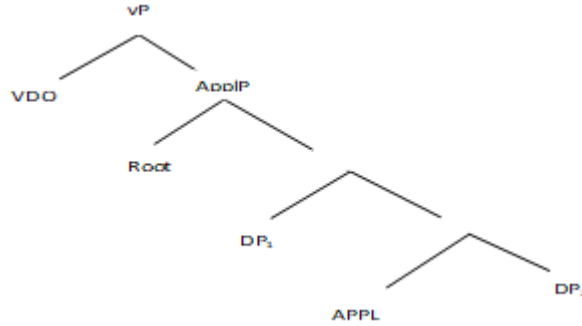


Figure 4: (We) played a joke on him.

(4) The APPL component functions as a semantic light verb expressing the "[EXPERIENCE]" sense. Positioned in the Spec-APPL position, it permits an argument role for "him" as the APPL argument, concurrently selecting a VP expressing an event as its complement. Within the structure, the VP event represents an [EXPERIENCE] of "him", who serves as the "experiencer" (EXPERIENCER). "Him" represents a case of expressing a real situation; as the "experiencer" (EXPERIENCER), "him" can also be replaced by "Zhang San", as exemplified in Figure (5):

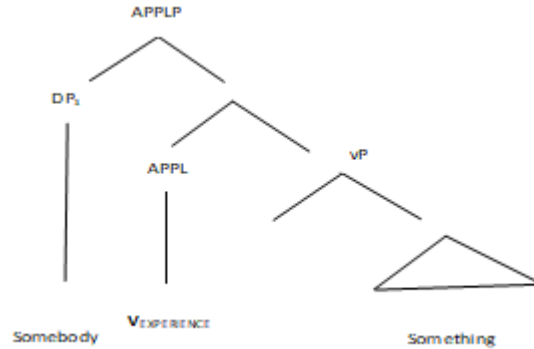


Figure 5: Somebody Vexperience something

Within this context, the semantic light verb  $V_{\text{EXPERIENCE}}$  selects a VP expressing an event as its complement, while simultaneously permitting an argument for the "experiencer" (EXPERIENCER). Thus, the "experiencer" (EXPERIENCER) light verb hypothesis unifies the structure and semantics of such sentences, offering robust explanatory power. Moreover, it distinctly articulates the unified relationship between the experiencer DP and the event's VP. Of particular note is that the semantic light verb  $V_{\text{EXPERIENCE}}$  in (5) succinctly encapsulates the semantic relationship between the DP at the Spec-APPLP position and the complement VP, signifying that the DP undergoes the action or event expressed by the VP, typically in a passive, affected, and reluctant manner.

Through the aforementioned analysis, we propose a unified analytical framework for handling structures like "blow his horn" and "play a joke on him" [6]. Subsequently, we delve into the

syntactic and semantic attributes of these constructions to validate the APPL semantic light verb hypothesis and ascertain its practical implications.

### 3. Conclusion

Drawing on Cuervo's APPL analysis method as both theoretical framework and analytical tool, this paper endeavors to provide a unified analysis of Chinese structures such as "blow his horn" and their related counterparts <sup>[7]</sup>. Commencing from familiar Chinese expressions like "play a joke on him", we take these constructions as our focal point, employing the proposed APPL semantic light verb hypothesis to explore their syntactic structures and elucidate their semantic properties in detail. To thoroughly depict these structures, we also draw comparisons among them, thereby corroborating certain linguistic phenomena, elucidating structural conundrums, showcasing the superiority of the APPL semantic light verb hypothesis, and reflecting our research philosophy of deducing from and validating within structures <sup>[8]</sup>.

The research presented herein aims to unify structures, experiment with them from diverse perspectives, and extrapolate to related structures, offering consistent analyses of such structures while emphasizing individuality <sup>[9]</sup>. This approach aligns with the latest theories of the Minimalist Program, better reflecting the concise and perspicuous foundational principles pursued by generative grammar.

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