Non-canonical Argument Realization

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Example (1a) shows the canonical order of Mandarin and (1b) an apparent inversion. The verbs are identical. This phenomenon is characterized as non-canonical argument realization (Hale&Keyser 2002). Although this apparent mismatch of thematic slots and syntactic positions is a well studied lexical semantics topic (Her 2009; a.o.), it has rarely been analyzed syntactically. It's been claimed that this mismatch is derived via subject suppression along with object promotion to a typical agent slot (Levin 1993).

(1)   a. Ba-ge-keren chi san-zhuo-cai.
            8-Cl-guests eat 3-Cl-dish
            'Eight guests eat three tables of dishes'

        b. San-zhuo-cai chi ba-ge-keren.
            3-Cl-dish   eat 8-Cl-guests
            'Three tables of dishes feed eight guests'   (*the alternation construction*)

The mismatch of syntax and semantics raises a UTAH problem (Baker 1988). There is a structural asymmetry between the two arguments. The object and the subject are not equivalently accessible to the Spec,TP position. A simple raising of the object would violate Relativized Minimality (RM, Rizzi 1990). I wish to resolve this apparent empirical and theoretical paradox by accounting for the structural derivation of these alternation constructions. Specifically two questions are asked: one regarding argument structure—how could the external argument be structured into vP such that UTAH is respected? one concerning word order—how could the internal argument get realized at Spec,TP such that RM problem is circumvented? I attempt to connect this analysis with other syntax-semantics mismatch phenomenon such as the middle voice clause. This study consists of three claims: (a) the surface subject is generated in a low position; (b) agent is absent in the syntax—what appears to be an agent is in fact a possessor-goal; (c) non-agentivity is independent of inversion: the goal-phrase is structured into vP independently of the Voice[middle]. Crucial evidence supporting my claims are laid out respectively.