

# ‘Again’ Skipping in Mandarin Chinese: A Syntactic Approach

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## 1. Introduction

An important issue in the theory of the syntax-semantics interface is the crosslinguistic ambiguity of ‘again’ between a repetitive reading and a restitutive reading. The repetitive reading means that the event that happened had happened before, whereas the restitutive reading means that the resulting state of the event that happened had held before. (2) is an example in English. It is a felicitous utterance in a repetitive context (1a), in which the presuppositional content of ‘again’ is an event of Xiaoming closing the door, and in a restitutive context (1b), in which the presuppositional content of ‘again’ is the state of the door being closed.

- (1) a. *Repetitive context*  
One day, the door to Xiaoming’s room was open, and he closed it. After that, his mom opened the door. Then, Xiaoming again closed the door.
- b. *Restitutive context*  
The door to Xiaoming’s room was installed closed, and his mom opened it. Then, Xiaoming closed the door again.
- (2) Xiaoming closed the door again. [✓(1a), ✓(1b)]

An early reference in which this issue has been discussed is McCawley 1968.

To the question of how this ambiguity of ‘again’ is derived, there are two approaches. The lexical account (among others, Kamp & Rossdeutscher 1994, Jäger & Blutner 2000, Fabricius-Hansen 2001, Pedersen 2015) argues that the ambiguity of ‘again’ stems from the existence of more than one homophonous ‘again’. The structural account (among others, Morgan 1969, Dowty 1979, von Stechow 1995, 1996, Beck & Johnson 2004, Beck 2005, Bale 2005, 2007), on the other hand, argues that there is only one ‘again’, and its ambiguity depends on the constituent it is attached to. To unfold the structural account, two possible LF verbal structures of (2) are laid out in (3).

- (3) a. *Repetitive LF: vP attachment*  
[<sub>VP</sub>[<sub>VP</sub> Xiaoming CAUSE [<sub>VP</sub> BECOME [<sub>AP</sub> close the door]]] again]
- b. *Restitutive LF: AP attachment*  
[<sub>VP</sub> Xiaoming CAUSE [<sub>VP</sub> BECOME [<sub>AP</sub>[<sub>AP</sub> close the door] again]]]

The structural account assumes that verbs like ‘close’ have two inner layers—namely, a VP headed by a covert BECOME head and an embedded AP headed by the adjectival root of the verb. In (3a), *again* is

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attached to vP, which contains information of an event of Xiaoming causing the door to become closed, and thus yields a repetitive reading. In (3b), *again* is attached to AP, which only contains information of the state of the door being closed, and thus yields a restitutive reading.

Assuming that verbs surface in the  $v^0$  position and that adverbs do not move and are interpreted in their base-generated position, the structural account predicts that in a head-initial language, since preverbal ‘again’ can only be attached to a constituent that is no smaller than a vP, it can only yield a repetitive reading. This prediction is true in English (Beck & Johnson 2004, Bale 2007): (4) is felicitous only in a repetitive context but not in a restitutive one.

- (4) Xiaoming again [<sub>vP</sub> closed the door]. [✓(1a), #(1b)]

A further prediction is that if ‘again’ precedes an embedding verb on the surface, since it must be attached to a phrase that is no smaller than the matrix vP, its only possible reading should be the one in which the presuppositional content of ‘again’ is introduced by the matrix verb. Indeed, (6) is felicitous only in a context in which the presuppositional content of ‘again’ is an event of Xiaoming wanting to close the door (5a). It is infelicitous when the presuppositional content of ‘again’ is, say, an event of Xiaoming closing the door but without wanting to do so (5b), or a state of the door being closed without it necessarily being the case that someone opened or closed it before (5c). So, this prediction is also borne out in English.

- (5) a. *Matrix repetitive context*: Again > want > CAUSE BECOME > close  
One day, the door to Xiaoming’s room was open. Xiaoming wanted to close the door, but his mom closed it before he did that himself. After that, his mom opened the door. Now, Xiaoming again wants to close the door.
- b. *Embedded repetitive context*: Want > again > CAUSE BECOME > close  
One day, the door to Xiaoming’s room was open. Xiaoming did not want to close the door, but his mom forced him to close it. After that, his mom opened the door. Now, Xiaoming wants to again close the door.
- c. *Embedded restitutive context*: Want > CAUSE BECOME > again > close  
The door to Xiaoming’s room was installed closed, and his mom opened it. Now, Xiaoming wants to close the door again.

- (6) Xiaoming again [<sub>vP</sub> wants to close the door]. [✓(5a), #(5b), #(5c)]

When we turn to Mandarin, we find the empirical picture to be different. Unlike English *again*, Mandarin *you* ‘again’ must surface preverbally, suggesting that if the structural account is on the right track, *you* can never yield restitutive readings. However, this is not the case: (7), the Mandarin translation of (2) with *you*, is felicitous in both repetitive and restitutive contexts (Xu 2012, 2016).<sup>1</sup> The second prediction is also false in Mandarin: (8), the Mandarin translation of (6), is felicitous in all three contexts in (5). This later phenomenon I dubbed ‘*again*’ skipping in Liu 2021.

- (7) Xiaoming you guanshang-le na shan men. [✓(1a), ✓(1b)]  
Xiaoming again close-PFV that CLF door  
‘Xiaoming closed that door again.’

- (8) Xiaoming you xiang [guanshang na shan men]. [✓(5a), ✓(5b), ✓(5c)]  
Xiaoming again want close that CLF door  
‘Xiaoming wants to close that door again.’

In (7–8), *you* can be syntactically separated from the constituent it is semantically attached to and raises a challenge for the structural account. This paper, following Xu’s work, attempts to rescue the structural account by proposing that *you* moves and reconstructs. Concretely, I argue that in an ‘again’ skipping

<sup>1</sup> Glossing abbreviations: 1 = first person, 3 = third person, CLF = classifier, EXP = experiential, FUT = future, INF = infinitive, PFV = perfective, PL = plural, PRS = present, PST = past, PTCP = participle, SG = singular.

construction, *you* is first base-generated in the embedded vP or AP, then moved to the specifier position of the matrix AspP, and finally interpreted in its base-generated position by reconstruction.

Section 2 shows that the class of objects that *you* can “skip” is a union of syntactic natural classes. Section 3 fleshes out a movement and reconstruction analysis of ‘again’ skipping. Section 4 presents evidence in favor of the movement and reconstruction analysis and discusses crosslinguistic implications of ‘again’ skipping. Section 5 concludes.

## 2. Data

The main question in this section is what Mandarin *you* can “skip.” In the first two subsections, I show that the verbs that *you* can “skip” are restructuring verbs. In the third subsection, I present data of *you* “skipping” adverbial adjuncts.

### 2.1. Fantastic skipping and where to find it

It is not the case that ‘again’ skipping is found with all embedding verbs in Mandarin. For example, embedding verbs whose complement clause is finite, such as *renwei* ‘think’, do not allow ‘again’ skipping. In a context like (9), in which the presuppositional content of ‘again’ is an event of Xiaoming closing the door without thinking that he would do so, low *you* is felicitous (9a), but high *you* is not (9b).

(9) *Embedded repetitive context*: Think > again > CAUSE BECOME > close

One day, the door to Xiaoming’s room was open. Xiaoming did not think that he would close the door, but his mom forced him to close it. After that, his dad opened the door. This time, Xiaoming thinks that he will again close the door.

- a. Xiaoming *renwei* [ta jiang you guanshang na shan men].  
 Xiaoming think he will again close that CLF door  
 ‘Xiaoming thinks that he will again close that door.’
- b. #Xiaoming you *renwei* [ta jiang guanshang na shan men].  
 Xiaoming again think he will close that CLF door  
 ‘Xiaoming again thinks that he will close that door.’

In table 1, we have a number of Mandarin embedding verbs. The verbs on the left-hand side allow ‘again’ skipping, and those on the right-hand side do not.

<i>bi</i> ‘force’	✓		
<i>dasuan</i> ‘intend’	✓		
<i>jihua</i> ‘plan’	✓		
<i>jueding</i> ‘decide’	✓	<i>faxian</i> ‘discover’	*
<i>mingling</i> ‘order’	✓	<i>fouren</i> ‘deny’	*
<i>quan</i> ‘urge’	✓	<i>gaosu</i> ‘tell’	*
<i>rang</i> ‘let’	✓	<i>huaiyi</i> ‘suspect’	*
<i>shefa</i> ‘try’	✓	<i>queren</i> ‘confirm’	*
<i>tingzhi</i> ‘stop’	✓	<i>renwei</i> ‘think’	*
<i>tiyi</i> ‘propose’	✓	<i>shengming</i> ‘declare’	*
<i>tuijian</i> ‘recommend’	✓	<i>shuo</i> ‘say’	*
<i>weixie</i> ‘threaten’	✓	<i>xiangxin</i> ‘believe’	*
<i>xiang</i> ‘want’	✓	<i>zhidao</i> ‘know’	*
<i>xuanze</i> ‘choose’	✓		
<i>zhunbei</i> ‘prepare’	✓		

**Table 1:** Some Mandarin embedding verbs and whether they allow ‘again’ skipping

Looking at table 1, we come back to the main question in this section: What exactly distinguishes the verbs on the left-hand side from those on the right-hand side? To answer this question, we need to introduce some other phenomena in Mandarin.

## 2.2. Tests for Mandarin restructuring verbs

‘Again’ skipping patterns with three tests for Mandarin restructuring verbs summarized by Z. N. Huang (2018). They are aspect lowering, inner topicalization, and focus fronting.

The first test, *aspect lowering*, refers to the phenomenon in which an aspect marker, such as the experiential marker *-guo*, appears low but can only receive a high interpretation (C.-T. J. Huang 1989, Li 1990, J.-W. Lin 2006, Grano 2014).<sup>2</sup> This phenomenon is allowed by restructuring verbs, such as *shefa* ‘try’ (10a), but not by nonrestructuring embedding verbs, such as *xiangxin* ‘believe’ (10b).

### (10) *Aspect lowering*

#### a. *Restructuring verb: High interpretation of -guo*

Lisi shefa [xiuli-guo zhe tai jiqi].

Lisi try repair-EXP this CLF machine

‘Lisi has tried to repair this machine.’

Not: ‘Lisi tries to have repaired this machine.’

#### b. *Nonrestructuring embedding verb: Low interpretation of -guo*

Lisi xiangxin [wo mai-guo zhe zhong baoxian].

Lisi believe I buy-EXP this kind insurance

‘Lisi believes that I have bought this kind of insurance.’

Not: ‘Lisi has believed that I buy this kind of insurance.’

(Z. N. Huang 2018: 351)

The other two tests involve fronting of an element from the embedded clause to the matrix clause. The second test, *inner topicalization*, brings forward a nonsubject phrase to a position that precedes the matrix predicate (Ernst & Wang 1995, Shyu 1995, Paul 2002, 2005, 2014, T.-H. J. Lin 2015), while the third test, *focus fronting*, preposes a *wh*-indeterminate to yield a universal quantifier interpretation (Li 1992, Ernst & Wang 1995, Shyu 1995, Paul 2002, 2005, 2014, Cheng & Giannakidou 2013). (11a) and (12a) are examples of restructuring verbs allowing inner topicalization and focus fronting, respectively, whereas (11b) and (12b) are provided as examples in which the matrix verbs are not restructuring verbs and do not pass these two tests.

### (11) *Inner topicalization*

#### a. *Restructuring verb: OK*

Wo [zhe pian baogao]<sub>1</sub> hui shefa [jinkuai xie-wan t<sub>1</sub>].

I this CLF report will try as.soon.as.possible write-finish

‘I will try to finish writing this report as soon as possible.’

#### b. *Nonrestructuring embedding verb: \**

\*Wo [zhe pian baogao]<sub>1</sub> xiangxin [Lisi xie-wan-le t<sub>1</sub>].

I this CLF report believe Lisi write-finish-PFV

Intended: ‘I believe that Lisi finished writing this report.’

(Z. N. Huang 2018: 351)

<sup>2</sup> The experiential aspect means that “an event has been *experienced* with respect to some reference time” (Li & Thompson 1981: 226). It is translated into English as present perfect in the examples.

(12) *Focus fronting*a. *Restructuring verb: OK*Lisi [shenme shi]<sub>1</sub> dou shefa [ziji chuli t<sub>1</sub>].

Lisi what matter all try self handle

'Lisi tries to handle everything himself.'

b. *Nonrestructuring embedding verb: \**\*Lisi [shenme shi]<sub>1</sub> dou xiangxin [Zhangsan ziji chuli t<sub>1</sub>].

Lisi what matter all believe Zhangsan self handle

Intended: 'Lisi believes that Zhangsan handles everything himself.'

(Z. N. Huang 2018: 352)

Verbs that allow 'again' skipping form a subset of those that pass the three tests summarized by Z. N. Huang. On this basis, I propose that 'again' skipping can serve as another test for Mandarin restructuring verbs. C.-T. J. Huang (2022) extends Z. N. Huang's list of tests for Mandarin restructuring verbs to a total of eight tests. His list includes 'again' skipping.

2.3. *'Again' skipping adverbial adjuncts*

Besides verbs, *you* can also "skip" adverbial adjuncts. In (13) are three contexts that have different information about time and location, and in (14) are three ways of saying the target sentence, 'Xiaoming met Xiaohong again at the park on a Tuesday', in Mandarin. These three ways are similar in that they bear the same information about time (Tuesday) and location (park), but they are different in that *you* surfaces in different positions.

(13) a. *Context 1: Park and Tuesday*

Last week, Xiaoming met Xiaohong at the park on a Tuesday. This week, ...

b. *Context 2: Park but not Tuesday*

Last week, Xiaoming met Xiaohong at the park on a Monday. This week, ...

c. *Context 3: Not park and not Tuesday*

Last week, Xiaoming met Xiaohong at school on a Monday. This week, ...

## (14) 'Xiaoming met Xiaohong again at the park on a Tuesday.'

a. Xiaoming zai Xingqi'er zai gongyuan you yudao-le Xiaohong.  
Xiaoming at Tuesday at park again meet-PFV Xiaohongb. Xiaoming zai Xingqi'er you zai gongyuan yudao-le Xiaohong.  
Xiaoming at Tuesday again at park meet-PFV Xiaohongc. Xiaoming you zai Xingqi'er zai gongyuan yudao-le Xiaohong.  
Xiaoming again at Tuesday at park meet-PFV Xiaohong

In (13a), the information about both time and location matches the target sentence; in (13b), only the information about location matches the target sentence; and in (13c), the information about neither time nor location matches the target sentence. These differences notwithstanding, the observation is that all three utterances in (14) are felicitous in all three contexts in (13).

This suggests that in all three sentences in (14), it is possible for *you* to only modify *yudao-le Xiaohong* 'met Xiaohong', despite the fact that in some of these sentences, *you* precedes one or more adverbial adjuncts. In other words, *you* can "skip" adverbial adjuncts. This effect is again not detected in English, where *again* is interpreted *in situ* (Bale 2007).

2.4. *Section summary*

I have shown that *you* can "skip" a union of syntactic natural classes, viz., adverbial adjuncts and a subset of restructuring verbs.

### 3. Proposal

The fact that the class of objects that *you* can “skip” is a union of syntactic natural classes calls for a syntactic account of ‘again’ skipping. In this section, I build on Xu’s (2012, 2016) movement and reconstruction analysis and propose that *you* moves in order to check its aspect feature.

#### 3.1. Movement and reconstruction

Recall Xu’s (2012, 2016) observation discussed in section 1: although *you* must surface preverbally, it can still be ambiguous between repetitive and restitutive readings, as in (7), copied below in (15).

- (15) Xiaoming you guanshang-le na shan men.  
 Xiaoming again close-PFV that CLF door  
 ‘Xiaoming closed that door, and ...’
- a. *Repetitive reading*  
 ‘He had closed that door before.’
- b. *Restitutive reading*  
 ‘That door had been in a state of being closed before.’

To account for this observation, Xu proposes that *you* may be base-generated in different positions, but it moves to the same preverbal position, where it gets pronounced. Then, *you* reconstructs in the sense of Lechner 1998 and is interpreted in its base-generated position. More specifically, if *you* is base-generated (and later interpreted) in a vP-adjoined (or higher) position, it yields a repetitive reading. In contrast, if *you* is base-generated in a position adjoined to the AP whose head is the adjectival root of the verb, it yields a restitutive reading.

I extend this movement and reconstruction analysis to ‘again’ skipping. While it is possible for *you* to be base-generated in other positions, I only focus on the cases in which it is externally merged with the matrix vP, the embedded vP, or the embedded AP. If *you* is externally merged with the matrix vP, we get the matrix repetitive reading in the end, and if it is externally merged with the embedded vP or AP, we get the embedded repetitive or restitutive reading in the end.

An immediate question arises. Why does *you* move? The next two subsections are attempts to answer this question.

#### 3.2. PF requirement

Xu (2012, 2016) argues that what motivates *you* to move is a Mandarin PF requirement (16).

- (16) *Mandarin PF requirement*  
 Adverbs must be preverbal. (Xu 2012: 477)

This view has two shortcomings.

First, it is not ideal for the definition of a PF requirement to heavily depend on syntactic categories. Second, this requirement cannot account for the ‘again’ skipping cases. Consider (17).

- (17) \*Xiaoming xiang [you guanshang na shan men].  
 Xiaoming want again close that CLF door  
 Intended: ‘Xiaoming wants to again close that door.’

In an embedding construction, if the matrix verb is a restructuring verb, *you* cannot surface low in the embedded clause and must surface high in the matrix clause. At PF, the hierarchical structures are supposedly lost. How would *you* know which verb to precede, the matrix or the embedded?

### 3.3. Aspectual agreement

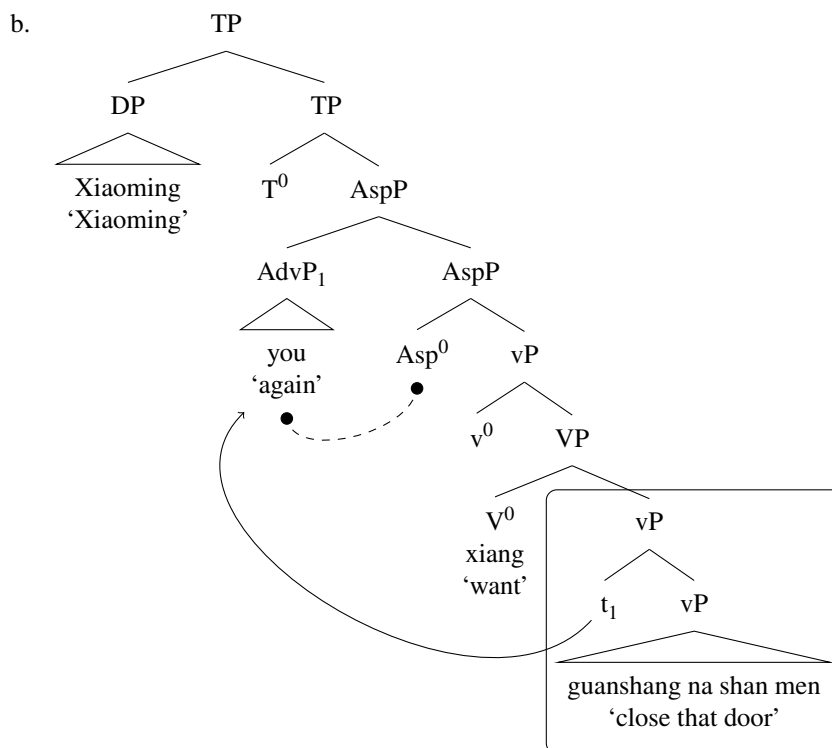
I state my proposal in two steps. First, I propose that no matter where it is externally merged, *you* is base-generated with an unvalued aspect feature that must be valued by the closest  $\text{Asp}^0$  probe via specifier-head agreement. This requirement motivates *you* to move to the specifier position of the closest  $\text{AspP}$ , a position that I take to be higher than  $v\text{P}$  but lower than  $\text{TP}$ . This position is also where Cinque (1999) puts adverbs like Italian *di nuovo* ‘again’ in the syntactic hierarchy. Second, I follow C.-T. J. Huang (2022) and assume that in Mandarin, a restructuring verb takes a smaller complement than a nonrestructuring embedding verb, a complement as small as  $v\text{P}$ , which does not contain the  $\text{AspP}$  that *you* needs.

Under this view, in the cases that I am looking at, *you* always moves, but the distance may vary. If it surfaces high and yields the matrix repetitive reading, the distance is rather short, but the distance is longer if it surfaces high and yields the embedded repetitive or restitutive reading. The long-distance movement of *you* (i.e., ‘again’ skipping) is allowed when it is base-generated in the embedded  $v\text{P}$  or  $\text{AP}$  and cannot value its feature within the embedded clause. This is true when the matrix verb is a restructuring verb, which does not embed an  $\text{AspP}$ . The correlation between ‘again’ skipping and restructuring is thus explained.

### 3.4. Section summary

In (18b), I sketch the syntactic derivation of an example for ‘again’ skipping (18a).<sup>3</sup>

- (18) a. Xiaoming you xiang [guanshang na shan men].  
 Xiaoming again want close that CLF door  
 ‘Xiaoming wants to close that door again.’



Here, *you* is base-generated in the embedded  $v\text{P}$  with an unvalued aspect feature. Then, it moves to the specifier position of the matrix  $\text{AspP}$  to check this feature by agreeing with the matrix  $\text{Asp}^0$ . Finally, it undergoes reconstruction and is interpreted in its base-generated  $v\text{P}$ -adjoined position, yielding an embedded repetitive reading.

<sup>3</sup> Head movements and subject movement are omitted for simplicity.

## 4. Evidence

In this section, I present evidence that the movement and reconstruction analysis is on the right track. I also comment on the crosslinguistic implications of the current analysis of ‘again’ skipping.

### 4.1. Blocking effect of negation

A key piece of evidence in favor of the movement and reconstruction analysis is a blocking effect that can be observed with negation. Xu (2012, 2016) notes that intervening negation makes it impossible for *you* to scope below negation (20).

- (19) a. *Context 1: Again > negation*  
 Yesterday, Xiaoming forgot to close the door to his room when he went out. Today, he again forgot to do so.
- b. *Context 2: Negation > again*  
 One day, the door to Xiaoming’s room was open, and he closed it. After that, his mom opened the door. Then, however, Xiaoming forgot to close the door when he went out.
- (20) Xiaoming you meiyou guanshang na shan men. [✓(19a), #(19b)]  
 Xiaoming again not.PFV close that CLF door  
 ‘Xiaoming again did not close that door.’

Since negation is an adverb like *you* in Mandarin (Chao 1948, 1965), Xu treats the blocking effect as a limitation on the movement of *you* due to Relativized Minimality (Rizzi 1990, 2001, 2004), which I paraphrase in (21).

- (21) *Paraphrased Relativized Minimality*  
 Moving *X* across *Y* is prohibited if *X* and *Y* have certain characteristics in common, such as when *X* and *Y* are both adverbials. (Rizzi 1990: 1, adapted)

However, Xu’s explanation faces some challenges under the frame of this paper, because it does not transfer over to the “skipping” of adverbial adjuncts.

I offer an alternative view that the blocking effect is a limitation on reconstruction instead, and the source of this limitation is the positive polarity of *you*. My evidence is (22), where *you* cannot surface under negation, but which can be rescued in the sense of Szabolcsi 2004 in two possible ways (23).

- (22) \*Meiyou ren you xiang [guanshang na shan men].  
 no person again want close that CLF door.  
 Intended: ‘No one wants to close that door again.’
- (23) a. Bu yiding meiyou ren you xiang [guanshang na shan men].  
 not necessarily no person again want close that CLF door  
 ‘It is not necessarily the case that no one wants to close that door again.’
- b. Meiyou ren zai xiang [guanshang na shan men].  
 no person again want close that CLF door  
 ‘No one wants to close that door again.’

One way is by adding another negation (23a). The other way is by using another ‘again’, *zai* (23b).

### 4.2. Crosslinguistic implications

Mandarin is not alone in having scope skipping effects of ‘again’, nor is it the only language in which we find a correlation between such effects and restructuring. (24) and (25) are reported from French and Italian, respectively.

- (24) *French re-*  
 Il lui a re-fait [faire son devoir].  
 he her have.PRS.3SG again-make.PST.PTCP do.INF her homework

a. *Matrix repetitive reading*  
 ‘He has again made her do her homework.’

b. *Embedded repetitive reading*  
 ‘He has made her redo her homework.’

(Vincent Homer, pers. comm.)

- (25) *Italian ri-*  
 Ri-possiamo [prendere il vaporino].  
 again-be.able.PRS.1PL take.INF the boat

a. *Matrix repetitive reading*  
 ‘We again have the possibility of taking the boat.’

b. *Embedded repetitive reading*  
 ‘We can retake the boat.’

(Cardinaletti 2003: 10)

An important point to make here is that the condition for the scope skipping effects of *re-* in French and *ri-* in Italian is the same as that for clitic climbing in these two languages. In French, clitic climbing is acceptable with certain causative verbs (Kayne 1989 et seq.), and so is the scope skipping of *re-* (Vincent Homer, pers. comm.). In Italian, clitic climbing is only acceptable with restructuring verbs (Rizzi 1978 et seq.), and so is the scope skipping of *ri-* (Nicoletta Loccioni, pers. comm.). We hence observe a similar correlation between scope skipping effects of ‘again’ and restructuring in Romance languages.

## 5. Conclusion

Mandarin *you* ‘again’ can “skip” restructuring verbs and adverbial adjuncts and be interpreted as if it is adjoined to a lower position. This “‘again’ skipping” effect patterns with tests for Mandarin restructuring verbs summarized by Z. N. Huang (2018) and is therefore proposed to serve as another test for Mandarin restructuring verbs. The scope skipping effect of ‘again’ and the correlation between this effect and restructuring are observed in Romance languages as well. I have elaborated on Xu’s (2012, 2016) account for the ambiguity of preverbal *you* so that it can not only apply to simple sentences but also provide an approach to theoretical issues related to movement and reconstruction in the ‘again’ skipping cases.

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