How to drop your object
Haiyong Liu, Classical and Modern Languages, Literatures and Cultures, Director of Linguistics Program and Associate Professor

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Although subject deletion has been widely discussed in the literature (e.g. (It) Sounds interesting! and (I) Got you.), which can be recovered from verb conjugation and/or from the context, very little research has been done on the deletion of the object cross-linguistically, which can rarely be recovered from verb conjugation but solely from the context (e.g. Add water and stir (it) and Like (it)!). My talk compares the characteristics of object drop in Chinese (e.g. Q: Ni chi-fan ma? (you eat-food Question: Do you eat food?) A: Chi. (fan) (eat (food): I do.) and in English (e.g. I love eating.). I conclude that each language can have only one of the two mechanisms regarding object omission, which is related to the referentiality of the object. A language like Chinese can only omit non-generic objects that can be recovered from the context, which includes definite, indefinite, and specific nouns. A language like English, on the other hand, can only omit generic objects that cannot be recovered from the context. From a language evolution perspective, I suggest that after the separation or specification of the subject and the object, i.e. the arguments of the verb, language then fine tunes their referentiality.

Haiyong Liu is associate professor in CMLLC and director of the Linguistics Program. His research interests are focused on Chinese syntax, acquisition, and pedagogy. He has published on topics regarding the second language acquisition of Chinese bare nouns, the syntactic formation of Chinese counter-factuality, and the number issue in Chinese inalienable possession, and non-verbal communication in the teaching of Chinese as a second language.

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