Wanting (to have) null verbs: A view from Mandarin and beyond

English start and want both embed to-infinitives (1) and NPs (2).

(1a) Kim started [to eat dinner]. "start-to-VP"
(1b) Kim wanted [to eat dinner]. "want-to-VP"
(2a) Kim started [dinner]. "start-NP"
(2b) Kim wanted [dinner]. "want-NP"

Two accounts have emerged of start-/want-NP and their relationship to start-/want-VP: For Pustejovsky (1995), (2a) and (2b) both involve coercion: start and want require an eventive complement which is overtly supplied in (1). In (2), coercion draws on lexical-semantic information in dinner to supply an appropriate eventive meaning ('eat/make dinner') for the complement. Alternatively, for Fodor and Lepore (1998), neither (2a) nor (2b) instantiate coercion but (2b) is special in introducing a silent light verb ∅have that establishes the right semantics for the construction and maintains a uniform semantics for want in (1b/2b) (cf. also den Dikken, Larsson and Ludlow 1997 and Harley 2004 on want). This paper articulates two novel arguments for the latter view.

**Argument 1: Mandarin NP complements.** Lin and Liu (2004) show that many Pustejovsky coercion phenomena are ungrammatical in Mandarin, including start-NP (3a). However, want-NP is grammatical (3b).

(3a) zhangsan kaishi *(chi) pingguo.
Zhangsan start eat apple
'Zhangsan started *(to eat) an apple.'

(3b) zhangsan yao (chi) pingguo.
Zhangsan want eat apple
'Zhangsan wants (to eat) an apple.'

If (3a) and (3b) both involve coercion, the split in grammaticality is mysterious. But if (3b) involves ∅have, the puzzle disappears: Mandarin and English differ in the availability of coercion, but both languages have ∅have.

**Argument 2: Embedded subjects.** A robust fact about predicates that tend crosslinguistically to restructure (aspectuals, modals, implicatives) is that they disallow overt embedded subjects even in non-restructuring languages like English (4). Cf. propositional and factive predicates (5) — crosslinguistically non-restructuring (Wurmbrand 2001) — which admit overt embedded subjects. These facts suggest (6).

(4a) Kim started (*Sandy) to eat. (5a) Kim believed Sandy to be tall.
(4b) Kim was able (*Sandy) to eat. (5b) Kim regretted Sandy leaving.
(4c) Kim managed (*Sandy) to eat.

(6) **Generalization:** Only non-restructuring predicates admit overt embedded subjects.

Adopting Cinque's (2006) proposal that restructuring verbs realize inflectional heads and the view that inflectional heads cannot introduce arguments, we explain (6): restructuring verbs instantiate monoclausal raising structures, the subject vacating its embedded (vP-internal) position and raising to matrix subject position (7a), whereas non-restructuring verbs instantiate biclausal constructions in which the embedded subject may be overt (7b).

(7a) Kim started [Kim to eat].
(7b) Kim regretted [PRO/Sandy leaving].

But want counterexamples (6): crosslinguistically it restructuring, yet also admits an overt embedded subject:

(8) Kim wanted (Sandy) to eat.

On the view that want may embed ∅have, however, (8) is explained: ∅have can embed NP (9a) or CP (9b) (cf. Cinque 2006:61 for a similar suggestion about Italian volere 'want'). When want embeds ∅have and ∅have embeds CP, an embedded subject is possible.

(9a) Kim want ∅have [NP dinner].
(9b) Kim want ∅have [CP Sandy to eat].

By postulating ∅have as an available complement to want but not to other restructuring verbs like start, we resolve the counterexample. [500 words]