

Are Topic Constructions Licensed by A' Movement in Mandarin Chinese?—A Preliminary Study

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Abstract. Topic structures are conventionally classified into two types in Mandarin Chinese, namely dangling and non-dangling topics. The present study concurs that non-dangling topics might be licensed by A' movement (e.g. Chen 1995), in the sense that they might be interpreted as an operator A'-binding their co-indexed variable, usually an empty category, in a corresponding comment clause. As regards so-called dangling topics, this study favors the traditional postulation of an A/A' position and also lends support to the A' movement analysis (e.g. Huang and Ting 2006).

1. Introduction

It is conventionally suggested that two types of topics exist in Mandarin Chinese: dangling topics (i.e. Chinese-style topics) and non-dangling topics. Non-dangling topics are accounted for in terms of an antecedent-pronominal analysis (e.g. by Xu and Langendoen 1985), but are interpreted as an instantiation of A'-movement (e.g. by Chen 1995, cf. Williams 1980). As for dangling topics, some studies treat them as semantically licensed (Li and Thompson 1976, Chafe 1976, Xu and Langendoen 1985, Tsao 1990), while some analyses propose that so-called dangling topics are syntactically licensed as non-dangling topics are (Shi 2000, Huang and Ting 2006, cf. Chen 1995). Given the controversy, the current study attempts to imply that A' movement probably could account for both types of topics.

2. Non-dangling Topics

Xu and Langendoen (1985) observe that topicalization in Mandarin is not subject to the subjacency condition, as illustrated in (1) where the EC (e_i) crosses more than one bounding node, i.e. NP and S (or S') but the example is acceptable. They advance that the EC (e_i) in the comment clause, as in (1), should be interpreted as a non-overt pronominal whose antecedent is the coindexed topic (*zhe-ben shu*, 'this book') rather than as a variable.

- (1) [_S *Zhe-ben shu*_i [_S *wo renwei* [_S_{NP}[_S *e'*_i [_S *e_j du guo e_i de*] *ren_j*] *bu duo*]]].
 This-CL book I think read ASP NOM man not many
 *‘This book, I think there aren’t many people who read.’

Despite Xu and Langendoen’s analysis, it has been argued that non-dangling topics occupy [Spec, CP] and are subject to the strong crossover condition (SCC) (Huang 1984) and to the empty category principle (ECP) (Chen 1995). The present study also notices some potential discrepancies between an EC coindexed with a topic constituent and a [+pronominal] element. To begin with, Xu and Langendoen regard the EC as a pronominal. There are two possible non-overt candidates associated with [+pronominal], viz. *pro* and PRO. It seems to turn out that the candidate PRO could be excluded, since the EC (*e_i*) in (1) is not subject to the PRO theorem. The EC is governed by the verb *du* ‘read’, which violates the PRO theorem but is still grammatical. Hence, what Xu and Langendoen refer to as an empty pronominal is not a PRO but a *pro*. However, when an overt pronominal like *ta* ‘it’ is substituted for the EC (*e_i*) in (1), the acceptability of the sentence seems to be lower. In addition, such an EC is not subject to the principle B of the binding theory. A pronoun can co-refer with an antecedent outside its governing category, but the EC (*e_i*), as in (1), cannot be coindexed with any NP other than the topic, which is situated in an A’ position, [Spec, CP]. The EC acts as a *wh*-trace rather than as a *pro*. Furthermore, Italian, for example, is characterized by rich inflection, especially marked on verbs. V is a licenser of a *pro* in this language, and a verb-governed EC is interpreted as a *pro*, i.e. Arb interpretation (Rizzi 1986). Unlike Italian, Mandarin seems to have no legitimate head that can license an EC in the object position as a *pro*. In short, it appears that the EC coindexed with a topic constituent differs from a [+pronominal] element (neither a PRO nor a *pro*). This paper implies that the EC might be interpreted as a variable A’-bound by a coindexed topic, and that non-dangling topics might be thus licensed by A’ movement.

3. So-called Dangling Topics

As far as so-called dangling topics are concerned, Xu and Langendoen (1985) account for semantic relations between dangling topics and comments, but do not explicate syntactic positions for the topics. Chen (1995) points out further two subtypes of dangling topics (or nongap topics termed by Chen) in Mandarin: general nongap topics, as the NP *shuiguo* in (2), and possessive-like nongap topics, as the NP *Zhangsan* in (3). A general nongap topic is proposed to be dominated by a maximal projection TopicP (TopicP → NP CP, where NP stands for such a topic), while a possessive-like nongap topic, adjoined to IP (p.86). It is observed that some NPs in [Spec, IP], traditionally an A position, are not theta-marked but merely case-marked, as the pronoun *it* in (4). Given this, Chen’s analysis of topics is predicated on an assumption that “an A position is either a Case position or a theta position” (by Brody 1993, as cited in Chen 1995:80). Chen maintains that a general nongap topic bears certain semantic relation to a

corresponding comment and therefore is ‘theta-marked’ and occupies an A position. A possessive-like nongap topic is adjoined to IP and is not excluded from IP; thus, the finite INFL can govern into the adjoined topic and assign case to it. A ‘case-marked’ possessive-like nongap topic is taken to occupy an A position.

(2) *Shuiguo*, wo zui xihuan pingguo.
 fruit I most like apple
 ‘As for fruit, I like apples most.’

(3) *Zhangsan*, erzi mai le na-ben shu.
 Zhangsan son buy ASP that-CL book
 ‘Zhangsan’s son bought that book.’

(4) *It* is unclear whether Bernard will come.

The current study concurs with Chen’s analysis of moved topics, which occupy an A’ position, [Spec, CP]. With reference to nongap topics, this study attempts to suggest some possible accounts from another perspective. In (4), the adjectival predicate *unclear* takes a clausal argument, i.e. *whether Bernard will come*. The pronoun *it*, though occupying [Spec, IP], need not be theta-marked in that the pronoun in the example is an expletive rather than an argument. The requirement of the expletive could be ascribed to the extended projection principle (EPP). In Mandarin, the structural subject is allowed to be non-overt in a sentence, as in *xia-yu le* ‘(It) rains’. English, in this respect, seems not on a par with Mandarin. Besides, the clausal argument in (4) could move to [Spec, IP], as in *whether Bernard will come is unclear*, and is theta-marked by the adjectival predicate, as it is in (4). (Note: A clausal argument is not subject to the case filter.) Hence, this study embraces the traditional proposal that an A position is an argument position, assumed to be both theta-marked and case-marked (Chomsky 1981).

It is propounded that a general nongap topic has certain semantic linkage with a comment and thus is theta-marked and occupies an A position. From another angle, where two constituents bear some semantic relation, one constituent might not be theta-marked by the other in some cases, as in *John studies Chinese at school*. In this instance, the PP *at school* is semantically related to the predicate *studies*, whereas the PP is an adjunct rather than an argument. According to Huang and Ting (2006), general nongap topics could be interpreted as subjects, NP adverbials, PP reduced forms, or non-dangling topics (see also Shi 2000). Based on their analysis, the general nongap topic *shuiguo* ‘fruit’ in (2) would be treated as a reduced form of the PP *zhai shuiguo zhizhong* ‘among all kinds of fruits’ as in (5). The PP in this case is situated in an A’ position (e_i) at D-structure and moves to another A’ position, [Spec, CP]. The A’ movement analysis seems consonant with the syntactic status of CP in the conventionally arboreal structures.

(5) (*Zhai*) *shuiguo* (*zhizhong*)_{*i*}, wo *e_i* zui xihuan pingguo.
 (at) fruit among I most like apple

‘Among all kinds of fruits, I like apples most.’

Possessive-like nongap topics, as in (3), are proposed to adjoin to IP and occupy an A position. As suggested by Chomsky (1981), an adjoined position is an A' position. This study implies that possessive-like nongap topics might alternatively occupy [Spec, NP] at D-structure, and that a genitive morpheme *de* is elliptical.

4. Conclusion

This paper focuses on the syntactic licensing concerning two types of topics in Mandarin Chinese. Xu and Langendoen put forth the pronominal analysis to deal with the issue as to non-dangling topics. The current study, nonetheless, observes some potential distinctions between an empty category coindexed with a topic constituent and a [+pronominal] element. In accord with Huang (1984) and Chen (1995), this study espouses the variable analysis that non-dangling topics might be licensed by A' movement. With respect to dangling topics, Chen proposes that both subtypes of them occupy an A position. From another point of view, the present study smiles upon the traditional assumption of an A/A' position (Chomsky 1981) and favors the A' movement analysis (Huang and Ting 2006).

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