

Syntactic Theory

Project Presentation: Wh-movement in Mandarin Chinese(MC)

Shuo Zhang

In this paper we're going to look at the analysis of Wh-movement in MC, including problems of overt/covert movement(Logical Form), Focused sentence in MC, and the relative issues of island/subjacency rules and restrictions in MC.

Our initial questions including the following two: (1) what kind of movement is involved(or is there movement involved?) in MC wh-questions? (2) Do all the wh-words behave the same way in regarding to movement? Interestingly, a brief investigation of the literatures in this field shows that the first question was typically dealt with in papers published in the 1980s(Huang,1982; Xu, 1985; Chiang, 1989), while the second is a topic commonly seen in papers beginning from 1990s until now(Tsai, 1994,1999; Pesetsky, 2000; Soh, 2005).

Fact: while the wh-in-situ is the most commonly seen type of question in MC, it is perfectly acceptable in many cases to ask a question with a fronted wh-phrase in natural discourse, especially when s/he wants to focus on/stress the wh-item.

In Huang's 1982 paper, which might be the earliest writing on this topic(and cited from time to time by following people), he pointed out that although structures such as those involving wh-questions in Chinese showed no evidence of movement at S-Structure, it was plausible to assume that such structures involve operator movement at LF. Hence the LF representation of (1) would be as in (1a):

(1)Ni xiang shui lai?

You want who come

Who do you want to come?

(1a)[cp Shui [IP ni xiang [cp ti [IP xi lai]]]] ?

Who you want come

Who do you want to come ?

Note that the latter sentence represents only the covert movement of WH-word in LF, while no overt movement is permitted in such a sentence to be grammatical.

While I have no knowledge to judge this theory, there are other researchers questioned Huang's arguments. Most notably, Xu and Langendoen(1985) maintained that wh-words in MC are interpreted in situ. The fronting of the wh-words is interpreted as the fronting of the base-generated topics. It is widely recognized that languages such as Chinese and Japanese are topic languages as opposed to English as a subject-object language. In a nutshell, in Chinese or Japanese, there is a topic of the sentence, which might be generated in subject or object position, appears in the initial place of a sentence. Example is shown in (2) :

- (2) [TOPIC zuqiusai [ni jintian kan *ei* le ma?]]
 The soccer game you today watch ASP ending-question-marker
 Did you watch the soccer game today?

It is obvious that the topic *zuqiusai* here is generated in base position (*e*). Not the subject of the sentence.

Thus Xu treated wh-words in Chinese as the base-generated topics. And its fronting movement is explained through the topic theory.

 In a 1989 paper, Hoh and Chiang proposed a new interpretation of wh-movement in MC, arguing against both Xu(1985) and Huang(1982). They provided evidence showing that wh-items in MC are indeed moved categories, and they assume the S-structure move-wh in MC to be motivated by an abstract syntactic feature, FOCUS, which interacts with semantic focus/emphasis in interesting ways.

This is the analysis that I find convincing now and I'll discuss it in contrast of Xu's TOPIC analysis next.

Preclausal wh-phrases as TOPIC and as FOCUSED items

Xu's analysis could account for (3):

- (3) [TOP shui de yanchu [ni zui ai kan *ei*?]]
 Who POSS performance you most like see
 "whose performance do you like to see the most?"

However, note that the examples (4)(5)(6) show that only the gap in a TOPIC structure—but not a wh-question—can be filled by another NP:

- (4) Alison de yanchu ni zui ai kan____
 Alison POSS performance you most like see____
 "You love (to see) Alison's performance the best." [topic structure]

- (5) Alison de yanchu ni zui ai kan Feijialuodehunli.
 Alison POSS performance you most like see *the marriage of Figaro*.
 "(As for) Alison's performance, you like (to see) *The Marriage of Figaro* the best."

- (6)* Shui de yanchu ni zui ai kan Feijialuodehunli?
 Who POSS performance you most like see *The marriage of Figaro*
 "Whose performance do you like to see *The Marriage of Figaro* the most?"

We see different behavior here between a TOPIC and wh-movement structure.

In (4) we have the common topic structure in MC, with a gap in the post-verbal object position. When it is filled in (5), it is still a grammatical sentence. But the wh-question counterpart in (6) is ungrammatical, indicating that the wh-phrase "shui de yanchu" (whose performance) may have left a trace hence blocking the NP *The marriage of Figaro* occupying that place. Chafe (1976) "Chinese style topics VS topics that undergone movement." "We would rather not consider the latter as 'topics' at all but as focused elements."

This is one argument that questioned the TOPIC theory and we'll see the FOCUSed movement theory now.

Overall: wh-movement motivated by the FOCUS movement. When FOCUS is moved the wh-phrases must move.

Explain what is focus with examples. There is a focus marker, usually "shi", and where it occurs, the word following it is meant to be focused/stressed. It can occur in many places which we will discuss below. We'll also see examples later.

Both the movement of the focus and wh-word is represented in trees.

Object and shi(tree)-fronting
Subject and shi(tree)-fronting
Intermediate landing site-fronting

TREE STRUCTURE IN ANOTHER SHEET OF PAPER

Briefly mentioned restrictions of FOCUS

(1) Object focusing--- ungrammatical [he ate NO FOCUS the apple.]

(2) More than one focus---ungrammatical

(3) THE FRONTING OF Wh cannot coexist with cleft sentence pp.57-58---might indicate that fronted wh-phrase is with a focus

Wh-phrase as FOCUSed item

Now we'll see

These Eight examples show the same behavior between the FOCUSed structure and the moved wh structure.

Sentences below manifest the two options of FOCUS (FOCUS being in either INFL or C position) for the major categories of subject NP and PP:

(7) women dou zhidao shi Zhangsan li jia chu zou le. In-situ

We all know FOC Zhangsan leave home out walk ASP

We all know that it was Zhangsan who has left home.

(8) shi Zhangsan women dou zhidao li jia chu zou le. moved

FOC Zhangsan we all know leave home out walk ASP.

It was Zhangsan that we all know who has left home.

nominal wh-phrases do not. Soh's analysis (2005): an adverbial wh-phrase in MC undergoes covert feature movement, while a nominal wh-phrase undergoes covert phrasal movement.

My own thoughts:

1. different treatment of what and who, where, when...
 2. the analysis of wh-movement in Chinese seems to have always been interpreted as other types of sentence structures. Wonder whether an independent analysis is possible.
-
