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Deriving the Secondary Topic Construction in Mandarin Chinese

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0. Introduction

In this paper, I analyze the construction in Mandarin Chinese where the patient argument of a verbal predicate occurs in a preverbal position as in (1a) rather than in its canonical position, namely, the postverbal position as in (1b).

(1) a. 

Zhangsan, fan, chi-guo-le.

rice  eat-ASP-ASP

Zhangsan, as for rice, has eaten.'

b. 

Zhangsan chi-guo-le fan.

rice  eat-ASP-ASP

Zhangsan has eaten rice.'

I will argue that the post-subject NP 'rice' in (1a) is not derived by base-generation nor by movement to spec/AGRoF. I will point out two possible derivations for this construction, either of them needs extra assumptions.

For the ease of presentation, throughout this paper I will refer to this post-subject NP as 'secondary topic', borrowing the term introduced by Tsao (1987) for the ho-NP. I argue that the post-subject NP at issue can not only be interpreted as a focus (cf. Ernst and Wang 1995) but can also be interpreted as a topic. This two-way interpretation is exactly on a par with the pre-subject NP fan 'rice' in (2), which I will refer to as the 'primary topic'.

(2) 

Fan, Zhangsan, chi-guo-le.

rice  Z.  eat-ASP-ASP

'Rice, Zhangsan has eaten.'

According to Ernst and Wang (1995) (citing Gundel 1977 and Culicover 1992), the pre-subject NP, namely a topic in their term, is often classified into two types: discourse topic and focus topic, as illustrated in (3).

(3) a. 

Zhongmingzi, Zhangsan hen xihuan tan, dajia yiwei hen xihuan ting sonata.  Z.  very like play all also very like listen

'As for sonatas, Zhangsan likes to play it and everyone also likes to listen to it very much.'

b. 

(Wo dei lanqiu  hen shou, danzi)

I to basketball very familiar but

'Im familiar with basketball, but'

zuqiu, wo yiqaibuzong

soccer I have no idea at all

'soccer, I have no idea at all.'

The discourse topic in (3a) sets a context for the conversation and the focus topic (often stressed) in (3b) introduces entities in contrast to others.

I argue that like the pre-subject NP in (3), the post-subject NP at issue can also serve either as a discourse topic or as a focus topic. It is generally agreed (e.g. Lu 1994, Ernst and Wang 1994) that this post-subject NP can be interpreted as a focus, e.g. in (4):

(4) Wo zhe-pian lunwen xihuan, ma-pian lunwen bu xihuan. (= their 16)

I this-CL paper like that-CL paper not like

'This paper, I like (but that paper, I don't).'

However, the focus interpretation of the post-subject NP at issue is not the only interpretation available. The postverbal NP can be forced to be a discourse topic, if there is a real focus present in the sentence. Consider the question-answer pair in (5):

(5) 

Q: Zhangsan zui xihuan zai nali chi pingguo?

Z.  most like at where eat apple

'Where does Zhangsan like to eat apples most?'
A: Zhangsan, pingguo, zai xihuan ZAI CHUANGSHANG chi.
Z. apple most like at bed eat

"Zhangsan, as for apples, likes to eat AT BED most."

Assuming with Kochemont and Culicover (1990) that constituents that answers a wh-question is focused, then the PP zai chuangshang 'at bed' in the answer part of (5) is the focus since this constituent answers the wh-word zai 'at bed' in the question part. This wh-question/answer pair clearly shows that the NP pingguo 'apple' in the answer part of (5) has the interpretation as a discourse topic: it is a piece of old information, which has been already mentioned in the question part. Based on this observation, we can thus conclude that the post-subject NP as in (1) can function either as a discourse topic or as a focus topic like the pre-subject NP as in (2). Given the precedence order of the pre-subject and post-subject NP in the clause, I will refer to them as the primary topic and the secondary topic, respectively.

2. Contrast between the Secondary Topic and the Primary Topic

I now point out three contrasts between the secondary topic construction and the primary topic construction. Some of these contrasts have been independently noticed by Fu (1994), Lu (1994), and Qu (1994). One possibility to capture these contrasts is to claim that the secondary topic is derived by A-movement (see Fu 1994, Qu 1994) whereas the primary topic is derived by A'-movement (cf. Lasnik and Saito 1995).


The first contrast between the primary topic and the secondary topic is shown in (6) and (7).

Primary topic:
(6) Pingguo, Zhangsan zhidao [Lisi chidian-le [e1]]
apple Z know L. eat-ASP

Secondary topic w/it embedded tensed clause:
(7) *Zhangsan, pingguo, zhidao [Lisi chidian-le [e1]]
Z. apple know L. eat-ASP

While the primary topic in the matrix clause can be interpreted as originating from the embedded finite clause in (6), the secondary topic cannot in (7).

This clause-boundedness constraint is often observed when A-movement applies, for example, in the case of super-raising.

(8) John1 seems [that it is likely [ t1 to win]]
The NP John raises across a tensed clause boundary and the sentence is ungrammatical.

On the other hand, A'-movement can freely take place out of a tensed clause, if no barrier is crossed, as illustrated in (9).

(9) What1 do you think [that John fixed t1 ]

Therefore, this type of clause-boundedness constraint on the secondary topic is often taken as indicating that it is derived by A-movement.

2.2. Anaphor Binding (cf. Fu 1994, Qu 1994)
The second contrast between the secondary topic construction and the primary topic construction is that the secondary topic can bind an anaphor whereas the primary topic cannot, as shown in (10).

(10) a. Baoyu1 bi taziji1/2 de fumu piping-le neige yahuaan?
B. force him/herself DE parents criticize which maid
Which maid did Baoyu forced her parents to criticize?

b. Primary Topic:
Neige yahuaan, Baoyu1 bi taziji1/2 de fumu piping-le?
which maid B. force him/herself DE parents criticize-ASP
Which maid did Baoyu forced her parents to criticize?

c. Secondary Topic:
Baoyu1, neige yahuaan, bi taziji1/2 de fumu piping-le?
B. which maid force him/herself DE parents criticize-ASP
Which maid did Baoyu forced her parents to criticize?
In (10a), *taziji 'himself' is bound by the NP *Baoxu* but not by the NP *neige yahuan 'which maid', since *neige yahuan does not c-command taziji*. When *neige yahuan becomes a primary topic in (10b), it still cannot bind the anaphor *taziji*. In contrast, when it becomes a secondary topic in (10c), it can bind the anaphor *taziji*. This contrast with respect to anaphor binding also seems to indicate that the secondary topic sits in an A-position and thus can bind an anaphor whereas the primary topic sits in an A′-position and thus cannot bind an anaphor.

2.3. Reconstruction effects (cf. Qiu 1994)

The third contrast between the primary topic construction and the secondary topic construction comes from their reconstructibility. As shown in (11a), *zijī 'self' contained in the primary topic can refer either to the NP *Zhangsan* or to the NP *Lisi*, as if the primary topic is 'put back' to the gap associated with it, hence the name 'reconstruction effect.' On the other hand, there arises no reconstruction effect in the secondary topic construction.

As shown in (11b), *zijī 'self' contained in the secondary topic can only refer to the c-commanding NP *Zhangsan*, but not to the lower NP *Lisi*.

(11) a. Primary Topic:
   *zijī de shì, Zhangsan* bi Lisi guanyu guan [e]
   self DE matter Z. force L. take care

   b. Secondary Topic:
   *Zhangsan*, *zijī de shì, Lisi guanyu guan [e]
   Z. self DE matter force L. take care

It is well known that reconstruction effects arise in A′-movement construction, as shown in (12).

(12) [Which pictures of himself] did John think Bill saw t₁? (Huang 1993, p. 103)

*Himself* in (12) can refer either to John or Bill.

As for A-movement, it is controversial whether the effects of principle A can be preserved under it. For example, Belletti and Rizzi (1988), Kitagawa and Kuroda (1992) argue that A-movement show reconstruction effects of the binding principle A. On the other hand, Mahajan (1990) and Chomsky (1994) argue that A-movement shows reconstruction effects. If Mahajan (1990) is correct that A-movement does not induce reconstruction effects, then the fact that the secondary topic does not show reconstruction effects indicates that it is derived by A-movement.

3. Deriving the Secondary Topic Construction

If the secondary topic is indeed derived by A-movement, then the next issue to consider is its landing site. Before turning to this issue, I'd like to first reject the base-generation analysis. Then, I'll argue that the landing site of the secondary topic is not spec of AGRoP. Finally, I'll point out two possible landing sites for it.

3.1. Against the Base-generation Analysis

Let's now consider the base-generation analysis of the secondary topic. It is proposed by Fu (1994) that the secondary topic sits in [spec/IP], adopting Kuroda's (1988) suggestion that IP has multiple spec's. Given this analysis, the secondary topic fan 'rice' in (1a) is derived by A-movement into spec/IP, as shown in (13).

(13) IP
   / \ spec IP
   | |
Zhangsan spec 'i'
   | / 
   fan₁ VP
   'rice' / \ V NP
   | |
   chi t₁
   'eat'

This analysis also argues that the secondary topic can be derived by base-generation. The example is shown in (14).

(14) ta, neibu diānyīng, xihuan neige yānyuān (= her 28)
he that movie like which actor
'As for that movie, which actor does he like?'
The example in (15) is also of this sort:

(15) Zhangsan, shui guo, zu xi huan chi ping guo.
    Z. fruit most like eat apple
    'Zhangsan, as for fruit, likes to eat apples most.'

In both (14) and (15), there is no apparent gap that is left by movement, which seems to support the base-generation analysis. But allowing the secondary topic to be base-generated would predict sentences like (16) to be grammatical, contrary to fact. In order to rule out sentences like (16), Fu (1994) invokes the Binding Condition B. The pronoun ta he' in (16) can be analyzed as violating the binding condition B if the root clause is taken as the binding domain.

(16) *Wo, neige ren, genben jibude ta le (= her 30)
    I that person totally can't remember he Prt.
    'I cannot remember that person at all.'

This base-generation analysis of the secondary topic as proposed by Fu (1994), however, runs into one problem. That is, if the secondary topic can be base-generated, it is not clear why sentences like (17) are ungrammatical.

(17) *Wo, neige ren, renwei Lishi genben jibude ta le.
    I that person think L. totally can't remember he Prt.
    'I, as for that person, think that Lishi can't remember him at all.'

In (17), the secondary topic sits in the matrix clause, coindexed with the pronoun ta he' in the embedded clause. The ungrammaticality of (17) can no longer be attributed to the binding Condition B, since the binding domain for the pronoun ta he' is the embedded clause and ta he' is free in the embedded clause, satisfying the binding condition B, so there must be some other reason for the ill-formedness of (17). Given the A-movement analysis, the ungrammaticality of (17) naturally follows, since it is generally assumed that the gap left by A-movement can not be filled with an overt pronoun.

If the secondary topic is not derived by base-generation, we still need to account for examples as in (14) and (15) where no apparent gap is found to be filled by a
(18) Shuiguos, ZHangingan zui xihuan chi [1 pinggou] fruit Z. most like eat apple
"As for fruit, ZHangingan likes to eat apples most."

(19) ZHangingan, wo hen xihuan ta1.
Z. I very like he
ZHangingan, I like him very much.

The evidence that (18) involves movement whereas (19) does not is based on their different locality behaviors. Consider the contrast between (20) and (21).

fruit I like that hate apple DE woman
"Fruit, I like the woman who hates apples."

(21) ZHangingan, wo xihuan neige [taoyian ta1 de] nuren
Z. I like that hate he DE woman
ZHangingan, I like the woman who hates him.

In (20), the NP pinggou 'apple' in the comment clause is embedded within a complex NP island and the sentence is ungrammatical. In contrast, in (21), the relation between the topic ZHangingan and the coreferential pronominal ta 'he' is not affected by embedding to 'he' in an island. If the topic Shuiguos 'fruit' in (20) is base-generated, it is not clear why its associated NP pinggou 'apple' is sensitive to islands, given that in general only movement is so constrained. Based on the contrast between (20) and (21), I thus conclude that the topic which denotes a group such as Shuiguos 'fruit' in (20) is derived by movement. This conclusion in turn supports the movement analysis of examples (14) and (15), which contain no apparent gap.

3.2. Against the movement to spec/AGRoP analysis

After rejecting the base-generation analysis, I now consider the landing site of the secondary topic, if it is derived by A-movement. It is argued by Qu (1994) that the secondary topic is derived by overt movement to spec/AGRoP. Under this analysis, (1a) would have the structure in (22).

\[
\text{CP} \quad (\text{adapted from his 59, p. 94})
\]
\[
/ \quad \text{AGRoP}
\]
\[
/ \quad \text{ZS} \quad \text{AGRoA'}
\]
\[
/ \quad \text{AGRo} \quad \text{AGRoP}
\]
\[
/ \quad \text{AGRo} \quad (\text{NP})
\]
\[
/ \quad \text{AspP}
\]
\[
/ \quad \text{VP}
\]
\[
/ \quad \text{t} \quad \text{V'}
\]
\[
/ \quad \text{V} \quad \text{t}
\]

chi

I will argue that the movement to spec/AGRoP analysis proposed by Qu (1994) is not correct. The argument is based on the hierarchical order between the modal verb and the secondary topic. As shown in the structure (22), Qu (1994) proposes that the AGRoP is higher than the Modal P. If the secondary topic is located in spec of AGRoP, then it is expected that the secondary topic should always be higher than a modal verb. This expectation is not borne out, however. Consider the examples in (23) and (24).

(23) a. Ta yinggai zongtong xie de shu kaohao du yi du he should president write DE book diligently read one read
He, as for the book that the president wrote, should read diligently a little bit.
b. Ta zongtong xie de shu yinggai hao bao du yi du.
   he president write DE book should diligently read one read
   'He, as for the book that the president wrote, should read diligently a little bit.'

(24) Wei le dacheng muhao,
   for achieve goal
   'In order to achieve the goal,'
   a. ta keyi fan bu chi, dianshi bu kan
      he can rice not eat TV not see
   b. ta fan keyi bu chi, dianshi keyi bu kan.
      he rice can not eat TV can not see
   'he can, rice, not eat; TV, not watch.'

As shown in (23) and (24), the secondary topic can either precede or follow the modal verb. Given the assumption that the AGRoP should occupy a fixed position in the clause structure, the flexible word order of the secondary topic with respect to the modal verb suggests that the secondary topic does not sit in the spec of AGRoP.

3.3. Two Possible Derivations of the Secondary Topic

I now suggest two possible derivations of the secondary topic. The first possibility is to adopt Ernst and Wang's (1995) suggestion that the secondary topic is derived by VP adjunction. The VP adjunction analysis can naturally account for the fact that the direct object and indirect object can have a free word order as a secondary topic.

(26) Primary Topic P
    / \
     IP
      / \ Secondary Topic P
       / \ VP
        / \...

4. In summary, I have argued first that the post-subject NP in (1a) can function either as a focus or a topic. Its exact function is determined by the discourse. Second, this type of NP cannot be base-generated, contrary to Fu (1994). Third, it is derived by A-movement, its landing site is not spec of AGRoP. Rather, we may argue that it is derived by VP-adjunction or by movement into the spec of a functional category, but as discussed earlier, both of them need to take additional assumptions.
REFERENCES


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