

Internal Topic and Focus in Mandarin Chinese: on the So-called Verb-duplicated Construction

In this work, I argue that Topic and Focus in Chinese can be licensed sentence internally by two distinct functional heads in a fixed order, viz. sentence internal Topic must precede the internal Focus, not *vice versa*. I show that the so-called verb-duplicated phenomenon in Chinese can be explained syntactically in terms of the information structure. Different from the previous analyses, I argue that “the verb duplicated construction” in Chinese should be analyzed as having the so-called original VP (henceforth VP1) base-generated in the INFL domain and the so-called duplicated verb as the predicate of a sentence (i.e. (1)). In (2a) the VP1 *xue diannao* ‘learn computer science’ serves as the Topic and the other preverbal phrase being the Focus has to follow VP1. However, the same VP1 contrasts with *xue yuyan* ‘learn language’ in (2b), and therefore, VP1 has to follow the other sentence internal phrase *qu meiguo* ‘go to the U.S.’, but not precede it. In other words, sentence internal Topic must precede the internal Focus, not *vice versa*. The result of this study will support Tang’s (1990) observation that sentence internal elements are licensed by functional projections in the INFL domain, but conflict with Huang’s (1982) V’-duplication tradition or other types of VP analyses. This study will further demonstrate that the long lasting dispute over the “Topic vs. Focus ambiguity” of preverbal phrases, e.g. the VP1 at issue, comes from the failure to differentiate distinct licensing positions of Topic and Focus. I will start with the examination of properties of VP1 and show that it behaves on a par with INFL elements rather than constituents within VP, e.g. *ba*-phrases, which denotes the periphery of predicate, must follow VP1 (e.g. (3a)), and sentential adverbs like *dagai* ‘probably’ can either precede or follow VP1 (e.g. (3b)). Besides, VP1 cannot take aspect markers whereas the so-called duplicated verb can (e.g. (3c)). This study will in turn show that treating the sentence internal elements as only involving either Topic (cf. Paul (2002)) or Focus (cf. Tsai (1994) and Shyu (1995)) is partially correct, and that different layers of projections for licensing internal Topic and internal Focus are needed. The proposed analysis and its supporting evidence further suggest that Rizzi’s (1997) “fine structure of the left periphery” can be adopted in the analysis of lower INFL domain with slight adjustments made for the Mandarin data.

- (1) [IP Ta [VP₁ **xue diannaο**] [VP [V₂ **xue le**] san ge yue]]
 he learn computer learn PERF three CL month
 ‘He has been studying computer science for three months.’
- (2) a. Ta (*xie chengshi) **xue diannaο** xie chengshi zongshi **xue bu hao**
 he write program learn computer write program always learn not well
 (, da diandong dao hai xing)
 play PCgame rather still can
 ‘As for studying computer science, it is programming that always bothers him (,
 although he is rather good at playing computer games).’
- b. Ta (*?**xue diannaο**) qu meiguο **xue diannaο xue le si nian** (, bu shi xue yuyan
 he learn computer go U.S. learn computer learn PERF four year not be learn language
 ‘It is studying computer science that he spent four years while being in the states (,
 not studying language).’
- (3) a. Ta (*ba ma) **xunlian ma** (ba ma) **xunlian de hen hao**
 he BA horse train horse BA horse train DE very good
 ‘He has been training horses and makes horses very well-trained.’
- b. Ta (dagai) **xunlian ma** (daigai) **xunlian le san ge xiaoshi**
 he probably train horse probably train PERF three CL hour
 ‘He probably trained horses for three hours already.’
- c. Ta **xunlian** (*le) **ma xunlian le san ge xiaoshi**
 he train PERF horse train PERF three CL hour
 ‘He has been training horses for three hours.’

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