

Nominal Internal and External Topic and Focus: Evidence from Mandarin

Yu-Yin Hsu (*hsuy@indiana.edu*)
Indiana University—Bloomington

Since Chomsky's (1970) *Remarks on Nominalization*, linguists have been exploring the parallelisms between sentential and nominal structure. Based on the Cartographic Approach of Giusti (1996, 2006) and Aboh (2004), I argue that the left periphery of nominals in Mandarin (i.e., the domain before demonstratives) has properties similar to the split CP domain proposed by Rizzi (1997). In addition, I argue that the nominal-internal domain (i.e., between demonstratives and NP) treats information structure in a way similar to the sentence-internal Topic and Focus that has been put forth in the literature (see Belletti 2004, Paul 2005, and Hsu 2012). The result supports the parallelisms between noun phrases and clauses in terms of the interaction between syntax and information structure.

Internal-Topic/Focus: Corver and Koppen (2009) point out that Dutch attributive adjectives in the indefinite neuter singular do not precede a schwa (orthographically *-e*), unlike attributive adjectives in other contexts; example (1) shows that having the marker *-e* incurs ungrammaticality. However, when such adjectives are used in nominal ellipsis, the marker *-e* is required, as shown in (2). Following Merchant (2001) and assuming that ellipsis is a pragmatic phenomenon, Corver et al. (2009) and Cornilescu and Nicolae (2012) argue that nominal ellipsis involves a Focus (i.e., the remnant) and a common Topic (i.e., the elided NP). We can see that similar examples are found in Mandarin. Although attributive adjectives may optionally take the suffix *-de* (e.g., (3a)), the *-de* marker is required in nominal ellipsis, as in (3b). Furthermore, the status of Topic and Focus in the nominal-internal domain is shown in *wh*-questions. Example (4) shows that the *wh*-phrase is an adjective, and that the noun, *gudong* 'antique', is the Topic given the discourse, and thus, *gudong* 'antique' can be overt or covert. As the answer to the *wh*-question (4a), adjectives of nationality in (4b) are Focus, and the NP Topic therein is optional.

External-Topic/Focus: In addition to the internal domain, I argue that the left periphery of nominals in Mandarin can also host Topic and Focus, similar to the CP domain. A nominal in Mandarin can consist of demonstrative, number, classifier and noun. Canonically, they have to occur in this fixed order, "Dem, Num, CL, N." I assume that the occurrence of demonstratives signals the left periphery of Mandarin nominals. It has been assumed in the literature that Focus is relevant to adjectives that occur in a non-canonical or peculiar position. Example (5) shows that the superlative attributive adjective, *zui gao-de* 'tallest', most naturally occurs at the beginning of the nominal preceding the demonstrative, rather than at its more common, canonical position (e.g., (5b)). This suggests that exhaustivity seems to be associated with the nominal periphery. Moreover, a corpus study by Zhang and Huang (1995) has reported that the speaker reverses the order of NP and Num-CL to emphasize quantity, as shown in (6). I argue that such inversion focalizes the Num-CL sequence and presents the NP as Topic at the nominal periphery. The discourse in (7) demonstrates this point; the NP (*plate, bowl, and cup*) as Topics partition the previously mentioned NP (*chinaware*) and each of them is associated with the following Num-CL sequence which is the answer to the *wh*-question, thus, the Focus.

I argue that identifying Topic and Focus in the internal and external domains can help to explain various so-called "reordering" and extraction phenomena affecting nominal elements and their associated discourse functions. It also helps to examine the parallels and differences between noun phrases and sentences.

Examples

- (1) Ik heb gisteren een zwart(*-e) konijn zien lopen. [Colloquial Dutch]
 I have yesterday a black-E rabbit see walk
 ‘I have seen a black rabbit yesterday.’
- (2) (Over *Konijnen* gesproken ... ‘Talking about rabbits...’)
 Ik heb gisteren een [Foc zwart-e] [Top ec] zien lopen.
 I have yesterday a black-E see walk
 ‘I have seen a black one yesterday.’
- (3) a. Wo zuotian kandao-le yi-zhi [NP hei-se(-de) tuzi].
 I yesterday see-PERF one-CL black-color-DE rabbit
 ‘I saw a black rabbit yesterday.’
 b. (Shuodao *tuzi*_i) wo zuotian kandao-le yi-zhi [NP [Foc hei-se*(-de)] [Top ec_i]].
 Speaking.of rabbit I yesterday see-PERF one-CL black-color-DE
 ‘(Talking about rabbits,) I saw a black one yesterday.’
- (4) a. Shuodao *gudong*, Zhangsan xihuan [NP [Foc na.guo-de] ([Top gudong)]]?
 Speaking.of antique Zhangsan like what.country-DE antique
 ‘Speaking of antiques, antiques of what countries does Zhangsan like?’
 b. Ta xihuan [NP [Foc faguo han xila de] ([Top gudong)]].
 he like French and Greece-DE antique
 ‘He likes French and Greece antiques.’
- (5) a. [Foc Zui gao-de] na yi-ge nusheng shi wo nupengyou.
 Most tall-DE that one-CL girl is my girlfriend
 ‘(Only) that tallest girl is my girlfriend.’
 b. # Na yi-ge [NP [Foc zui gao-de] nusheng] shi wo nupengyou.
 that one-CL most tall-DE girl is my girlfriend
- (6) a. Qing gei wo [liang-bei guozhi]. → the neutral reading with canonical order
 please give me two-CL juice
 ‘Please give me two cups of juice.’
 b. Qing gei wo [Top guozhi_i] [Foc liang-bei]. (Zhang and Huang 1995:3)
 Please give me juice two-CL
 ‘Please give me TWO CUPS of juice’
- (7) A: **How many pieces** of *chinaware* do we need to prepare for tonight's party?
 B: Qing zhunbei [[Top *panzi*] [Foc *sishi-ge*]], [[Top *wan*] [Foc *ershi-ge*]], [[Top *beizi*] [Foc *ershi-ge*]].
 please prepare plate 40-CL bowl 20-CL cup 20-CL
 ‘Please prepare plates, 40 of them, bowl, 20 of them, and cups, 20 of them.’

Selected References

- Aboh, Enoch O. (2004) Topic and Focus within D. *Linguistics in the Netherlands* 21: 1-12.
- Belletti, Adriana. 2004. Aspects of the Low IP Area. In Luigi Rizzi (ed.), *The Structure of CP and IP*, 16-51.
- Giusti, Giuliana. (1996) Is there a FocusP and a TopicP in the Noun Phrase Structure? *University of Venice Working Papers in Linguistics*, Vol. 6, n.2: 105-128.
- Giusti, Giuliana. (2006) Parallels in clausal and nominal periphery. In Mara Frascarelli (ed.) *Phrases of Interpretation*, Mouton de Gruyter, Holland. P163-184.
- Cornilescu, Alexandra and Alexandru Nicolae. (2012) Nominal ellipsis as definiteness and anaphoricity: The case of Romanian. *Lingua* Vol.122: 1070-1111.
- Corver, Norbert and Marjo van Koppen. (2009) Let's Focus on Noun Phrase Ellipsis, *Groninger Arbeiten zur Germanistischen Linguistik* 48: 3-26.
- Hsu, Yu-Yin. (2012) Two Functional Projections in the Medial Domain in Chinese. *Concentric: Studies in Linguistics*, 38.1: 93-136.
- Merchant, Jason. 2001. *The Syntax of Silence: Sluicing, Islands, and the Theory of Ellipsis*, Oxford University Press, Oxford.