Towards a syntactic focus movement account of the sluicing-like construction in Chinese
Wei Song
University of Minnesota

Sluicing is an elliptical construction in which a wh-phrase appears in the place where we expect a full clause. A standard analysis of sluicing is that it derives from overt wh-movement followed by deletion of TP, i.e. the PF-deletion account (e.g., Ross 1969; Merchant 2001; Lasnik 2001). However, the PF-deletion account may have difficulty in accounting for the apparent sluicing cases in wh-in-situ languages because wh-phrases in these languages normally do not undergo overt movement (e.g., Huang 1982). Chinese, a wh-in-situ language, has a sluicing-like construction (henceforth SLC) as in (1).

(1) Mouren ganggang likai-le – caicai shi shei?
somebody just leave-PERF guess SHI who
‘Somebody just left – guess who?’

Following Wang & Wu (2006), I propose that SLC in Chinese should be analyzed as overt focus movement of a wh-phrase followed by deletion of TP. I show that strong evidence for this analysis comes from the fact that the distribution of the focus marker shi in SLC exactly parallels its distribution in wh-fronting constructions where wh-phrases undergo overt focus movement to the pre-subject position.

Wang (2002) noted that the distribution of shi in SLC displays an asymmetry between wh-phrases such as shei “who” and shenme “what” and wh-phrases such as zai-nali “where”, shenme-shihou “when”, and wei-shenme “why”. While shi is obligatory before shei “who” and shenme “what” as in (2), shi is optional before zai-nali “where”, shenme-shihou “when”, and wei-shenme “why” as in (3).

(2) a. Zhangsan zui xinren mouren, dan wo bu zhidao *(shi) shei.
Zhangsan most trust someone but 1SG NEG know SHI who
‘Zhangsan trusts someone most, but I don’t know who.’
b. Zhangsan tebie taoyan mouwu, dan wo bu zhidao *(shi) shenme.
Zhangsan very dislike something but 1SG NEG know what
‘Zhangsan dislikes something very much, but I don’t know what.’

(3) a. Zhangsan he Lisi zai moudi, xiangyu-le, dan wo bu zhidao (shi) zai-nali.
Zhangsan and Lisi PREP some.place meet-PERF but 1SG NEG know SHI where
‘Zhangsan and Lisi met in some place, but I don’t know where.’
b. Zhangsan zai moushi, like-le paidui, dan wo bu zhidao (shi) shenme-shihou.
Zhangsan PREP some.time leave-PERF party but 1SG NEG know SHI when
‘Zhangsan left the party at some time, but I don’t know when.’

Wang (2002) suggests that the asymmetry of the distribution of shi is between wh-arguments and wh-adjuncts. However, I show that argument-adjunct is not the right distinction because shi is also optional before the d-linked wh-argument in (4) and the (oblique) prepositional wh-argument in (5).

(4) Zhangsan yudao-le mou-ge xuesheng, dan wo bu zhidao (shi) na-ge xuesheng.
Zhangsan meet-PERF some-CL student but 1SG NEG know SHI which-CL student
‘Zhangsan met some student, but I don’t know which student.’

(5) Zhangsan song-le yi-ben shu gei mouren, dan wo bu zhidao (shi) gei shei.
Zhangsan give-PERF one-CL book to someone but 1SG NEG know SHI to whom
‘Zhangsan gave one book to someone, but I don’t know to whom.’

I claim that the asymmetry of the distribution of shi, rather than being sensitive to the argument-adjunct distinction, is morphologically-driven. While shi is obligatory before simple (i.e. mono-morphemic) wh-phrases such as shei “who” and shenme “what”, shi is optional before composite (i.e. multi-

---

1 In this paper I treat the morpheme shi as a focus marker (e.g., Paris 1979; Huang 1982, 1984; Chiu 1993; Shi 1994; Lee 2005). I gloss shi as SHI. I use the abbreviation PERF for perfective, NEG for negative, and 1SG for first-person singular.
morphemic) wh-phrases such as zai-nali “where”, shenme-shihou “when”, wei-shenme “why”, d-linked wh-arguments, and prepositional wh-phrases. Note that the wh-phrase zenmeyang “how” that interrogates the manner or method of the event is not allowed in SLC (cf. Adams 2004).

(6) *Zhangsan yong mou-zhong fangshi, shasi-le Lisi, dan wo bu zhidao shi zenmeyang, Zhangsan use some-CL manner kill-PERF Lisi but 1SG NEG know SHI how Intended? ‘Zhangsan killed Lisi in some manner, but I don’t know how.’

Importantly, the asymmetry of the distribution of shi between simplex and composite wh-phrases in SLC exactly parallels that in wh-fronting constructions where wh-phrases undergo overt focus movement to the pre-subject position. Note that (7) – (11) are minimal pairs with (2) – (6). While shi is obligatory in (7), it is optional in (8) – (10). The wh-phrase zenmeyang “how” is also not allowed in wh-fronting constructions as in (11).

(7) a. Shi shei?, Zhangsan zui xinren ti? b. Shi shenmei, Zhangsan tebie taoyan ti?
   SHI who Zhangsan most trust SHI what Zhangsan very dislike
   ‘Who is it that Zhangsan trusts most?’ ‘What is it that Zhangsan dislikes very much?’

(8) a. (Shi) zai-nali, Zhangsan he Lisi ti xiangyu-le?
   SHI where Zhangsan and Lisi meet-PERF
   ‘Where was it that Zhangsan and Lisi met?’

b. (Shi) shenme-shihou, Zhangsan ti likai-le paidui?
   SHI when Zhangsan leave-PERF party
   ‘When was it that Zhangsan left the party?’

(9) (Shi) na-ge xueshengi, Zhangsan yudao-le ti?
   SHI which-CL student Zhangsan meet-PERF
   ‘Which student was it that Zhangsan met?’

(10) (Shi) gei shei, Zhangsan song-le yi-ben shu ti?
   SHI to whom Zhangsan give-PERF one-CL book
   ‘To whom was it that Zhangsan gave a book?’

(11) *Shi zenmeyang, Zhangsan ti shasi-le Lisi?
   SHI how Zhangsan kill-PERF Lisi
   Intended? ‘How was it that Zhangsan killed Lisi?’

The consistency of the asymmetry of the distribution of shi between simplex and composite wh-phrases in SLC and wh-fronting constructions strongly supports the analysis that SLC in Chinese, like sluicing in English, derives from overt movement followed by TP-deletion. That is, Chinese exhibits genuine sluicing, which provides a plausible explanation for the commonalities such as pied-piping, strict/sloppy identity ambiguity, and island repair effects between SLC in Chinese and sluicing in wh-moving languages.

Specifically, I suggest that the focus marker shi in SLC is a spelled-out Focus head in the left periphery. Wh-phrases undergo overt focus movement to spec-FocP, and shi is raised to a higher functional projection, i.e. ShiP, to c-command the wh-phrases and derive the surface word order.

(12) Zhangsan da-le mouren,
    Zhangsan hit-PERF someone
dan wo bu zhidao [Shi [FocP shei] ti [TP Zhangsan da-le ti]].
but 1SG NEG know SHI who Zhangsan hit-PERF
   ‘Zhangsan hit someone, but I don’t know [CP who [TP Zhangsan hit ti]].’