

Alternatives and Focus: Distribution of Chinese Relative Clauses Revisited

Yu-Yin Hsu

Hong Kong Polytechnic University

In this paper, I present findings from the investigation of syntax and information structure of Chinese relative clauses (hence RCs) and results of a production study; I argue that Chinese relative clauses at the left-periphery of a nominal express Focus, similar to Focus at the left-periphery of a sentence *à la* Rizzi (1997). The result of this paper supports the parallelism between clausal and nominal structures (Giusti, 1996; Aboh, 2004).

Chinese RCs can occur before demonstrative (RC1) or between Cl and N (RC2).

(1) (RC1) *Demonstrative Numeral Classifier* (RC2) *Noun*

Following Kayne (1994), Simpson (2003) proposes that RC2 is derived from RC1 as a result of demonstrative movement. Ming's (2010) corpus study suggests that RC2 is basic and RC1 is more marked, and that RC1 serves to identify the referent of noun and RC2 describes the characteristics of noun (see Fox and Thompson, 1990). Following Chao (1968), Huang (1982) and Constant (2011) propose that RC1 expresses restrictive interpretation, and RC2 expresses descriptive interpretation. However, Tsai (1994) argues that RC1 is nonrestrictive and RC2 is restrictive. Zhang (2015) argues that RC1 expresses specificity and RC2 does not. Del Gobbo (2005, 2010) and Shi (2010), instead, argue that Chinese relative clauses are all restrictive.

Chinese RCs can modify pronouns and proper names (e.g., (2)), suggesting that RCs' function may not be mainly for expressing specificity or identifying the referent of noun.

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|--------|--|------|-------------|---------|--------|-------|------|-----|-----------|-----|-------------|
| (2) a. | Yi-hui-tou, | wo | jiu | kanjian | [RC1 | zheng | zai | zuo | yundong | de] | ta. |
| | look-back | I | immediately | see | | right | PROG | do | exercise | | DE him |
| | 'As soon as I turned around, I saw him, who's doing exercise.' | | | | | | | | | | |
| b. | Nimen | hui | kandao | [RC1 | pao.de | geng | kuai | de] | Liuxiang. | | (Shi, 2010) |
| | you | will | see | | run.De | more | fast | DE | Liuxiang | | |
| | 'You will see a Liuxiang who runs faster.' | | | | | | | | | | |

If the "restrictive" function is understood as to specify a subset of objects (Keenan and Comrie, 1977), Shi (2010) argues that both RC1 and RC2 (whether they are individual-level and stage-level RCs) are all restrictive; that is, even in examples like (2), the individual can be understood as realizing in a set of different stages, and RCs restrict a subset of stages. Nonetheless, only considering "restrictiveness" or "specificity" does not seem to be sufficient. Without contexts, it is usually reported by native speakers of Chinese that (3a) with RC1 seems to suggest that the speaker has more than one father (contrary to the intended interpretation), whereas (3b) with RC2 better expresses the intended interpretation.

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|-------------|---|---------|------|------|-------------|------|------|-------------|--------|--------|
| (3) a. ?*wo | [RC1 | jianchi | zhu | zai | xiangxia | de] | na | ge | laoba | |
| | my | insist | live | at | countryside | DE | that | CL | father | |
| | 'my father, who insists on living in the countryside' | | | | | | | | | |
| b. | wo | na | ge | [RC2 | jianchi | zhu | zai | xiangxia | de] | laoba |
| | my | that | CL | | insist | live | at | countryside | DE | father |

However, the same (3a) with the same intended nonrestrictive interpretation is accepted in some contexts. The example in (4) presents a contrastive context where RC1 indicates one situation of the denotation of the noun as an alternative to other potentially possible situations (underlined in the latter part of the sentence).

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|-------------|---|------------|----------------|---------------|------------|-----------------|------------|-----------|-----------|--------------|
| (4) Shuodao | wo | [RC1-Focus | <u>jianchi</u> | <u>zhu</u> | <u>zai</u> | <u>xiangxia</u> | <u>de]</u> | <u>na</u> | <u>ge</u> | <u>laoba</u> |
| | speaking.of | my | insist | live | at | countryside | DE | that | CL | father |
| | bu | zhi | ta | shenme.shihou | yuanyi | bandao | dushi | lai | gen | women zhu! |
| | not | know | he | when | willing | move | city | come | with | us live |
| | 'Speaking of my father, who insists on living in the countryside, [we] don't know when he will be willing to move to the city to live with us!' | | | | | | | | | |

[Proposal] I propose that the main function of Chinese RCs at the pre-demonstrative position

(i.e., RC1) is to express Focus, restricting and emphasizing one (or a subset of) alternative denoted by the RC as apposed to other (overt or covert) alternatives, following Krifka (2007) that “Focus indicates the presence of alternatives that are relevant for the interpretation of linguistic expressions”. Syntactically, I argue that RC1 is derived by moving from a modifier position of NP (i.e., RC2) to the Spec,FocusPhrase at the nominal-periphery, which is a result of nominal-internal Focus movement. This movement analysis is supported by the superiority effect found in the co-occurrence of multiple RCs (see Lin, 2008). Examples in (5) show that when one of the two RC2 moves, only the former can move to the left-periphery ((5b)), but the latter cannot move across the former to the left-periphery ((5c)).

- (5) a. na ge [_{RC} **zuotian meiyou lai de**] [_{RC} **hen xihuan shang ke de**] xuesheng
 that CL yesterday not come DE very like go class DE student
 ‘that student who didn’t come yesterday, who likes to come to class very much’
 b. [_{RC} **zuotian meiyou lai de**] na ge [_{RC} **hen xihuan shang ke de**] xuesheng
 c. * [_{RC} **hen xihuan shang ke de**] na ge [_{RC} **zuotian meiyou lai de**] xuesheng

In addition, when a nominal is marked with a Focus operator, such as *zhiyou* ‘only’, the RC therein is better occurring at the nominal-periphery. In a scenario where a director is looking for three students with a peculiar property to play certain roles in a new movie, the director complains to his casting director as in (6): using RC1 or RC2 differs in acceptabilities.

- (6) ‘How come you got me these unqualified actors? I have told you that....’
 a. ?***Zhiyou** san ge [_{RC2} **conglai-bu xizao de**] xuesheng cai shi wo yao de!
 only 3 CL never shower DE student exactly be I want De
 ‘Only 3 students who never take a shower are whom I am looking for.’
 b. **Zhiyou** [_{RC1} **conglai-bu xizao de**] san ge xuesheng cai shi wo yao de!
 only never shower DE 3 CL student exactly be I want De

This proposal has gained support from a production study. In a forced-choice questionnaire experiment (N=156), participants were asked to choose between RC1 and RC2 to complete a dialogue. The need of expressing “restrictiveness” was manipulated into two conditions (a non-Focus condition where RCs modify the whole set, and a Focus condition where RCs modify a subset contrasting with other alternative subsets) and were crossed with 5 information statuses (non-Focus declaratives, contrastive Focus of RC, *even*-Focus of RC, *only*-Focus of RC, and answers to *wh*-questions). The overall result shows significant effects of choosing RC1 under the Focus condition ($p < .001$), and when different information statuses were involved ($p < .001$): contrastive Focus ($p < .001$) and *only* Focus ($p = .022$) show significant effects on choosing RC1. No significant effects were found between RC1 and RC2 when no nominal-internal Focus is involved (i.e., in declaratives and in answers to *wh*-questions).

If the current proposal is on the right track, it also explains why the NP after RC2 can undergo further topicalization, but the constituent after RC1 cannot (cf. Lin and Tsai, 2015; Zhang, 2015). Assuming the Phase Impenetrability Condition and that movement cannot be too short (Bošković, 2005), I propose that moving the demonstrative phrase to be before RC1 violates anti-locality (7a), but extracting an NP that RC2 modified is fine (7b).

- (7) a. ***Na ge xuesheng**_i, wo renshi [_{t_i} [_{FocP} [_{RC1} **zuotian lai zhao ni de**] [_{Foc'} Ø_{Focus} _{t_i}]]].
 that CL student I know yesterday come find you DE
 ‘(As for) that student, I know [the one] who came to look for you yesterday.’
 b. **Xuesheng**_i, wo renshi [_{t_i} [_{DP} na ge [_{ModP} [_{RC2} **zuotian lai zhao ni**] de _{t_i}]].
 student I know that CL yesterday come find you DE
 ‘(As for) students, I know that one who came to look for you yesterday.’

In sum, the theoretical analysis and empirical data follow naturally if RC1 is distinguished from RC2 in expressing Focus within the nominal domain. It also shows that features of information structure play an important role in narrow syntax like other formal features do.