

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

Yu-Yin Hsu
Indiana University

1. Introduction

◆ Syntactically, in general, Topic and Focus involve items in a non-canonical position, which denote special information of a sentence.

◆ In Chinese, the object is allowed to occur between the subject and the verb.

(1) Zhangsan na.ben.shu₁ kanguo.le ec₁
Zhangsan that.CL.book read.PERF
'Zhangsan has read that book.'

1.1 The dispute over the medial phrases

◆ Some literatures refer to the medial phrases as **Topic**, e.g., Tsao (1990) and Paul (2002) argue for the Secondary Topic, as opposed to the sentence-initial Topic.

◆ Some refer to such medial phrases as **Focus**, e.g., Tsai (1994), Ernst and Wang (1995), and Shyu (1995) argue for the contrastive Focus conveyed by the medial element.

→ The sentence-internal domain:
below TP and above vP

1.2 The goal of this study

- ◆ To show that the sentence-internal domain in Chinese is relevant to Topic/Focus.
- ◆ To argue that two distinct projections are needed sentence-internally for Topic and Focus.
- ◆ To demonstrate that the so-called “verb-duplicated construction” is better accounted for under the proposed two-projection analysis.

2. The S-internal position is relevant to information-structural notions

2.1 Answers to questions:

(2) ni zuoye xiewan.le ma? 'Are you done with your assignment?'

a. wo zuoye xiewan __ le
I assignment write PERF

'I am done with the assignment.'

b. wo e xiewan __ le
I write PERF (overt and phonologically null are possible)

'I am done with [it].'
→ zuoye is a **Topic**

c. wo xiewan zuoye le
I write assignment PERF

'I am done with the assignment.'
(redundantly unnatural)

→ (2a) (2b) vs. (2c): the S-internal position is **Topic** related.

◆ The sentence-internal item can be the answer to *wh*-questions and have Focus intonation

(3) ni shemo xiewan.le? 'What have you finished?'

a. wo zuoye xiewan __ le (zuoye can be stressed)
I assignment write PERF
'THE ASSIGNMENT, I have finished it.'

b. wo xiewan zuoye le (zuoye cannot be stressed)
I write assignment PERF
'I have finished the assignment.'

→ The stressed intonation on the internal item shows that the sentence-internal position is relevant to **Focus**.

◆ The same position can be used for both **Topic** and **Focus**.

2.2 The emphatic *shi*

◆ In cleft sentences, the emphatic *shi* can sit sentence-internally to mark its following phrases.

(4)

- a. wo [**shi shu**] maihao.le (bi hai.mei)
I SHI book buy.PERF (pen not.yet)
'It is the book that I bought (, not pens).'
- b. wo **shu** [**shi** kanwan.le] (hai jibuzhu zhongdian)
I book SHI read.PERF (not.yet remember main.points)
'As for book, I did finish reading it.'

◆ Answers involving **Topic** is not compatible with *shi*.

- (5) a. ni zuoye xiwan.le ma?
you homework write.PERF Q-PART
'Did you write the homework?'
- b. wo (***shi**) zuoye xiewan.le
I SHI homework write.PERF
'I wrote the homework.' (Paul (2002))

◆ Answers involving **Focus** is compatible with *shi*.

- (6) a. ni shemo xiwan.le? (Baogao?)
you what write.PERF
'What did you finish? (Paper?)'
- b. wo **shi zuoye** xiewan.le (baogao hai.mei)
I SHI assignment write. PERF paper not.yet
'It is the assignment that I finished (, not the paper).'

→ (5) vs. (6): It is shown that sentence-internal **Topic** and **Focus** behave differently with respect to the emphatic *shi*.

2.3 Indefinite phrases

◆ Li and Thompson (1981): **Topics** in Chinese must be either generic or definite; an indefinite Topic is not allowed.

◆ Tsai (1994): an indefinite phrase is allowed sentence-internally.

- (7) wo **yi.pian.lunwen** keyi yingfu (, liang.pian jiu bu xing le)
I one.CL.paper can handle 2. CL.paper then not can ASP
'I can handle ONE PAPER (, but not two).'

→ sentence internal-position is allowed to host a **Focus** phrase.

→ It is further supported by examples with the emphatic *shi*.

- (8) wo **shi yi.pian.lunwen** keyi yingfu (, liang.pian jiu bu xing le)
I SHI 1.CL.paper can handle 2. CL.paper then not can ASP
'It is one paper that I can handle (, but not two).'

→ (2)-(8) show that both **Topic** and **Focus** are allowed S-internally.

3. Two S-internal functional projections: **TopP** and **FocP**

◆ Following the spirit of Rizzi (1997), I claim that two distinct projections should be identified in the sentence-internal domain (i.e., between TP and vP) to host **Topic** and **Focus** respectively, and that such projections are present in a structure only if needed.

◆ Argument #1: Co-occurred **Topic** and **Focus** in a fixed order

(9) 'Speaking of books, it is novels that he reads most.'

- a. ta **shu** **xiaoshuo** kan.de zui duo
he book novel read.RESULT most many
- b. *ta **xiaoshuo** **shu** kan.de zui duo
he novel book read.RESULT most many

◆ Argument #2: Answers to *wh*-questions

(10)a. ta **shuiguo** zui chang chi shemo?
 he fruit most often eat what
 ‘Speaking of fruit, what does he eat most often?’

b. ta (**shuiguo**) *(**pingguo**) zui chang chi
 he fruit apple most often eat
 ‘(Fruit,) he eats apples most often.’

➔ While the occurrence of **Topic** in the answer is optional, **Focus** is obligatory in answering *wh*-questions.

◆ Argument #3: The compatibility of the emphatic *shi*

(11) ‘Speaking of books, it is novels that he reads most.’

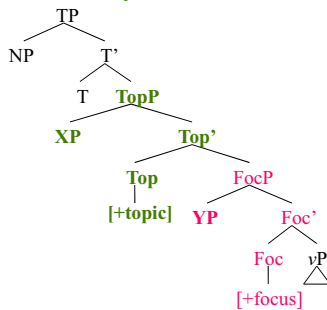
a. *ta [**shi shu**] **xiaoshuo** kan.de zui duo
 he SHI book novel read.DE most many
 b. ta **shu** [**shi xiaoshuo**] kan.de zui duo
 he book SHI novel read.DE most many

➔ While the emphatic *shi* is known to be allowed sentence-internally, it is shown that the emphatic *shi* is only compatible with the **Focus** element but not with the **Topic**.

The proposed structure

◆ (9)-(11): Two internal positions are involved with different functions and structures.

(12) Sentence-internal **TopP** and **FocP**



4. Further support–
 the so-called V-duplicated construction

4.1 Phenomenon:

◆ In Chinese, a verb can be followed by a nominal complement (13a) or an adverbial phrase denoting the duration (13b) or resultativeness (13c).

(13) a. ta kan.le [shu]
 he read.PERF book
 ‘He read books.’

b. ta kan.le [liang.ge.xiaoshi]
 he read.PERF 2.CL.hour
 ‘He has read for two hours.’

c. ta kan.de [hen lei]
 he read.RESULT very tired
 ‘He read and got very tired.’

◆ However, having more than one constituent to follow the verb yields ungrammatical sentences.

(14) a. *ta kan.le [shu] [liang.ge.xiaoshi]
 he read.PERF book 2.CL.hour
 ‘He has read books for two hours.’

b. *ta kan.le [shu] [hen lei]
 he read.PERF book very tired
 ‘He read books and got very tired.’

◆ Therefore, it seems that an “extra-copy” of the verb is needed to salvage such ungrammatical sentences.

(15) a. ta [**kan shu**] [**kan.le** liang.ge xiaoshi]
 he read book read.PERF 2.CL.hour
 ‘He has read books for two hours.’

b. ta [**kan shu**] [**kan.de** hen lei]
 he read book read.RESULT very tired
 ‘He read books and got very tired.’

4.2 Huang's (1982) V-duplicated analysis

(16)

ta [VP [V1' **qi**_{original} ma] [V2 **qi**_{duplicated}.le xan.ge.xiaoshi]]

he ride horse ride PERF 3.CL.hour

'He rode for three hours.'

➔ There are some problems shared by VP-analyses.

4.3 Questions for VP analyses

◆ **Q1:** It is not clear why V2 always carries aspect markers, but V1 never does, if V1 is the "original" verb and V2 is the "duplicated" one.

(17) 'He read books for three hours.'

a. ta **kan**₁ shu **kan**₂.le san.ge.xiaoshi
he read book read.PERF 3.CL.hour

b. *ta **kan**₁.le shu **kan**₂ san.ge.xiaoshi
read. PERF read

c. *ta **kan**₁.le shu **kan**₂.le san.ge.xiaoshi
read. PERF read.PERF

4.3 Questions for VP analyses

◆ **Q2:** If VP1 is analyzed as part of the predicate-VP, why is the distribution of VP1 similar to temporals and locatives, as a constituent independent of the predicate-VP?

(18)

a. [_{VP1}**kan shu**]ta [_{VP1}**kan shu**]keyi [_{VP1}**kan shu**] **kan**₂ haojige.xiaoshi
readbook he can read many.hour
'he can read books for many hours.'

b. (jintian/zai.zheli) wo (jintian/zai.zheli) keyi (jintian/zai.zheli) kan shu
today/at home I can read book
'Today/At home, I can read books.'

4.3 Questions for VP analyses

◆ **Q3:** Under the VP-analysis, it is not clear why VP1 never follows *ba*-phrases, if *ba*-phrases indicate the left-periphery of VP.

(19)

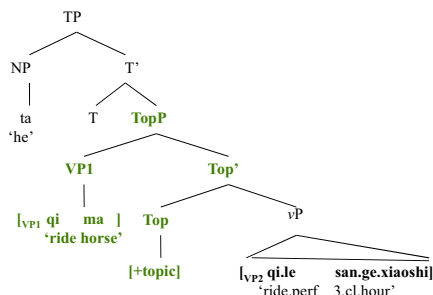
ta (*ba ma) **xunlian**₁ ma (ba ma) **xunlian**₂.de hen hao
he BA horse train horse train.RESULT very well
'He trains horses very well.'

4.4 The proposal

4.4.1 VP1 as the internal **Topic**

◆ **Claim:** the so-called verb-duplicated construction involves two base-generated VPs.

(20)



◆ **Argument #1: Topic** interpretation of VP1

(21)

a. ni [_{VP1}**xue zhongwen**] **xue**₂.le wu nian ma?
'Did you learn Chinese for 5 years?'

b. dui, wu ([_{VP1}**xue zhongwen**]) **xue**₂.le wu nian
yes, I learn Chinese learn.PERF 5.year
'Yes, I spent five years learning Chinese.'

➔ VP1 is optional in the answer.

◆ Argument #2: Co-occurred with the *even*-phrase

Lian-phrases (i.e., even-phrases) are known as Focus phrases with the marker *lian*- (see Shyu (1995) and Paul (2002)).

Thus, when the internal Focus position is occupied by an *even*-phrase, it is supposed that VP1 at issue can only be licensed at the Topic-Spec.

➔ The inference is born out: **VP1** must precede the *lian*-phrase and can only be the Topic when co-occurs with **the *lian*-phrase**.

(22)

ta (**lian minima*) [_{VP1}qi ma] *lian minima* dou qi₂ bu hao
 he even mini.horse ride horse even mini.horse all ride not.well
 'he can't ride well, even a mini.horse.'

The proposed analysis predicts that ...

- ◆ The **Topic-VP1** cannot take aspect markers, i.e., (17)
- ◆ The **Topic-VP1** is licensed at a functional domain outside of the predicate-VP (i.e., (18)), and also that *ba*-phrases cannot precede it (i.e., (19)).

➔ It accounts for examples that are problematic to VP analyses.

The present analysis also predicts that ...

- ◆ VP1 has to precede V2, since VP1 is licensed at the **TopP** which is higher than the predicate-VP structurally.

(23) 'He played games for three hours.'

a. ta [_{VP1}wan youxi] [_{VP2}wan.le san.ge.xiaoshi]
 he play game play.PERF 3.CL.hour
 b. *ta [_{VP2}wan.le san.ge.xiaoshi] [_{VP1}wan youxi]
 play.PERF 3.CL.hour play game

4.4.2 VP1 as the internal **Focus**

- ◆ According to the proposed two-projection analysis (cf the structure in (17)), one may wonder another possible location for VP1, **the Spec-Foc**.

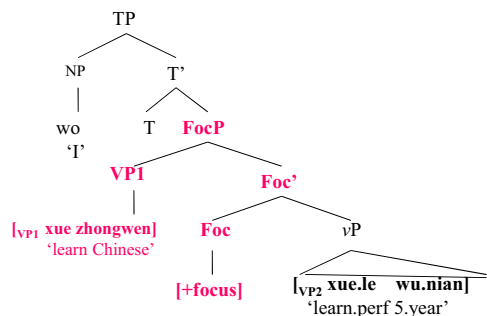
◆ Claim: VP1 can be base-generated at Spec-Foc.

◆ Argument: answers to *wh*-questions

(24)a. ni shemo xue.le wu.nian?
 you what learn.PERF 5.year
 'What have you learnt for five years?'

b. wo [_{VP1}xue zhongwen] [_{VP2}xue.le wu.nian]
 I learn Chinese learn.PERF 5.year
 'I have learnt Chinese for five years.'

(25) VP1 as the internal Focus



4.4.3 VPs as the S-internal **Topic** and **Focus**

(26) 'Speaking of doing exercise, it is playing tennis that he can play for a long time.'

ta [_{Top-VP}zuo yundong] [_{Foc-VP}da wangqi]
 he do exercise play tennis

keyi [_{VP}da haoji.xiaoshi]
 can play many.hour

➔ VPs can co-occurred sentence-internally before the predicate.

4.5 Further examples for VPs as S-internal **Topic/Focus**

- ◆ The relative positions of sentential adverbs and modals:

(27)

a. ta (xianran) [_{VP1}qi ma](xianran) [_{VP}[_{VP}qi.de(*xianran) hen.lei]]
he obviously ride horse ride.RESULT very tired
'Obviously, he was riding and got very tired.'

b. ta (keyi) [_{VP1}kan shu] (keyi) [_{VP}[_{VP}kan (*keyi) shi.ge.xiaoshi]]
he can read book read 10.CL.hour
'He can read for ten hours.'

→ VPs are licensed outside of the predicate, but below TP.

4.5 Further examples for VPs as S-internal **Topic/Focus**

- ◆ The emphatic *shi*:

(28)a. wo **shi** xue.zhongwen xue.le wu nian (, bu shi xue hanyu)
I SHI learn Chinese learn.PERF 5.year
'It is learning Chinese that I spent five years
(, not learning Korean).'

b. *wo **shi** xue zhongwen xue.le wu nian (, bu shi si nian)
I SHI learn Chinese learn. PERF 5.year
'Speaking of learning Chinese, it is five years that I spent
learning it (, not four years).'

→ **Foc-VP** vs. **Top-VP**

4.5 Further examples for VPs as S-internal **Topic/Focus**

- ◆ Co-occurred VPs vs. the emphatic *shi*

(29) 'Speaking of doing exercise, it is playing tennis that he can play for a long time.'

ta (***shi**) [_{Top-VP}zuo yundong] (**shi**) [_{Foc-VP}da wangqiu] keyi
he SHI do exercise SHI play tennis can
[_{VP}[_{VP}da haoji.xiaoshi]]
play many hour

→ The emphatic *shi* is not compatible with **Top-VP** but it is compatible with the **Foc-VP**.

- ◆ Two functional projections, **TopP** and **FocP**, are needed.

5. Summary and conclusion

- ◆ The sentence-internal domain in Chinese is relevant to Topic and Focus.
- ◆ The present study demonstrated that treating sentence-internal elements as either Topic (cf. Tsao (1990) and Paul (2002)) or Focus (cf. Tsai (1994) and Shyu(1995)) is only partially correct.
- ◆ Two functional projections need to be identified for the sentence-internal Topic and Focus, i.e., **TopP** and **FocP**.
→ **TP-Top-FocP-vP-VP**

5. Summary and conclusion

- ◆ The proposed analysis accounts for the Topic/Focus ambiguity of sentence-internal phrases (e.g., bare-preposed objects and the VP1 in the so-called verb-duplicated construction).
- ◆ It is shown that syntactic representation maps the informational structure in Chinese.
- ◆ Given the insight of Rizzi (1997), this study suggests that the domain between TP and vP behaves on a par with the left periphery of sentences, with slight adjustments made for Chinese data.

Selected references:

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