

Sentence-internal topics in Mandarin Chinese: the case of object preposing*

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This paper provides substantial evidence for analysing the preposed object as an internal topic. The dominant misconception of the preposed object as an instance of focalization, mainly due to a false parallel with the *lian...ye/dou* 'even' construction, is invalidated, both on syntactic and semantic grounds. The preposed object is shown not to be adjoined to vP, but to occupy the specifier position of a functional projection FP below the subject and above vP. Like the external topic in the sentence-initial position, the internal topic can be derived in two ways, by movement or by base-generation. In contrast to the external topic position (where e.g. conditional and causal clauses are base-generated), no clauses are admitted in the internal topic position. Likewise, multiple topics are only possible in the external topic position and excluded from the internal topic position.

1. Introduction

The main aim of this paper is to show that object preposing is not a case of focalization as commonly claimed in the literature (cf. Ernst & Wang 1995, Shyu 1995, 2001, Tsai 2000, Zhang 1997 among others). Instead, the position between the subject and the verb occupied by the preposed object is analysed as an **internal topic** position, in opposition to the **external topic** position to the left of the subject. It is important to point out immediately that topic is understood here as limiting " [...] the applicability of the main predication to a certain restricted domain" in the sense of Chafe (1976: 50) rather than as what the sentence is "about".¹ Furthermore, we do not adhere to Li & Thompson's (1976) view according to

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¹ The passage below cites Chafe's (1976) view on "topics, Chinese style":

[...] The following are typical Mandarin sentences with topics, provided by Li and Thompson:

- (15) Nei-xie shumu shu-shen da
those tree tree-trunk big
- (16) Nei-ge ren yang ming George Zhang
that person foreign name George Zhang

To begin with, it is misleading to use, as some authors do, the standard English translations 'As for those trees, the trunks are big' or 'As for that person, his foreign name is George Zhang' if, as I understand to be the case, no contrastiveness need be involved in the Chinese sentences. In fact, Chinese seems to express the information in these cases in a way that does not coincide with anything available in English. [...]

But what is such a topic? The examples I have seen do not fit precisely the characterization that a topic is "what the sentence is about", which I think applies better to English subjects and perhaps to Chinese subjects like *shu-shen* and *yang ming* in the above sentences. If one considers, for example, what bigness is predicated of in the first sentence, it is not 'those trees', but rather their trunks. What the topics appear to do is to limit the applicability of the main predication to a certain restricted domain. The bigness of trunks applies within the domain of those trees. George Zhang being his foreign name applies within the domain of that person. Typically, it would seem, the topic sets a spatial, temporal, or individual framework within which the main

which TOPIC PROMINENT is in opposition with SUBJECT PROMINENT and both are conceived of as binary features.² On the contrary, it is more than evident that in a language like Chinese, the subject plays as important a role as in so-called "subject prominent" languages. To describe Chinese as "topic prominent" only makes sense when meant to express the fact that Chinese displays characteristics **in addition** to the properties associated with non topic prominent languages.

The article is organized as follows. In section 2, the currently dominant analysis of object preposing as an instance of focalization will be invalidated. Section 3 argues that the preposed object constitutes an internal topic and occupies the specifier of a functional projection below the subject and above *v*P. Section 4 compares the internal and the external topic and discusses the different constraints holding for both types. Section 5 suggests a more meaningful definition of topic prominence and concludes the article.

2. Against object preposing as focalization

The term OBJECT PREPOSING refers to the case where the object - **without** any additional marking - occurs between the subject and the verb, more precisely to the left of adverbs, negation and auxiliaries (instead of occupying its canonical postverbal position):

- (1) Ni zhongyao yiqian yong-guo ma³
2SG Chinese.medicine before use -EXP PART
'Have you ever taken Chinese medicine before?'
- (2) Ni kunqu hui bu hui ?
2SG Kunqu.opera know NEG know
'Do you know how to sing the *Kunqu*-opera?'
- (3) Women gugong qu-guo le
1PL imperial.palace go-EXP PART
'We have been to the imperial palace before.'
- (4) Wo dianying bu kan le
1SG film NEG watch
'I won't go to the movies.'
- (5) Ta huoche mei ganshang
3SG train NEG catch
'He didn't catch the train.'

(slightly modified examples from FAN Jiyang 1984: 29)

- (6) Wo Shanghai ye dao-guo, Tianjin ye dao-guo⁴

predication holds. [...] In brief, "real topics" (in topic prominent languages) are not so much "what the sentence is about" as "the frame within which the sentence holds".

(Chafe 1976: 50 - 51; emphasis mine, W.P.)

² According to Li & Thompson (1976: 459sq.), Sino-Tibetan languages are [+ topic prominent], Indo-European languages are [+ subject prominent], Japanese and Korean are [+ topic prominent], [+ subject prominent] and Tagalog is [- topic prominent], [-subject prominent].

³ The following abbreviations are used in glossing examples: CL classifier; DUR durative aspect; EXP experiential aspect; NEG negation; PART sentence-final particle; PERF perfective aspect; PL plural (e.g. 3PL = 3rd person plural); SG singular; SUB subordinator.

1SG Shanghai also go-EXP Tianjin also go -EXP
 'I have also been to Shanghai and to Tianjin, too.'

(Wu 1995: 531)

The absence of any additional marking on the preposed object is important because most analyses do not distinguish "bare" object preposing in this strict sense from the obligatory preverbal position of the focalized object in the *lian...ye/dou* 'even' construction (see (7) - (9)) and indiscriminately claim the properties of the one construction to equally hold for the other:⁵

- (7) Ta lian gourou ye /dou chi
 3SG even dog:meat also/all eat
 'He even eats dogmeat.'
- (8) Ta lian wo /Zhangsan ye /dou qing -le
 3SG even 1SG/Zhangsan also/all invite-PERF
 'He invited even me/Zhangsan.'
- (9) Ta lian xiaohaizi ye /dou bu xihuan
 3SG even child also/all NEG like
 'He doesn't even like children.'

This lack of precision is probably at the origin of the widespread misconception that object preposing is tantamount to focalization. This is, however, not borne out by the data.

2.1. Object preposing vs. the *lian...ye/dou* construction

First of all, a simple comparison of sentences (1) - (6) with (7) - (9) shows that the semantics of object preposing and the *lian...ye/dou* construction are completely different. While the latter gives rise to an 'even' interpretation for the element quantified over by *lian...ye/dou*, where "the speaker presupposes that there exist some other elements which hold the same property as that attributed to the quantified element" (Paris 1998: 144) this is evidently not the case for object preposing.

Second, this semantic difference is reflected in the different question patterns available. More precisely, in the *lian...ye/dou* construction the VP itself, being presupposed, cannot be questioned and accordingly, an *A-bu-A* question is ruled out here. A particle question where the question operator can have scope over the entire sentence or the *lian...ye/dou* constituent alone is however acceptable (cf. Paris 1998: 142):

- (10) a. *Lian Zhangsan ye /dou yao bu yao lai?

⁴ (6) is a possible answer to the question *Ni Shanghai, Tianjin dou dao-guo ma?* The presence of two occurrences of *ye* 'also' in both conjuncts likewise excludes an interpretation of (6) as an instance of the *lian...ye/dou* construction (cf. (7) – (9) below).

⁵ Note that *lian* plus object NP can equally appear to the left of the subject in sentence-initial position (cf. example (i)). This fact in itself strongly suggests that object preposing and the *lian...ye/dou* construction are two completely different constructions:

- (i) Lian gourou ta ye /dou chi
 even dog.meat 3SG also/all eat
 'He even eats dogmeat.'

even Zhangsan also/all want NEG want come

- (10) b. Lian Zhangsan ye /dou yao lai ma?
 even Zhangsan also/all want come PART
 'Does even Zhangsan want to come?' (= Paris 1998, (7) -
 (8))

This is in sharp contrast with the acceptability of the *A-bu-A* question in the presence of a preposed object (cf. (2) above).

Furthermore, as noted by Paris (1994: 250), a clausal object can be fronted in the *lian...ye/dou* construction, but it cannot be preposed:⁶

- (11) a. Ta wang-le [s ji-dianzhong kai hui]
 3SG forget-PERF what.time hold meeting
 'He forgot at what time the meeting is.'
- (11) b. *Ta [s ji-dian zhong kai hui] wang-le
 3SG what.time hold meeting forget-PERF
- (11) c. Ta lian [s ji-dian zhong kai hui] ye wang-le
 3SG even what.time hold meeting also forget-PERF
 'He even forgot at what time the meeting is.'
- (12) Ta [NP kai hui de shijian] wang-le
 3SG hold meeting SUB time forget-PERF
 'He forgot the time of the meeting.'

(12) with an NP-object shows that the unacceptability of (11) is indeed due to the clausal status of the preposed object.

Last, but not least, as has been known since Hou (1979), proper names (of persons) and pronouns cannot be preposed, a restriction which does not hold for the object in the *lian...ye/dou* construction:⁷

⁶ Thanks to Fu Jingqi for helping to construe the minimal quadruple in (11) and (12).

⁷ As pointed out by an anonymous reviewer, preposing of a proper name improves when a contrastive conjunct is present:

- (i) Wo Li laoshi mei jiandao, Wang laoshi dao shi jiandao-le
 1SG Li teacher NEG see Wang laoshi actually be see -PERF
 'I did not see teacher Li, (but) teacher Wang I actually did see.'

This does, however, not affect our argument concerning the crucial difference in this respect between object preposing and the *lian...ye/dou* construction, because in the latter, a contrastive conjunct is precisely absent. Furthermore, a sentence like (14a) *Wo-de pengyou ta renshi* is very well acceptable under the interpretation 'My friends, he knows them' (according to an anonymous reviewer, the same holds for (13a) under the reading 'Me, Xiaowang doesn't know'). In other words, as soon as it is possible to interpret the second DP in a sequence 'DP DP VP' as the subject of the sentence (which is quasi-automatically the case when it is [+human]), the interpretation 'Topic, Subject VP' is chosen. This observation was already made by C.-T. James Huang in his MA thesis (Huang, p.c.). It is in accordance with the judgement encountered in the Chinese literature (cf. Li Linding 1986, Xu Shu 1988 among others) that in general it is more "natural" to topicalize an object to the sentence-initial position than to prepose it. Whether the unacceptability of pronouns and proper names in object

- (13) a. *Wo Xiaowang bu renshi
1SG Xiaowang NEG know
- b. Wo lian Xiaowang ye /dou bu renshi
1SG even Xiaowang also/all NEG know
'I don't even know Xiaowang.'
- (14) a. *Wo-de pengyou ta renshi
1SG-SUB friend 3SG know
(intended meaning: 'My friends know him.')
- b. Wo-de pengyou lian ta ye /dou renshi
1SG-SUB friend even 3SG also/all know
'My friends know even him.'

The preceding discussion has provided extensive evidence for object preposing and the *lian...ye/dou* 'even' construction as two separate constructions with distinct syntactic and semantic properties. In the next section, I will argue that object preposing does not involve any focalization at all.

2.2. Object preposing vs. *shi...de* focus clefts

It is true that like sentence-initial external topics (cf. (15)), preposed objects can be used contrastively:

- (15) zhei-ge xuesheng, wo xihuan, nei -ge , wo bu xihuan
this-CL student 1SG like that-CL 1SG NEG like
'This student, I like, that one, I don't.'
- (16) Wo cai chi-le , fan hai mei chi (Zhu & Fan 1999: 113)
1SG vegetables eat-PERF rice yet NEG eat
'I have already eaten the vegetables, but not the rice.'
- (17) Wo yi-pian lunwen keyi yingfu , liang-pian jiu bu xing le
1SG 1-CL article can assume 2 -CL then NEG possible PART
'One article, I can handle, but two is impossible.'
(Tsai 1994: 138; (32))

But in the same way that this contrastive use cannot be mistaken as indicating the focus status of the sentence-initial topic, it does not constitute proof for a focus status of the preposed object, either.

First of all, no bipartition into focus and presupposition exists for object preposing sentences. Accordingly, the VP itself can be questioned, as illustrated above (cf. (1) and (2)). Also consider the following question – answer pair provided in passing by Lin Jo-wang in his review of Zhang (1997) (cf. Lin 1998):

preposing reflects a constraint on the processing of two [+human] NPs in preverbal position, as suggested by an anonymous reviewer, is an issue that needs further research.

- (18) a. Ni zuoye xie -wan -le mei ?
2SG homework write-finish-PERF NEG
'Have you finished your homework?'
- (18) b. Wo (zuoye) zaojiu xie -wan -le
1SG homework long:ago write-finish-PERF
'I finished (my homework) already a while ago.' (Lin 1998: 14; (6))

The presence of the negation *mei* indicates that it is the VP that is questioned here. This would be excluded if the preposed object were really a focus, because then the VP would constitute the presupposed part. In this respect, the situation in object preposing sentences contrasts sharply with *shi...de* focus cleft sentences where the question can only bear on the focused element and where the presupposition remains unaffected (cf. Paul & Whitman 2001):

- (19) a. Ta shi bu shi zai Beijing xue yuyanxue de ?
3SG be NEG be at Beijing learn linguistics DE
'Was it in Beijing that he studied linguistics?'
- b. Bu shi, ta shi zai Shanghai xue de
NEG be 3SG be at Shanghai learn DE
'No, it was in Shanghai.'
- c. % Bu shi, ta shi zai Beijing xue fawen de
NEG be 3SG be at Beijing learn French DE
(% 'No, it was in Beijing that he studied French.')
- d. % Bu shi, ta shi zai Beijing jiao yuyanxue de
NEG be 3SG be at Beijing teach linguistics DE
(% 'No, it was in Beijing that he taught linguistics.')

The infelicitousness of (19c-d) as possible answers to the question in (19a) clearly indicates that only the focused constituent i.e. the PP *zai Beijing* can be questioned.

The lack of a bipartition into focus vs. presupposition is further illustrated by the possibility of object preposing in list contexts:

- (20) Wo yifu xi -le , di tuo -le , wan shua-le ,
1SG clothing wash-PERF floor wipe-PERF bowl scrub-PERF

chuang ye zhengli -le
bed also put:in:order-PERF
'I did the laundry, wiped the floor, washed the bowls and also made the bed.'
(Zhu & Fan 1999: 113)

Since it implies the non-existence of any other element satisfying the property in question (cf. Paris (1998: 144), to focalize an element is exactly the opposite of listing.

Last, but not least, as observed by Paul & Whitman (2001) a preposed object cannot be clefted by means of *shi...de*, which would, however, be expected if it really were a focus:

- (21) a. Women gugong qu-guo le (= (3) above)
 1PL imperial.palace go-EXP PART
 'We have been to the imperial palace before.'
- b. *Women shi gugong qu-guo de
 1PL be imperial.palace go-EXP DE

3. The preposed object as internal topic

As established in the preceding section, object preposing has to be distinguished from the *lian...ye/dou* 'even' construction and does not involve focalization. I propose to analyse the position occupied by the preposed object as the specifier of a functional projection FP above *vP* (inclusive of *vP*-adjoined material like adverbs and negation). This functional projection FP hosts the sentence-**internal** topic and is different from the Focus Phrase postulated for the *lian...ye/dou* construction (cf. e.g. Shyu (1995)).

So far nobody has examined the relative position of these two projections, for in the great majority of analyses, object preposing and the *lian...ye/dou* construction are treated as one and the same phenomenon. The two examples below suggest that the internal topic projection is higher than the *lian*-Focus Phrase:

- (22) a. Ta (*you) nei-ben shu you kan-le yi-bian
 3SG again that-CL book again see-PERF 1 -time
 'He has read that book one more time.' (Fu Jingqi 1994, (10))
- b. Wo you lian yi-fen qian ye mei you le
 1SG again even 1-CL money also NEG have PART
 'Once again I don't even have a cent.'
 (Ernst & Wang 1995: 251, (45))

This mirrors the relative ordering between an external topic and a *lian*-phrase when to the left of the subject:

- (23) a. Zhe-ge waiguoren, lian gourou ta ye /dou chi
 this-CL foreigner even dog.meat 3SG also/all eat
 'This foreigner, he even eats dogmeat.'
- b. *Lian gourou zhe-ge waiguoren ta ye /dou chi
 even dog.meat this-CL foreigner 3SG also/all eat

The fact that in the hierarchy postulated for the sentence periphery by Rizzi (1997), topic is located in a projection above focus further supports the analysis of the preposed object as an internal topic.

The analysis proposed here thus differs from Ernst & Wang (1995) where the preposed object is adjoined to (an auxiliary or main) *vP*. In my view, there exist at least two reasons for rejecting the analysis in terms of *vP*-adjunction.⁸

First, only **one** preposed object is allowed between the subject and the *vP*, though an adjunction scenario would lead us to expect the possibility of multiple adjunction:⁹

(24) a. *Ni [DP huiyuan dahui] [DP mingtian -de richeng]
2SG member meeting tomorrow-SUB program
anpai-hao -le meiyou?
plan -finish-PERF NEG

b. [DP Huiyuan dahui], ni [DP mingtian -de richeng]
member meeting 2SG tomorrow-SUB program
anpai-hao -le meiyou?
plan -finish-PERF NEG
'The general membership meeting, have you fixed tomorrow's
program?'

(25) a. *Women [DP nan-pai] [DP yajun] hai keneng nadao
1PL man-volleyball second:place still probably obtain

b. Nan-pai , women yajun hai keneng nadao
man-volleyball 1PL second:place still probably obtain
'The men's volleyball, perhaps we can still get the second place.'
(Fan Jiyan 1984:30-31)

Second, the proposal that the preposed object occupies the specifier position of a functional projection better explains the extraction facts observed by Fu Jingqi (1994). She provides examples showing that an object extracted from a non-finite embedded clause cannot adjoin to intermediate VP positions, but must occur to the left of the highest verb:¹⁰

(26) a. Ta rang Zhangsan pai Xiaoping diaocha -le nei-jian shi¹¹
3SG make Zhangsan send Xiaoping investigate-PERF that-CL matter

b. Ta [nei-jian shi] rang Zhangsan pai Xiaoping diaocha -le
3SG that-CL matter make Zhangsan send Xiaoping investigate-PERF
'He asked Zhangsan to send Xiaoping to investigate that matter.'

⁸ Tsai (2000) also argues against an adjunction approach and in favor of a functional projection as host for the preposed object. However, he assumes that this FP is "headed by an implicit focus feature" and that it "defines the domain of contrastive focus" (Handout, p.4).

⁹ For those speakers who can construe one complex DP from the two DPs in preverbal position, sentences (24a) and (25a) are acceptable. As the bracketing indicates, this reading is to be excluded here (cf. Fan 1984: 31).

¹⁰ Fu (1994) herself interprets this kind of extraction data as an argument in favour of object preposing as IP-adjunction rather than as VP-adjunction. More precisely, the preposed object occupies the lower specifier position of IP, whereas the subject is in the higher specifier of IP. This analysis is however invalidated by the acceptability of adverbs between the subject and the preposed object (also cf. (30) below):

(i) Wo zai meiguo [hen duo difang] zhu-guo
1SG at America very many place live-EXP

'I have lived in a lot of places in America.' (Tsai Mei-chih 1995: 161, (127))

¹¹ Audrey Li (1990: 17-24) provides evidence for the possibility of a non-finite verb to be marked for aspect. Also cf. Paul (1998) for further evidence concerning the dissociation of finiteness and aspect in Chinese.

- c. *Ta rang Zhangsan [nei-jian shi] pai Xiaoping diaocha -le
3SG make Zhangsan that-CL matter send Xiaoping investigate-PERF
- d. *Ta rang Zhangsan pai Xiaoping [nei-jian shi] diaocha -le
3SG make Zhangsan send Xiaoping that-CL matter investigate-PERF
(Fu 1994, (15))

If we suppose that non-finite clauses lack the functional architecture postulated for finite ones, the observation illustrated in (26) automatically follows: only the matrix verb *rang* can be dominated by the functional projection FP representing a possible landing site for the preposed object. Likewise, an object preposed from an embedded finite clause is predicted to occur in the FP immediately dominating the VP it was extracted from i.e. to the right of the embedded subject rather than to the right of the matrix subject:

- (27) a. Wangwu shuo Lisi du -wan -le na -ben xiaoshuo
Wangwu say Lisi read-finish-PERF that-CL novel
'Wangwu said that Lisi finished reading that novel.'
- b. Wangwu shuo Lisi [na -ben xiaoshuo] du -wan -le
Wangwu say Lisi that-CL novel read-finish-PERF
'Wangwu said that Lisi finished reading that novel.'
- c. *Wangwu [na -ben xiaoshuo] shuo Lisi du -wan -le
Wangwu that-CL novel say Lisi read-finish-PERF
(example from Lu 1994 as reported in Ernst & Wang 1995: 244)

To summarize, the preposed object has been shown to occur in an FP below the subject and above the vP and to represent the sentence-internal topic.¹²

Ernst & Wang (1995) also invoke a second "lower" topic position when discussing object preposing, in particular when trying to explain why Chinese - unlike English - allows object preposing. Their proposal, however, differs from mine in two important respects.

First, they identify a **VP**-internal base-generated position i.e. the position for the object marked by *ba* as the "lower topic".¹³ Putting aside the obvious incongruity of qualifying the *ba*-object as a topic,¹⁴ it is far from clear why in principle the availability of a base-generated position **within** the VP should be linked with that of a position **adjoined** to

¹² At first sight, our proposal might resemble Tsao (1990). However, Tsao (1990) applies the notion TOPIC to virtually every preverbal phrase (including the subject which is a "primary topic" for him), giving rise to "primary, "secondary" and "tertiary" topics and thereby making "topic" a vacuous term. For a detailed critique of Tsao's (1990) approach, cf. Paris (1994).

¹³ The distribution of adverbs and negation to the left of *ba* shows that the *ba*-phrase is located within the vP:

- (i) Ta you ba wo pian -le
3SG again BA 1SG cheat-PERF
'He cheated me again.'
- (ii) Ta mei ba Lisi pian le
3SG NEG BA Lisi cheat PART
'He didn't cheat Lisi.'

¹⁴ Apparently, Ernst & Wang (1995) here apply Tsao's (1990) incorrect view of the *ba*-phrase as a "secondary topic" without, however, adopting the remainder of his approach, in particular his analysis of the subject as a "primary topic".

VP, which in turn is to be associated with the sentence-initial topic position. In the concrete case at hand, this is even more implausible, because the syntactic and semantic properties of the *ba*-object and the preposed object are completely different, as Ernst & Wang (1995: 257, footnote 1) acknowledge themselves.

Second, they stipulate that if a certain projection may contain a topic, then it may also contain a focus, a stipulation made necessary by their association of object preposing with focus. To establish such an implicational relationship between topic and focus seems rather ad hoc, especially for Chinese where a constituent that is overtly focalized by means of *shi...de* is precisely excluded from the external topic position (cf. Paris 1998: 153; (36), (37)):¹⁵

- (28) a. ta shi zai Jiujinshan yujian Zhangsan de
3SG be at San:Francisco meet Zhangsan DE
'It is in San Francisco that he met Zhangsan.'
- b. *Shi zai Jiujinshan ta yujian Zhangsan de
be at San:Francisco 3SG meet Zhangsan DE

The PP *zai Jiujinshan* 'at San Francisco' can be clefted with *shi...de* when to the right of the subject, but not when occupying the sentence-initial topic position.

Liu & Xu (1998), Xu & Liu (1998) and Liu (2000) also argue for the existence of a topic between the subject and the VP, the SUBTOPIC, which is different from the sentence-initial topic, the MAIN TOPIC. Among the wide array of phenomena covered by their term subtopic¹⁶ we also find cases similar to object preposing, which Liu (2000) calls "argument split topics":

- (29) Wo lan chenshan/ zhei-zhong chenshan mai-le san-jian
1SG blue shirt this-kind shirt buy-PERF 3 -CL
'I bought three blue shirts/three shirts of this kind.'
(slightly modified example from Liu (2000))
- (30) Wo zhe ji -nian xiaoshuo ye xie -guo ji -pian
1SG this several-year novel also write-EXP several-CL
dan ziji bu tai manyi
but self NEG too satisfied
'I have written quite a few novels these past years, but I'm not very satisfied.'
(slightly modified example from Liu & Xu 1998: 88)

¹⁵ This is not to say that a focalized constituent cannot occur in a sentence with a sentence-initial topic (see e.g. (23a) above). Also cf. Kiss (1998: 245, (29)): 'As for Mary, it was PETER that she voted [sic] on'.

¹⁶ The following list clearly illustrates the heterogeneity of the phenomena subsumed under the label *subtopic*:

- (i) Ta ren bu xiang ren, gui bu xiang gui
3SG man NEG resemble man ghost NEG resemble ghost
'He neither resembles a human being nor a ghost.'
- (ii) Qu jiu qu, wo hai pa ni bu cheng
go then go 1SG still be:afraid 2SG NEG accomplish
'Let's go, I'm not afraid of (going with) you.'
- (iii) Ta congming dao ting congming, jiushi xie zuoye tai cuxin
3SG intelligent actually very intelligent only write homework too careless
'He is very intelligent for sure, only he is too careless when writing his homework.'

(Liu & Xu 1998: 88)

We will not go into the details of Liu's (2000) analysis which proposes to derive the "split topic" in preverbal position by movement out of the postverbal object NP. What is more interesting here is Liu's (2000) observation that the default position for this kind of "split topic" in Wu and Min dialects is the position between subject and VP. Also, other examples from these dialects suggest that bare object preposing of the type: 'S DP VP' (as illustrated in (1) – (6) above) is less restricted here than in Mandarin Chinese.¹⁷ Though given my unfamiliarity with the overall syntax of the dialects mentioned (the knowledge of which is indispensable for a correct interpretation of these data), my analysis of the preposed object in Mandarin Chinese as an internal topic seems to be corroborated by Liu and Xu's observations.

4. The internal vs. the external topic position

It is commonly acknowledged that the constituent occupying the external topic position can be derived in two ways, either by base-generation in that same position or by movement from within the sentence (IP or TP according to the theory adopted):

- (31) Hua , ta zui xihuan chahua
 flower 3SG most like camelia
 'Flowers, he prefers camelia.'
- (32) [Zhei-zhong cai]_i, wo tebie xihuan t_i
 this -kind dish 1SG especially like
 'This kind of dish, I like particularly.'

In fact, the same holds for the internal topic i.e. we have quite a number of cases which cannot be derived via movement from the postverbal position:

- (33) a. Ta nei-jian shi hai mei zuo jue ding ne
 3SG that-CL matter still NEG make decision PART
 'He has not yet come to a decision concerning that matter.'
 (Fu 1994, (29))
- b. *Ta hai mei zuo jue ding nei-jian shi ne
 3SG still NEG make decision that-CL matter PART
- c. *Ta hai mei zuo nei-jian shi (de) jue ding ne
 3SG still NEG make that-CL matter SUB decision PART

¹⁷ For example, contrary to Mandarin Chinese, preposing of pronouns is allowed in the Western dialects Xining and Linxi (Liu 2000: (23), (24)):

- (i) Shijian women *hā* bu deng (Xining)
 time 1PL HA NEG wait
 'Time does not wait for us.'
- (ii) Wo ta *hā* jiaolai-le (Linxi)
 1SG 3SG HA call -PERF
 'I have called him to come.'

Note, however, the presence of the particle *hā* whose status is unclear (Liu interprets it as the beginning of a case system). We encounter a similar problem with Liu & Xu's examples of "argument split topics" from Min and Wu dialects where sometimes adverbs like *ye* 'also', *dao* 'actually' etc. occur in preverbal position without being taken into account.

- (34) a. Ta yingyu kao -le ge jiushi-fen
3SG English take.exam-PERF CL 90 -point
'He obtained 90 points in the English exam.'
- b. *Ta kao -le ge jiushi-fen yingyu
3SG take.exam-PERF CL 90 -point English
- c. *Ta kao -le yingyu ge jiushi-fen
3SG take.exam-PERF English CL 90 -point
- (35) a. Ta bai-mi dieyong you -le ge di-yi
3SG 100-meter butterfly.stroke swim-PERF CL first
'He won the first place in the butterfly style.'
- (Tan Jingchun 1997)
- b. *Ta you -le ge di-yi bai -mi dieyong
3SG swim-PERF CL first 100-meter butterfly.stroke
- c. *Ta you -le bai-mi dieyong ge di-yi
3SG swim-PERF 100-meter butterfly.stroke CL first

As illustrated by the unacceptable (b) and (c) sentences, there exists no postverbal position the preverbal DP could have originated from by movement; accordingly, it must have been base-generated. The existence of both base-generation and movement as derivational possibilities for the preverbal DP provides additional evidence for my analysis in terms of an internal topic.

Furthermore, it is interesting to note that the external and the internal topic can co-occur in a sentence:

- (36) Huiyuan dahui , ni mingtian -de richeng anpai-hao -le meiyou?
member meeting 2SG tomorrow-SUB program plan -finish-PERF NEG
'The general membership meeting, have you fixed tomorrow's program?'
(= (24b) above)
- (37) nan-pai , women yajun hai keneng nadao (= (25b) above)
man-volleyball 1PL second:place still probably obtain
'The men's volleyball, perhaps we can still get the second place.'
- (38) Zhe huar , ni shui jiao duo le
this flower 2SG water pour much PART
'This flower, you have watered it too much.'
- (Fan Jiyao 1984:30-31)

In other respects, however, the internal topic position is rather different from the external one.

First, as already noted in section 3 above (when contrasting object preposing with the *lian...ye/dou* construction), only DPs, but not clauses are acceptable in the internal topic

position. In contrast, the external topic position does allow for clauses, in particular causal and conditional clauses, as extensively argued for by Gasde & Paul (1996):

- (40) [_{TopP} [_S Yinwei ta pingshi zhuyi duanlian]
 because 3SG ususally attach:importance take.exercise
 [_{Top'} [_{Top°} Ø] [_{IP} suoyi shenti yizhi hen hao]]
 therefore body always very good
 'Because he does sports regularly, he is in excellent health.'
- (41) [_{TopP} [_S Ruguo ni yao mai fangzi]
 if 2SG want buy house
 [_{Top'} [_{Top°} dehua] [_{IP} wo jiu jiegei ni qian]]
 PART 1SG then lend 2SG money
 'If you want to buy a house, I will lend you some money.'
 (Gasde & Paul 1996: 272-273; (20), (21))

Like external topics in the form of DPs (cf. (15) above), causal and conditional clauses occupy the specifier of the functional projection Topic Phrase (situated below CP). Its head, Top°, takes the main clause as its complement and may be covert or overt (e.g. realized by pause particles *a*, *me*, *ne* etc. or by the particle *dehua* occurring with conditional clauses).

Another important difference between the external topic position and the internal topic position is the fact that while multiple topics are allowed in the former (cf. (42)), they are excluded for the latter (as already noted in section 3):

- (42) Hua , meiguohua, ta zui xihuan
 flower rose 3SG most like
 'Flowers, roses he likes them best.'
 (slightly modified example from Tang 1990:333)
- (43) *Ni [huiyuan dahui] [mingtian -de richeng] anpai-hao -le meiyou?
 2SG member meeting tomorrow-SUB program plan -finish-PERF NEG
 (= (24a) above)

Sentences (42) and (43) each contain both a base-generated and a moved topic which can co-occur in the external topic position, but not in the internal one.

Last, but not least, a DP is subject to many more constraints when in the internal topic position than when in the external topic position (cf. the discussion of examples (11) – (14) above).

These major differences between the external and the internal topic position reflect the different nature of the functional categories involved. While Topic Phrase allows for recursion (cf. Gasde & Paul 1996), thereby giving rise to multiple topics, this is excluded for FP and results in the acceptability of one internal topic only.

5. Conclusion

Challenging the dominant misconception of object preposing as an instance of focalization, this article has provided substantial evidence for analysing the preposed object as an internal topic, where topic is to be understood as a frame within which the sentence holds. The internal topic is not adjoined to ν P, but occupies the specifier position of a functional projection below the subject and above ν P. The internal topic position is different from the external topic position to the left of the subject insofar as only DPs, but no clauses are allowed here; likewise, multiple topics are excluded. It resembles the external topic position, however, with respect to the existence of both movement and base-generation as derivational possibilities.

Having established the existence of an internal topic position, it might be suggested that so-called TOPIC PROMINENCE not only involves the availability of a topic position external to the sentence (i.e. left of the subject), but also that of a sentence-internal topic in a functional domain below the subject. In any case, it seems more than evident that Li & Thompson's (1976) conception of topic prominence is inappropriate. In particular, it is not the case that a topic prominent language lacks some of the properties displayed by a so-called SUBJECT PROMINENT language. Quite on the contrary, it is topic prominent languages that possess additional properties not found in subject prominent languages.

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