

Identical Topics in Mandarin Chinese and Shanghainese*

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1. Introduction

1.1. Introductory remarks

Identical topic (IT henceforth) was previously known as copying topic (Xu & Liu (1998:141-157). It is fully or partially identical to a corresponding element (CE henceforth) occurring in the following part of the clause. Broadly speaking, IT is semantically empty. Being an unusual type of adding, it properly falls into the central concern of this volume.

It seems IT can be attested in all Chinese dialects, though the phenomena in question have been poorly documented and have scarcely been studied under a unified category. IT seems to be a better candidate to characterise topic prominent languages than many other topic types including the non-gap topic, which has long been called "Chinese style topic" since Chafe (1976) and has been viewed as a major characteristic of topic prominent languages (e.g., Li & Thompson, 1976, Xu & Langendoen 1985, Gasde 1999). I believe the study of IT structure is necessary to obtain a clearer and more complete picture of topic structure in general. As far as I know, Wu dialects of Chinese, including Shanghainese, are the ones which have the richest IT types and the greatest text frequency of IT. Therefore, this study will be based on both Mandarin and Shanghainese data.

In the present paper, I will follow the framework for topic structure developed in Xu & Liu (1998). According to this schema, a topic in topic prominent languages could be not only a discourse element, but also a basic syntactic function; topics can occur in various syntactic levels including the pre-subjective position (main topics), the position between the subject and the predicate (subtopics), and even a still lower position (sub-subtopics); at least four major types of topics can be specified: argument co-indexed topics (gap topics), background-frame topics (nongap topics), copying topics (now re-termed as identical topics) and clausal topics (mostly conditionals), all of which are often syntactically encoded in similar manner, e.g., followed by a topic marker.

Xu & Liu (1998:141-157), and Liu & Xu (1998b) have offered a preliminary description of so-called copying topic structure in Mandarin and Shanghainese. This paper will be a further exploration of IT. I will discuss IT structure in terms of syntax, semantics and discourse functions in turn, especially the semantic relations between IT and argument structure, and referential features of IT. We will attempt to show that IT is a semantically empty element, different from any other topic types. On the other hand, IT prefers unbounded elements, such as generic NPs or VPs without aspect marking. This property relates IT closely to other frame-setting topics (in Gasde's 1999 terms). As a more gen-

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eral proposal, we will argue that some kinds of frame-setting topics such as IT prefer generic elements, while aboutness topics (also Gasde's terms) prefer definite ones, because there is a principle we called the Principle of Frame Being Bigger (PFBB), and generic NPs are "bigger" than specific or definite ones in terms of its referents.

What comes next will be a discussion of the status of IT structure in Chinese. We will show that Chinese not only tends to have definite arguments serving as aboutness topics, but also tends to have generic elements to be located in the topic positions. The latter tendency is stronger in southern dialects than in Mandarin. Chinese (especially in South) often uses two strategies to "coin" a frame from inside the argument structure. One is to split an objective NP into two parts, letting a bare NP serve as a generic topic while leaving the classifier phrase behind the predicate to serve as a specific or definite object. The other is to create a nominal or verbal identical topic to serve as a frame-setting topic.

1.2. A preliminary view of identical topic data

To begin with, let us look at some Mandarin and Shanghainese sentences containing IT. (1) to (9) are small part of the examples in Xu and Liu (1998). I will use (S) to stand for Shanghainese and leave Mandarin unmarked throughout the paper. To save the space, the corresponding element will be glossed as CE.

- (1) **Xingxing** hai shi na ge **xingxing**, **yueliang** hai shi na ge **yueliang**.
 star still be that CL CE moon still be that CL CE
 'As for star, it remains that star, As for the moon, it remains that moon'
- (2) Ta **zhuren** dao ye shi **zhuren**, danshi...
 he head/director unexpectedly also be CE, but...
 'As for head, he is indeed a head unexpectedly, but...'
- (3) Ta erzi **congming** dao ting **congming**, jiushi tai cuxin.
 he son smart unexpectedly quite. CE but too careless
 'Saying smart, his son is smart indeed, but is too careless'
- (4) **Qu jiu qu**.
 go just CE 'Saying go? It's fine to go'
- (5) (S) **Phingdeu**-meq **phingdeu** leqweq, kong sageq bangiou.
 illegal-spouse-Top CE Ptc say what friend
 'He/She is exactly an illegal spouse, how can you call him/her a friend'
- (6) (S) **Si**-meq **si** jingsang, **die**-meq **die** jingsang.
 water-Top CE insufficient, electricity-Top CE insufficient
 'As for water, it is insufficient; as for electricity, the same is true'
- (7) (S) **Befaq** tsung you **befaq** ho xiang geq.
 Method eventually have CE can think Ptc
 'As for solution, (we) will eventually be able to find a one'
- (8) (S) Lo-Wong **niqxing**-zy tsengge **niqxing** geq.
 Old-Wang warm-hearted-Top/be really CE Ptc
 'Old-Wang is really keen in helping others'

observe that 1. IT can be NP, VP (including AP in Chinese) but not AdvP. This category constraint is shared by topics in general. 2. IT and other topic types share the same set of topic markers; 3. Topic sensitive operators are also sensitive to IT though we identify these operators only in terms of their connection with “normal” topic types. I will demonstrate these features in detail in section 2 and will offer explanations of them in later sections. For the moment, the above evidence seems sufficient to treat IT as a kind of topic.

2. The syntactic categories and morphological features of IT

2.1. The syntactic categories of IT: Neutralization between NP and VP

IT can be an NP as in (1, 2, 5, 6, 7) above or a VP including AP as in (3, 4, 8, 9,), but cannot be an AdvP. For instance:

- (15) (S) I *ganggang*-meq *ganggang* veq qi, (**muozang*-meq *muozang* veq qi),
 he before-Top CE not go at-once-Top CE not go
exiq-meq *exiq* veq qi,
 later-time-Top CE not go
 ‘He didn’t go before. Nor will he go at once or later’

ganggang ‘a short time ago’, *exiq* ‘a later time’ and *muozang* ‘at once’ in (15) are all temporal adjuncts, but only *muozang* is kept from occurring as IT because it is a temporal adverb instead of a noun. This limitation on word classes is consistent with the case with Chinese topics in general (cf. Xu & Liu 1998:108-111).

In the IT position, interestingly, distinction between NPs and VPs becomes insignificant or even are neutralized. Compare (22) and (23) below:

- (16) (S) a. I *die’ing*-meq *die’ing* veq hoexi, *tsaq ziangdji*-meq *tsaq ziangdji* veq hoexi.
 he movies-Top CE not like, play Chinese-chess-Top CE not like
 ‘He doesn’t like movies. Nor does he like playing Chinese chess’
 b. Geq dio djungtsy *liotsuq*-meq *liotsuq* me ho, *phioliang*-meq a me *phioliang*.
 this CL skirt fabric-Top CE quite good, pretty-Top also quite CE
 ‘This skirt is made of good fabric and also looks quite pretty’

Parallelisms in the fashion of (16) are usually required to be structurally harmonic. Note here that the first clause in each parallelism contains a nominal IT and the last one a verbal IT. Furthermore, we can freely replace the NP *die’ing* ‘movies’ with a VP *khoe die’ing* ‘watch movies’ or replace the VP *tsaq ziangdji* ‘play Chinese chess’ with the NP *ziangdji* ‘Chinese chess’ in (16a) at no cost of semantic and even pragmatic changes. Also note (12) above, taken from Middle Chinese, which is a similar instance in this respect. We shall explain the neutralization in 4.4.

2.2. Marking of IT: pauses, topic markers and topic-sensitive operators

Every IT can be followed by an optional pause, like other topic types. There are some factors affecting the occurrence of pause after IT and topics in general. Normally, the main topic is more likely to be followed by a pause than a subtopic, and a heavy topic is

more likely to be followed by a pause than a light topic. In any case, however, the pause is not obligatory for IT as illustrated by the above examples of IT.

Like intonation pitch or emphasizing stress, pause can serve as a kind of discourse means. It can, for instance, mark a special peripheral position serving a certain discourse function such as topicalization. As syntactic means, pause is only in a relatively low degree of grammaticalization. In Chinese, IT does not always rely on pause. It means that IT is not just a pragmatic constituent, but has obtained a sort of syntactic status. Furthermore, since it seems harder for a discourse topic to “insert” between the subject and the predicate without pause, and Chinese IT does often occur as a subtopic without pause, it becomes clearer that IT in Chinese does exhibit strong syntactic nature. In other words, IT has been highly grammaticalized or syntacticized.

Compared with pause, topic markers are means of more grammatical nature. By “topic markers” we refer to function morphemes attached directly to topics, following them as in Chinese, Japanese, Korean and many Tibeto-Burman languages (cf. Xu & Liu 1998), or preceding them as in Tagalog (cf. Shibatani 1991), or, as a circumfix, surrounding them, as in Bunun (cf. Cheng 1991). If a topic introduced by a topic marker does not need to be followed by pause, then this kind of marking should be more grammaticalized than those that are always accompanied by pause. IT is often marked with a topic marker, as in (5), (6) and (8)-(11), all of which also apply to other topic types. In addition, topic markers attached to IT need no pause, as shown in (5), (6), (8) and (9). It again verifies the syntactic nature of IT.

Besides topic markers, topic sensitive operators (TSO) play crucial roles in IT structure as well. Before proceeding with IT, let us take a brief look at TSO in Chinese.

TSOs are independent words (mostly adverbs), the occurrence of which is closely relevant to a topic in the same clause in a certain way. There are two classes of TSOs. One can be called **topic indicator**, which always co-occurs with a topic (in general, not only IT), usually following the topic but sometimes can be separated with it by other elements like *zuotian* ‘Yesterday’ in (17) below. In other words, whenever there exists a topic indicator, there will be a topic existing. Compare:

- (17) a. Zhe ge xiaohair zuotian bing le.
this CL child yesterday be-ill Ptc ‘This child was ill yesterday’
- b. Zhe ge xiaohair zuotian **haishi** bing le.
this CL child yesterday eventually be-ill Ptc
‘This child was ill eventually yesterday’
- c. Yi ge xiaohair zuotian bing le.
a/one CL child yesterday be-ill Ptc ‘A child was ill yesterday’
- d. ??Yi ge xiaohair zuotian **haishi** bing le.
a/one CL young person still/after-all loss-election Ptc
‘A child was ill eventually yesterday’

Haishi ‘still, eventually’ is a TSO. The indefinite subject *yi ge xiaohair* ‘a child’ in (17d) cannot function as a topic in Chinese, so *haishi* cannot co-occur with this nontopical subject, though the indefinite subject itself is acceptable as shown in (17c). In view of their persistent co-occurrence with topics, we may regard topic indicators as indirect markers for topics. Following are some other topic indicators in Mandarin: *hai* ‘still, yet’, *ye* ‘also; even’, *dao* ‘unexpectedly, actually’, *dou* ‘all; even’. Due to the close con-

nection with topics, topic indicators can even become real topic markers through re-analysis, as is the case with Shanghainese *to* (= Mandarin *dao*) ‘unexpectedly’. Compare:

- (18) (S) a. Lo Uong , **to** me khexing.
 Lo Uong, unexpectedly quite happy
 ‘As for Old Wang, he is actually quite happy’
 b. Lo Uong-**to**, me khexing.
 Lo Uong-unexpectedly/Top quite happy
 ‘As for Old Wang, actually, he is quite happy’

When there is pause after a topic, *to* as an adverb should follow the pause, as in (18a). Interestingly, however, *to* can also precede the pause, as in (18b). In the latter case, *to* has actually been out of the domain of the following VP and has become a topic marker, i.e. the head of the TP (topic phrase) projection, patterning with other topic markers. The same re-analysis also takes place with *a* (=Mandarin *ye*) ‘also’ (see Xu & Liu 1998:103-104). In other words, they have been grammaticalized from indirect topic markers into direct ones.

The other class of TSO is the **topic licenser**. A topic licenser does not always co-occur with a topic, but in many cases it licenses a topic in a clause, and to delete it will make the clause ungrammatical. Topic licensers in Mandarin include negatives *bu* ‘not’ and *mei(you)* ‘haven’t, didn’t’, multi-functional adverb *jiu* ‘only, just, soon, immediately, as early as, firmly’, *pian* ‘against normal way or others’ will’. Compare the following Mandarin examples:

- (19) a. Ta baijiu **bu** he.
 he white-liquor not drink ‘As for (strong) white liquor, he doesn’t drink it.’
 b. ??Ta baijiu he.
 he white-liquor drink ‘As for (strong) white liquor, he drinks it’
 c. Ta he baijiu.
 he drink (strong) white liquor ‘He drinks (strong) white liquor’
- (20) a. Ta weixian-de shiqing *(**jiu/pian**) ai zuo
 he dangerous-Modi matter/thing just like do
 ‘As for dangerous things, he just likes to do them’
 b. Ta ai zuo weixian-de shiqing.
 he like do dangerous-Mod matter/thing ‘He likes to do dangerous things’

Now we go back to IT. Topic markers are not obligatory, especially in Mandarin, cf. (1)-(4). On the other hand, in most cases Mandarin IT goes along with TSO. Rechecking all of the 11 Mandarin IT examples in Xu & Liu (1998a:142-143), I found 8 of them contain topic indicators, 2 of the rest contain topic licensers, and only one example, which belongs to the so-called verb copying construction, contains no TSO. If we delete the TSOs in Mandarin IT sentences, most sentences will become ill-formed, as with the case in (1-4) above.

Mandarin IT can also be followed by a topic marker. Whether or not a topic marker is employed basically does not affect the acceptability of a clause containing IT. It is TSO that plays more crucial role than topic markers or pause in Mandarin IT structure.

The Shanghainese case is somewhat different. As shown in Xu & Liu (1998), Shanghainese IT structure has wider semantic range, more syntactic variations, more discourse functions and greater text frequency. While TSO is too a positive factor in comprising an IT construction, in many cases a topic marker can go well without TSO to license an IT in a clause. For instance:

- (21) (S) a. Phingdeu-**meq** phingdeu leq-weq, kong sageq bangiou. (= 5)
 illegal-spouse-Top CE Ptc say what friend
 ‘ he/she is exactly an illegal spouse, how can you call him/her a friend.’
- b. I khexing-**meq** khexing teqle
 he happy-Top CE so ‘He is so happy’

Both (21a) and (21b) have the topic marker *meq* after the IT, but contain no TSO. Sentences like these have no exact counterparts in Mandarin. In addition, as mentioned above, some Shanghainese TSOs have been re-analysed as post-topic markers, hence their role in licensing IT has been integrated into the topic marker system in Shanghainese.

There is one more difference between Mandarin and Shanghainese regarding the occurrence of pause after a topic marker. Mandarin is more likely to have a pause after a topic marker for IT or the topic in general than Shanghainese.

All of these facts show that IT in Shanghainese is in a higher degree of grammaticalization than IT in Mandarin in that the former needs less pragmatic motivations indicated by TSO and less discourse means such as pause. This situation coincides with the fact that topics in general is more syntacticized in Shanghainese than in Mandarin.

2.3. The marking of reference and aspect for IT

Li & Thompson (1981:447) observe that in the so-called verb-copying construction the direct object of the first verb is typically nonreferential. Similarly, Tsao (1987:17) points out that the first verb in the construction in question does not take any aspect markers. Tsao also believe that the VP consisting of the aspectless verb and the nonreferential object has been nominalized into a generic NP in the “secondary topic position”. Leaving Tsao’s nominalization analysis aside, their findings apply to IT in general. In short, IT contains no referential encoding for nominal elements and no aspect marking for verbal elements (There is no pure tense marking in Chinese). In other words, IT prefers bare NPs and bare VPs. CE, on the other hand, is free of such constraints. Below are some examples of nominal IT, which are beyond Li & Thomson’s and Tsao’s concerns:

- (22). a. Ta (***yi ge** /***zhe ge**) zhuren dao shi **yi ge** zhuren.
 he a CL this CL director unexpectedly be one CL CE
 lit. ‘As for head(s), he is a head actually’
- b. Ta (***yi suo** /***zhe suo**) daxue- me ye shang-le **zhe suo** daxue.
 he a CL this CL university-Top also study-in-Perf this CL CE
 lit. ‘As for university, he also studies in this university’

No matter whether CE is indefinite as in (30) or definite as in (31), IT should be bare NPs. Now let’s turn to verbal IT:

- (23) a. Ta daying dao daying-**le** san ci.
 he promise unexpectedly CE Perf three time
 ‘He has promised three times indeed’
- b. *Ta daying-**le** san ci dao daying-**le** san ci.
 he promise-Perf three times unexpectedly CE-Perf three time
 ‘He actually has promised three times’
- c. *Ta daying-**le** dao daying-**le** san ci.
 he promise-Perf unexpectedly CE-Perf three time
 ‘He actually has promised three times’
- (24) Zhan(***zhe**)-me wo ye zhan-**zhe**.
 stand(-Dur)-Top I also CE-Dur ‘I was/am also standing indeed’

(23) and (24) illustrate that IT cannot take any aspect markers (either perfective or durational) even if the marker in question occurs in CE.

What underlies the inhibition of IT from reference encoding or aspect marking will be accounted for in section 4.3.

3. The syntactic position and ordering of IT

3.1. IT as main topics and subtopics

As previously mentioned, IT in Chinese can appear in various syntactic levels, serving as main topic or as subtopic. For example:

- (25) **Shan** yi bu shi na zuo **shan**.
 mountain already not be that CL CE
 ‘As for the mountain, it is no longer that mountain’
- (26) a. (congqian) (zai shuxuexi) **Zhuren** ta ye dang-guo **zhuren**.
 previously at math-Dept. head/director he also serve-as-Exper CE
 ‘He used to serve as a head (in the Department of Mathematics)’
- b. Ta **Zhuren** ye dang-guo **zhuren**.
 he head/director also serve-as-Exper CE.
 ‘He used to serve as a head’
- c. **Dang** ta ye **dang-guo** zhuren.
 serve-as he also CE-Exper head/director
 ‘He used to serve as a head’
- d. Ta **dang** ye **dang-guo** zhuren.
 He serve-as also CE-Exper head/director
 ‘He used to serve as a head’

(25) is a clause where there is IT but no subject. This IT is a main topic preceding the predicate. (26) contains a group of largely synonymic sentences, but the position these ITs take varies. In (26a) IT is a main topic in the pre-subjective position. It can either take

the sentence-initial position or follow one or more temporal and/or spatial elements. The presence or absence of *spatial / temporal elements* will not affect the status of IT in (26a) as a main topic because there can be more than one topics in one syntactic level in our topic schema (cf. Xu & Liu 1998:51-56). In (26b) IT is a nominal subtopic. In (26c, d), we see verbal ITs serving as a main topic and a subtopic respectively.

IT also occurs in dependent clauses, mostly resultative clauses. The distinction between main topics and subtopic remains valid here, though verbal IT predominantly functions as subtopic in this level as shown in (27) below. IT as a nominal main topic in dependent clauses are permitted basically only in Shanghainese as in (28) below:

- (27) a. Ta zui de **zhan** dou **zhan** bu qi.
 he drunk so-that stand even CE not up
 'He was so drunk as to be unable to stand up at all'
- b. Wo guyi xie de ta **kan** ye **kan** bu chu.
 I intentionally write so-that he see also CE not out
 'I intentionally wrote it (in such a way) that he cannot even read it.'
- (28) (S) I tse teqle **ning**-meq **ning** a liq veq qi.
 he drunk so-that person/body-Top CE also/even stand not up
 'He was so drunk as to be unable to make his body stand up at all'

3.2. The syntactic distance between IT and CE

The distance between IT and CE ranges in a great scale, from zero (neighboring immediately) to a long distance across several clause boundaries. (29) and (30) illustrate both extremes respectively:

- (29) (S) a. **Sy** sy mmeq, **Die** die mmeq, **meqi meqi** mmeq.
 water CE not-have electricity CE not-have gas CE not-have
 'As for water, it's unavailable, and the same is true for electricity and gas'
- b. I **lozeq** **lozeq** geq.
 he simple/honest CE Ptc 'He is really simple and honest'
- (30) (S) a. **Iaq**-meq nung ezy io qing isang khe iq tsang fongtsy
 medicine-Top you still should request doctor prescribe one CL prescription
 phe nge **iaq** le qiq
 buy some CE come eat
 'As for medicines, you still should request the doctor to give you a prescription and then buy some back to take'
- b. **Tsytsang** nguo thing kong tshangtsang ijing jio Xio Wong pha
 paper I hear say factory-head already ask little Wang send
 liang geq kungning qi ma iqnge **tsytsang** uele.
 Several CL worker go buy some CE back.
 'As for paper, I heard somebody said that the head of the factory had asked Little Wang to send several workers to buy some back.'

In (29a), IT is a main topic and its CE immediately follows it. In (29b), IT is a subtopic and its CE directly follows it too. In (30a), IT is a main topic in the matrix clause while CE occurs in a complementary embedded clause which is several levels lower than the matrix one. The distance between IT and CE crosses several clause boundaries.

With all the flexibility for distance between IT and CE, there are many cases which seem to require immediate adjacency between IT and CE.

When IT occurs in each clause of a co-ordinate sentence in parallel form, adjacency between IT and CE is desired as in (31).

- (31) (S) **si si** jingsang, **die die** jingsang (, **meqi meqi** jingsang).
 water CE insufficient, electricity CE insufficient gas CE insufficient
 ‘As for water, it is insufficient, and as for electricity (and gas), the same is true’

This requirement leads further to an extremely interesting type of IT where CE itself functions as a kind of topic. Compare:

- (32) (S) a. I ueteq so ve, a uedeq da izong.
 he can cook rice also can wash clothes
 ‘He is capable of cooking meals as well as washing clothes’
- b. I **ve-meq ve** ueteq so, **izong-meq izong** ueteq da.
 he rice-Top CE can cook clothes-Top CE can wash
 ‘He is capable of both cooking meals and washing clothes’
- c. *I **ve-meq ueteq so ve**, **izong meq ueteq da izong**.
 ‘(he) rice-Top can cook CE clothes Top can wash CE’

(32a) stands for the canonical VO pattern in Chinese. In (32b), each clause has IT as a subtopic, which takes the original object as its CE. As CE, original objects must now precede the governing verb and can no longer follow the verb, as the unacceptability of (32c) shows. According to our topic schema (Xu & Liu 1998), the position CE takes in (32b) should be that for a subtopic, too. Hence, we have both IT and CE occurring as subtopics.

This analysis, how strange it sounds, is not surprising for Chinese. As Gasde (1999) suggests, there are two types of topics which serve different semantic and pragmatic functions. One is frame-setting topic and the other is aboutness topic. If they co-occur, the former always precedes the latter and is in a more external position. Adopting this taxonomy, we may claim that when both IT and CE are topics, IT is a frame-setter and CE an aboutness topic¹.

Verbal IT is another kind of IT which prefers to be close to CE, though in a less rigid fashion. Compare (33a) with (33b):

¹ In Gasde’s schema, frame-setting topics should be IP-external and should not follow the subject of the clause. Accordingly ITs in (32b) could not be frame-setters. However, it is hard to treat ITs as aboutness topics. In Section 4.3, we will see more properties IT shares with other frame-setters. Reasons for the frame-setter analysis are given also in 6.2.

- (33) (S) a. Geqtaq-geq meqzy **ju**-meq **ju** teqle.
 here-Modi stuff/goods expensive-Top CE so
 ‘Goods here are so expensive’
- b. Geqtaq-geq meqzy **ju**-meq lotso zengkuong *(a) **ju** teqle.
 here-Modi stuff/goods expensive-Top early time also CE so
 ‘Goods here were very expensive in the past, too’

In (33a), IT and CE (*ju*, ‘expensive’) are immediately neighboring. If one inserts a temporal adverbial between IT and CE as in (33b), the sentence will be ill-formed unless an topic sensitive operator such as *a* ‘also’ is added in. The contrast between (33a) and (33b) conforms with the fact that verbal IT strongly prefers the subtopic position, one that is closer to CE than a main topic to CE. In fact, in my data gathered from Old Chinese, Mandarin Chinese and its dialects, almost all the attested examples containing a subject and a verbal IT are the case where IT serves as a subtopic as in (34a), though the rarely attested pattern, i.e. verbal IT occurring pre-subjectively, is acceptable as in (34b), thus it is marked.

- (34) a. Ta **dang** ye **dang** guo zhuren. (=26d)
 he serve-as also CE-Exper head/director
 ‘He used to serve as a head’
- b. **Dang** ta ye **dang**-guo zhuren. (=26c)
 serve-as he also CE-Exper head/director
 ‘He used to serve as a head’

Before studying this issue in more depth, we can now get a preliminary impression: while the distance between IT and CE ranges in a big scale, some types of IT structure tend to have IT and CE located closely. A long-distance IT-CE construction usually needs more conditions such as TSOs to be well-formed, and that kind of structure sounds more marked. The default position for verbal IT is that of subtopic.

4. The semantic properties of IT

4.1. Introductory remark

Various subtypes of IT are not always consistent with one another in respect to their semantics. Yet they have something in common semantically, which makes them to appear like *neither arguments nor predicates*. In other words, IT is almost semantically unique compared with other components in a clause.

This section will examine the semantic status of IT relative to argument structure and its nature of referentiality. For convenience, I will use **semantic role(s)** as a cover term to refer to both thematic role(s) and the semantic role of the predicate.

4.2. The semantic emptiness of IT

As NP or VP, IT does add a meaningful entity to the clause physically. In most cases, however, IT does not change the argument structure at all. Nor does it bring in any semantic content for the clause. So its semantic contribution to the sentence meaning differs from either arguments or adjuncts. In addition, IT cannot be the predicate itself.

When IT is verbal, usually its CE instead of IT will function as a predicate in a certain syntactic level. Furthermore, since IT and CE are fully or partially identical, only one of them is needed for the clause meaning. Everything shows that it is CE that serves a “normal syntactic function” and plays certain semantic role in the clause. Then, we have to state, maybe strangely, that the contribution of IT to the clause meaning is virtually zero, and IT is semantically empty (Note that here it is physically substantial but semantically empty, whereas an “empty category” is physically empty but semantically meaningful). Semantic emptiness makes IT outstanding from other topic types, though in many respects IT really has much in common with them.

Now let us turn to some concrete observations supporting my claim for the semantic emptiness of IT. There are some complicated situations, which I will attribute to a continuum of grammaticalization.

4.2.1. The position for role assignment

CE occupies a syntactic position which assigns it a theta role, like other constituents occupying the same position, or serves as the predicate. For instance:

- (35) **Xiangyan**-me wo yiqian ye chou-guo **xiangyan**.
cigarette-Top I previously also smoke-Exper CE
'As for cigarettes, I used to smoke them too'
- (36) **Xiao-Wang**-me wo yijing gei le **Xiao-Wang** yi zhang piao le.
Little-Wang-Top I already give Perf CE one/a CL ticket Ptc
'As for Little-Wang, I have given him a ticket'
- (37) a. **Tiaowu**-me wo yiqian ye xihuan **tiaowu**.
dance-Top I previously also like dance
'As for dance, I used to like it too'
- b. **Tiaowu**-me, wo yiqian ye jingchang **tiaowu**.
dance-Top I previously also often CE
'As for dancing, I used to do it frequently too'

The syntactic positions of CEs show that *xiangyan* ‘cigarette’ in (35) is a patient while *Xiao-Wang* in (36) is a recipient. Also one can judge from the position of CE that *tiaowu* ‘dance’ is the theme of the verb *xihuan* ‘like’ in (37a) while it is the predicate in (37b). The positions of IT, by contrast, offer no clue to their semantic roles because they are all the same in the above examples. Thus it is reasonable to assume that CE rather than IT plays the semantic role. IT is then left empty semantically.

4.2.2. The semantic impact of negatives on the clause meaning

It is quite natural that the addition of a negative on CE will definitely change the meaning of a clause, or to be more accurate, the truth condition of a clause. In contrast, surprisingly, negatives on IT are often optional, in other words, the presence or absence of a negative may not change the truth condition for a clause. For instance:

- (38) a. Ta **canjia** ye **canjia** huiyi, (danshi bu hui tijiao lunwen).
he attend also CE meeting (but not will submit paper)
'He actually will also attend the conference, (but will not submit a paper)'

- b. Ta **canjia** ye **bu canjia** huiyi, (danshi hui tijiao lunwen).
 he attend also not CE meeting (but will submit paper)
 'He actually will not attend the conference, (but will submit a paper)'
- c. Ta **bu canjia** ye **bu canjia** huiyi, (danshi hui tijiao lunwen).
 he not attend also not CE meeting (but will submit paper)
 'He actually will not attend the conference, (but will submit a paper)'

Note the first clause of each examples above. By adding the negative *bu* 'not' on CE in (38a), one gets (38b), and its meaning is opposite to that of (38a). By going further to add the negative on IT in (38b), one gets (38c), and its meaning remains the same as that of (38b)². The above results can be formulated as follows:

- (39) a. Neg + VP (as CE) ≠ VP (as CE)
 b. Neg + VP (as IT) = VP (as IT)

(39) could be stronger evidence for the emptiness of IT. No meaningful constituent would remain semantically unchanged despite negation.

4.2.3. The omission of IT and CE

Generally every IT are omissible and the omission will change neither the grammaticality nor the semantic meaning of the clause, though the omission will cause a syntactic change from topic structure into nontopic structure. There are some complicated situations that will be accounted for in 4.2.4. In fact if we want to translate Chinese sentences containing ITs we would better delete all the ITs to get more natural sentences in target languages of no IT structure, though in our gloss, we often translate ITs in the form of 'as for IT' to be as loyal to the source sentences as possible.

How about CE then?

If CE is an argument, it usually can be deleted too. In so doing, one has in fact turned IT into another type of topic, i.e., the so-called gap topic. Compare:

- (40) a. **Xiangyan**-me wo yiqian ye chou-guo xiangyan. (= 35)
 cigarette-Top I previously also smoke-Exper CE
 'As for cigarettes, I used to smoke them too'
- b. **Xiangyan**_i-me wo yiqian ye chou-guo [_i].

According to the current theory one may claim that there is a gap or trace in (52b), but if IT is deleted, no one will argue for a gap, as in (41)

- (41) a. [_i] Wo yiqian ye chou guo xiangyan_i.
 I previously also smoke Exper cigarette
 'I used to smoke too'

Since the IT position receives no theta role and is semantically empty, its omission causes no feeling of any gap in intuition.

When CE is the predicate, the omission of CE is absolutely prevented. For instance:

² Although (38c) is acceptable, it sounds marked and is less likely to be attested in text than (38b), because the negative is kind of bounding means and ITs prefer to be unbounded.

- (42) Chou me wo yiqian ye *(chou-guo) xiangyan.
 smoke Top I previously also CE-Exper cigarette.
 'I used to smoke, too'

The predicative CE again reminds us of the asymmetry between IT and CE, that is that ITs are optional while CEs are obligatory. It proves that the former is semantically empty.

4.2.4. From conditional IT to morphological IT: a continuum of grammaticalization

It is true that not every type of IT is semantically empty in the same degree. We do see diversity among IT types in terms of semantic status. The diversity may reflect a continuum of grammaticalization from discourse to syntax and then to morphology.

The starting point for the grammaticalization of IT, and of many other topic types, is the conditional. In some cases IT can be analyzed as reduced conditional clauses. One such example is (4), repeated below:

- (43) Qu jiu qu.
 go just go
 '(saying go?/ If you ask me to go,) It is fine to go'

We can make the conditional meaning more evident by adding a co-ordinate clause:

- (44) Qu jiu qu, bu qu jiu bu qu.
 go just go, not go just not go
 'If you want (me/us) to go, it's fine; If you want (me/us) not to go, it's fine too'

In certain contexts, NPs can also function this way:

- (45) A: Zher zhi you miantiao, meiyou mifan.
 Here only have noodle not-have rice
 'There are only noodles here, no rice'
 B: Miantiao jiu miantiao.
 noodle just noodle
 '(Saying noodles?/ If only having noodles) Noodles are OK'

Conditionals are inherent topics in a sense, especially for preceding conditionals (cf. Haiman 1978, Ford & Thompson 1986, Schfffrin 1992). Chinese conditionals can be viewed as topics even in the syntactic level (cf. Gasde & Paul 1994, Xu & Liu 1998: 237-250). So it is not surprising for a reduced conditional to serve as IT. In the meantime, however, it is somewhat difficult to say that conditional ITs are semantically empty, though the omission of a conditional IT does not affect the sentence meaning as much as that of a full conditional clause. Furthermore, there is no optional negation for conditional IT, and the polarity must be kept consistent between IT and CE), c.f. (46):

- (46) qu jiu qu / bu qu jiu bu qu / *qu jiu bu qu / *bu qu jiu qu.
 go just go / not go just not go / go just not go not go just go

It means the degree to which these conditional ITs are grammaticalized is relatively low. On the other hand, many IT types which are more grammaticalized may be traced to their

conditional origin. For lots of IT examples present in the paper, which are obviously empty and omissible, we may have alternative gloss closer to the conditional meaning. For example:

- (47) **Xiangyan**-me wo yiqian ye chou guo **xiangyan**. (=35)
 cigarette-Top I previously also smoke Exper CE
 Previous gloss: ‘As for cigarettes, I used to smoke them too’
 Alternative: ‘If saying cigarettes, I used to smoke them too’

Both glosses are fine, though English speakers may feel less comfortable with the latter. When IT appears as a subtopic, a more grammaticalized position, to gloss it as a conditional seems to be a little bit harder:

- (48) a. Wo **xiangyan**-me yiqian ye chou guo **xiangyan**.
 I cigarette-Top previously also smoke Exp CE
 ‘As for cigarettes, I used to smoke them too’
 ?‘If saying cigarette, I used to smoke them too’

So I assume that there is a continuum of grammaticalization, i.e. from conditional clauses to (reduced) conditional IT and then to syntactic IT. It is thus reasonable that types of IT are semantically empty in varied degree.

In fact, some IT types in Shanghainese have gone farther along this pathway. They have become something which can hardly be viewed as syntactic components but rather as morphological morphemes of CE. They are the emptiest semantically, so to say. Recall (8) and (9), repeated below:

- (49) (S) Lo-Wong **niq(xing)**-zy tsengge **niqxing** ge. (=8)
 Old-Wang warm-hearted-Top/be really CE Ptc
 ‘Old Wang is really keen in helping others’

- (50) (S) khosi **jiq(suq)**-aq **jiqsuq** leq. (=9)
 Exam end-Top/also CE Ptc
 ‘The exam has/had already ended’

Note that we add a bracket in each example this time. It is to show that the first syllable of IT here, though a nonword morpheme or even a meaningless syllable, can stand alone as IT. This fact strongly hints that this type of IT constructions is closer in nature to morphology than to syntax. A nonword syllable alone is not supposed to occupies a syntactic position. On the other hand, CE can never be shortened like ITs in (49-50). When one cut short CE this way, the result will be absolutely ungrammatical as shown in (51):

- (51) (S) Lo-Wong **niqxing**-zy tsengge **niq*(xing)** ge. (←49)
 Old-Wang warm-hearted-Top/be really CE Ptc
 ‘Old Wang is really keen in helping others’

Consistent with their nonword status, ITs in (49-50), can scarcely be glossed with ‘as for...’, because they have lost much of their topical role. IT and CE together, e.g., *niq(xin) ...niqxin* in (49) can be analysed as something like a morphological variant of the verb *niqxin* ‘warm-hearted’. However, in some aspects, they maintain their characters as topics. They not only carry typical topic markers, but also syntactically behave like other

topics carrying topic markers. As noted in Xu & Liu (1998:113), constituents with topic markers cannot occur in relative clause. The same is true for ITs in (49-50). Chinese adjectives are predicative and behave like a kind of intransitive verbs, hence any AP modifying a noun is virtually a relative clause. Keep this in mind, then compare (49) above with (52) below:

- (52) (S) a. *iq geq niqxing-geq ning*
 one CL warm-hearted-Modi person
 ‘a warm-herated person / a person who is warm-herated’
- b. *iq geq tsenggeq niqxing-geq ning*
 one CL really warm-hearted-Modi person
 ‘a person who is really warm-hearted’
- c. **iq geq niqxing-zy tsenggeq niqxing-geq ning*
 one CL warm-heated-Top really CE Modi person

Either the adjective *niqxing* or the AP headed by *niqxing* can be a relative clause, as in (52a, b); but when we expand this AP into the IT construction of (49), it can no longer serve as a relative clause. Its nature of being a topic is responsible for this. That is why we still include this kind of IT in our IT system.

To sum up, we propose (53) as a major pathway for the grammaticalization of IT. It might account for at least most types of IT:

(53) **conditional clause > conditional IT > syntactic IT > morphological IT**

Since Chinese topics in general can be syntacticalized to a great extent and are rich in type, some IT types might have undergone their own pathways of grammaticalization which is similar to, but not the same with (53).

The particular process demonstrated in (53), though seldom touched on in the literature, is in fact a normal instance of grammaticalization. Hopper & Traugott (1993:95) describe a main pathway of grammaticalization as “**lexical item used in specific linguistic contexts > syntax > morphology**”. Comrie (1988:266) points out that “many syntactic phenomena can be viewed as phenomena semantic and/or pragmatic in origin which have become divorced from their semantico-pragmatic origin, in other words as instances of the grammaticalization (or, more accurately, syntacticization) of semantic-pragmatic phenomena.” Bringing these ideas together, a general model for grammaticalization could be in the form of “**semantics/pragmatics > syntax > morphology**”. The development from conditionals to syntactic IT in Chinese reflects the first stage of the process, i.e., “**pragmatics > syntax**”, with conditional IT as an intermediate phase. The further change from syntactic IT to morphological IT in Shanghainese reflects the second stage, i.e., **syntax > morphology**.

4.3. The referentiality of IT as a sub-type of frame-setting topics

4.3.1. Unboundedness for both nominal and verbal ITs

The referentiality of a nominal phrase on one side, and the tense and aspect (especially aspect for Chinese, a language without no tense system) of a verbal phrase on the other side, are similar phenomena in essence from the perspective of a higher conceptual level,

both serving as an index to help hearers build connection between linguistic elements in the sentence and their counterparts in the real-time world. For convenience, I will discuss both sides under the same term, i.e., referentiality.

In the following parts of 4.3, I will explain why IT usually contains no referential encoding for nominal elements and no aspect marking for verbal elements, as described in 2.3. I will show that underlying this fact is an overwhelming tendency for IT, that is being unbounded. For nominal, being unbounded means being generic, often encoded as bare NPs, while for verbal, being unbounded means being tenseless and aspectless, i.e., as “bare” VPs. This tendency arises from a basic nature of Chinese topics, i.e., frame-setters. Something can become a frame for another thing only if the former is “bigger” or “broader” than the latter. This condition has some variations, depending on the types of topics. For IT, the best way to being bigger or broader is to be unbounded.

4.3.2. **Frame-setters and the Principle of Frame Being Bigger (PFBB)**

Since Chafe (1976), many linguists agree that in languages like Chinese, a basic role for topics to play is to “set a spatial, temporal or individual framework within which the main predication holds”. Advancing from this basis, Gasde (1999) proposes a more clear-cut taxonomy, which divides topics into two categories: **frame-setting topics** and **aboutness topics**. His frame-setting topics include the following subtypes: spatial topics, temporal topics, Chinese-style topics (non-gap topics) and its German counterparts, i.e. so-called “free themes”, PP individual frames, conditionals.

Checking all the sub-types Gasde identifies, one can observe that they share a common property, which is that **frames are always bigger or broader than the “content” the frames contain**, i.e., the events, states or propositions indicated by the following predications, or, in particular, the elements semantically relevant to topics. For instance, when somebody says “In China, Heinrich speaks Chinese”, it means as far as this sentence is concerned, the space where Heinrich speaks Chinese is within China and must be smaller than China because he is unable to go to every corner in China. This is a locative frame-setting topic (\neq a locative adjunct, according to Gasde). The temporal ones are in the similar situation. Let’s consider individual frames, which look less transparent. When one says “For Flitz, the world is too big”, can we then state that the proposition “the world is too big” is smaller than “Flitz”? Yes. The proposition is effective only within Flitz’s conceptual world. Since there are also many other ideas and beliefs existing in his mind, the proposition alone is smaller than Flitz as a whole. A more tricky case may be the conditional topic. When one says “If you go, I’ll go”, does the former clause tells something bigger than what the latter tells? Yes. The former denotes a free, “unbound” event, which covers more possibilities, both taking place and not taking place. In contrast, the latter is a bound variable, totally depending on whether the former takes place. In this sense, it is indeed smaller than the former.

Based on the above discussion, I propose a principle, which can be called the “Principle of Frame Being Bigger” (PFBB). The relation of being “bigger” vs. “smaller” means a super-set vs. sub-set, whole vs. part, or an effective domain vs. proposition, and so forth.

4.3.3. **Applications of PFBB for various topic types**

Our previous study of topic structure (Xu & Liu 1998) has implicitly touched on the fact that topics are often bigger than the relevant elements in their comments, though we didn’t distinguish frame-setting topics from aboutness topics. Before discussing the referentiality of IT, let’s take a brief review on how PFBB applies to various topic types other than IT. We will clearly see then how IT follows PFBB in a way, too.

Xu & Liu (1998:68-75) point out that an unexchangeable relation of super-set vs. sub-set or whole vs. part persistently exists between a topic and its semantically related element, if any, in the comment no matter whether the topic is nominal, locative, temporal, verbal or clausal. The following examples are all taken from there:

- (54) a. **Shuiguo**, wo zui xihuan **pingguo**.
fruit I most like apple 'Among fruits, I like apples most'
b. ***Pingguo**, wo zui xihuan **shuiguo**.
apple I most like fruit
- (55) a. **Huoche**-shang, chengke keyi zai **canche**-li yong can.
train on passenger may at dining-couch-in use meal.
'In train, passengers can have their meals in the dining coach'
b. ***Canche**-li, chengke zai **huoche**-shang keyi yong can.
dining-couch in passenger at train on may use meal
- (56) a. **Mingtian xiawu**, wo san dianzhong zai bangongshi deng ni.
Tomorrow afternoon I three o'clock at office wait you
'I will wait for you in my office at three o'clock tomorrow afternoon'
b. ***San dianzhong**, wo **mingtian xiawu** zai bangongshi deng ni.
three o'clock I tomorrow afternoon at office wait you
- (57) a. Ta **shao cai** buguo **chao jidan, zhu baicai** eryi.
He cook dishes only fry egg boil cabbage Ptc
'If he cooks, he can only fry eggs and boil cabbage'
b. *Ta **chao jidan, zhu baicai** buguo **shao cai** eryi.
He fry egg boil Cabbage only cook dishes Ptc
- (58) a. **Xiao-Zhang hui pian ren**-me, wo xiang ta **zhi hao pian-pian laopo**.
Little-Zhang will deceive people-Top I think he only can deceive wife
'If Xiao-Zhang will deceive others, I think he can only deceive his wife'
b. ***Xiao-Zhang hui pian laopo**-me, wo xiang ta **zhi hao pian-pian ren**.
Xiao-Zhang will deceive wife-Top I think he only can deceive people

In each case above, the topic is bigger than its semantically relevant elements: *shuiguo* 'fruit' > *pingguo* 'apples' (nominal), *huoche* 'train' > *canche* 'dining coach' (locative), *mingtian xiawu* 'tomorrow afternoon' > *san dianzhong* 'three o'clock' (temporal), *shao cai* 'cook dishes' > *chao jidan, zhu baicai* 'fry egg, boil cabbage' (verbal), and finally, *Xiao-Zhang pian ren* 'Xiao-Zhang deceives others' > *Xiao-Zhang pian laopo* 'Xiao-Zhang deceives his wife' (clausal). The reverse of this relation, by contrast, is ruled out.

While genericity, usually encoded by bare NPs, is the favored reference for frame-setters like *shuiguo* 'fruit' in (54a), definite or universal-quantified NPs are also fine, as in (59), (60)

- (59) Zhe liang kache wo zhengzai jiancha jiashi zhizhao.
this CL truck I be...ing check drive licence
lit. 'For this truck, I am checking the driver licence'

- (60) Meige ren, wo dou zhi jide xing, bu jide mingzi.
 every person I all only remember surname not remember personal-name
 ‘For everybody I only remember their surnames but not personal names’

Frame-setting topics do not necessarily precede the subject. Subtopic is also a good position for them. For example, (61) is equally acceptable as (54a):

- (61) Wo **shuiguo** zui xihuan **pingguo**.
 I fruit most like apple
 ‘Among fruits, I like apples most’

Usually, a frame-setter is outside the argument structure in the clause. Thus Gasde (1999) claims that it is “IP-external”. In Chinese, however, there are also cases in which speakers can create an “IP-internal” frame-setting topic. There are two ways to do so. One is to make an argument “split”, the other to coin an IT. Let me examine them in turn.

4.3.4. Splitting the argument for setting a frame

This is a pattern where the head of the objective NP (DP) is separated from its modifiers by the verb. The head is put in the topic position preceding the verb while the modifier is left in the normal object position following the verb. For convenience, let’s call the head “split topic”. A syntactic constraint for the split is that the modifier left behind must be a syntactically autonomous NP, such as a Num-CL (numeral-classifier) phrase, a Dem (demonstrative)-CL phrase, or a *de*-phrase (*de* is a relativizer/nominalizer). For instance:

- (62) a. Wo (**lan**) **chenshan** mai-le **san jian**.
 I blue shirt buy-perf three CL
 lit. ‘As for (blue) shirts, I bought three ones of them’
- b. Wo **chenshan** mai-le **zhe jian**.
 I shirt buy-perf this CL
 lit. ‘As for the shirt, I bought this one’
- c. Wo **chenshan** mai-le **lan** *(de).
 I shirt buy-perf blue Nom
 lit. ‘As for the shirt, I bought a blue one’
- d. Wo **zhe zhong chenshan** mai-le **san jian**.
 I this kind shirt buy-perf three CL
 lit. ‘As for this kind of shirt, I bought three ones’

The split topic is often a bare NP, i.e., a bare noun or an NP with a non-deictic modifiers, as (*lan*) *chenshan* ‘(blue) shirts’ in (62a). Definite Dem-CL is permitted for the topic only when CL is a kind-denoting classifier like *zhong* ‘kind, sort’ in (62d)³. Either bare NPs or NPs with kind-denoting classifiers are generic, while the phrases in object positions are either specific, as in (62a, c), or definite (less often), as in (62b). Thus there is a

³ If there is a whole-part relation between the topic and the object, the topic can contain a demonstrative and/or a numeral, as in *Wo (zhe) san ge li chi le liang ge* ‘I ate two of the three pears’, lit. ‘I (this) three CL pears eat Perf two CL’. This is a frame-setting topic construction, but is not a split one, since the two separate parts cannot be combined into one phrase.

type (bigger)-token (smaller) relation between the two sides. The topics in (62) are all subtopics, but they can also function as main topics.

As we can see, each phrase in the object position in (62) contains a gap which takes the split topic as its antecedent. Furthermore, since the split topic is generic, it can be an antecedent for the gaps following both a specific phrase and a definite phrase simultaneously. A non-generic object has no such function. Compare (63a) with (63b):

- (63) a. Wo chenshan_i mai-le san jian [_i], ta mai-le zhe jian [_i]
 I shirt buy-Perf three CL he buy-Perf this CL.
 'I bought three shirts, and he bought this (shirt)'.
 b. Wo mai-le san jian chenshan_i, ta mai-le zhe jian [_i/_j].
 I buy-Perf three CL shirt he buy-Perf this CL.
 'I bought three shirts, and he bought this'

In (63a), *chenshan* as a split subtopic serves as the antecedent not only of the gap following the specific *san jian* 'three CL', but also of that following the definite *zhe jian* 'this CL'. The second clause of (63a) actually means 'he bought this **shirt**'. In (63b), the truth condition for the first clause remains the same with (63a), but there is no generic topic there. Since no word can serve as the antecedent for the gap in the second clause in (63b), the clause does not specify which kind of clothes was actually bought.

The split topic can be widely attested among Chinese dialects. In some southern dialects it seems to be more dominant than in Mandarin (c.f. Liu, to appear)

To split an argument for the creation of a frame-setting topic violates the proximity principle, i.e., elements with close syntactic and/or semantic relationships tend to be located closely (c.f. Croft 1990:174-183). As Foley's example (as cited in Croft *ibid.*:179) shows, Russian has a similar split construction. Croft explains it as "pragmatic factors determining word order compete with the iconic-distance principle in determining linguistic structure". However, the split topic construction is an unmarked pattern and does not need to be triggered by apparent pragmatic factors in many southern Chinese varieties. Therefore, I prefer to attribute the wide use of this pattern in Chinese to the syntacticization of frame-setting topics. Since it is a highly syntacticized position, speakers always try to fill in it. The generic bare NP extracted from the object is one of the candidates to fill in the position. This candidate is particularly welcome when there is no "IP-external" frame-setter.

4.3.5. The referentiality of nominal and verbal ITs

IT, which prefers generic elements too, is just another argument-internal candidate to fill in the frame-setter position. Interestingly, while the split topic violates the proximity principle, IT, as a semantically empty constituent, violates the principle of economy. Its existence again proves the syntactic significance of the frame-setter position in Chinese.

Nominal IT actually has much in common with the split topic. Compared:

- (64) a. Split topic: Wo **chenshan**_i ye mai-le san jian [_i]
 I shirt also buy-Perf three CL
 lit. 'As for shirts, I also bought three ones of them'

- b. IT: Wo **chenshan**_i ye mai-le san jian **chenshan**_i.
 I shirt also buy-Perf three CL CE
 lit. 'As for shirts, I also bought three ones of them'

(64a, b) are two synonymous sentences with similar structure. The only distinction between them is the overt occurrence of *chenshan* 'shirt' in the object position in (64b). In other words, while the split topic is co-indexed with a gap, IT is co-indexed with the repetition of itself. Both constructions are means to make frame-setting topics from the available argument structure.

The more significant similarity lies in the way the two topic types observe the Principle of Frame Being Bigger. In both constructions, the topic and comment share a common NP, overt or covert, thus there is no relation of being bigger based on different lexical items like *shuiguo* 'fruit' vs. *pingguo* 'apple'. The relation of being bigger here consists in genericity on the topic side vs. specificity/definiteness on the comment side. In other words, IT structure and split topic structure follow PFBB the same way. They observe PFBB as perfectly as "IP-external" frame-setting topics discussed in 4.3.3, though in a different way.

Thus far, by relating IT with other frame setting topics, I have explained why nominal IT prefers generic NP. Yet, we are still left a question: provided the bare NP in the IT position is generic, is the co-indexed NP in the CE position generic too? The answer should be 'yes'. A full specific or definite NP in Chinese can be viewed as a combination of a specific/definite phrase and a generic NP. The specific phrase is in the form of Num-CL, and the definite one in the form of Dem-(Num)-CL, while the generic NP is in the form of bare NP, typically (Adj)-N. The most powerful evidence supporting this analysis comes from kind-denoting classifiers. As shown in (62d), repeated as (65a), a phrase consisting of a definite demonstrative plus a kind-denoting classifier can also function as a split topic, patterning with a bare NP. Furthermore, like a bare NP, the definite kind-denoting phrase can also follow a specific/definite determiners, as in (65b).

- (65) a. Wo **zhe zhong chenshan** mai-le **san jian**. (=62d)
 I this CL(kind) shirt buy-perf three CL
 'As for this kind of shirt, I bought three ones'
- b. Wo mai-le **san jian zhe zhong chenshan**.
 I buy-Perf three CL this CL(kind) shirt
 'I bought three shirts of this kind'

What I mean by "generic" in the paper is equal to "kind-denoting". That accounts for why kind-denoting phrase can function like a generic bare noun. Note that the object *san jian zhe zhong chenshan* 'three shirts of this kind' in (65b) is a specific phrase, which does consist of a specific phrase with a numeral classifier and a generic NP with a kind-denoting classifier. If *zhe zhong chenshan* 'this kind of shirt' means *tiaowen chenshan* 'striped shirt' in a certain context, the speaker can use the bare NP in place of the kind-denoting phrase in (65b), yielding (66):

- (66) Wo mai-le **san jian tiaowen chenshan**
 I buy-Perf three CL striped shirt
 'I bought three striped shirts'

(65b) and (66) reveal that the bare NP in a specific phrase is actually generic in nature. It coincides to the hypothesis that a DP contains a bare NP as the complement of D.

Now let us turn to verbal IT. Our above analysis applies to verbal IT in a similar manner.

Verbal IT too should be bigger than CE, following PFBB. For nominal IT, generic NPs are favored elements to serve as IT. Generic nominals are a kind of unbounded elements. Their counterparts in verbals are unbounded VPs in the form of bare VPs in Chinese. Generic NPs denote people or objects as kinds, types, not as any individuals in the real-time world. In other words, a generic NP indicates an unindividualized set. Similarly, an unbounded VP denote an action or state as a kind, a type, i.e., an unindividualized set, not as any individual one in the real-time world. In contrast, verbal CE usually indicates a concrete action or state, with certain aspect marking, including zero marking. A set is larger than any individual within the set. Hence PFBB is well observed.

This analysis accounts for why verbal IT contains no aspect marking, as described in 2.3.

4.4. The neutralization of nominal and verbal ITs

The observations made thus far in Section 4 may lead to an explanation of the neutralization of nominal and verbal elements as mentioned in 2.1.

Since IT is semantically empty, it can be neither argument nor predicate. The morphological and syntactic differences between both categories basically arise from the opposition between being arguments and being predicates⁴. While features like (in)definiteness or (non) specificness mainly serve to bound an argument, those like the past/present tense or (im) perfective aspect mainly serve to bound a predicate. The IT position, however, is neither argumental, nor predicative. In this position, nominal IT does not behave like prototypical NPs while verbal IT does not behave like prototypical VPs. Unbounded NPs and VPs are alike in nature. The differences between the two sides are no longer salient thereby. Hence the neutralization of nominal and verbal elements in the IT position. Tsao (1987) argues that the first VP in the so-called verbal copying construction has been deverbilized and nominalized. While Tsao's analysis well accounts for the 'deverbilization' of VPs, it fails to account for the 'denominalization' of NPs in the IT position. Therefore the neutralization analysis seems to be a more precise description. In addition, the neutralization analysis also sounds better than the nominalization analysis in the fact that verbal IT is predominant over nominal ones.

5. IT in discourse and Pragmatics

5.1. Discourse motivations and the degree of grammaticalization

The topic, including IT, even as a syntactic notion, is highly relevant to discourse and pragmatics. To be more aware of IT, it is necessary to relate IT to discourse and pragmatics. This aim, however, seems to be too far for this paper. For example, the occurrence of IT has much to do with topic sensitive operators (TSO), a group of words with complicated semantic meanings and pragmatic functions. TSO alone deserves extensive studies. In addition, there are actually various types of IT, the occurrence of which might be triggered by different discourse factors, as preliminarily described in Xu and Liu

⁴ That is why linguists think bare NPs in Romance languages are predicative because they cannot serve as arguments, (c.f. Chierchia 1998).

(1998). Without detailed investigation of each type, a satisfying generalization of functions of IT can be hardly drawn.

On the other hand, the importance of discourse motivations are far from being equal for each IT type. It appears that the more grammaticalized or more morphologicalized an IT type is, the less discourse conditions it needs to occur, and the less marked it sounds. For instance, the verbal IT in Shanghainese functioning like the morphological variant of verb the stem, such as in (49-50), needs almost no particular contexts to occur.

In the following part of this section, I will only briefly deal with some factors which may not only motivate the occurrence of some ITs, but also underlie the grammaticalization of some IT types. These factors can be divided into two groups. One includes focus, emphasis, affirmation and concession. The other includes contrast, co-ordinating and parallelism.

5.2. Focus, emphasis, affirmation and concession

In many languages, a topicalized argument usually leaves a gap or a resumptive pronoun in the normal position for the argument. This is in part true for Chinese. However, there is an alternative in Chinese, i.e. repeating the topicalized element in the comment. That yields what we call identical topic (IT) structure. A major motivation to do so is to emphasize the element which has been topicalized. A lexically meaningful element should be more informative than a gap or pronoun. This seems to fit in linguistic iconicity: longer, heavier, more meaningful linguistic elements will cause greater informational power. Compare (40), repeated as (67):

- (67) a. Xiangyan-me, wo yiqian ye chou-guo xiangyan.
cigarette-Top I previously also smoke-Exper CE
'As for cigarettes, I used to smoke them too'
- b. Xiangyan_i-me, wo yiqian ye chou-guo [_i].
cigarette-Top I previously also smoke-Exper
'As for cigarettes, I use to smoke them too'

In (67a), *xiangyan* 'cigarette' occurs twice, as a topic first and then part of the comment, where *xiangyan* is emphasized; whereas in (67b), *xiangyan* occurs only as a topic, which has a co-indexed gap in the comment, where *chou-guo* 'used to smoke' is emphasized. In fact, the CE *xiangyan* in (67a) occupies the sentence-final position, which is for natural focus in Chinese (cf. Liu & Xu 1998a). In addition, CE often co-occurs with focus markers like *shi* or focus sensitive operators, some of which are also topic sensitive operators such as *ye* 'also/even' in (67a). In cases where CE does not occur in the natural focus position, focus markers or focus sensitive operators may become obligatory, as in (68):

- (68) Xianggang Lao-Wang *(shi/ye) dao Xianggang qu-guo.
Hong Kong old-Wang Foc to CE go-Exper
'As for Hong Kong, Old-Wang really has been there'

Because *Xianggang* 'Hong Kong' as CE does not occur sentence-finally as a natural focus, the focus marker *shi* or the focus/topic sensitive operator *ye* must co-occur with CE. When CE is stressed by the focus marker *shi*, it is a contrast focus (c.f. Liu and Xu 1998a). The above data can be generalized as (69) below:

- (69) CE often occurs as a natural focus or contrast focus in Chinese. The IT phrase is thus strongly emphasized because the single element occupies both positions of the topic and the focus within a clause.

The emphasis function of IT structure is more important for verbal elements than for nominal elements in Chinese. When a Chinese speaker is to stress a nominal, he can employ the so-called pseudo-cleft structure with *shi...de*, which has similar emphasis function as that of English cleft sentences. The *Shi...de* construction also applies to a VP with its arguments and adjuncts. In such a case, the stressed part is normally one of the arguments or adjuncts rather than the verb itself (c.f. Zhu 1979). In addition, according to Paris (1998), the *shi...de* construction has the effect of transforming a stage-level predication (+event) into an individual-level one (-event), where the VP become generic in her term, or unbounded in my term. In other words, this construction is unable to emphasise a VP as an event, especially the verb itself. IT structure makes up for this “flaw”. While verbal IT occurs as an unbounded element, CE remains all its features as a bounded verb, including its aspect feature. That is one of the reason verbal IT is more common than nominal IT. Another reason might be the fact that reduced conditionals, which is a main source for IT, is more often verbal.

In Shanghainese, based on its emphasis effect, IT structure becomes a very ordinary and unmarked pattern for affirming or stressing a property, a state or an event. This pattern is used so frequently as even to be *undergoing a change from syntax into morphology* (c.f. 4.2).

In Mandarin as well as in other dialects, either nominal or verbal IT can occur in a concessional clause. That is why we sometimes add a *but*-clause after an IT clause in our examples, such as (2), (3). Verbal IT, in particular, has become common means to express concession in colloquial Mandarin and exhibits a high degree of grammaticalization. For example, in (70), the IT *congming* “smart/clever” is a positive VP, but its CE is under negation. Thus IT here is totally empty.

- (70) Ta erzi **congming** dao **bu congming**, danshi hen yonggong.
 he son smart actually not CE but quite diligent
 ‘Although his son is actually not smart, but is quite diligent’

As we have seen in 4.2.4, the more empty an IT is, the more grammaticalized it is.

In fact, concession is inherently related with affirmation. When one uses a concessional, he is in a position where he has to affirm some fact, say A, which sounds disharmonious with his main statement, say B, but what he really wants to stress is B despite A. That is why the concessional often contains affirmative words or morphemes. In Chinese, conjunctions for concessionals always contain affirmative morphemes. For instance, *Suiran*, ‘although’, lit. ‘although it is so’, *zongran*, ‘although’, lit. ‘let it be so’, *guran* ‘though indeed’, lit. ‘certainly so’, *ran’er* ‘but, however’, lit. ‘so, but’. These facts hint that the concessional usage of IT should have derived from its affirmative role.

Among the types of IT mentioned so far in this subsection, examples like (67a) and (68) sound relatively marked in that their occurrence needs particular contexts and strong discourse motivations, e.g., when IT is given/activated information, or the speaker strongly desires to emphasize the expression serving as IT and CE. The remaining types, including Shanghainese verbal IT for emphasis or affirmation, Mandarin verbal IT for concession, are all unmarked patterns, like other syntactic or morphological means for these functions. No special context is needed for them.

5.3. Contrast, co-ordination and parallelism.

One of the roles a topic may play is contrast. A topic with a topic marker such as Shanghainese *meq* typically has the contrasting function⁵. The same is true for IT. For some types of IT, like those exemplified by (6, 12, 13, 15, 16), contrasting function shows up most prominently. In these cases, the two or more co-ordinate clauses are tightly bound with each other and no single clause can stand alone, although there is not any conjunction there to tie them up. Obviously, the IT construction plays crucial role here. Since the construction strongly indicates a contrast between two or among more topics in a co-ordinate sentence, at least two topics should be present in a syntactically similar way. The contrasting function here has given rise to a fixed formula for co-ordinating. This is in accord with other types of topic structure. As we noted before (Xu & Liu 1998:233-234), the topic marker *meq* in Shanghainese, while marking contrastive topics, also plays an active role in linking co-ordinate clauses. Since Chinese, particularly spoken Mandarin and many dialects, lack pure (lexically meaningless) conjunction for verbal elements⁶, the linking function of contrastive topics, especially contrastive ITs which prefer a syntactic parallelism, is indeed an important way to organize co-ordinate sentences in discourse.

Comparing the above analysis with what we see in 5.2, one can find, interestingly, that various types of IT have gone along different pathways of grammaticalization and result in different patterns with regard to semantic and pragmatic functions. Some have developed into specialized patterns for emphasis or affirmation, whereby some have further developed into a specialized pattern for the concessional clause, belonging to a complex sentence, while others developed into a parallel sentence pattern, belonging to a compound sentence.

6. Conclusion

6.1. Summary

An identical topic (IT) is wholly or partially identical to certain part of the following comment. The corresponding element (CE) may be an argument, part of an argument or a predicate in a certain syntactic level. In some special cases, CE itself may be a topic.

IT can be a nominal or verbal element, the latter being predominant in Chinese. The differences between nominals and verbals in the IT position make little sense and even are neutralized. Pause after IT is only optional. Topic markers, which also apply to other types of topics, are often employed after IT. While topic sensitive operators (TSO) play crucial role in triggering the occurrence of IT in Mandarin, topic markers are a more important factor in Shanghainese.

Being a linguistic entity, IT is semantically empty, while CE contributes its lexical meaning to the clause meaning. In a sense, the occurrence of IT violates the principle of linguistic economy. There is a continuum of grammaticalization for IT. At one extreme is the conditional IT, which sounds more meaningful. At the other extreme are morphologized IT types, which can be reduced into nonword elements or even meaningless syllables. Like what we call "split topic", IT prefers unbounded elements, usually in the form of generic bare NPs or aspectless VPs. In so doing, IT follows the principle of frame being bigger (PFBB) in a way, because an unbounded element is bigger in its extension than

⁵ See Xu & Liu (1998:228-237) for a discussion of the contrasting function of topics and its relationships with other functions topic may play.

⁶ Cantonese *thungmai* 'and' is an exception. It can be used for NPs, VPs and clauses.

a specific or definite one. In addition, since IT is neither an argument nor a predicate, the bounding conditions respectively for arguments or predicates are no longer in need. That also accounts for the neutralization of nominal and verbal elements in this position.

For some types, the occurrence of IT relies on particular contexts or discourse motivations. The most prominent motivation is to emphasize a constituent because IT structure makes the emphasized element occur twice, in both topic position and focus position. Due to the emphasis function, some types of IT have been so grammaticalized as to be common patterns for emphasis, affirmation or concession. For these IT types to occur does not need particular contexts or special discourse motivations. The contrastive function, on the other hand, makes IT play an active role in organizing co-ordinate sentences in discourse and become highly grammaticalized means, too.

6.2. IT in the classification of topics.

As far as I know, identical topic structure is something novel in the linguistic literature. How to classify it properly, i.e. to find it an appropriate position relative to other types in a general schema of topics, remains a tough task. In my opinion, the frame-setting vs. aboutness division of topics (Gasde 1999), is a well-established taxonomy. Yet we will still face trouble when classifying IT by this design. Since an aboutness topic should be an argument, IT, being semantically empty, cannot be an aboutness topic. In addition, an aboutness topic should function as a pivot of a sentence (in Foley and Van Vanlin's sense, see Sasse 1995) by means of its either semantic or pragmatic salientness. Many IT types, especially verbal IT, which is dominant over nominal IT, seem to fail in playing such a function. On the other hand, according to Gasde, the frame-setter is IP-external and is not supposed to follow the subject. Unfortunately, IT, although able to precede the subject, takes the subtopic position as its favor. Thus it is also difficult to label it as a frame-setting topic due to its syntactic position.

Since this classification is based more on semantics than on syntax, let us take more care of semantics and put aside syntactic obstacles. Then it will make me more comfortable to treat IT as a frame-setter than as an aboutness topic. Like other frame-setters, IT follows PFBB. In addition, the aboutness topic prefers definite elements. Contrarily, IT prefers generic ones. Recall that even CE can be a topic sometimes (3.2). If IT is a frame-setter, then we will get a frame-setting + aboutness order, which will be at least a more desired result than the reverse. Since Gasde's design does not cover IT, we may say that as a special subtype of frame-setters, IT can occur after the subject. It is very special in that while other frame-setters really set/add frames external to the argument structure, ITs "artificially" created frames based on the material inside the argument structure. Unlike gap topic, however, ITs do not "take away" anything from arguments. That special situation prevents ITs from being aboutness topic. In this respect, split topics seem to stand in the midway between the gap topics and ITs.

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