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Extraction out of Mandarin Clauses: Topic vs. Focus?

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Introduction

This study compares extraction out of Mandarin adjunct (if-initial clauses vs. if-final clauses) and complement (that clause) in topicalized constructions and focalized constructions through contextualized acceptability judgment experiments.

Research questions

- 1) Is extraction out of mandarin adjunct clauses acceptable?
- 2) In how far do discourse factors play a role?

Three main approaches to long-distance dependencies:

- Syntactic approach: adjuncts are “island” (e.g. Huang 1982, Chomsky 1986) .
- Processing approach: extraction out of adjunct is sensitive to frequency/distance and other processing factors (Kluender 1991, Hofmeister & Sag 2010)
- Discourse-based approach: Goldberg (2006, 2013) Backgrounded Constructions are Islands, Abeillé et al (2020): it is unfelicitous to extract an element out of a backgrounded constituent when the extracted element is focalized (as in wh-questions or clefts). If most adjunct clauses are backgrounded, it is unfelicitous to extract out of them with a focalizing construction.

Previous experiments:

Sprouse et al. (2016) found a penalty for extraction out of if-adjuncts with English wh-questions (without context) but not with relative clauses.

Kush et al (2018, 2019) and Bondevik et al. (2021) observed an if-adjunct penalty in Norwegian wh-questions but not in topicalizations.

Gibson et al. (2021) and Abeillé et al. (2022) replicated the adjunct penalty in English wh-questions (without context) but not in wh-questions with context, nor in topicalizations, compared to complement that-clauses.

Myers (2012) tested Mandarin topicalizations out of if- and because- initial adjuncts, finding a high acceptance rate (69.4%). However, he did not compare them with non extraction, nor with complement clauses

Zenker & Schwartz (2017) compared Mandarin topicalizations for because- and that-clauses, and found no adjunct island effect.

Mao et al.(2022) found no penalty for topicalizations out of Mandarin if- final adjuncts compared to that- clauses.

Two Experiments

Two Acceptability Judgment Experiments on IbeX Farm. Participants were presented with contextualized fsentence pairs & asked to rate the second sentence on a 1-7 Likert scale, and answer yes/no comprehension questions. Only participants with accuracy rates above 80% were kept.

Exp1: Extraction out of Mandarin if initial vs if final clauses

- 24 Experimental items, 30 filler items(6 ungrammatical ones) followed by comprehension questions
- 36 Mandarin natives recruited through social media
- A 2x2 design: **Focus Status**(Focus vs. Topic); **If-clause-position**(if initial vs. if final)

Context:

zhangshan de baba xiai wenxue.
zhangshan's father loves literature

(1)

a. Topic & If final:

zheben shu, ta hui feichang gaoxing, [ruguo ta renzhen yuedu].
(-FM) this-CL book, he will very happy, if she carefully read

b. Focus & If final

Shi zheben shu, ta hui feichang gaoxing, [ruguo ta renzhen yuedu].
FM this-CL book, he will very happy, if she carefully read

c. Noextraction & If final (controller)

ta hui feichang gaoxing, [ruguo ta renzhen yuedu zheben shu].
he will very happy, if she carefully read this-CL book

d. Topic & If initial

zheben shu, ruguo ta renzhen yuedu, ta hui feichang gaoxing.
(-FM) this-CL book, if she carefully read he will very happy

e. Focus & If initial

Shi zheben shu, ruguo ta renzhen yuedu, ta hui feichang gaoxing.
FM this-CL book, if she carefully read he will very happy

f. Noextraction & If initial(controller)

[ruguo ta renzhen yuedu zheben shu], ta hui feichang gaoxing
if she carefully read this-CL book he will very happy

Exp2: Extraction out of Mandarin if clauses vs. that clause

- 24 Experimental items, 24 filler items followed by comprehension questions
- 37 Mandarin natives recruited through social media
- A 2x2 design: **Focus Status**(Focus vs. Topic); **Clause Type**(if clause vs. that clause)

(2)

a. Topic & That clause

zheben shu, ta feichang gaoxing ta renzhen yuedu le.
(-FM) this-CL book, he very happy she carefully read-ASP

b. Focus & That clause

Shi zheben shu, ta feichang gaoxing ta renzhen yuedu le
(+FM) this-CL book, he very happy she carefully read-ASP

c. Noextraction & That clause

ta feichang gaoxing ta renzhen yuedu le zheben shu
he very happy she carefully read-ASP this-CL book

d. Topic & If clause

zheben shu, ta hui feichang gaoxing, ruguo ta renzhen yuedu.
(-FM) this-CL book, he will very happy, if she carefully read

e. Focus & If clause

Shi zheben shu, ta hui feichang gaoxing, ruguo ta renzhen yuedu.
(+FM) this-CL book, he will very happy, if she carefully read

f. Noextraction & If clause

ta hui feichang gaoxing ruguo ta renzhen yuedu le zheben shu
he will very happy if she carefully read-ASP this-CL book

Predictions

Syntactic approach:

- Exp1: Higher structural distance with initial if-clauses might lower their acceptability(Haegeman,1994).
- Exp2: Extractions from if-clauses should be rated worse than that-clauses (adjunct island).

Processing approach:

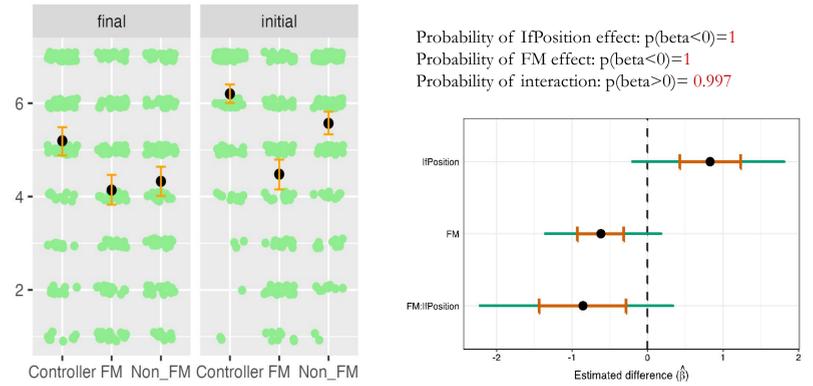
- Exp1: shorter linear distance between the filler and the gap favors extraction out of if-initial adjuncts
- Exp2: no differences between if-clauses and that-clauses

Discourse approach:

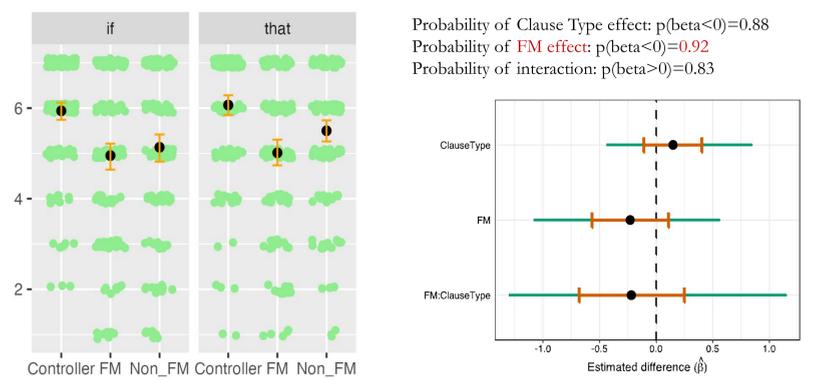
- Exp1: Focus-Background Conflict Constraint (Abeillé et al., 2020) penalizes extraction of a focused element from a backgrounded constituent because there is a discourse conflict. If initial if-clauses are more backgrounded than final if-clauses, a bigger penalty for focusing out of initial if-clauses is predicted.
- Exp2: A penalty for focus extraction out of if-clauses is predicted, if that-clauses are less backgrounded.

Results

Exp1 Extraction out of Mandarin if-initial vs. if-final clauses



Exp2 Extraction out of Mandarin if-clauses vs. that-clauses



Bayesian analyses excluding the control condition show:

Exp1:

- a high probability for a main effect of If-clause Position effect (higher ratings in if-initial sentences)
- a high probability for a main effect of Focus-Marker effect (lower ratings in focused conditions)
- a high probability for an interaction: bigger difference between Focus and Topic in if-initial sentence

Ungrammatical fillers were rated much lower (3.64)

Preference for initial if-clauses confirm previous work (Li & Thomson 1981, Paris 1999) and corpus data (Wong, 2006): 82% if-clauses in initial position

Exp2:

- a low probability for Clause-type effect
- a high probability for a main effect of FM(lower ratings in focused conditions)
- a low probability for an interaction (no adjunct island)

Ungrammatical fillers were rated lower (4.37)

Discussions

1. Extraction out of Mandarin adjunct clauses is acceptable.

- Generally, there is a penalty for topicalization (cf Zenker & Schwartz 2017), as in English.
- However, topicalization remains quite acceptable, both out of that- and out of if-clauses. We did not find any adjunct penalty in Exp 2 (in the non FM condition). This would not be predicted by an adjunct island approach

2. Discourse factors do play a role.

- Generally, topicalization is sensitive to discourse factors; it is disfavored by a focus marker, both for if-clauses and that-clauses. The FM is worse out of initial than final if-clauses, which is compatible with a discourse clash theory assuming that initial if-clause are more backgrounded than final if-clauses (Pan & Paul, 2018), as in English (Haegerman, 2010).
- The lack of difference between if-final and that-clause may be due to a similar background status.

Selected References

- [1]Abeillé et al. 2020, Cognition; [2] Goldberg, A. E. (2016). Constructions at work. Oxford: Oxford University Press. [3]Goldberg, A. E. 2013. Backgrounded constituents cannot be “extracted”. Experimental syntax and island effects, 221. [4] Mao et al. 2022, Topicalization out of Mandarin and English if-clauses and that-clauses, Exling; [5]Myers, J. 2012. Testing adjunct and conjunct island constraints in Chinese. Language and Linguistics, 13; [6] Huang, 1982, Logical Relations in Chinese and the Theory of Grammar; [7] Pan & Paul, 2008. The syntax of complex sentences in Mandarin Chinese; [8] Ross, Constraints on Variables in Syntax,1967; [9]Zenker, F., Schwartz, B. D. 2017. Topicalization from adjuncts in English vs. Chinese vs. Chinese-English interlanguage. 41st BUCLD Conference,