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# The introduction of auditory signals in Chinese and French narratives: Perspectival center and focus structure

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Perceptive relationships can be conceptualized from either the experiencer's perspective (e.g., *I heard a gunshot*) or the phenomenon's perspective (e.g., *a gunshot sounded*). In some languages, a specific category of 'perceptibility verbs' (Viberg 2019) is employed to convey the phenomenon-based perspective. This is exemplified, in the auditory domain, by verbs signifying "be audible" in languages like Finnish, Swedish, and Japanese, among others (Viberg 1983, 2019; Huumo 2010).

Chinese and French, on the other hand, lack such specialized lexical verbs and belong to languages that rely on different morphosyntactic strategies to express a perceptive relationship from the phenomenon's viewpoint (Lamarre 2020, Sarda et al. Under review).

Focusing on the less-explored auditory domain, this study adopts a contrastive perspective to examine the specialized constructions available in Chinese and French. In particular, the locative inversion construction emerges as a strategy commonly used in both languages, as seen in (1-2). Closely related to existentials (Sarda & Lena 2023), these constructions show remarkable similarities in both languages concerning the predicates recruited (e.g., emission and directed-motion verbs), the position and role of locatives, as well as their function within discourse.

In this talk, the focus will be on the discourse-pragmatic function of phenomenon-based encodings versus experiencer-based encodings, examining their incidence on the discourse organization. Specifically, we explore the interplay between inverse perspectivation at the sentence level and broader discourse structure, and potential correlations between construction type, sentence-level features, and the tracking of both the experiencer and the phenomenon in subsequent text (Ariel 2001).

The research builds on a bilingual corpus composed of two subcorpora: comparable and parallel. The comparable subcorpus includes samples from both language (N = 200), extracted from contemporary novels by searching for keywords indicating the phenomenon (i.e., the sound signal being introduced in the narrative). This approach allowed us to observe the types and relative frequency of the syntactic patterns associated with these introductions, and their correlation with referent tracking.

The parallel subcorpus consists of aligned translations of Chinese-to-French and French-to-Chinese sentences (N = 150), extracted using the same method as the comparable corpus but retaining only the sentences in which phenomenon-based encodings are expressed as directional relationships (as seen in (1-2)). This allowed us to explore questions such as the influence of venitive deixis on the tracking of the experiencer.

Our analysis confirms that experiencer-based forms represent the unmarked case, with the experiencer simultaneously serving as the perspectival center and the sentence topic. In contrast,

phenomenon-based constructions introduce a mismatch into both the perspectival structure and the discourse flow. Findings indicate that the experiencer is a discourse entity that remains accessible for activation, even when it is not explicitly mentioned in the sentence. Nevertheless, phenomenon-based encodings can lead to relatively low to moderate discourse permanence of the sound signal as a topic, potentially resulting in topic shifts (Givón 1983, von Heusinger & Schumacher 2019, Landragin 2021, Hou & Landragin 2023).

Two pressures, it is argued, are at play in phenomenon-based perceptivizations: on the one hand, the sentence assigns the role of subject to the phenomenon to redirect the attention away from the experiencer; on the other, it signals, often through postverbal position, that this subject is not to be misconstrued as a topical, discourse-old element.

- (1) a. French.  
 Du petit pré d'en bas montaient des voix enfantines, (...).  
 from.the little meadow below rise.PST.3PL INDF.ART.PL voices childlike  
 Lit. 'From the little meadow below were rising children's voices, (...).'
- b. Chinese.  
 Shùlín xiàmiàn yī xiǎo fāng cǎodì=shang chuán-lai yì-qún értóng de shēngyīn: (...)  
 Lit. 'From the small meadow below the trees came the sound of a group of children.'  
 (Roman Rolland, *Jean Christophe*, Chinese translation by Fu Lei)
- (2) a. Chinese.  
 Wàibian chuán-lai xiǎoxuéshēng de hǎnjiào-shēng...  
 outside spread-come(VEN) schoolchildren SUB shout-sound
- b. French.  
 De l' extérieur parvenaient des cris d' écoliers...  
 from the outside approach.PST.3PL INDF.ART.PL shouts of schoolchildren  
 Lit. 'From outside came the shouts of schoolchildren'. (Mo Yan, *Fēng rǔ féi tún [Big Breasts and Wide Hips]*, 1996, French translation by N. Dutrait & L. Dutrait)

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