

## FOCUS FOCALIZATION

### 1. Definition

Focus is often defined as the notion that provides new or salient information in a sentence. Focus typically involves a focus-background articulation. Focus is the ‘informative’ part of the sentence; the background is the ‘non-informative’ part, that is, the knowledge that the speaker presupposes to be shared by the hearer (Halliday 1967, Jackendoff 1972, Vallduvì and Engdhal 1996 among others).

There are different uses of focus. New information, in its simplest form, is expressed by the so-called ‘information focus’, which, for example, can correspond to the part of the sentence that answers a *wh*-constituent question, as ‘John’ in (1).

(1) Q: Who did you meet yesterday?

A: I met [*John*]<sub>F</sub>.

Focus is also used to correct or confirm an information. This is known as ‘contrastive focus’ (Kiss 1998 among others), as in (2).

(2) A: I know that you met John yesterday.

B: No, I met [*Paul*]<sub>F</sub>.

‘Exhaustive focus’ indicates that the focus denotation is the only one that leads to a true proposition. For example, this is the kind of focus expressed by clefts (Krifka 2007, Kiss 1998):

(3) It’s [*John*]<sub>F</sub> who broke the vase.

The focus denotation in (3) implies an identity statement, as in ‘the one who broke the vase is John, and not someone else’.

Focus can also be realized by means of scalar particles like *even* and *also* (König 1991). It is defined as ‘scalar focus’: the alternatives are ordered in a scale and the focus denotation is the least likely or biggest element on such a scale.

(4) I could ate even [*a tiger*]<sub>F</sub>.

In (4), the element focused by *even* is ‘a tiger’ and it is the least probable element in a scale of things that I could eat.

## 2. The expression of focus

Focus is a complex phenomenon that involves various domains of grammar, affecting morpho-syntactic and phonological properties of the sentence. Focus has been associated with special syntactic positions in certain languages: it can be realized pre-verbally as in Hungarian (Kiss 1998), in clause initial position as in Italian (Rizzi 1997), or *in situ*, i.e. in its original position, without any change in the canonical word order of the language, as in Chinese (see example (7) below), which also allows fronting focalization as shown below (see example (8) and (9)).

Focus is usually marked through a prominent accent on a word or a minimal constituent. All models relating focus with phonology rely on a direct correspondence between semantics and prosody and require an accent signaling the presence of a focused constituent (Bolinger 1958, Jackendoff 1972, Rooth 1992, Cinque 1993, Selkirk 1995, Schwarzschild 1999, Büring 2003).

In some tonal languages (like Kwa languages, see Ameka 1992, 2010), focus can be marked by lexical markers. These markers are often optional, have a delimiting function in creating a prosodic boundary, and always appear at one of the edges of the constituent they mark:

- (5) [Bíyà    sà-é]<sub>F</sub>    wǒ-nò.  
beer    this-FOC 3S-drink  
'It's this beer that he drank.'

### 3. The expression of focus in Chinese

Chinese uses different means to express focus. For example, the informational (example (6)) and contrastive focus (example (7)) are expressed with stress while leaving the focused element *in-situ*:

- (6) Q: 你買了甚麼?  
Nǐ mǎi le shénme?  
2S buy ASP what  
'What did you buy?'
- A: 我買了這本書。  
Wǒ mǎi le [zhè bēn shū]<sub>F</sub>.  
1S buy ASP this CL book  
'I bought this book.'

(7) A: 我知道，張三喝葡萄酒了！

Wǒ zhīdào, Zhāngsān hē pútáojiǔ le!

1s know Zhangsan drink wine PART

'I know, Zhangsan drank wine!'

B: 不是，（他）喝橘汁了！

Bù shì, (tā) hē [jú-zhī]<sub>F</sub> le!

No to.be 3s drink orange-juice PART

'No, he drank wine!'

The focus object bears the prominent stress and the canonical word order doesn't change.

The most studied focus structure in Chinese is the *even*-construction, which expresses 'scalar focus' (Paris 1979a, 1998, 1999, Gao 1994, Tsai 1994, Shyu 1995, 2004, Paul 2005, Badan 2007, 2008 among others):

(8) 我連這本書都 / 也看完了。

Wǒ lián zhè běn shū dōu / yě kàn-wán le.

1s even this CL book all also read-finish PART

'I (finished to) read even this book.'

The construction is formed by two elements: *lián* 連 and *dōu* 都 / *yě* 也. *Lián* 連 (which is optional in certain cases) precedes the focused item and is traditionally associated with the meaning of *even* in English. *Dōu* 都 literally means 'all' and must always be present; it is quasi-fully interchangeable with *yě* 也 'also' (see Hole 2004).

Focused elements in this construction always precede the verb (which is immediately preceded by *dōu* 都 / *yě* 也). As a consequence, a focused object, obligatorily moves from its canonical post-verbal position to the left of *dōu* 都 either to a position following the subject (as in (8)) or to the very beginning of the sentence (as in (9)); note that *dōu* 都 (or *yě* 也 for that matter) never moves from the pre-verbal position.

(9) 連這本書我都看完了。

Lián      zhè běn shū      wǒ dōu kàn-wán      le.  
even    this CL book    1s all read-finish PART  
'Even this book, I (finished to) read.'

The syntactic and interpretive differences between (8) and (9) are still an open issue (Badan 2008, Gu and Constant 2009).

The nature of *lián* 連 and its syntactic behavior is also a controversial topic. In traditional Chinese grammars, *lián* 連 is labeled as a preposition (Chao 1968), or as a 'focusing adverb' (Tsai 1994, 2004). Paris (1979a), Tsai (2004), and Badan (2007, 2008) propose that the *even* interpretation of the *lián* 連...*dōu* 都 construction is the result of the interaction of *lián* 連, as a focus particle, with *dōu* 都. Badan (2007, 2008, following Cheng and Giannakidou 2006) analyzes *dōu* 都 as a 'maximality operator', which provides the largest (that is, 'maximal') plurality of individuals having a certain property.

'Exhaustive focus' is expressed in Chinese by the *shì* 是...*de* 的 construction, whose interpretation is similar to that of cleft constructions in English. The focused

item is preceded by the copula *shì* 是 and the particle *de* 的 appears at the end of the clause (Paris 1979b, Cheng 2008, Paul 2008) :

(10) 我是在北京结婚的。

Wǒ shì zài bèijīng jiéhūn de.

1s to.be in Peking get married PART

'It's in Peking that I got married.'

The *shì* 是...*de* 的 structure has been and still is an often discussed topic in Chinese linguistics. The general agreement is that it is a focus construction. However, there is no agreement with respect to the analysis of this 'construction' and the nature of *shì* 是 and *de* 的. For instance, Huang (1982) considers this construction a pseudocleft sentence; Paul and Whitman (2008) argue that *shì* 是...*de* 的 is a cover term for at least four distinct constructions; Cheng (2008) proposes that *shì* 是...*de* 的 is actually not a construction: *shì* 是 is a copula, which selects a small clause with subject and a predicate, and it has no particular affinity with *de* 的. For Cheng the *shì* 是...*de* 的 combinations can come about due to different structures with different syntactic properties.

Another way to express focalization is by using *dōu* 都 in sentence initial position:

(11) 都大學生了！

Dōu dàxuéshēng le!

All university-student PART

‘They are *even* university students!’

‘They are *already* university students!’

The interpretation of the sentence-initial *dōu* 都 construction is ambiguous between *even* and *already* and depends on the context (Badan 2008, Pan 2007).

An extensively discussed construction in Chinese is that in which the bare object is moved to a position between the subject and the verb.

(12) 我酒喝（可樂不喝）。

Wǒ jiǔ hē (‘Kělè’ bù hē).

1s liquor drink Coke not drink

‘Liquor I drink (but Coke I don’t drink).’

(Ernst and Wang 1995:22)

This construction has been analyzed as expressing either focus (Shyu 1995, 2001, Ernst and Wang 1995, Tsai 1994, Zhang 1996), topic (Paul 2002) or contrastive topic (Badan 2008) and is still subject of debate. This construction is controversial because it has properties of both focus and topic: the object needs a contrastive stress as a focus, but it can be followed by topic particles (Paul 2002, Badan 2008).

Although Chinese is a tonal language, several studies show that lexical tones can be phonetically implemented with an accent, when uttered with emphasis (Pierrehumbert and Beckman 1988, Xu and Wang 2001, Xu 2005, Chen and

Gussenhoven 2006). For instance, *lián* 連 is generally regarded as optional; however, when *lián* 連 is not spelled out, the element to the left of *dōu* 都 requires a focus accent (Sybesma 1996, Badan 2008). In (13), the accent is on *zhè xiē shū* 這些書 ‘these books’, so the reading is obligatorily a focus reading:

(13) 張三這些書都看完了。

Zhāngsān    zhè xiē    shū    dōu kàn-wán    le.

Zhangsan    this CL.PL    book    all read-finish    PART

‘Zhangsan (finished to) read even these books.’

If the accent is on *dōu* 都, the interpretation is unambiguously quantificational:

(14) 張三這些書都看完了。

Zhāngsān    zhè xiē    shū    dōu kàn-wán    le.

Zhangsan    this CL.PL    book    all read-finish    PART

‘Zhangsan read all these books.’

When *lián* 都 is present, the special accent is not necessary. The same effects appear in sentence-initial *dōu* 都 constructions: if the accent is on the focused element, the interpretation is a focus (as in (11)), if the accent is on *dōu* 都 the sentence is ungrammatical or at least weird (15).



(15) 都大學生了！

\*?Dōu      dàxuéshēng      le!  
all      university-student      PART

Finally, in cases with the object moved between the subject and the verb, the object also needs to be put in prosodic contrasts with another item in the context or in a conjunction (see (12) above).

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