

RETHINKING *WH*-ISLAND EFFECTS IN JAPANESE AND CHINESE

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1 Recalling *Wh*-island

The contrast between Japanese and Chinese with respect to *wh*-island effects has been generally assumed to be true. Specifically, in Japanese the embedded *wh*-arguments in (1) cannot take the matrix scope over a *wh*-island (Watanabe 1992)¹, while in Chinese they can, as in (2) (Huang 1982, Tsai 1994), and yet in both languages they can take scope over strong islands (see examples in section 4). The observation has attracted quite a few studies in resolving how *wh*-phrases take scope in these languages (Nishigauchi 1986, 1990, Watanabe 1992, Aoun and Li 1993, Tsai 1994, Reinhart 1997).

[Japanese]

- (1) a. *Kimi-wa [watasitai-ga nani-o doko-de katta ka] oboete-iru no?
you-Top we-Nom what-Acc where-at bought Q remember Q
'What do you remember [where we bought ___]?'
b. *Kimi-wa [dare-ga kuru ka(dooka)] siritai no?
you-Top who-Nom come whether want.to.know Q
'Who do you wonder [whether ___ will come]?'

[Chinese]

- (2) a. Ni xiang-zhidao [Lisi weishenme mai-le shenme] ne?
you want-know Lisi why buy-Perf. what Q
'What do you wonder [why Lisi bought ___]?'
b. Ni xiang-zhidao [shei weishenme cizhi] ne?
you want-know who why resign Q
'Who do you wonder [why ___ resigned]?'

¹ Watanabe (1992) notes that in Japanese "the degree of unacceptability varies among different speakers". In this paper, let us assume the marginal sentences in (1) as *wh*-island violations.

In this paper, I will provide evidence showing that, 1) Chinese *wh*-arguments, in fact, exhibit *wh*-island effects, contrary to what has been assumed in the past; 2) the apparent lack of *wh*-island effects is due to the disguise of D-linking; 3) Chinese argumental *wh*-construals still cannot be patterned with Japanese ones, although they seem to behave similarly; 4) this leads to the need to reinvestigate the mechanisms underlying the *wh*-elements of the *wh*-in-situ languages on the one hand and those triggering *wh*-island effects on the other.

2 D-linking

With a closer inspection on the language data in (2), speakers of Chinese will find that these sentences can be acceptable only under a certain discourse scenario. That is, the *wh*-phrases at issue here must be D(iscourse)-linked (Pesetsky 1987). Take (2b) as an illustration. It is more feasible under the scenario in (3).

(3) No *wh*-island effects under D-linking scenario

- a. Context: Recently there have been three clerks resigning from their positions in your department. Each clerk resigned for a certain reason. You are curious about this. So you go to the personnel office to find the answer. After you explain why you are there. The personnel director asks:
- b. Ni xiang-zhidao [shei weishenme cizhi] ne? (=2b)
 you want-know who why resign Q
 ‘Who do you wonder [why ___ resigned]?’

In fact, if we replace the *wh*-words in question with explicitly D-linked ones, the Chinese examples become readily acceptable:

- (4) a. Ni xiang-zhidao [Lisi weishenme mai-le na-ben-shu]?
 you want-know Lisi why buy-Perf. which-Cl-book
 ‘Which book do you wonder [why Lisi bought ___]?’
- b. Ni xiang-zhidao [na-ge-ren weishenme cizhi] ne?
 you want-know which-Cl-person why resign Q
 ‘Which person do you wonder [why ___ resigned]?’

The observation that a D-linked *wh*-phrase may overcome Subjacency violations is not novel as we can also observe it in English as in (5).

- (5) a. *What do you remember where we bought *t*?
 b. Which book do you remember where we bought *t*?

The point is since Chinese bare *wh*-arguments in (2) can be read as D-linked ones, how to filter out the D-linked interpretation so as to illicit *wh*-island effects becomes a crucial task. If there is an explicit way to do so without solely resorting to context, it may provide a piece of solid evidence of *wh*-island effects in Chinese.

3 ‘How-many’ Phrases and (Non-)referentiality

The previous section directs us to the issue of (non-)referentiality where D-linking plays a crucial part in nullifying *wh-island* effects (Cinque 1990, Rizzi 1990, Pesetsky 1987). This can also be observed in English ‘how-many’ phrases. In (6) the ‘how-many’ phrase has two interpretations, ‘presuppositional’ (6a) and ‘non-presuppositional’ (6b) (Lahiri 2002, Cresti 1995, Miyagawa 2004, cf. Longobardi 1987). They can be distinguished by the answers in (7) where (7a) corresponds to (6a) and (7b) to (6b).

- (6) Q: How many people should I talk to?
 a. ‘For what n: there are n-many people x, such that I should talk to x?’
 b. ‘For what n: I should talk to n-many people?’
 (7) A: a. You should talk to Bill, Jane, and Tom.
 b. Three.

Importantly, when the ‘how-many’ phrase is embedded in a *wh-island*, the non-presuppositional interpretation is gone. The answer to it can only be the presuppositional one as in (9a).

- (8) Q: How many people do you wonder [whether I should talk to]?
 (9) A: a. You should talk to Bill, Jane, and Tom.
 b. # Three.

The ‘how-many’ phrases in Chinese can be constructed with an indefinite *ji* ‘several’. Unlike English, when occurring in questions, they are exclusively used in asking numbers, namely, the non-presuppositional reading.

- (10) Q: Ni mai-le ji-ben-shu ne?
 you bought-Perf. several-Cl-book Q
 ‘How many books did you buy?’
 (11) A: a. San ben.
 three Cl
 ‘Three (books).’
 b. #The Lord of the Rings, Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows, ...

To derive the presuppositional interpretation, a D-linked demonstrative *na* ‘which’ must be added as in (12), and the corresponding answer turns out to be just the other way around.

- (12) Q: Ni mai-le na-ji-ben-shu ne?
 you meet-Perf. which-several-Cl-person Q
 ‘For what n: there are n-many books x such that you have bought x?’
 (13) A: a. #San ben.
 three Cl
 ‘Three (books).’
 b. The Lord of the Rings, Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows, ...

In this sense, the interpretational contrast in English ‘how-many’ phrases is overtly realized in the absence/presence of the D-linked demonstrative *na* ‘which’ in Chinese. As predicted, only the D-linked ‘how-many’ phrases survive the *wh*-islands in (14-15):

- (14) a. *Ni xiang-zhidao [Lisi weishenme mai-le ji-ben-shu] ne?
 you want-know Lisi why buy-Perf. several-Cl-book Q
 ‘How many books do you wonder [Lisi bought ___ why]?’
 b. Ni xiang-zhidao [Lisi weishenme mai-le na-ji-ben-shu] ne?
 you want-know Lisi why buy-Perf. which-several-Cl-book Q
 ‘For what n: there are n-many books x such that you wonder [Lisi bought x why]?’
- (15) a. *Ni xiang-zhidao [(you) ji-ge-ren weishenme cizhi] ne?
 you want-know have several-Cl-person why resign Q
 ‘How many people do you wonder [why ___ resigned]?’
 b. Ni xiang-zhidao [na-ji-ge-ren weishenme cizhi] ne?
 you want-know which-several-Cl-person why resign Q
 ‘For what n: there are n-many people x such that you wonder why x resigned?’

In sum, what is demonstrated above shows that *wh*-island effects also occur to Chinese *wh*-arguments when we carefully exclude the D-linkedness. This amounts to saying that Chinese *wh*-construals can be patterned with Japanese ones since they both exhibit *wh*-island violations on the one hand while they are not constrained by strong islands on the other hand. In the next section, I will show that it cannot be so.

4 Strong Island and Pied-piping

Pesetsky (1987) notes that in Japanese a felicitous answer to a question involving a complex NP island like (16) must recapitulate the entire island. One strategy to catch such an observation is to resort to the pied-piping mechanism where the whole island undergoes LF movement to avoid extraction violation (Nishigauchi 1986, Choe 1987, Richards 2008).

- (16) Q: Mary-wa [[John-ni nani-o ageta] hito-ni] atta-no? (from Pesetsky 1987)
 Mary-Top John-Dat what-Acc gave man-Dat met-Q
 ‘What did Mary meet the man who gave ___ to John?’
- A: a. */??Konpyuutaa desu
 computer Cop
 ‘It’s a computer.’
 b. [[Konpyuutaa-o ageta] hito] desu
 computer-Acc gave man Cop
 ‘It’s the man who gave a computer (to him).’

The Chinese counterpart, on the other hand, does not necessarily require the whole island as the answer. As (17a) shows, a short one is also fine.

- (17) Q: Ni zui xihuan [[shei xie] de shu]?
 you most like who write DE book

‘Who is the person x such that you like the book that x writes most?’

- A: a. Zhangsan. (person name)
 b. [[Zhangsan xie] de shu].
 Zhangsan write DE book
 ‘The book that Zhangsan writes.’

Also, Fiengo et al. (1988) show that in Chinese the answer to a question with subject island cannot pied-pipe the whole island.

- (18)Q: [Shei tan gangqin] zui heshi?
 who play piano most appropriate
 ‘(lit.) That who plays the piano is most appropriate?’
 A: a. Zhangsan. (person name)
 b. #Zhangsan tan gangqin.
 Zhangsan play piano
 ‘Zhangsan plays piano.’

At this point it is important to note that the ‘how-many’ phrases in Chinese are not like the *wh*-adverbs which are sensitive to both strong and weak islands (Huang 1982, Tsai 1994). Specifically, the non-presuppositional, number-denoting ‘how-many’ phrase in Chinese is fine with strong islands in (19). It is evidenced by the corresponding answers in (20) which are exclusively numbers.

- (19) a. (Complex NP)
 Ni shouji-le [[ji-ge-guojia faxing] de youpiao] le ne?
 you collect-Perf. how.many-country issue DE stamp Perf.Q
 ‘How many countries have you collected [the stamps that ___ issued]?’
 b. (Adjunct clause)
 Wo [zai da-wan ji-dao-timu zhihou] jiu keyi xiuxi ne?
 I at answer-finish how.may-Cl-question after then may rest Q
 ‘How many questions can I take a rest [after I finish answering ___]?’
 c. (Sentential subject)
 [Ji-ge-ren da bangqiu] zui heshi?
 how.many-Cl-person play baseball most appropriate
 ‘How many people are [that ___ play baseball] most appropriate?’
- (20) a. 76-ge(-guojia).
 76-Cl-country
 ‘76 countries.’
 b. 20-dao(-timu).
 20-Cl-question
 ‘20 questions.’
 c. 9-ge(-ren).
 9-Cl-person
 ‘9 persons.’

This is very interesting and makes us wonder why the strong islands are too weak to block the

non-presuppositional, number reading while the weak islands like *wh*-islands are so strong as to block this reading.

5 Rethinking *Wh*-island

If what is presented is correct, *wh*-island effects should still exist in Chinese. They can be suppressed by D-linkedness of the *wh*-phrases, as in English, which leads to the traditional observation of the lack of *wh*-island effects in Chinese. Two lines of thoughts are in order. Firstly, the mechanisms behind the *wh*-arguments in *wh*-in-situ languages are to be reinvestigated. One way is to have the normal *wh*-phrase, argument or adjunct, undergo covert/LF movement to take scope as originally argued by Huang (1982). But then we would have to explain why strong island effects are still absent in Chinese on the one hand while on the other hand the corresponding answers can be short ones different from the pied-piped ones in Japanese. Another way is to maintain the non-movement approach, for example, unselective binding, as advocated by Tsai (1994) (see also Aoun and Li 1993). It immediately explains the problem regarding the strong islands. Yet, it predicts the absence of *wh*-island effects, contrary to what we have observed.

Secondly, and I am inclined to this view, the *wh*-island effects are to be considered as a cross-linguistic phenomenon and are subject to be re-interpreted as some other effects, for example, intervention effects (cf. Beck 1996, Beck and Kim 1997, Pesetsky 2000, Miyagawa 2004, Beck 2006, among many others). In this way, it remains intact for what has been accumulated so far on the explorations of mechanisms behind Japanese and Chinese *wh*-in-situ construals in the linguistic literature. Attention would only be given to what triggers *wh*-island effects. For Japanese, the effects may be attributed to the blocking of the movement path, just as the long-assumed Subjacency violations. For Chinese, assuming the non-movement approach, the effects may be due to the blocking of the probe-goal relation of a certain agreement mechanism. Further research is needed for how the blocking works in the probe-goal system, which I leave it open for the time being.

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