POLARITY ITEMS, MAXIMIZERS AND MINIMIZERS IN MANDARIN CHINESE

Over the past twenty-five years of work on NPIs in Chinese, at least three types of expressions sensitive to negation have been recognized. They may be exemplified by *shenme* (Type A), *renhe* (Type B) and *conglai* (Type C) respectively.

**Type A**: Existential Polarity Wh-phrases (“EPWs”) – (cf. Huang 1982; Lin 1998, etc.)

1. *Zhangsan zuotian*(MEI) chi *shenme*  
   Zhangsan yesterday DIDN’T eat what  
   (a) “Zhangsan did not eat anything”  
   (b) “Zhangsan barely ate anything [= He only ate a little.]”

**Type B**: Renhe-NPs (cf. Wang 1993)

2. *ta *(mei) you renhe aihao  
   he doesn’t have any hobbies  
   “He doesn’t have any hobbies”

**Type C**: Neg-sensitive Adverbs (cf. Hsiao 2002)

3. *wo congla*(mei)-you jian-guo ta  
   I ever didn’t see-Asp. him  
   “He have never seen him”

**Fact 1**: Unlike Types B & C, Type A expressions do not yield their reading from the presence of the negative marker alone: in addition to the presence of ‘mei’ in (1), an accent must fall on it and the intonation contour must be falling at the end (cf. Pan, 2007). Without these prosodic elements, the interpretation of wh-phrases must be interrogative by default (cf. (1’) below)) :

1’. *Zhangsan zuotian* mei chi *shenme*  
   Zhangsan yesterday didn’t eat what  
   “What didn’t Zhangsan eat ?”

**Fact 2**: Unlike Types A and B, Type C expressions cannot fall within the c-command domain of negation (cf. 3’). The former two types must fall within negation’s c-command domain (cf. 1-2).

3’ *wo mei-you congla* jian-guo ta  
   I didn’t ever see-Asp. him

In view of Fact 1, I argue that Type A expressions (EPWs) are not NPIs at all. Independent evidence comes from their acceptability in non-downward entailing (non-DE) contexts and their unacceptability in many typical DE contexts. Furthermore, wh-phrases are at least 5-way ambiguous: they may denote minimum quantities excluding the empty set (cf. 1b), unlike NPIs.

In view of Fact 2, I attempt to explain the reason behind the relative inverse scopes of Types B and C expressions with regard to the negative markers. After having shown that the past syntactic analyses (cf. Progovac 1993, Hsiao 2003) to account for this fact are inadequate, we will appeal to the semantics of these expressions, suggesting that Type B and C expressions are minimizers and maximixers – in the sense of Israel (2001) – which would derive the ‘∀¬’ and the ‘¬∃’ universal quantification readings.
SELECTED REFERENCES