

# Grasping the Dangling Topic – A New Approach to Explaining Gapless Topic-Sentences in Mandarin



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## 1. Introduction

For over 40 years, the so-called “Chinese-style” topic or dangling topic has been a ground for discussion in the field of Chinese Linguistics. This type of topic can be defined as a definite DP in topic position. What sets it apart from other types of topics is that it is not structurally related to an element such as a resumptive pronoun or a gap in the comment. Therefore, there appears to be no immediate explanation for the relation of the dangling topic and its comment.

A high number of ideas and approaches have been put forward by numerous scholars, all trying to explain why and how this specific type of topic appears in Mandarin. During the research for this thesis, I have come across numerous possible explanations for the semantic properties of these topic sentences. However, only very few were concerned with their structure. It has been proposed that all sentences in Mandarin are topic-comment, however, this does not explain how dangling topics and their comment are related and why the dangling topic is relevant to the discourse even though it does not seem to have an obvious syntactic connection to its comment. Furthermore, I want to find out in which position the dangling topic is situated structurally and how it has appeared there, either by movement or base-generation. I also plan to answer the question as to how dangling topic sentences differ from ordinary topics and hanging topics that are clearly related to an element in the comment.

The motivation for this thesis was firstly to investigate whether Mandarin has any special properties that make these dangling topic sentences available; I will work on other languages with similar sentences but also languages that do not appear to have anything comparable to dangling topics. Secondly, I wanted to look at these topics from a new point of view which is not entirely focused on semantics. My approach also takes syntax and prosody into account. Lastly, I find this topic very intriguing as the sentences in question have mainly been analyzed in isolation while my approach is to compare them to other, similar structures and furthermore to divide them into different types on the basis of semantics. For this, I take a high number of example sentences from different sources into account with the intention of covering as many possible dangling topic sentences in my research as possible.

In order to ensure that the main points made about dangling topics in the literature are

thoroughly explained, the first chapter contains two literature reviews. These summaries of ideas are then used to provide definitions of notions that are crucial to the following analyses. In the next step, dangling topics are compared to other types of topics in order to figure out the basic structural properties of the former.

The following chapter is concerned with looking into former approaches and new ideas of how to explain dangling topic sentences in Mandarin. I will test these ideas on the basis of the definitions from chapter 1 and find out whether or not they are useful for solving our issue.

In the final chapter, we will then summarize two papers that I find crucial to the structural analysis of dangling topic sentences. The first paper by Aboh (2007) is concerned with questions like where the notions of information structure, like topic, are introduced in the derivation. Furthermore, we look into the idea that there are topic markers present universally. For this approach, Shen (1988) provides prosodic evidence from Mandarin. Accordingly, the following section depicts the derivation proposed for dangling topic sentences.

Finally, we will refer back to the question mentioned in the beginning as to whether Mandarin is actually different from other languages or not. Here, we will compare Mandarin to two other languages. The last section consists of the final syntactic analysis using the approaches and evidence discovered throughout the entire chapter.

The thesis ends with a summary of all the main points made in the literature and the thesis itself. I will summarize the most important evidence and explain my decision for following or dismissing some approaches.

All examples sentences that have not been adopted from the literature have been checked by a native speaker of Mandarin.

## 2. Basic Analysis – Definitions

### 2.1 Mandarin Syntax

In this section, I will give a short overview of the main characteristics of Mandarin Syntax. I will focus on word order and information structure, highlighting the main points made in the literature about these topics.

The basic and thus unmarked word order in Mandarin is SVO (Sybesma 2015, Huang, Li & Li 2014 and others). Li and Thompson (1981:26) have argued that Mandarin does not only have SVO-language properties, but also SOV characteristics and can therefore not be clearly classified in the framework of typological syntax. However, this co-occurrence of different word orders could be explained by the fact that Mandarin has been analyzed as a topic-prominent language and that information structure overrides basic word order (Sybesma 2015, LaPolla 2015b). If this is the case, it does not change the fact that the unmarked word order in Mandarin is SVO; later on in this section we will see evidence that word order is actually influenced by information structure. We will therefore stick to the analysis that Mandarin is fundamentally SVO in the following sections.

Furthermore, Mandarin normally has a head-initial word order; only within noun phrases, it is strictly head-final (Xiang 2015). Wh-elements stay in-situ in every type of wh-sentence (Yang 2015).

We will now look at the term *topic prominence*; different proposals have been made that the majority or possibly all sentences in Mandarin need to be analyzed as topic-comment constructions (among others, LaPolla 2015a). This statement is obviously controversial as it mixes up the elements of syntax with the notions of elements that usually belong to information structure. I will therefore stick to the analysis by Wu (2017:62) that “both topic and subject exist in Chinese as two different notions”. The characteristic of Mandarin being topic prominent can accordingly be derived from the fact that multiple types of topic sentences exist in this language. We will look into the different types in the next section.

Along these lines, it has also been claimed that Mandarin is a Null-Subject Language (NSL); Modesto (2008) has falsified this statement by proposing that the occurrence of Null Subjects is a result of the topic prominent characteristic of Mandarin. This brings us to the next topic of this section, namely information structure.

Sybesma (2015) states that in Mandarin sentence structure, old information generally precedes new information. Following this, in a natural discourse situation, answer 1b. would therefore be the most natural response to question 1a., even though c. is grammatically correct. These examples also verify the statement mentioned before that

information structure usually overrules basic word order, in this case turning the object left to the verb into the topic of example 1b..

1. a. Nǐ zhǎo-dào nǐ de yàoshi le ma?  
 You search-find you DE key LE MA  
 Have you found your key?
- b. Yàoshi, wǒ hái méi zhǎo-dào.  
 Key, I yet NEG search-find  
 My key, I have not found it yet.
- c. ?Wǒ hái méi zhǎo-dào wǒ de yàoshi.  
 I yet NEG search-find LE I DE key  
 I have not found my key yet.

At this point, it is crucial to realize that the object from 1a. has not turned into a topic without giving up its object properties; the object *yàoshi* 'key' has simply taken up the topic *position* of the sentence, not given up its objecthood, such as being ruled by the transitive verb *zhǎo-dào* 'to find'.

We learn from this that in order to fully comprehend Mandarin sentence structure, the notions of subject, object and topic must at no point be confused or compared to each other. However, we have seen in 1b. that information structure does to some extent rule over word order.

The goal of this section is to understand why Mandarin word order and information structure work the way they do and what is so peculiar about them. This thesis is concerned with a type of topic sentences whose occurrence is rather uncommon and therefore harder to explain with the tools we have so far. In this respect, we have discovered that Mandarin syntax and information structure are closely related. LaPolla (2015b) even goes as far as to suggest that word order is entirely controlled by the information flow in a discourse situation.

In summary, we have established so far that Mandarin has the prominent features of an SVO-language, it is topic-prominent to the sense that multiple different types of topic sentences exist in this language and that the notions of syntax and information structure must not be confused in our analysis. Furthermore, we have discovered evidence that information structure influences the word order and overrules it. Later on in the discussion,

these preliminaries will be crucial in order to understand why and how Mandarin topic sentences are formed the way they are.

## 2.2 Definition of Topic and Comment

In this section, the different approaches of how to define the term “topic” and its notions are discussed. We will look into multiple angles in the literature on this issue and finish off with a conclusion that will serve as the definition for topic in the following sections. This seems to be a necessary precondition in order to avoid ambiguity and to take into account as many points of view as possible into this work.

The starting point of this investigation is to define what elements can be topics in Mandarin. Typically, definite DPs<sup>1</sup> are the elements that appear in topic position (we will later discuss what position exactly is meant by that) (Chen, Xu, Chen, Royle 2018); however, it is also possible for VPs (2a.), prepositional (2b.) and postpositional (2c.) phrases to appear in topic position (Xu & Langendoen 1985).

2. a. Chūqù chī fàn, méi yǒu rén bù xǐhuan.  
Go-out eat food, not exist people NEG like  
Going out to eat, there are no people who do not like it.
- b. Zài túshūguǎn, wǒ xǐhuan xuéxí.  
In library, I like study.  
In the library, I like to study.
- c. Zài zhuōzi shàng, wǒ zhǎodào le shū.  
On table on-top, I find LE book  
On the table, I have found books.

Modifiers cannot appear in topic-position (Xu & Langendoen 1985) (example adopted).

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<sup>1</sup> There is an ongoing discussion whether or not Mandarin actually has a determiner phrase. One could also refer to these elements as definite NPs; however, as there is no consensus on this topic, I will continue to use the terminology DP, knowing that there are no determiners per se in Mandarin

- d. \*Cáoyú de, wǒ xǐhuan jùběn.  
 Caoyu DE, I like plays  
 Caoyu's, I like plays.

There is also general consensus about the number of elements that can appear in topic position, namely a maximum of three. The order of these topics is variable and not rigid. However, one should take the following quote into account: “When one attempts to emphasize many things at once, one fails to emphasize anything.” (Xu & Langendoen 1985). Even though topicalization is not necessarily about emphasizing an element, this comment can still be adopted to the analysis of topics. On this note, the more recent research of Chen, Xu, Chen and Royle (2018) has shown that actually no more than two elements can appear in topic position.

As for comments, Xu and Langendoen (1985) state that any sentence type can be a comment: declarative, interrogative, imperative or exclamative. There seems to be no preferred sentence structure for comments in topic sentences.

Another important property that needs to be discussed concerning topics in Mandarin is their syntactic position. According to Chen, Xu, Chen and Royle (2018), a topic is found in an early and syntactically prominent position. Other researchers (Badan & DelGobbo 2011, Huang 1989, LaPolla 1988, Li & Thompson 1981) claim that the topic is always realized in sentence-initial position. LaPolla (1988) however, adds that topics can also appear in immediate post-subject position. In Mandarin, the topic always precedes the comment.

The unmarked word order of Mandarin is SVO, while both SOV and OSV are possible marked versions. According to Huang, Li and Li (2014), there are different types of movement taking place in these cases. SOV sentences are derived by short distance A'-movement marking contrast or focus of the moved element (Badan 2015). For OSV sentences, A'-movement takes place over a long distance, topicalizing the moved constituent. We will look into evidence for this claim in the section 2.4. Furthermore, only OSV “allows a coindexed pronoun in the postverbal object position” (Huang, Li & Li 2014:201-202).

Li and Thompson (1981:15) refer to Mandarin as a *topic prominent* language as they state that topics in this language are especially important for the syntactic analysis.

Modesto (2008) proposes that there is a special Topic Prominence Parameter that explains this structural feature of Mandarin. According to his analysis, every subject in Mandarin occupies a “topic” position, therefore making it a topic prominent language.

The issue with analyzing topics as an element comparable to subjects or objects is that topic, in the way that we have examined it so far, has a semantic notion rather than a syntactic function (see also section 2.1). We will thus look into the semantic properties and thematic role of topic.

In the literature, there is very little consensus on the semantics of topic. According to Li and Thompson (1981:86), the topic gives a “spatial, temporal, or individual framework within which the main predication holds.” Shi (2000) states that a topic has to refer to an entity that has been mentioned before and that the comment sentence then adds new information on this entity. Chen, Xu, Chen and Royle (2018) agree with this statement and thus explain that topics are based on shared information within a discourse. Following their argumentation, topics must therefore meet the following semantic criteria:

*aboutness/relevance*, *definiteness* and *givenness*. One condition therefore is that the referent must have been mentioned before. However, generic topics are also possible in Mandarin (3b.).

3. a. Zhè zhī gǒu, wǒ hěn xǐhuan.

This CL gou, I very like

This dog, I really like [it].

b. Gǒu, wǒ hěn xǐhuan.

Dog, I very like

Dogs, I really like [them].

As for the thematic role, Shi (2000) claims that topics themselves do not have one; their thematic role is always assigned by and depends on the elements inside the comment. This correlates with the observation that topics are semantically selected by their predicates (Huang 1989). According to these analyses, a topic can be assigned any thematic role, depending on its predicate.

The verdict of these different analyses of the semantic properties of topic is that it is an element that is especially relevant to the discourse. We adopt the idea that topics can be definite, indefinite and generic and that at least for ordinary topics, the thematic role

depends on an element in the comment.

In the next paragraph, we will investigate the relation of topics and their comments. This is especially interesting for our later analysis of the state of dangling topics and their comments as this seems to be a highly debatable point.

Li and Thompson (1981:92) have claimed that topics do not have a direct “doing” or “being” relation to the verb of the comment; they are just being commented on. However, when looking at reconstruction effects, this claim does not hold up.

Shi (2000) therefore states that the topic has to be related to at least one position in the comment. Badan and Del Gobbo (2011) further specify these positions: in general, topics can be linked to a gap (4a.), or, depending on the syntactic structure of the sentence, also to a resumptive pronoun (4b.). This is also supported by LaPolla (1988).

4. a. Zhè běn shū<sub>i</sub>, wǒ hěn xǐhuan t<sub>i</sub>.  
 This CL book, I very like  
 This book, I like it very much.
- b. Zhāngsān<sub>i</sub>, wǒ rènshi tā<sub>i</sub>.  
 Zhangsan, I know he  
 Zhangsan, I know him.

We will refer to sentences like 4a. as *ordinary topic sentences* or *left dislocation topics*; sentence 4b. is a so-called *hanging topic (HT) sentence*. We will further define this notion in section 2.5. This distinction is adapted from Badan and Del Gobbo (2011). Shi (2000) distinguishes between general, definite and dangling topics. Portner (2002) claims that besides the overt topic, there might also be a covert topic. We will not look into these distinctions but stick to the analysis above by Badan and Del Gobbo (2011).

In summary, we have found out that different syntactic elements can appear in topic position. This position is in any case very prominent, mainly sentence-initial. As for semantics, topics must be relevant to the discourse, followed by a comment that modifies them. Structurally, ordinary topics are related to a gap in the comment and are ruled by its predicate, whereas hanging topics are related to a resumptive pronoun. In the next sections, we will see what other types of topic sentences exist in Mandarin and whether they are derived by movement or by base-generation.

### 2.3 Definition of “Dangling Topics”

The dangling or so-called “Chinese-style” (Xu & Langendoen 1985) topic has been widely discussed within the field of Chinese linguistics. So far, no satisfactory explanation has been agreed upon for the extraordinary structure of these sentences. In this section, we will review the literature on this topic and find out how dangling topics can be defined.

As for ordinary and hanging topic sentences, there seems to be general consensus about the fact that the topic is structurally related to an element in the comment (Shi 2000, Badan & Del Gobbo 2011, LaPolla 1988 and others). This relation can be inferred by a gap, a resumptive pronoun or a clitic within the comment (see section 2.2). Whether or not the sentence-initial position of these topics is the result of movement or of base-generation will be touched upon later in this thesis.

Dangling topics do not abide by the structure of these topic-sentences. On the surface, there seems to be no element that the topic is overtly related to or ruled by (Huang, Li & Li 2014, Shi 2000). While in ordinary topic sentences, the topic element is usually overtly ruled by an intransitive, transitive or ditransitive verb, this is not the case in dangling topic sentences. Furthermore, dangling topic sentences have neither a corresponding gap, nor a resumptive pronoun or a clitic in the comment (Badan & Del Gobbo 2011, see 5a.). This sparks the question how these topics and their comments are related.

#### 5. a. Shuǐguǒ, wǒ xǐhuan píngguǒ.

Fruit, I like apple

[As for] fruit, I like apples.

Why is it necessary to find out about the topic-comment relation in this case? As for semantics, multiple approaches have been put forth; the most widely held idea is that dangling topics and the following comments have a so-called *aboutness* relation, meaning that the comment is in some way about the topic (among others, Li & Thompson 1981, Huang, Li & Li 2014). Xu and Langendoen (1985) refer to the same idea of topic as a “frame of reference for the following comment”.

This idea has been criticized by Shi (2000) as being too broad and thus not sufficient as an explanation for the structure of dangling topic sentences. He goes even farther and

proposes that “a structural relationship does not exist between dangling topics and their comment”. According to his findings, the structure of any dangling topic sentence can be explained by other properties and is thus not unique to this construction.

Wu (2017) states that Shi (2000) does not take semantics and pragmatics into account in his analysis. According to him, the aboutness condition is by no means too broad as it is a “largely relevance-based pragmatic concept, rather than a syntactic concept”. This clarification of terminology is certainly crucial to the semantic analysis of the dangling topic sentences, however, it does not explain their special structural properties.

On the note of semantics, Hu and Pan (2009) have found some issues with the aboutness condition, too. Along with Shi (2000), they argue that “there is no accepted definition for aboutness [...], as the precise nature of aboutness has never been made clear.” However, they do not disapprove of the aboutness condition per se, but see a need for it to be defined more precisely. Hu and Pan (2009) therefore propose that the aboutness condition has to be divided into two separate conditions to assure the grammaticality of dangling-topic sentences. The first condition is the *Topic Licensing Condition* (Pan & Hu 2008):

“A topic can be licensed if

- (i) there is a set Z introduced by a variable x in the comment, and
- (ii) the set Z thus generated does not produce an empty set when intersecting with the set T denoted by the topic.”

In the examples below (6a. and b.), there is a clear superset-subset relation to be inferred between topic and comment. This relation has also been referred to as a *whole-part* relation (Li & Thompson 1981:93). The *Topic Licensing Condition* correctly predicts that example 5a. (here repeated as 6a.) is acceptable, while example 6b. is not (examples adopted from Hu & Pan 2009).

6. a. Shuǐguǒ , wǒ xǐhuan píngguǒ.  
 Fruit, I like apples  
 As for fruit, I like apples.

- b. \*Píngguǒ, wǒ xǐhuan shuǐguǒ.  
 Apples, I like fruit  
 As for apples, I like fruit.

The second condition Hu and Pan (2009) propose is the *Topic Interpretation Condition*:

“In a configuration  $\Sigma = [_{\text{TOP}} X [_{\text{IP}} \dots Y \dots]]$ , the topic X is properly interpreted if it can form a subject-predicate relation with an element Y in the comment clause, where Y is the subject and X, the predicate.”

This condition explains that the relationship of topic and the element in the comment is only possible in one direction and thus prevents uninterpretable structures (see 7a. and b., examples adopted from Hu & Pan 2009).

7. a. Píngguǒ shì shuǐguǒ.  
 Apple be fruit  
 Apples are fruit.
- b. \*Shuǐguǒ shì píngguǒ.  
 Fruit be apples  
 Fruit are apples.

The main issue with this analysis is that it focuses mainly on one set of examples. In section 3.1, I show that there are more varieties of dangling topics that need to be taken into account.

The majority of the literature reviewed in this chapter has focused on the semantic relation between the dangling topic and its comment. So far, no thorough explanation has been proposed for the specific structure and the syntactic properties of these sentences. Accordingly, there is not yet a satisfactory answer to why definite DPs can appear in sentence-initial position in Mandarin. In the majority of the literature in this topic, the initial response to this problem was to look at the semantic relation between topic and comment. In the following section, I will show why this approach might be flawed and why relatedness itself might eventually not even be a necessary condition to understand the underlying syntactic structure.

The final definition of dangling topic sentences that we will adopt for this thesis is as follows:

- i. There is no structural relation between the topic and an element in the comment or the entire comment,
- ii. the topic is in no case ruled by an intransitive, transitive or ditransitive verb, and
- iii. topic and comment are somehow semantically related.

## 2.4 Movement or Base-Generation?

In this section, I will use syntactic diagnostics to determine whether topics of any kind in Mandarin are moved or base-generated in sentence-initial position. Movement has typically been defined as the appearance of a syntactic structure in a different position than its base position, more specifically in a higher syntactic position (Shu 2015). There are two different types of possible movements: phrasal (A and A') and head movement. A-movement describes the movement to an argument position, for A'- or wh-movement, the element ends up in the Specifier-position of the CP. As for the third type, a head of a phrase is always moved to another head-position. The trigger for movement can always be traced back to features, for example the assignment of Case or factors having to do with information structure. Depending on the language, movement can be overt or covert (Shu 2015). Base-generation however denotes the establishment of a syntactic element in its base position.

It has been argued before that both processes can take place in one language for one sentence type, in this case topic sentences (Kahnemuyipour & Shabani 2018). In order to grasp all possible topic sentences in Mandarin, I will make a distinction between three types of sentences containing a topic as we have seen in the examples given above.

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| 8. a. Type 1: (ordinary) topic sentences | Zhāngsān <sub>i</sub> , wǒ xǐhuan t <sub>i</sub> .<br>Zhangsan, I like<br>Zhangsan, I like [him]. |
| b. Type 2: hanging topic sentences       | Zhāngsān <sub>i</sub> , wǒ xǐhuan tā <sub>i</sub> .<br>Zhangsan, I like he                        |

- c. Type 3: dangling topic sentences
- Zhangsan, I like him.  
 Shuǐguǒ, wǒ xǐhuan píngguǒ.  
 Fruit, I like apple  
 [As for] fruit, I like apples.

Type 1 is a basic topic sentence in which the object of a transitive verb appears in sentence-initial position (8a.). In this type, not only objects, but also subjects can be topicalized. This topic element is then followed by a comment, supposedly containing a gap (Badan & Del Gobbo 2011). In the following, I will argue that this gap is the result of A'-movement (Shu 2015).

In type 2 (8b.), the topic is coindexed with a resumptive pronoun or a clitic in the comment (Badan & Del Gobbo 2011). In the example above, the element takes up the object position of the transitive verb in the comment. Similar to type 1, other elements can appear in topic position, too.

The last type of topic sentences that will be discussed here is type 3 (8c.), the dangling topic. In these cases, the verb in the comment does not rule the topic element (see section 2.3). Following Badan and Del Gobbo (2011), I will argue that both latter types of topics are base-generated in the sentence-initial position. Therefore, I will first look into whether or not an extraction of the topic-types from a wh-island is possible. Following Kahnemuyipour and Shabani (2018), the extraction of moved element should not be available.

9. a. Type 1 \*Zhāngsān, wǒ xiǎng zhīdào shéi xǐhuan.  
 Zhangsan, I want know who like  
 Zhangsan, I want to know who likes [him].
- b. Type 2 Zhāngsān<sub>i</sub>, wǒ xiǎng zhīdào shéi xǐhuan tā<sub>i</sub>.  
 Zhangsan, I want know who like he  
 Zhangsan, I want to know who likes him.
- c. Type 3 Shuǐguǒ, wǒ xiǎng zhīdào shéi xǐhuan píngguǒ.  
 Fruit, I want know who like apple  
 [As for] fruit, I want to know who likes apples.

As expected, sentence 9a. is ungrammatical, as the extraction of the object from within

the wh-island is not possible. In b. and c., the topics can freely appear in sentence-initial position which hints towards the process of base-generation in these cases.

In the next diagnostic, we will form examples with complex NP islands. We expect the same results here.

10. a. Type 1 \*Zhāngsān<sub>i</sub>, wǒ rènshi hěn duō xǐhuan de rén.  
 Zhangsan, I know very many like DE people  
 Zhangsan, I know a lot of people who like [him].
- b. Type 2 Zhāngsān, wǒ rènshi hěn duō xǐhuan tā de rén.  
 Zhangsan, I know very many like he DE people  
 Zhangsan, I know lot of people who like him.
- c. Type 3 Shuǐguǒ, wǒ rènshi hěn duō xǐhuan píngguǒ de rén.  
 Fruit, I know very many like apple DE people  
 [As for] fruit, I know a lot of people who like apples.

Both tests show that elements are not restricted by island constraints as long as the respective position is filled by either a resumptive pronoun (Type 2) or an independent object (Type 3). As for the question what kind of topics are moved into sentence-initial position and which ones are base-generated there, it is evident that only Type 1 topics are moved. Badan and Del Gobbo (2011) and other scholars agree that the type of movement that takes place in these cases can be classified as A'-movement. In contrast, Type 2 and 3 are base-generated in sentence-initial position. The results of these diagnostics are also supported by Badan and Del Gobbo (2011).

Following the arguments in this section, we will adopt the analysis that dangling topics are the result of base generation. They do not have a corresponding position in the comment that is ruled by the verb. This distinguishes them from hanging topics, even though they are both the result of base-generation. We will look more into these differences in the following section. For now, we accept that dangling topics are not overtly related to any element in the comment.

## 2.5 Hanging Topics vs. Dangling Topics

As seen from the previous diagnostics, hanging topics (HTs) and dangling topics (DTs) behave similarly when it comes to island constraints. Therefore, they seem to have the same syntactic structure on the surface. In this section, we will see what other similarities and differences there are between these two types of topic-sentences.

The main structural difference between HTs and DTs is that the former are coindexed with an element within the comment; this is not the case for DTs (Xu & Langendoen 1985 and others). Therefore, the dangling topic itself is not overtly ruled by a verb (Shi 2000) or, put differently, subcategorized by a verb (Huang 1989).

In HT sentences however, the resumptive pronoun is the anaphor to the topic as its antecedent (11a.). It is therefore ruled by the predicate of the comment and the topic and the element in the comment are related by binding.

As mentioned before, dangling topics are not overtly bound to an element in the comment (11b.); however, there seems to be a semantic relation to either one element of or to the entire comment<sup>2</sup>. The nature of this semantic relation will be investigated later on.

11. a. HT     Zhāngsān<sub>i</sub>, wǒ xǐhuan tā<sub>i</sub>.  
               Zhangsan, I like he  
               Zhangsan, I like him.
- b. DT     Shuǐguǒ , wǒ xǐhuan píngguǒ.  
               Fruit, I like apple  
               [As for] fruit, I like apples.

The most striking similarity of these two types of sentences is that there is no gap in either of the comments. As we have seen from the diagnostics, both topics are base-generated in their sentence-initial position. The existence of HT sentences in Mandarin proves that a gap is not a necessary condition for a topic-comment construction and therefore gives us a hint towards why DT sentences are grammatical in this language.

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<sup>2</sup> The reason why I am choosing to not rule out that the topic is related to the entire comment is that there is more than one type of DT sentences that differ in some respect to the examples investigated in this section. They will be discussed later on.

Their surface structure is parallel and thus there is no need to argue that DT sentences are an exceptional type of sentences.

So far we have established that HT and DT sentences have a similar syntactic structure and that there is no gap in the comment. We will now analyze how these sentences differ from each other.

Badan and Del Gobbo (2011) show that one crucial difference between HTs and DTs is that more than one dangling topic can appear in a sentence (12b.), whereas hanging topics are limited to one (12a.) (examples adopted, translations edited).

12. a. HT \*Zhāngsān, Lǐsì he Xiǎoyù, tā zài yuèlǎnshì kànjiàn tāmen.  
 Zhangsan, Lisi and Xiaoyu, he at reading room see they  
 Zhangsan, Lisi and Xiaoyu, he sees them in the reading room.
- b. DT Wǒ de jiāren, wǒ de fùmǔ , mǔqīn yǐjìng tuìxiū le.  
 I DE family, I DE parents, mother already retire LE  
 My family, my parents, my mother has already retired.

Another observation they made is that HTs and DTs can co-occur. However, the DT always has to precede the HT (13a. and b.).

13. a. DT>HT Wǒ de jiāren, bàba, wǒ zuòtiān kànjiàn tā le, māma, wo hái méi  
 I DE family, father, I yesterday see he LE, mother, I yet NEG  
 kànjiàn tā le.  
 see she LE  
 My family, my father, I saw him yesterday, my mother, I have not seen  
 her yet.
- b. HT>DT \*Bàba, wǒ de jiāren, wǒ zuòtiān kànjiàn tā le, māma, wo hái méi.  
 Father, I DE family, I yesterday see he LE, mother, I yet NEG  
 kànjiàn tā le.  
 see she LE  
 My father, my family, I saw him yesterday, my mother, I have not seen  
 her yet.

Badan and Del Gobbo (2011) explain these differences by stating that dangling topics

and hanging topics are not base-generated in the same position. Following the previous analysis, this would mean that the dangling topic is base-generated in a syntactically higher position in a functional projection than the hanging topic (Badan & Del Gobbo 2011). Furthermore, there should be more than one dangling topic position available, but only one hanging topic position.

Another possible explanation for the order constraints on DTs and HTs could be that the hanging topic actually needs to be as close as possible to the resumptive pronoun in the comment. The order HT>DT would interfere with the relation of the HT and its resumptive pronoun and therefore form an ungrammatical sentence.

What do we learn from this comparison? Even though hanging and dangling topics seem to be very similar at first glance, there are important structural differences between them. Perhaps, they occupy different positions in a functional projection. Also, hanging topics have a direct relation to an element in the comment which the dangling topic lacks. For our final goal of understanding the structure of dangling topic sentences, this means that we have to take a closer look at this relation between dangling topic and comment. In the following chapter, we will establish the properties of this relation and assess how it needs to be analyzed.

In summary, the main question that has arisen in this chapter is how we can syntactically analyze the structure of the dangling topic sentences as they appear to be very different from the two other types of topic sentences in Mandarin. If dangling topics are not related directly to an element or a gap in the comment, then there ought to be another reason why these topics appear in sentence-initial position and why they are so crucial to the meaning of the entire sentence. In order to answer this question, we will look into both semantics, prosody and syntax in the following chapters.

### 3. Dangling Topics – Approaches

#### 3.1 Types of Dangling Topic Sentences

During the research for this thesis, I have come across a high number of examples for dangling topic sentences. In this section, I want to sort these examples into categories in order to understand their semantic properties. I see this as a valuable step as I have come across approaches in my research that only work for specific examples of DT sentences, but do not work for other ones.

Depending on the explanation in the respective papers, different kinds of dangling-topic sentences were mentioned. Li and Thompson (1981:96-98) enumerate a number of topic-comment examples from which some can be defined as dangling-topic sentences following our definition given above (see section 2.3). I have adopted some more examples from Badan and Del Gobbo (2011), Xu and Langendoen (1985), Shi (2000) and from Huang and Ting (2006).

After collecting this data, I categorized the given sentences semantically and came up with four different types of dangling topic sentences. I made this distinction solely to find a pattern in the high amount of example sentences I came across. In the end, I opted for a more simplistic distinction of only two types. I will elaborate the reasons for that later in this section. In the following, I have modified some of the translations for coherence.

#### Type 1: whole-part

14. a. Shí ge lí, wǔ ge làn le (Xu & Langendoen 1985)  
 Ten CI pear, five CI LE  
 Of ten pears, five have spoiled.
- b. Wǔ ge píngguǒ, liǎng ge huài le. (Li & Thompson 1981:92)  
 Five CI apple, two CI spoil LE  
 Of five apples, two have spoiled.
- c. Wǒ de jiāren, jīntiān wǒ kànjiàn bàba le (Badan & Del Gobbo 2011)  
 I DE family-people, today I see father LE  
 Of my family, I saw my father today.

The first category that has also been mentioned before in the literature (Li & Thompson 1981:93) is *whole-part*, meaning that the topic and an element in the comment have a superset-subset relation. In these DT sentences, only a modified NP is possible in sentence-initial position. In all cases above, the element in the comment is part of the category to which the topic refers.

## Type 2: category-entity

15. a. Shuǐguǒ, wǒ xǐhuan píngguǒ. (Badan & Del Gobbo 2011)  
 Fruit, I most like apple  
 As for fruit, I like apples the most.
- b. Miàn, wǒ zuì xǐhuan chī là de. (Li & Thompson 1981:96)  
 Noodles, I most like eat spicy DE  
 As for noodles, I like to eat the spicy ones the most.
- c. Huā (a), wǒ zuì xǐhuan méiguīhuā. (Badan & Del Gobbo 2011)  
 Flower PART, I most like rose  
 As for flowers, I like roses the most.

The second set of examples, I refer to as *category-entity* DT sentences. In these cases, the topic denotes a category; an element from this category is then referred to in the comment. In these cases, only definite and bare DPs can appear in topic position. This distinguishes the *category-entity* DT sentences from the *whole-part* examples in which modified DPs appear in topic position.

## Type 3: entity-property

16. a. Nèi zhǒng dòuzi, yī jīn sānshí kuài qián. (Li & Thompson 1981:96)  
 That kind beans, one catty thirty piece money  
 That kind of beans, one catty is thirty Yuan.
- b. Nèi kē shù, yèzi dà. (Li & Thompson 1981:94)  
 That CI tree, leaf big  
 That tree, the leafs are big.
- c. Zhè ge rén, wǒ juéde jìxìng tèbié hǎo. (Badan & Del Gobbo 2011)  
 This CI person, I think memory especially good  
 This person, I think his memory is especially good.

For the third type *entity-property*, the comment denotes a, possibly very prominent, feature, quality or characteristic of the entity referred to in the topic position. Both bare and modified NPs are possible in sentence-initial position. In any case, the topic and one element in the comment are semantically related.

After having analyzed these three types in detail, one characteristic has become quite

obvious: in every case mentioned above, the topic and an element in the comment have some type of *superset-subset* relationship. Even though the nature of this relation differs slightly, there seems to be no need for us to divide these examples into three different categories. Instead, I will refer to them as one, namely *superset-subset* DT sentences.

This leaves us with the last set of examples. We will see shortly that they differ from the *superset-subset* DT sentences.

#### Type 4: framework

17. a. Huǒ, xiāofángduì lái de kuài. (Shi 2000)  
 Fire, firefighter come MOD fast  
 As for the fire, the firefighters came fast.
- b. Zhè jiàn shì, nǐ bù néng guāng máfan yī ge rén. (Li & Thompson 1981)  
 This CI matter, you NEG can only bother one CI person  
 For this matter, you cannot only bother one person with it.
- c. Wùjià, Niūyuē zuì guì. (Huang & Ting 2006)  
 Price, New York most expensive  
 As for prices, New York is the most expensive.

Other than the examples listed before, there is no separate element in the comment that the topic is related to. Instead, the topic is semantically related to the entire comment. In the section 2.2, we have mentioned before that Li and Thompson (1981:86) have referred to the semantics of topic in general as a “spatial, temporal, or individual framework within which the main predication holds.” These criteria do not hold for the *superset-subset* DT sentences for the following reason: firstly, it is important how the term *framework* is defined; in this analysis, I will refer to *framework* as a restriction of circumstances under which an utterance is true. If we look back at *superset-subset* DT sentences with this definition in mind, we see why it is not suitable: the topic is not a background information that is necessary in order to frame what is happening in the comment. In these sentences, an element in the comment is clearly a part of the entity that is denoted by the topic.

The criteria above by Li and Thompson (1981:86) do however give a proper definition for the examples we will refer to as *framework* DT sentences. In these sentences, the topic gives a restriction of the circumstances under which the comment is true. It limits the background and setting in which the comment takes place. Therefore, the topic is related

to the entire comment, not only one element in it.

What do we learn from this classification? We have seen different approaches in the first chapter on how to explain DT sentences in general. The most common one was the *aboutness* condition. The reason why I am not advocating this idea is that it does not grasp the semantic properties of the entirety of the dangling topic sentences. If we look at aboutness in the traditional sense, thus denoting that the comment is somehow *about* the topic, this does not capture at all the fact that in superset-subset DT sentences, there is an obvious relation between the topic and one element in the comment.

In order to solve this issue, we will look at a point made in section 2.3 again. There, we have briefly discussed the approach by Hu and Pan (2009) to separate the term aboutness into two different conditions, namely the *Topic Licensing Condition* and the *Topic Interpretation Condition*. The problem with this approach is that it leaves out the framework DT sentences completely. It does correctly predict the grammaticality of the superset-subset DT sentences, but as we have seen, this is not the only type of DT sentence in Mandarin. Accordingly, no definition of aboutness proposed before holds for both types of DT sentences.

My idea is to look at the bigger picture instead; what do all of these DT sentences have in common, besides their structure that we will discuss later on? Semantically, the only thing that is consistent for these sentences is that the topic is *relevant* for the interpretation of the comment. Without the topic, the sentences would be incomplete, lacking crucial discourse information. This captures both the superset-subset DT sentences, as the category that the element in comment belongs to is an essentially *relevant* piece of information; the relevance-based approach also correctly predicts the framework DT sentences in which the topic conveys an essential background of the situation in the comment. In summary, *relevance* is the one condition we will adopt in order to describe the relationship between dangling topics and their comment.

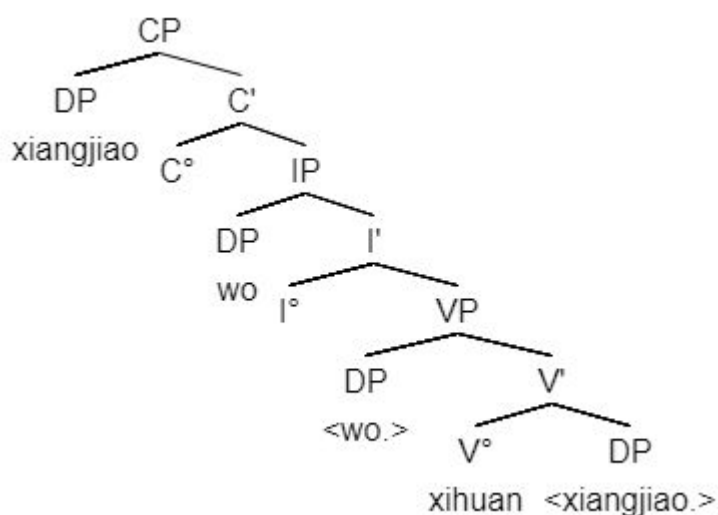
### 3.2 A Sentence-Type Feature for Dangling Topic Sentences

Along the way of approaching the issue of the DT sentence structure, I came up with the idea to assign features to different positions in the structure in order to explain the base-

generation of the topics in sentence-initial position. I ended up dismissing this idea for various reasons after testing it on different examples. However, it helped me significantly for understanding the next steps in my analysis so I decided to include this idea in my thesis.

In order to understand the structure of dangling topic sentences, I decided to first look into ordinary topic sentences and their structure in Mandarin. We have referred to these sentences as type 1 topic sentences. As we have established before (see section 2.2), elements leave a gap in the comment when moved into topic position (a).

Structure (a)

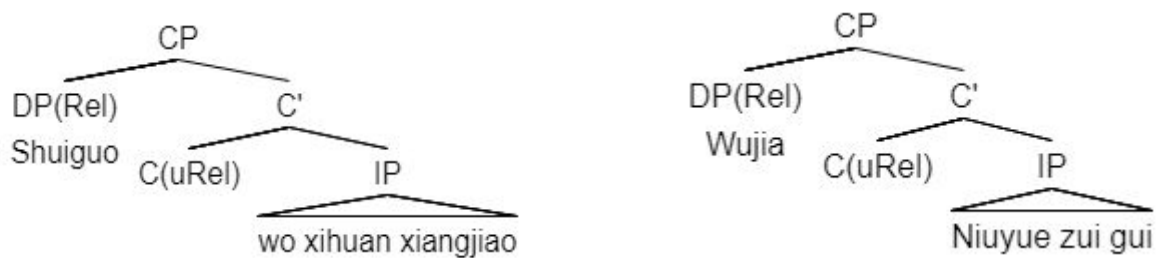


18. a. Xiāngjiāo<sub>i</sub>, wǒ xǐhuan t<sub>i</sub>.  
 Banana, I like  
 Bananas, I like [them].

If in this case, movement is triggered because of the fact that a topic-comment sentence is desired to be expressed, the triggering of base-generation in the case of dangling-topic sentences should be possible, too. The idea here is that there has to be a reason and also a source from which dangling topics originate. If movement is triggered, then why treat base-generation differently in a sentence where bare DPs appear in a marked position? In order to find an answer to this question, my first approach was to give the C-head a feature that has to be checked at the DP in the Specifier of the CP (b). We will for now

refer to this feature as [Rel] for *relevance* as we have decided before that the dangling topic and its comment have a relevance-based relation. I will insert structures for both superset-subset and framework DT sentences.

Structure (b)

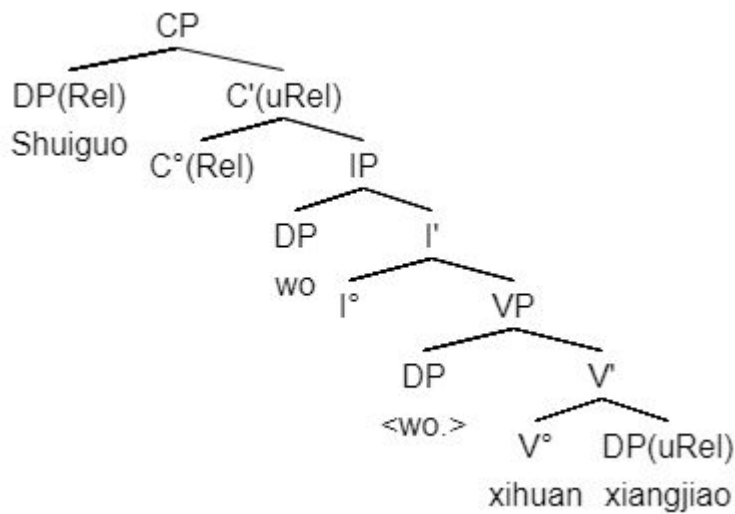


19. a. Shuǐguǒ, wǒ xǐhuan xiāngjiāo.  
 Fruit, I like banana  
 [As for] fruit, I like bananas.
- b. Wùjià, Niǔyuē zuì guì.  
 Price, New York most expensive  
 [As for] prices, New York is most expensive.

The feature used in (b) is intended to express that the topic is relevant to the information in the comment. The base-generation of the topic is triggered by the feature on the C-head that needs to be checked. The issue with this analysis is that the structure correctly predicts the base-generation of the topic in the sentence-initial position, however, the relation between topic and an element in the comment or the whole comment itself is not expressed in (b). Furthermore, there is no way to determine which element ends up in topic position.

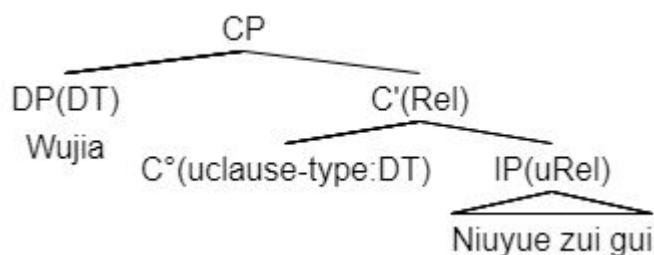
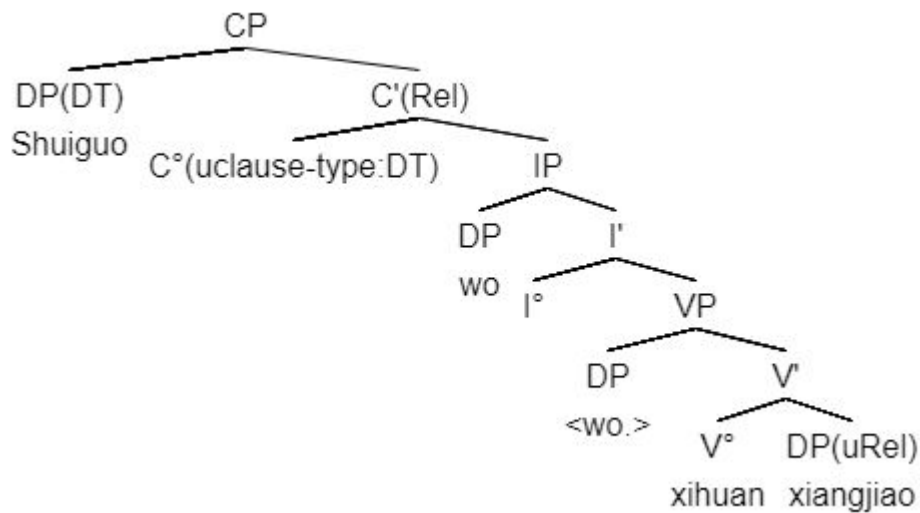
Therefore, I decided to opt for a more elaborate approach in the next structure. In (c), both the DP in the Specifier of the CP and the C-head carry a [Rel] feature. The feature of the DP in the Specifier of the CP is checked at C', triggering the base-generation of the DT in topic position. The [Rel] feature of the C-head is checked at the element related to the topic, in this case *xiāngjiāo* 'banana'.

## Structure (c)



The obvious issue with this analysis is that it only works for the superset-subset DT sentences. In framework DT sentences, the topic is related to the entire comment; there is no way of expressing this with the structure in (c). Another problem with this approach is that it does not express the direct relation of *shuǐguō* and *xiāngjiāo* either. Thus, the next step was to separate the relatedness condition and base-generation issue from each other. My idea was to denote a separate sentence-type feature to the C-head in order to grasp the structural particularities of these sentences. The basis for this approach was the fact that *wh*-structures and topic sentences show many similarities with regards to island constraints (Tsai 2015); it has been widely accepted that *wh*-sentences have a *Question* feature that is expressed on the C-head (Aboh 2007). I will insert a structure here in order to clarify my train of thought.

## Structure (d)



In (d), we solve the issue of finding a structure that works for both superset-subset and framework DT sentences by simply adjusting the position of the [uRel] feature. In these structures, the sentence type is denoted by the feature (DT) for dangling topic. This triggers the base-generation of the topic in the Specifier position of the CP. The relatedness between the topic and the element in the comment is still expressed by the [Rel] feature, however, the it is now carried by C'. This correctly expresses the relatedness of the topic and the element in the comment.

With these structures, I have tried to explain why dangling topics appear in sentence-initial position. The issue with my analysis is that I held on to the idea that there needs to be a functional trigger that causes the base-generation in these sentences. However, there is no evidence that this is a necessary condition. Also, there is no need to express the relatedness of topic and comment from a structural point of view. We have already established the nature of this relation in the section about semantics.

Furthermore, there is no reason to believe that DT sentences have a specific sentence type. While they do show some properties of *wh*-structures, these sentences also have a number of characteristics that correspond with simple declarative sentences. The purpose of this section was to show that dangling topic sentences are not the result of solely structural processes, but are influenced by a number of other factors. In the following chapter, we will discuss the role of information structuring in syntax and how prosodic characteristics can help us explain DT sentences.

### 3.3 Approaches in the Literature

Many approaches for explaining dangling topics have been put forth in the literature. In this section, I want to examine these approaches and determine how well they represent the structural properties of dangling topic sentences.

The first idea I want to look into is that dangling topic sentences are actually the result of deletion and that they can be reconstructed into sentences that do not contain a topic at all. It has been argued that the particle *de* is part of the underlying structure of these sentences (Shen 1988). This approach is especially attractive for superset-subset sentences as there is a clear semantic relation between the topic and an element in the comment. Example 20b. could therefore be the result of a reconstruction of 20a..

20. a. Shuǐguǒ, wǒ xǐhuan xiāngjiāo.  
 Fruit, I like banana  
 [As for] fruit, I like bananas.
- b. Wǒ xǐhuan *de* shuǐguǒ shì xiāngjiāo.  
 I like DE fruit be banana  
 The fruit I like are bananas.

The main issue is that reconstructability is always connected to movement. As we have proved before, there is no movement taking place in DT sentences (see section 2.4). Dangling topics are always base-generated in sentence-initial position. Also, there is no evidence for the fact that the additional material in 20b. was deleted in 20a..

For framework DT sentences, this approach would turn out to be even less suitable as the

two sentences would differ semantically.

21. a. Wùjià, Niǔyuē zuì guì.  
 Price, New York most expensive  
 [As for] prices, New York is most expensive.
- b. Niǔyuē de wùjià zuì guì.  
 New York DE price most expensive  
 New York's prices are most expensive.

Sentence 21b. is a statement that focuses on a property of the city New York, while in 21a., the speaker intends to make a comparison of prices between multiple cities, ending up with the observation that New York's are the highest. This approach does therefore not qualify as suitable to explain any type of DT sentences.

Another possible explanation for DT sentences could be the idea that they are actually the result of ellipsis of previous or subsequent discourse material. Dangling topic sentences are widely perceived as incomplete by Mandarin native speakers when presented in isolation. It is therefore reasonable to assume that there is possibly information from a previous or following sentence necessary in order to properly make sense of the DT sentence. Put into more theoretical terms, Shi (2000) argues that the well-known framework DT sentence in 22a. is actually only part of a more complex discourse situation (see 22b. and 22c.). This discourse material can then be recovered on the basis of an connective adverb in the DT sentence.

22. a. Nà chǎng huǒ, xìngkuī xiāofángduì lái de kuài.  
 That CL fire, fortunately fire brigade come DE fast  
 [As for] that fire, luckily the fire brigade came fast.
- b. Nà chǎng huǒ, xìngkuī xiāofángduì lái de kuài, bùrán tǐjiù huì  
 That CL fire, fortunately fire brigade come DE fast, otherwise Ø really will  
 shāosǐ bù shǎo de rén.  
 burn-dead not few people  
 [As for] that fire, luckily the fire brigade came fast, otherwise [it] would have  
 burned many people to death.

- c. Nà chǎng huǒ, xìngkuī xiāofángduì lái de kuài, bùrán nà cì wǒmen dōu huì  
 That CL fire, fortunately fire brigade come DE fast otherwise that-time we all will  
 shāosǐ le.  
 burn-dead LE  
 [As for] that fire, luckily the fire brigade came fast, otherwise we would all have  
 been burned to death that time.

Shi (2000) and along with him, Huang and Ting (2006), argue that in the recovered discourses of DT sentence 22a. the topic *nà chǎng huǒ* 'that fire' is in an antecedent-anaphor relation with an element in the comment, namely a gap in 22b. and *nà cì* 'that time' in 22c.. These elements are then connected to each other by an adverb, in this case *xìngkuī* 'fortunately'. They deduce that therefore, neither of the sentence-initial elements is actually a dangling, but a regular topic.

If we assume that a connective adverb is necessary in dangling topic sentences in order to explain their structure and to make sense of the discourse situation, then it should not be possible to express these sentences without the adverb. However, this is not the case, as Shi (2000) shows himself. According to his analysis, the following example is grammatical, but the discourse is simply not recoverable (22d.). He argues that therefore, the element in sentence-initial position cannot be licensed as a topic and becomes a “sentential adverbial”.

- d. Nà chǎng huǒ, xiāofángduì lái de kuài.  
 That CL fire, fire brigade come DE fast  
 [As for] that fire, the fire brigade came fast.

Huang and Ting (2006) follow up on this argumentation bringing forth another example in which the additional discourse information is obligatory for the sentence to be grammatical (23a. and b.). After consulting with a native speaker, I have come to the conclusion that their analysis is wrong, sentence 23b. is grammatical without the discourse background information.

23. a. Zhè jiàn dà shì, xìngkuī Zhāng-Xiàozhǎng lái le, yàoburán wǒ hái bù zhīdao  
 This CL big issue, fortunately Zhang-Principal come LE, otherwise I still not know

rúhé chǔlǐ.

how deal-with

[As for] this big issue, fortunately Principal Zhang has come, otherwise I would not know how to deal with [it].

b. Zhè jiàn dà shì, xìngkuī Zhāng-Xiàozhǎng lái le.

This CL big issue, fortunately Zhang-Principal come LE

[As for] this big issue, luckily Principal Zhang came.

I see two main issues with this approach: firstly, there is no evidence that the element in sentence-initial position is the antecedent to a deleted anaphor. Wei (2015) even states that in Mandarin, a linguistic antecedent is not implicitly necessary if the context is sufficient to understand a discourse. For the examples 22b. and 22c. this would mean that we would assume an antecedent-anaphor relationship where the sentence containing the anaphor is then elided. This relation can only be recovered with the help of a connective adverb, however, as we have seen above, this can be left out, too. Eventually, there is no material in the DT sentences that would support the idea of deleted material.

The second issue is a matter of terminology: Shi refers to the element in sentence-initial position in 22d. as a “sentential adverbial”; however, he does not give a definition for this. After looking into the different types of dangling topics in section 3.1, I see no reason why this element cannot be defined as a framework dangling topic. It meets all of the criteria as giving important background information and the circumstances concerning the point in time the discourse is referring to.

It is very understandable how this approach can be very convincing at first sight as it puts dangling topic sentences into context, while they are perceived as incomplete in isolation. However, this approach entirely is based on material that cannot be proved to be deleted in the first place. Furthermore, the argumentation relies on elements that can actually be left out without influencing the sentence's grammaticality. I agree that the semantics change when material is left out, however, this does not account for the structural properties these sentences have.

Neither of these two approaches have lead to a satisfactory generalization for both superset-subset and framework DT sentences. We therefore conclude that there is no additional material at all involved in forming dangling topic sentences. In the next chapter, we will thus look into an approach that focuses more on the structural and syntactic

properties on dangling topics in order to solve this issue.

## 4. Final Analysis

### 4.1 Summary of Aboh (2007)

In this section, I will briefly summarize the main points made in Aboh's paper "Information Structuring begins with the Numeration" (2007). Later on, we will use his approach to analyze and explain dangling topic sentences in Mandarin.

In the introduction, Aboh firstly gives a short overview of the state of the art of current minimalist theory; according to him, there is a gap in the current framework that he is intending to fill. The issue he refers to is that in many languages, notions of information structure are syntactically modified in the computational system. He concludes that the numeration must therefore contain lexical choices for these notions of information structure and that there is a need to empirically prove that "core syntax must involve information sensitive functional projections (e.g. TopP, FocP, InterP).".

In the second section of the paper, Aboh first gives an overview of the different viewpoints in the debate about the relation between information structure and syntax. The main issue is that there is no consensus of where the notions of information structure are represented. This is necessary in order to explain the additional meaning that comes with, for example, topicalization of an element. According to Chomsky (1995:220), this representation takes place on an additional syntactic level other than numeration. Other researchers have proposed that information structure and syntax only interact indirectly.

In the next section, Aboh briefly explains why the introduction of the notions of information structure to the computational system would violate Chomsky's inclusiveness condition (Chomsky 1995) as it would add new material to it.

The following part of the paper is concerned with wh-structures; Aboh states that it is widely accepted that the functional head C carries a wh- or interrogative feature. Accordingly, he deduces that information-structure-sensitive features are directly encoded in syntax and that there is no need to treat the notion *Interrogative* differently than the

notions of *Topic* and *Focus*.

In section 2.1, we have discussed that word order in Mandarin is controlled by information structure; Aboh lists examples supporting this idea in his next step, elaborating that unnatural question-answer pairs are produced when information structure is overlooked (see examples 1a., b. and c. in section 2.1). Aboh deduces that this type of examples is evidential for his statement “that strict application of the inclusiveness condition requires that core notions of information structure (interrogative force, topic, focus) be part of the numeration, and project in syntax.”

The next issue Aboh works on are “wh-words and interrogative force”. His first step is to further examine the Mandarin particle *ne* which he analyzes as being related to interrogative force in this language. He infers that *ne* and wh-words do not have the same properties and in addition, that wh-phrases do not generally clause-type as they can occur in other sentences than just questions.

His explanation for this statement is that firstly, all languages contain a question-particle, either pronounced or unpronounced, and regardless of whether wh-movement takes place or not. Secondly, he concludes that wh-movement is motivated by focus and not by clause-typing, as we have seen from the reasoning above. He therefore hypothesizes that both clause-typing and wh-movement are related to interrogative force and focus.

On this note, he deduces the following main hypothesis:

“Core syntactic properties that trigger question formation also correlate with the information structure required in the answer (e.g. New information focus vs. identificational or contrastive focus [...]).”

In the following section, Aboh argues that markers for notions of information structure, namely *Question*, *Topic* and *Focus*, should be included in the lexicon. Therefore, the numeration contains these notions already. He follows this line of argumentation on the basis of question-answer pairs from the language *Maale*, whose characteristic is that “all sentence types must be morphologically marked on the verb”. These examples show inflective proof for the idea that the information structure of questions and their respective answers are correlated.

He deduces from this evidence that “both the question and the answer have an active Force (interrogative vs. declarative, permissive interrogative vs. imperative) that must have been part of their respective numerations.”. He then gives more evidence from *Lele*

supporting this idea, concluding that speakers of these languages must have at some point learned lexical items for the notions of information structure, thus as part of their lexicon.

He follows up with the statement below:

“The only interface between Information Structure and Syntax is the Lexicon.”

The next section focuses on examples from *Gungbe*, mainly concentrating on topic sentences. Aboh shows that Gungbe spells out a topic marker that is never found in other contexts, never modifies copula or main predicates, does not have a lexical meaning and always follows the element it modifies. He continues to elaborate that these topic markers and other markers for information structure occupy different functional projections. According to the findings in this paragraph, there is no need to treat these markers for information structure differently than question markers (which have been accepted to head their own functional projection).

The main point of the section about ellipsis in Gungbe is that “information structure, encoded by discourse particles, has direct access to syntax.”, supporting the ideas mentioned previously. Aboh emphasizes that neglecting this view would inflict the aforementioned inclusiveness condition by Chomsky (1995). Another important point is that only definite and specific elements can be topicalized in Gungbe. He reasons that definiteness and specificity are therefore prerequisites that an element has to fulfill in order to appear in topic position. The previously discussed topic markers and specificity markers are then introduced in the numeration, selected and finally merged with other elements into a new phrase, namely a topic phrase TopP.

In the following part, Aboh refers back to *wh*-phrases and *-questions*, comparing them to sentences containing focus and topic. He declines the idea that elements are topicalized or focalized by chance, but in contrast carry a feature that denotes these information structuring properties. This feature is spelled out as a topic or focus marker in Gungbe, parallel to interrogative markers.

He defines these features as follows: they are “optional formal features that are added as lexical items enter the numeration. [...] arbitrarily added as the relevant categories are introduced in the numeration.” He concludes that notions of information structure like Topic, Focus and Interrogative force are part of the lexicon and project in syntax.

#### 4.2 Prosodic Evidence from Shen (1988)

In this section, we are going to take a short excursion concerning the prosody-syntax interface. Therefore, we will look into some points made in Shen's paper "Identifying Topic in Chinese through Prosodic Features" (1988). My intention is to show that the prosodic marking in form of a break that could function as a topic marker is actually empirically verifiable.

In her investigation, Shen examines spoken language on the basis of acoustic and auditory analyses. Her goal is to find out how syntax and prosody are related in Mandarin. As opposed to focus, topic has been identified to have a non-prominent pitch accent crosslinguistically. In order to show how syntax and prosody are connected, she lists the following example, stating that there are two possible readings to it.

24. a. Fǎguó nǚrén piàoliang.  
       France woman pretty  
       b. In France, women are pretty.  
       c. French women are pretty.

In the interpretation 24b. of 24a., *Fǎguó* 'France' functions as a topic; given our previous analyses, we can identify it as a framework dangling topic. In 24c., the sentence-initial element is the modifier of the following DP *nǚrén* 'woman/women'. According to Shen, the semantic variability of this sentence lies in the assignment of a prosodic feature, namely in adding (24b.) or leaving out (24c.) a disjuncture or break behind the sentence-initial element.

The next section of the paper is concerned with identifying whether a subject is also the topic of the sentence. Again, we have an example with two alternative readings. The bracketed sentence denotes the discourse context.

25. a. (Zhāngsān lái wǎn le). Lǎoshī zuò cuò chē le.  
       (Zhangsan come late LE) Teacher sit wrong bus LE  
       (Zhangsan was late). The teacher took the wrong bus.  
       b. The teacher (Zhangsan) took the wrong bus.  
       c. The teacher (not Zhangsan) took the wrong bus.

In this example set, the difference in reading depends on whether the subject, in this case *Lǎoshī* 'teacher', is a before mentioned (25b.) or a new (25c.) entity to the discourse. Shen elaborates that this semantic difference is again denoted by prosody; if an element is coreferential to an antecedent, then it has an even mid-low key. This element is then both the topic and the subject of the sentence (25b.). If a new referent is introduced, it has a higher key, to be more specific a mid-key. The element then only has subject properties (25c.).

The final analysis by Shen that I want to look at is her work on “Topic-Locative/Time-Phrase vs. Modifier”. Shen states that in the following sentence 26a., there is a particle *de* to be found in its underlying structure.

26. a. Táiwān [*de*] shū piányi.  
       Taiwan [DE] book cheap  
       In Taiwan, books are cheap.

From our point of view, this is a framework DT sentence. As we have seen in chapter two, it is rather unrealistic and also impractical to assume that there is underlying material that needs to be deleted in order to form these sentences. However, I do agree with Shen that these topics are also prosodically marked: “It may be said that sentence-initial constituents denoting location and time function as topic-locative/time-phrases when followed by a disjuncture [...]”. This concurs with our definition of framework dangling topics (see section 3.1).

The conclusion of this brief excursion into the relation between prosody and syntax is that the former considerably influences the latter. For our analysis of dangling topics, this shows that they are not bare DPs as assumed before, but they are marked prosodically by a subsequent break. In the following section, we will see how this matches our investigation that the notion topic is a lexical element that is added in the numeration (Aboh 2007).

### 4.3 Structure and Numeration of Dangling Topic Sentences

In this section, we will take a closer look at the syntactic processes that take place when

forming a dangling topic sentence in Mandarin. We will use both the points made in Aboh (2007) about the notions of information structure and the prosodic evidence from Shen (1988).

Aboh (2007) states that under the minimalist approach, additional discourse information, in our case topic, is not visible to the computational system. He argues that this is an issue for languages in which information structure is “determined by lexical choices that are manipulated by [the computational system] in the course of various syntactic operations” (Aboh 2007). He infers that the numeration of these types of sentences with a marked information structure has to contain lexical choices for this matter.

As we have discussed in the section before, Aboh advocates the idea that every language contains a *topic* marker which heads a functional projection, the same as question markers do. In Mandarin, the question marker *ma* is pronounced (27a.) (Sun 2006:177), while there is no overtly realized topic marker in some topic-comment sentences (27b.).

27. a. Chī fàn le *ma*?  
 Eat food LE MA  
 Have you eaten?
- b. Shuǐguǒ, wǒ xǐhuan chī.  
 Fruit, I like eat  
 Fruit, I like to eat [it].

While sentence 27b. is perfectly grammatical, it does not entirely correspond to what happens in spoken Mandarin; following the research by Shen (1988), there is prosodic marking of the topics, for example by a subsequent pause. A more precise representation of 27b. would therefore be the following (27c.).

- c. Shuǐguǒ ~, wǒ xǐhuan chī.  
 Fruit PAUSE, I like eat  
 Fruit, I like to eat [it].

In Mandarin, a number of different particles can be found, for example *Sentence Final Particles* (SFP) or *Utterance Final Particles* (UFP) (Shi 2015). A number of different

analyses of the semantics of these particles have been put forth; for this section, we adopt the framework by Li (2006:4-57) for the functions of the SFPs and UFPs.

<i>ne</i>	“evaluative” in that it indicates that the speaker considers the content to be extraordinary or of particular importance
<i>ba</i>	“degree” in that it marks a low degree of the speaker’s commitment or intention
<i>ma</i>	“degree” in that it marks a high degree of the speaker’s commitment or intention
<i>a</i>	“discourse” in that it highlights relevance of the utterance to the discourse context

I am mentioning these particles in order to show that particles can be used in Mandarin to manipulate the meaning of an utterance, thus, these particles are lexical elements that change the semantics of a sentence.

If we apply this knowledge to topic sentences, we find that the particle *a* (or in some variations also *ya*) can appear after a topic. If we look at the semantic-pragmatic function of this particle in a discourse situation, the framework given above correctly ascribes *relevance* to the particle, matching our former analysis that the relation between topics and their comment is relevance based. The particle *a* in topic sentences is obviously not utterance or sentence final, but it does appear to have the same grammatical properties as UFPs and SFPs: it is a lexical element and it influences semantics in the area of information structuring. Therefore, I will analyze *a* as a topic marker in Mandarin (28a.).

28. a. Shuǐguǒ a, wǒ xǐhuan chī.  
 Fruit PART, I like eat  
 Fruit, I like to eat [it].

These examples shows that there are topic markers in Mandarin, either pronounced or unpronounced. We will now apply these results to dangling topic sentences. In section 2.2, we had assumed that definite DPs without marking appear in topic position. However, this analysis above shows that that is not the case. Topics are prosodically or lexically marked in Mandarin.

This supports Aboh's theory that *Topic* is part of the lexicon; another core point of his analysis is that the topic feature is added arbitrarily in the numeration, it is not dependent

on the topic itself. If we apply this to our example superset-subset DT sentence, we will end up with the following numeration:

[<shuiguo, 1>, <wo, 1>, <xihuan, 1>, <xiangjiao, 1>, <TOP, 1>]

The TOP feature merges with the element that is intended to be topicalized, forming a topic phrase (TopP) and ends up triggering the base-generation of the dangling topic in the Specifier position of the CP. This ultimately leads us to the following structure<sup>3</sup>.

(a) [CP[DP shuiguo][C[C°][TopP [...][Top'[Top° ~][IP [DP wo][I'[I°][VP[DP <wo.>][V'[V° xihuan][DP xiangjiao]]]]]]]] (DT sentence with a pause)

(b) [CP[DP shuiguo][C[C°][TopP [...][Top'[Top° a][IP [DP wo][I'[I°][VP[DP <wo.>][V'[V° xihuan][DP xiangjiao]]]]]]]] (DT sentence with particle)

I will now give a short outline of the derivation of this sentence under the proposed analysis.

Lexical entries:

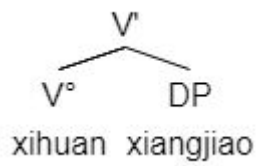
Label	Category	Selectional features (relevant for this derivation)
shuiguo	[DP]	
wo	[DP]	
xihuan	[V]	
xiangjiao	[DP]	
TOP (a/~)	TOP	[ <i>u</i> DP]

---

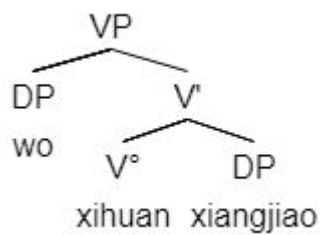
<sup>3</sup> I am deliberately leaving out “little v” in order to keep the derivation as simple as possible and limited to only the elements necessary to the point I am making.

Derivation:

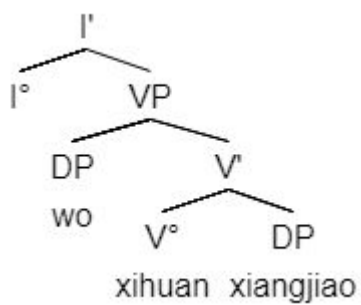
MERGE ( $V^\circ$ , DP) *label*  $V'$



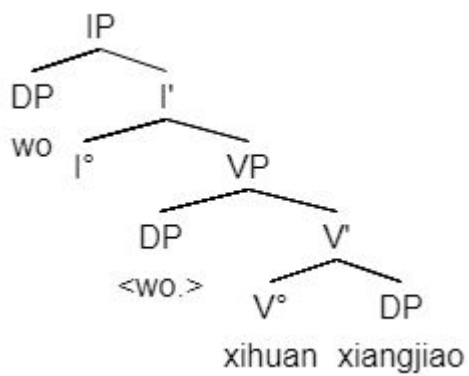
MERGE (DP,  $V'$ ) *label* VP



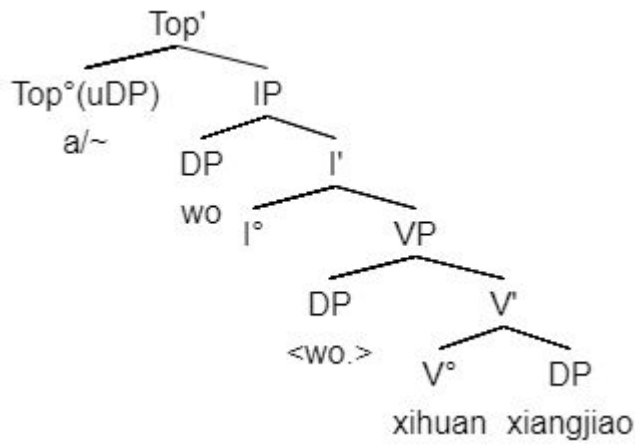
MERGE ( $I^\circ$ , VP) *label*  $I'$



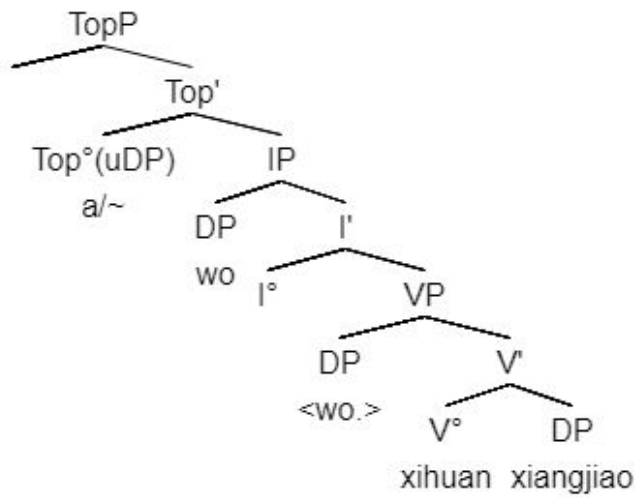
MERGE (DP,  $I'$ ) *label* IP



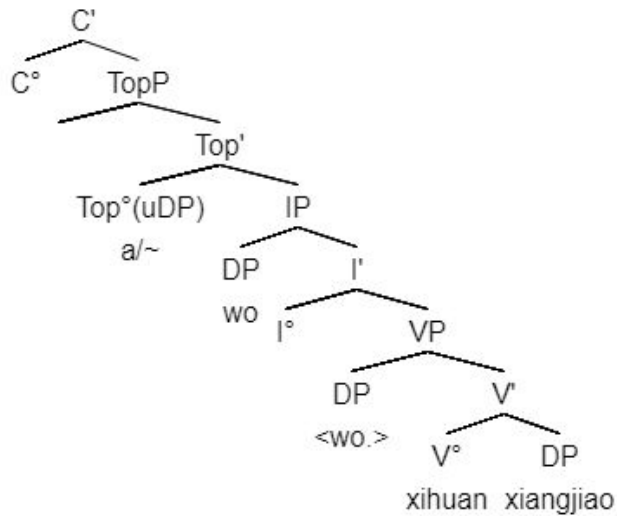
MERGE (Top°, IP) *label* Top'



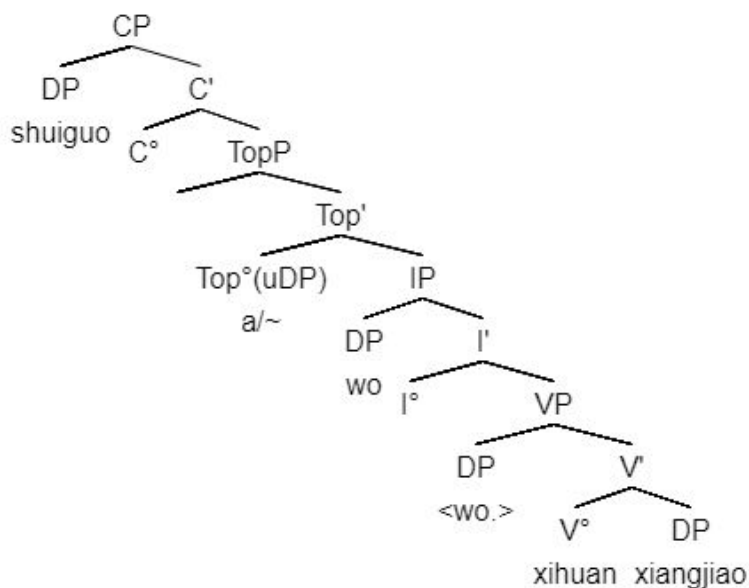
MERGE (Spec/Top, Top') *label* TopP



MERGE ( $C^\circ$ , TopP) *label* C'



MERGE (DP, C') *label* CP



In this analysis, all elements of the numeration are used and all necessary features are checked, the structure is convergent. Aboh's approach correctly describes the structure of DT sentences in Mandarin.

In general, I agree with Aboh's ideas and fact that information structuring takes place on the level of numeration and that it has direct access to syntax. The only issue I find in this proposal is that there is no explanation as to why and how the topic feature ends up on the

specific DP it is supposed to modify. Aboh emphasizes multiple times in his paper that this assignment is arbitrary. I see how this is a sufficient explanation for some sentences, but not for all. For superset-subset DT sentences, this approach works well in combination with the semantic conditions established in Hu and Pan (2009) (see section 2.3). The *Topic Licensing Condition* and the *Topic Interpretation Condition* correctly predict that in our example given above, the only possible structure is that *shuǐguǒ* 'fruit' works as the superset and *xiāngjiāo* 'banana' as the subset. As I had already indicated in section 2.3, this unfortunately only works for this type of DT sentences, not for framework DT sentences.

If we elaborate the numeration of a framework DT sentence, we end up with this:

[<wujia, 1>, <niuyue, 1>, <zui, 1>, <gui, 1>, <TOP, 1>]

If the topic feature is in fact added arbitrarily on this level and there are also no semantic conditions that denote which element is the topic, then there is no way to know where the feature will eventually end up.

I do not think that this observation entirely falsifies the approach from Aboh. On the contrary, I believe that this is an idea that is worth working on and exploring more in depth in order to make it suitable for both superset-subset and framework DT sentences.

#### 4.4 Argumentation against “Chinese-Style” Topics

Dangling topics have earlier been referred to as “Chinese-style topics” (Xu & Langendoen 1985 and others). This terminology inevitably implies that these topics are somewhat unique to the language and set it apart from other languages. In this section, I intend to show that there is no such thing as “Chinese-style topic”, but that this construction is available in other languages, too.

The first evidence to support this statement comes from a paper by Kahnemuyipour and Shabani (2018) in which the authors give a number of examples of topic sentences in the Iranian language *Eshkevarat Gilaki*. In their section “Type-subtype split”, they list two examples that are structurally parallel to the superset-subset DT sentences we have

discussed before (29a., b. and c.).

29. a. Mive, bogut-em chaar te sib xa-m.  
 Fruit, said-1sg four CL apple want-1sg  
 [As for] fruit, I said I want four apples.
- b. Maashin, mu xa-m du te toyotaa be-hen-em  
 Car, I want-1sg two CL Toyota SBJV-buy-1sg  
 [As for] cars, I want to buy two Toyotas.
- c. Shuǐguǒ , wǒ xǐhuan píngguǒ.  
 Fruit, I like apple  
 [As for] fruit, I like apples.

Structurally, a bare DP appears in sentence-initial position in both Eshkevarat Gilaki and Mandarin that is then commented on. In Eshkevarat Gilaki, the topic element has no direct structural relation to an element in the comment or is subcategorized by the verb in the comment. The sentences respond to the characteristics we have established for a dangling topic sentence in Mandarin.

The next property that might set Mandarin apart from a number of languages is that it has been characterized as topic prominent (Li & Thompson 1981:15 and others). In fact, I believe that this characterization is a matter of terminology: there are two different views on what topic prominence means. Firstly, if we follow Wu (2017:62) as mentioned before in section 2.2, a high number of different topic sentences are possible in Mandarin. According to our analysis, we have found three types: ordinary topics (type 1), hanging topics (type 2) and dangling topics (type 3). This could either mean that there should be a maximum of only two different types of topic sentences possible in the majority of other languages or, if Mandarin is in some way more productive on topicalizing elements, then there should be constraints for that in other languages.

In order to show that this is not the case, I will look at a language that has a quite free word order and along with that, also freely topicalizes elements. In German, both type 1 and 2 of topic sentences occur.

30. a. Type 1 Das Buch lese ich.  
 The book read I

- The book, I am reading [it].
- b. Type 2 Das Buch, ich lese es.  
The book, I read it  
The book, I am reading it.

In the following example set, I have underlined the constituents that can possibly be a topic in German.

- c. Ich habe das Buch heute am See für drei Stunden gelesen.  
I have the book today at lake for three hours read  
I have read the book by the lake for three hours today.

Following this argumentation, there should be no need to call Mandarin more topic prominent than other languages<sup>4</sup>.

In the last paragraph, I have deliberately left out type 3 of topic sentences in my analysis as I want to elaborate the following point first. Other scholars and I myself in this thesis have referred to the dangling topic as a *bare* DP. However, after looking at the points made in Aboh (2007) and Shen (1978), I have come to the conclusion that the DPs are not actually bare (see also section 4.1). If in Mandarin, dangling topics are marked prosodically by a break or by a particle, then they should not be any different to topics that appear in sentence-initial position in for example German. I have listed an example for both a superset-subset (31a.) and a framework dangling topic sentence (31b.).

31. a. Was Obst betrifft mag ich Bananen am liebsten.  
What fruit concern-3sg like-1sg I bananas the most  
As for fruit, I like bananas the most.
- b. Was Preise angeht ist New York am teuersten.  
What prices concern-3sg be-3sg New York most expensive  
As for prices, New York is most expensive.

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<sup>4</sup> I do not intend to make a detailed typological analysis of the different types of topics in multiple languages. My point is to show that Mandarin topic structures are not unique.

The English translation shows that this sentence has the exact same meaning as our superset-subset and framework DT sentence examples from Mandarin. In German, the DP has to be embedded into the expression *was...betrifft* 'as for'. By definition, this expression thus functions as a topic marker. Accordingly, dangling topics might be marked in a different form in multiple languages, but there is no evidence to assume that this makes Mandarin syntactically different from other languages.

In conclusion, I do not acknowledge that there is such thing as a “Chinese-style topic”. We have seen that parallel sentences exist in various, unrelated languages with the only distinction being the form of marking for these topics. I therefore advocate to stick to the term “dangling topics” as it adequately refers to a class of topics that we can find crosslinguistically.

#### 4.5 Final Syntactic Analysis

After investigating all viewpoints and approaches I have come across during this work, I have come up with a proposal for the analysis of dangling topic sentences in Mandarin. This analysis involves evidence from syntax, semantics and prosody. In the following section, I want to summarize all of the material collected in the last sections.

Firstly, I want to make a connection between the research by Shen (1988) and Aboh (2007). Aboh lists a number of examples from *Gungbe* that contain a morpho-lexical topic marker. He proposes that this item is found in the mental lexicon of the speaker. With Shen's investigation, we were able to show that the DPs in sentence-initial position are actually not bare, but are prosodically marked, namely by a pause. Shen has given numerous examples on how prosody can influence syntax. Another possible marking in natural language is the sentence-final particle *a*. I connected these to findings in order to show that topic is a lexical entry in Mandarin, too, that can be added in order to turn an element into the topic of a sentence.

superset-subset    [<shuiguo, 1>, <wo, 1>, <xihuan, 1>, < xiangjiao, 1>, <TOP, 1>]  
 framework        [<wujia, 1>, <niuyue, 1>, <zui, 1>, <gui, 1>, <TOP, 1>]

We assume that these lexical markers (pause and particle) occupy an own functional projection similar to *wh*-sentences from the evidence shown in Aboh (2007). Furthermore, the TOP head carries a [uDP] feature in order to express that a DP has to be base-generated in topic position. I therefore assume the following structure.

(a) [CP[DP][C[C°][TopP [...][Top'[Top°(uDP) a/~][IP [DP][I'[I°][VP[DP][V'[V°][DP]]]]]]]]

The advantage of this analysis is that it works for both types of DT sentences; Aboh (2007) explains that the topic feature can be added to any element in the numeration.

Unfortunately, this is also the disadvantage of this approach if we use it by itself. Without taking semantics into account, this could form possibly unacceptable sentences. The following two examples represent two of the possible outcomes of the numeration of the superset-subset DT sentence example given above.

32. a. \*Wǒ, shuǐguǒ xǐhuan xiāngjiāo.  
 I, fruit like banana  
 [As for] me, fruit likes bananas.
- b. \*Xiāngjiāo, wǒ xǐhuan shuǐguǒ.  
 Banana, I like fruit  
 [As for] bananas, I like fruit.

Both sentences are semantically unacceptable. We therefore turn to the investigations of Hu and Pan (2009) that states that there are two semantic parameters involved that avoid the formation of the unacceptable sentences 32a. and 32b.. Unfortunately, this solution is only aimed at superset-subset sentences. As for framework DT sentences, we are back to the issue of how the right elements acquires the topic feature.

My idea at this point is that there is another semantic parameter involved than the two proposed by Hu and Pan (2009) that correctly predicts the framework DTs. I find this the most likely solution to this issue for two reasons: firstly, semantic parameters are what make the superset-subset dangling topic sentences work, so it is logical to assume that there is also one for the framework dangling topic sentences. Secondly, framework DT sentences remain grammatically correct when word order is changed. Consider the following examples.

33. a. Wùjià, Niǔyuē zuì guì.  
Price, New York most expensive  
[As for] prices, New York is most expensive.
- b. ?Niǔyuē, wùjià zuì guì.  
New York, price most expensive  
[As for] New York, the prices are most expensive.
34. a. Nà chǎng huǒ, xiāofángduì lái de kuài.  
That CL fire, fortunately fire brigade come DE fast  
[As for] that fire, luckily the fire brigade came fast.
- b. ?Xiāofángduì, nà chǎng huǒ lái de kuài.  
Fire brigade, that CL fire come DE fast  
The fire brigade, that fire came fast.

When the topic and the subject of the comment switch positions, the sentences do not make sense anymore semantically, but stay grammatical. I therefore assume that the adjustment in the analysis has to be made on the level of semantics, not syntax.

For our investigation, this means that we have all the means by now to structurally explain and analyze dangling topic sentences in Mandarin. I will now use our tools to depict both the structure of a superset-subset and a framework DT sentence. The following examples have been adopted from Badan and Del Gobbo (2011) and Xu and Langendoen (1985).

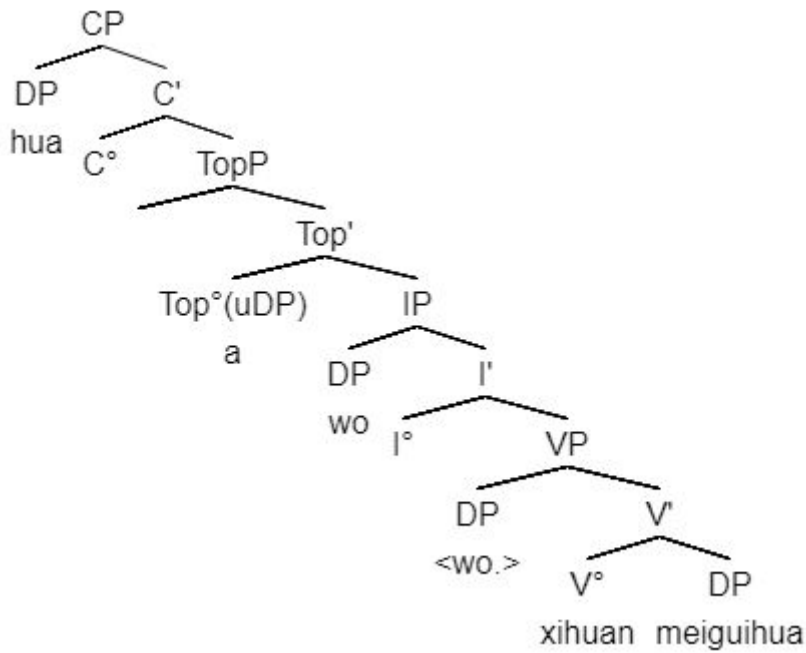
35. a. Huā a, wǒ zuì xǐhuan méiguīhuā.  
Flower PART, I most like rose  
As for flowers, I like roses the most.
- b. Nà chǎng huǒ ~, xiāofángduì lái de kuài.  
That CL fire PAUSE, fire brigade come DE fast  
[As for] the fire, the fire brigade came fast.

Numeration:

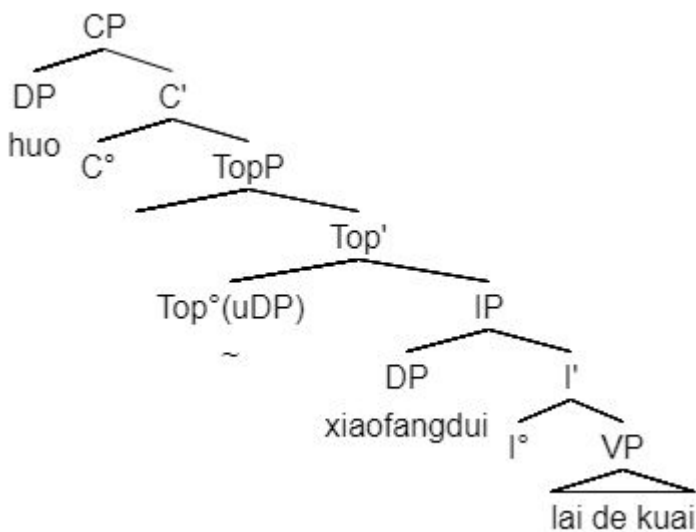
[<hua, 1>, <wo, 1>, <xihuan, 1>, <meiguihua, 1>, <a, 1>]

[<huo, 1>, <xiaofangdui, 1>, <lai, 1>, <de, 1>, <kuai, 1>, <PAUSE, 1>]

Structure (e)



Structure (f)



The conclusion of this analysis is that we do not know yet what semantic processes take place to denote the topic feature to the right constituent. It is evident that “a core part of syntax is semantically driven” (Luuk 2015). However, we do know now how to represent dangling topic sentences structurally; we have discovered that the topics are base-

generated in sentence initial position, that there is a lexical topic feature in the numeration and that this is part of the functional projection we refer to as Topic Phrase (TopP). For marking, we have found both a prosodical marker and a particle. Our structure works for both framework and superset-subset dangling topic sentences.

## 5. Conclusion

In this thesis, we have taken a close look at the semantic and structural properties of dangling topics in Mandarin. The goal was to find a thorough analysis for the syntactic composition of dangling topic sentences and to understand what processes take place in order to end up with a grammatical sentence. In my analysis, the main question was where the dangling topic is positioned syntactically and why it ends up in the sentence-initial position.

In the first chapter, Mandarin was defined as an SVO-language in which forming topic sentences is a productive process and information structure overrules word order. Along with this, we have also defined Mandarin to be a topic-prominent language. Topics usually appear in sentence-initial or in a syntactically prominent position that is very relevant to the discourse. In Mandarin, different elements can appear in topic position and the comment always follows the topic phrase. The next step was to look into the semantic conditions that have to be fulfilled in order to form a grammatical topic sentence, namely the *Topic Licensing Condition* and *Topic Interpretation Condition* (Hu & Pan 2009).

After distinguishing the two other types of topics that exist in Mandarin besides the dangling topic – ordinary topics and hanging topic – two diagnostics were used to determine which ones are moved or base-generated. As a result, ordinary topics are moved from a lower syntactic position to topic position whereas both dangling and hanging topics are base-generated there.

In the next chapter, we have first made a semantic distinction between two types of dangling topic sentences: superset-subset and framework DT sentences. In this section, I also dismiss the *aboutness* condition and advocate a relevance-based approach for the semantic properties of the DT sentences. Furthermore, I have argued against three other approaches that have been put forth for explaining DT sentences, one of them being my

own. Looking into ideas that have not been explored before was a condition that I established in order to ensure that all viewpoints are taken into account.

Finally, the last chapter is concerned with a step-by-step analysis of the dangling topic sentences in Mandarin. After briefly summarizing the points from both Aboh (2007) and Shen (1988), a thorough derivation of the structure of DT sentences was presented. In this analysis, one of the main points is that there are topic markers in Mandarin, parallel to those found in, for example, Gungbe or Fengbe (Aboh 2007). In Mandarin, topics can be marked by either a particle or prosodically by a pause following it. In the next step, we have integrated the topic marker into the numeration. In theory, this approach works for both superset-subset and framework DT sentences. The main issue that has occurred is that there is no definite answer on how the topic marker ends up on the right element in the numeration. My idea was therefore to connect this approach to the semantic conditions mentioned before, however, I have shown that this only works for superset-subset dangling topic sentences. This problem is therefore yet to be solved.

After having established that topic markers exist in Mandarin, a brief section on the note of comparative syntax shows that there are no specific properties that set Mandarin apart from other languages. The chapter was finalized with a detailed syntactic analysis using the results of the research in this thesis.

The result of taking all these steps in my analysis is that dangling topics are base-generated in the Specifier position of the CP and that a Topic Phrase has to be added to the structure. In this TopP, we find a topic marker which is either a pause or the particle *a* (*ya*, respectively). The reason why the Topic Phrase is assumed to have its own functional projection is that it was shown that information structuring is part of the numeration and therefore needs to be represented structurally. This also refutes the idea that Mandarin is somehow different from other languages that have a morphological marker for topics. Mandarin topics are also marked, therefore, topic markers are not exclusive to inflecting languages. I therefore argue against calling the dangling topics “Chinese-style” topics and advocate that they exist in other forms in other languages, too. Dangling topics sentences are thus not a different clause type, but a construction that is very productive in Mandarin.

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