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The Two Sides of Wh-indeterminates in Mandarin
A Prosodic and Processing Account

Mandarin is a wh-in-situ language, in which wh-words remain in their base position as their declarative counterparts do. Mandarin is also a wh-indeterminate language, in which wh-words such as shénme can have an interrogative interpretation 'what' (wh-interrogative) or a non-interrogative existential interpretation 'something' (wh-existential). Due to the wh-in-situ and wh-indeterminate nature, clausal typing (i.e. how to classify the clause as a wh-question) in Mandarin and the licensing of Mandarin wh-indeterminates have long been two intriguing topics.

This dissertation investigates clausal typing in Mandarin and the licensing of Mandarin wh-indeterminates, from the perspectives of prosody and processing. By conducting a series of studies, we find that prosody plays an essential role in marking and typing wh-questions, and listeners can anticipate clause types by utilizing prosody since the clause onset. Hence, we propose an extended clausal typing hypothesis, recognizing the role of prosody in clausal typing and making the original clausal typing hypothesis more complete, cross-linguistically speaking. With respect to the licensing of wh-existentials, we provide evidence and analysis that wh-existentials can also be licensed in veridical contexts with certain constraints, in addition to the commonly assumed nonveridical contexts. Regarding the licensing of wh-interrogatives, our processing evidence supports that a covert dependency is required between the wh-interrogative and the interrogative operator (Q) at CP-Spec.


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