Reflexivization in Mandarin: the role of zi-ji and its components

This dissertation analyzes reflexivization in Mandarin Chinese. It focuses on the anaphor zi-ji and the reflexivizing verbal prefix zi-. It shows that in contrast to the widely adopted position that zi-ji is a simplex anaphor, it is in fact complex, consisting of the prefix zi- and a pronominal stem -ji. This entails that zi-ji can license reflexivity by protection (Reuland 2011a).

Zi- is an operator on argument structure, identifying two argument positions. Its effect is similar to the bundling operation of Reinhart and Siloni (2005). Zi- also operates on verbs taking clausal complements; if so, it identifies the external argument of the verb with a free variable in its complement. This explains a hitherto mysterious binding pattern: the pronominal za in the complement of a zi-verb must be bound by the subject of that verb; the same applies to zi-ji, unless the ‘blocking effect’ enforces an even lower subject.

None of the current approaches provide an account for the binding pattern in the complements of ziverbs. I show that Gibson’s (2016) Agree-based approach, which provides a principled account of both nonlocal binding of zi and the blocking effect, can be straightforwardly integrated with my account of that peculiar binding pattern. I also show that a puzzling contrast between local and nonlocal binding of zi-ji reduces to a timing difference involving the interaction of zi-ji’s constituents with the syntactic environment. Overall, then, the system of Mandarin fits in with a crosslinguistically well-established pattern of anaphoric systems.

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