

Mandarin Possessors Move Through the Edge Too

Whether Mandarin nominals constitute phases remains controversial. While some approaches argue that Mandarin lacks DP altogether and therefore lacks nominal phase boundaries, a growing body of evidence suggests that nominal domains in Mandarin display phase-like behavior under specific structural conditions. This paper advances the stronger claim that Mandarin nominals do constitute phases, and that this phasehood is revealed by the fact that possessor extraction in Mandarin proceeds through the nominal edge.

We begin by establishing that Mandarin possessors undergo movement. In (1), the subject maintains a possessive relation with the object, and the sentence presupposes the existence of Wangmian's son. Crucially, it is the existence of Wangmian's son that functions as the theme of the eventuality of death. This presupposition can only be derived if *si* 'die' takes a possessive phrase as its complement. The sentence in (1) is therefore best analyzed as a structural variant of *Wangmian de erzi si le* 'Wangmian's son died'.

- (1) Wangmian si le erzi.
Wangmian die PFV son
'Wangmian lost a son through death.'

Further evidence for a possessor raising analysis comes from object coordination. The sentence *Zhangsan da le erzi* 'Zhangsan beat his son' is a case in which the subject is externally merged and binds into the object, schematically represented as *Zhangsan_i da le [PRO_i erzi]*. Because binding is a semantic relation, it is insensitive to coordination, as shown in *Zhangsan da le [erzi he Lisi]* 'Zhangsan beat his son and Lisi'. By contrast, the construction in (1) is sensitive to object coordination, as shown in (2).

- (2) Wangmian si le [erzi he Lisi].
Wangmian die PFV son and Lisi
'Wangmian lost a son through the death of his son and Lisi.'

Coordinate structures are well known to block movement. The sensitivity of (1) to object coordination therefore indicates that Wangmian in (1) is extracted from within the object via movement, rather than being base-generated in the clausal domain. This raises the further question of whether possessor extraction proceeds through an intermediate position within the nominal domain—namely, the nominal edge.

We next show that possessor extraction is sensitive to the structural constitution of the nominal edge. To identify the highest nominal projection in Mandarin, we compare the relative ordering of possessors, classifiers, numerals, adjectives, relative clauses, prepositions, full demonstratives (FDs), and reduced demonstratives (RDs). Reduced demonstratives are found to occupy the highest position in the nominal spine. In particular, RDs have grammaticalized into a category distinct from full demonstratives and occupy a different structural position. Taking numerals as a diagnostic, RDs must precede numerals (*nei liang-ben shu* 'those two books'), whereas the reverse order is ungrammatical (**liang-ben nei shu*). By contrast, full demonstratives follow numerals (*wu-ben zhe-zhong shu* 'five books of this kind'), and cannot precede them (**zhe-zhong wu-ben shu*). These ordering facts indicate that RDs precede all other nominal projections and therefore constitute the highest functional head in Mandarin nominals.

Importantly, possessor extraction is sensitive to whether this highest projection is present. As shown below, the presence of a reduced demonstrative blocks possessor raising:

- (3) Wangmian si le (*nei) erzi.
Wangmian die PFV NEI son
'Wangmian's that son died.'¹

We therefore conclude that Mandarin possessor extraction is sensitive to the structural constitution of the nominal edge. This sensitivity provides direct evidence that possessor movement in Mandarin proceeds through the nominal edge, supporting the view that Mandarin nominals constitute phases under appropriate structural conditions.

¹This effect cannot be reduced to definiteness, since full demonstratives do not induce the same restriction. Nor can it be attributed to information-structural factors, as changes in information structure fail to rescue the construction.