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## Are some languages 'more pragmatic' than others?

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### 1. Introduction

The division of labour between Syntax ('sentence grammar') and Pragmatics (sometimes called 'discourse grammar'), informally defined in (1), is a highly controversial issue, which crucially opposes generative and functional linguists.

- (1) a. **Syntax:** constraints bearing on the combination of morphemes and phrases up to *sentence* level, and the resulting interpretive effects.  
(cf. *John wants \*(something)/John drinks {(alcohol)/\*(water)}*).
- b. **Pragmatics:** constraints bearing on the flow of linguistic communication between language users.  
(cf. *"I have asthma" → Please put out your cigarette.*)

Chomsky's theory of Autonomous Syntax (e.g. Chomsky 1986) postulates that whatever properties are specific to the Language faculty apply up to Sentence level and are not directly motivated by our world knowledge or the requirements of communication. Under this theory, truly *linguistic* properties are of a purely formal nature and appear to us 'unmotivated' — just as the mechanisms of human vision appear to us 'unmotivated', except from a biological viewpoint.

Functional linguists such as Bolinger (1979), Garcia (1979), Givón (1979), Kuno (1987), Levinson (1991), among many others, uphold a different view, according to which the properties of sentence grammar are basically motivated by our world knowledge and the needs of communication.

On the functionalist side, we further find the interesting view — which I plan to discuss here — according to which natural languages vary as to the relevance of pragmatic factors to their linguistic description. A variant of this idea is that some languages are *sentence-oriented* while others are *discourse-oriented* (cf. Bamgrootgraks 1987 on Thai.) Typical illustrations of this theoretical stand are Li & Thompson (1975, 1979) and Huang (1994, 2000). Huang (2000) proposes a 'new typology' distinguishing *syntactic languages* (SLs) from *pragmatic languages* (PLs):

- (2) HUANG'S (2000) ASSUMPTIONS
- '(...) Some languages are more pragmatic than others. In these pragmatic languages, syntactic structure is more closely related to semantic representation and/or pragmatic information.' (Huang 2000:276)
- 'There are some grounds for believing that in a pragmatic language like Chinese, Japanese and Korean, when syntax and world knowledge clash, world knowledge frequently wins. By way of contrast, in a syntactic language like English, French and German, when there is a conflict between syntax and world knowledge,

syntax usually takes the upper hand (...).' (*ibid.*: 265)

In what follows I will review some of the empirical evidence given by Huang (2000) (in the wake of Li & Thompson 1975, 1979) in support of the theory phrased in (2). And I shall counter-argue that the assumptions in (3), rather than those in (2), are on the right track:

(3) MY OWN ASSUMPTIONS

- a. Syntax and Pragmatics are *equally* relevant for the languages which Huang labels *SLs* and for those he classifies as *PLs*
- b. The contrasts between these two groups of languages always pertain to sentence-grammar, crucially **NOT** to the speakers' 'world knowledge' or to the way they construe inferences.

I must emphasize here that should (3) be correct, it would not necessarily follow that Chomsky's 'minimalist' theory of autonomous syntax (e.g. Chomsky 1995) is correct or optimal. This, in my opinion, is a completely independent debate.

In section 2, I will survey and discuss the major diagnostic tests proposed by Huang (2000) in support of his distinction between *SLs* and *PLs*. I will argue that the empirical evidence he provides fails to establish that some languages are 'more pragmatic' than others. In the concluding section, I will emphasize the nonexistence of a class of 'pragmatic languages', and briefly suggest why Korean, in particular, may *SEEM*, at first glance, 'more pragmatic' than French.

## 2. The *SL/PL* distinction: discussing the diagnostic tests

The three main properties listed in (4) are those on which Huang bases his distinction between *SLs* (represented by English and other Indo-European languages) and *PLs* (represented by Chinese, Japanese and Korean).

- (4) Diagnostic tests proposed by Huang (2000) for distinguishing *SLs* from *PLs*
- a. Ambiguity resolution for zero anaphora.
  - b. Ambiguity resolution for long-distance reflexives.
  - c. 'Chinese-style' vs. 'English-style' topics

### 2.1. Pronoun anaphora

#### 2.1.1. Morphology and the typology of empty categories

Huang (2000) points out that *PLs* exhibit a far greater rate of zero anaphora than do *SLs*, and that many Chinese-style zero anaphors do not fit into Chomsky's typology of empty categories. This leads Huang to assume that *PLs* altogether form a distinct type of languages, where syntax is less prominent than it is in English.

Consider for instance the ambiguity of the implicit arguments of the predicate meaning 'teach' in the Chinese examples in (5):

- (5) a. Laoshi<sub>i</sub> hai zhao bu dao [yi ge [ø<sub>i</sub> keyi jiao ø<sub>x</sub> de] xuesheng<sub>x</sub>].<sup>1</sup>  
 teacher still find not one CL can teach REL pupil  
 Lit. 'The teacher still cannot find a pupil — can teach —'  
 (i) 'The teacher still cannot find a pupil *whom he* can teach.'  
 (ii) ?#'The teacher still cannot find a pupil *who* can teach *him*.'
- b. Xuesheng<sub>x</sub> hai zhao bu dao [yi ge [ø<sub>x</sub> keyi jiao ø<sub>i</sub> de] laoshi<sub>i</sub>].  
 pupil still find not one CL can teach REL teacher  
 Lit. 'The pupil still cannot find a teacher — can teach —'  
 (i) 'The pupil still cannot find a teacher *who* can teach *him*.'  
 (ii) ?#'The pupil still cannot find a teacher *whom he* can teach.'  
 [adapted from Huang 2000: 263]

In both (5a) and (5b) the implicit subject and object of 'teach' must be bound by the 'teacher' and 'pupil' phrases. One of these phrases is in an operator position (the head of the relative clause) while the other is in an argument position (the matrix subject). Under Chomsky's syntactic approach, this contrast leads us to identify the zero arguments of 'teach' as different types of zero categories depending on the position of their binders — the zeros are traces if they are bound by the head of the relative clause, and pronominals if they are bound by the matrix subject. But Huang argues that there is no reason to make such a syntactic distinction in Chinese. According to him the two sentences in (5) are each completely ambiguous from a syntactic viewpoint, and only our *knowledge of the world* (what we know about teachers and pupils) leads us to choose one interpretation over the other: in both (5a) and (5b) we construe the interpretation so that the subject of 'teach' is bound by the 'teacher' phrase, and its object by the 'pupil' phrase. So Huang's assumption is that *pragmatics* (our world knowledge) is, in Chinese, the crucial factor in ambiguity resolutions involving zero anaphors, whereas in English the crucial factor is syntax (the contrast between *wh*-traces and pronominals).

I counter-argue that the main contrast between the Chinese examples in (5) and their English translations lies in *morphology*, not in the relative prominence of syntax and pragmatics. The English personal pronouns *he/him* and relative pronouns *who/whom* are overt and specified for case and for the type of dependencies they may enter, while the Chinese implicit arguments are invisible and hence completely underspecified. Beyond this morphological contrast, there is no difference in the way English and Chinese articulate syntax and pragmatics.

Chinese formally distinguishes two sentences, (5a) and (5b), each open to two interpretations. Out of the four resulting readings, two are selected as pragmatically felicitous. English distinguishes 4 sentences (6a,b,c,d), each open to one interpretation.

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<sup>1</sup> Abbreviations used in the glosses [some of them are borrowed from the sources]: ACC = accusative, AUX = (perfect) auxiliary, CL = classifier, DAT = dative, DEC = declarative, DF = definite, DM = demonstrative, F = feminine (gender), HON = honorific, INF = informal (style), LOC = locative, M = masculine (gender), NOM = nominative, PF = perfective marker, PL = plural, PASS = passive, POSS = possessive, PRS = present, PST = past, REL = relative marker, RES = resulative marker, SG = singular, TOP = topic; 1, 2, 3 = first, second, third person. In the Chinese examples in (5), *zhao* + *dao* are two verbs (literally 'look for' and 'arrive') whose combination in this negative context translates as 'can't find'. [Thanks to Marie-Claude Paris for her feedback on *zhao-bu-dao*].

Out of the four resulting readings, two are selected as pragmatically felicitous (the same as in Chinese):

- (6) a. The teacher<sub>t</sub> still cannot find a pupil<sub>p</sub> whom<sub>p</sub> he<sub>t</sub> can teach t<sub>p</sub>.  
 b. ?#The teacher<sub>t</sub> still cannot find a pupil<sub>p</sub> who<sub>p</sub> t<sub>p</sub> can teach him<sub>t</sub>.  
 c. ?#The pupil<sub>p</sub> still cannot find a teacher<sub>t</sub> whom<sub>t</sub> he<sub>p</sub> can teach t<sub>t</sub>.  
 d. The pupil<sub>p</sub> still cannot find a teacher<sub>t</sub> who<sub>t</sub> t<sub>t</sub> can teach him<sub>p</sub>.

These data thus do not show that the interpretation of Chinese zero pronouns is 'more pragmatic' than that of English overt pronouns. They only bring out the fact that Chinese uses implicit anaphors in (5) where English uses overt functional nominals in (6), and that zero morphology may be a source of greater ambiguity than overt morphology.

### 2.1.2. Pronoun ambiguity resolution

The fact that ambiguities involving anaphora are often resolved on the basis of world knowledge is in no way specific to ZERO anaphora, as witnessed by the French examples in (7):

- (7) a. Jean déteste celui qui l' a collé.  
 John hate.PRS.3SG the one who 3MSG.ACC AUX.PRS.3SG flunk.PP  
 'John hates the one who flunked him.'  
 b. Jean déteste celui qu' il a collé.  
 Jean hate.PRS.3SG the one whom 3SG.NOM AUX.PRS.3SG flunk.PP  
 'John hates the one whom he flunked.'

These two sentences are completely homophonous (pronounced as in (8a)) but are open to two structural analyses — as shown by the glosses in (7) and the structural representations in (8b,c):

- (8) a. zhǎ detest sǎlūi kilakole.  
 b. Jean<sub>j</sub> déteste celui<sub>h</sub> qui<sub>h</sub> t<sub>h</sub> l'<sub>j</sub> a collé. [= (7a)]  
 John hates the-one who him-flunked  
 c. Jean<sub>j</sub> déteste celui<sub>h</sub> qu'<sub>h</sub> il<sub>j</sub> a collé t<sub>h</sub>. [= (7b)]  
 John hates the-one whom he flunked

So the string phonologically transcribed in (8a) is ambiguously analysed and interpreted as in (7a) or (7b). But should we enrich the lexicon and distribute the 'teacher' and 'student' in the same positions as Huang in his Chinese examples, the ambiguity is resolved under exactly the same conditions as in Chinese:

- (9) a. **L'étudiant** déteste **le prof** qui l' a collé. [kilakole = (7a)]  
 'The student hates the teacher who flunked him.'  
 b. **#L'étudiant** déteste **le prof** qu' il a collé. [kilakole = (7b)]  
 'The student hates the teacher whom he flunked.'  
 c. **#Le prof** déteste **l'étudiant** qui l' a collé. [kilakole = (7a)]  
 'The teacher hates the student who flunked him.'  
 d. **Le prof** déteste **l'étudiant** qu' il a collé. [kilakole = (7b)]  
 'The teacher hates the student whom he flunked.'

In (9) as in (5), two syntactic analyses (and interpretations) (respectively corresponding to (7a) and (7b)) are available for each distribution of the 'teacher' and 'student' phrases. But for each distribution of these phrases, one interpretation (hence one structural analysis) is selected on pragmatic grounds — due to what we know about teacher/student relations: teachers flunk students and not conversely. These examples only show that when a linguistic form is equally open to two or more syntactic analyses (and semantic interpretations), world-knowledge may contribute to ambiguity resolution. This is a rather well-known fact but it is no truer in Chinese than it is in French or English.<sup>2</sup>

### **2.1.3. Zero pronouns vs. overt weak pronouns**

Li & Thompson (1979) (as well as Huang 2000) claim that the interpretation of Chinese-type zero pronouns is characteristically calculated on pragmatic grounds, NOT on syntactic grounds.

- (10) [...] There are no structural properties predicting the interpretation of the referent for zero-pronouns [...] The interpretation of the referent for the unrealized pronoun is inferred on the basis of pragmatic knowledge.'  
(Li & Thompson 1979 : 312)

In (11)<sup>3</sup> I present a paradigm of Chinese data (involving zero pronouns) presented by Li & Thompson (1979), with its French and English translations in (12a-h) and (12a'-h').

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<sup>2</sup> On overt and zero pronouns and pronoun specification in Korean, cf. Jeon (1989), Shim (1991), Kang (1999), a.o.

<sup>3</sup> The Chinese examples, in (11) and their English glosses and translations are taken from Li & Thompson (1979: 313). The excerpt is borrowed from a classical Chinese text entitled *Shui-Hu Zhuan*. The syntax of the attested examples is said to be the same as that of Modern Mandarin.

(11) (Mandarin) Chinese	(12) French/English
a. Yang-Zhi qu-lu Yang-Zhi take-to-the-road 'Yang-Zhi took to the road'	a. Yang-Zhi se mit en route. take.PST.3SG to the road a'. 'Yang-Zhi took to the road.'
b. Bu shu run $\emptyset_1$ lai-dao DongJing not many days arrive DongJing 'In a few days, (he) arrived in DongJing.'	b. En quelques jours il <sub>1</sub> in a few days 3MSG.NOM parvint à DongJing. arrive.PST.SG in DongJing b'. 'In a few days he <sub>1</sub> arrived in DongJing.'
c. $\emptyset_2$ ru-de cheng-lai. enter city '(He) entered the city.'	c. Il <sub>2</sub> entra dans la ville. 3MSG.NOM enter.PST.3SG in the city c'. 'He <sub>2</sub> entered the city.'
d. $\emptyset_3$ suan ge ke-dian. find a hotel '(He) found a hotel.'	d. Il <sub>3</sub> trouva un hôtel. 3MSG.NOM find.PST.3SG a hotel d'. 'He <sub>3</sub> found a hotel.'
e. $\emptyset_4$ an-xi xia. settle down '(He) settled down.'	e. Il <sub>4</sub> s'installa. 3MSG.NOM settle-down.PST.3SG e'. 'He <sub>4</sub> settled down.'
f. zhuang-ke jiao-huan $\emptyset_5$ $\emptyset_6$ dan-r. carrier give-back (his) luggage 'The carrier gave back (to Yang-Zhi) (his) luggage.'	f. Le porteur lui <sub>5</sub> rendit the carrier 3SG.DAT give-back.PST.3SG s <sub>6</sub> -es bagages. POSS. 3SG -PL luggage.PL f'. 'The carrier gave him <sub>5</sub> back his <sub>6</sub> luggage.'
g. $\emptyset_7$ yu-le $\emptyset_8$ xie yin-liang give-aspect some money ' (Yang-Zhi) gave (the carrier) some money.'	g. Il <sub>7</sub> lui <sub>8</sub> donna 3MSG.NOM SG3SG.DAT give.PST.3SG de l'argent. some money g'. 'He <sub>7</sub> gave him <sub>8</sub> some money'
h. $\emptyset_9$ zi hui-qu-le. self return-aspect '(The carrier) went back by himself.'	h. (et) il <sub>9</sub> repartit (and) 3MSG.NOM go-back.PST.3SG tout seul. on his own h'. 'and he <sub>9</sub> went back on his own.'

This narrative comprises two parts: in the first part (11a-e) a single discourse referent (Yang-Zhi) is available for the zero pronouns. In the second part (11f-h) two discourse referents are available: Yang-Zhi, and the carrier.

Li & Thompson (1979) claim that in Chinese, as soon as two or more discourse referents are contextually available, zero anaphora leads to systematic ambiguity, and that this ambiguity is resolved on pragmatic grounds (the hearer's world knowledge), rather than on syntactic grounds (e.g. Binding Theory). However, we observe that EXACTLY THE SAME ambiguity-resolution strategies are applied in French and English to the pronouns in examples (12f-g-h), although they are overt, and inflected for gender, number and case. In the considered French and English examples, since the two competing discourse referents call for pronouns identically specified for gender and number, the pronouns'

inflectional features do not contribute to ambiguity resolution. Hence there is absolutely no contrast between the Chinese zero pronouns in (11) and their French and English overt counterparts in (12) as regards interpretation. There would only be a Chinese-English/French contrast if the two discourse referents should motivate different gender and/or number inflection on the pronouns, as in (13):

(13) [Modified second part of the narrative in (11-12)]

- a. FRENCH
- (i) La concierge<sub>c</sub> lui<sub>yz</sub> rendit <sub>S<sub>yz>c</sub>-es</sub> bagages.<sup>4</sup>  
 DF.FSG janitor 3SG.DAT give-back.PST.3SG POSS.3SG-PL luggage.PL.  
 'The female-janitor gave him (\*her) back his (>her) luggage.'
- (ii) Il<sub>yz</sub> lui<sub>c</sub> donna de l'argent.  
 3MSG.NOM 3SG.DAT give.PST.3SG some money  
 'He gave her (\*him) some money.'
- (iii) Elle<sub>c</sub> retourna dans <sub>S<sub>c>yz</sub>-a</sub> loge.  
 3FSG.NOM go-back.PST.3SG to POSS.3SG-FSG lodgings  
 'She went back to her (>his) lodgings.'
- b. ENGLISH
- (i) The landlady<sub>l</sub> gave him<sub>yz</sub> back his<sub>yz</sub> luggage.  
 (ii) He<sub>yz</sub> gave her<sub>l</sub> some money.  
 (iii) She<sub>l</sub> went back to her<sub>l</sub> lodgings.

In this case the second referent introduced in the discourse (*la concierge*, *the landlady*) is straightforwardly understood as female-denoting (in French because of feminine inflection on the definite article, in English because of the lexical content of the noun *landlady*). Correlatively, those overt pronouns which are morphologically specified for gender: French *il/elle*, English *he, him, his, her, she*) are contextually unambiguous. But this does not prove ambiguity resolution to be more *syntax-based* in French/English than in Chinese. It boils down to the fact that Chinese, unlike English and French, fails to have *inflectional morphology*. And this property crucially pertains to word and sentence grammar, NOT to world knowledge or pragmatics.

Syntactic and pragmatic constraints play similar roles in both types of languages. World knowledge is only activated for pronoun ambiguity resolution when morphosyntax makes two competing readings equally available.

### 2.3. Reflexives

Huang (2000) emphasizes that the theory of anaphora which Chomsky and some of his disciples initially built on the basis of English evidence, does not extend to such languages as Chinese. What characterizes the Chomskyan approach to anaphora in general, and to reflexives in particular, is that it entirely relies on structural factors. For instance, it is assumed that there exists a class of natural-language expressions which include English *himself* (*herself*, etc.) and which Chomsky calls *reflexive anaphors*, whose antecedent must belong to the same clause and must occupy a certain type of structural position wrt. the reflexive:

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<sup>4</sup> In (13a,b) adjacent referential indices (e.g. 'yz') indicate that the two readings are equally available, while indices separated by '>' (e.g. 'y>z') indicate that one (or several) reading(s) is/are preferred.

- (14) a. John<sub>j</sub> frightened himself<sub>j</sub>.  
 b. John<sub>j</sub>'s cat<sub>c</sub> frightened himself<sub>c/\*j</sub>.

Huang argues that the Chomskyan theory of reflexives does not extend to such languages as Chinese, since (15) is ambiguous in Chinese (unlike English (14b)); moreover, the *preferred* reading for Chinese (15) is precisely the one which is discarded for English (14b):

- (15) Xiaoming<sub>x</sub> de mao<sub>m</sub> ba ziji<sub>z/?m</sub> xia le yi tiao.  
 Xiaoming POSS cat BA self frighten PF one CL  
 Lit. 'Xiaoming's cat frightened self.'  
 (i) 'Xiaoming<sub>x</sub>'s cat frightened him<sub>x</sub>.'  
 (ii) ?'Xiaoming's cat<sub>c</sub> frightened himself<sub>c</sub>.'  
 [adapted from Huang 2000: 120]

The crucial property here, according to Huang, is of a semantic nature: since Xiaoming denotes a person, it is more salient than the cat on the Animateness Scale, therefore it is selected as the preferred antecedent for *ziji*.

Huang further claims that the interpretation of Chinese *ziji* is also often based on world knowledge, hence on pragmatic rather than syntactic properties.

- (16) a. Zhangsan de baba de qian bei ziji de  
 Zhangsan POSS father POSS money PASS self POSS  
 pengyou tou zou le.  
 friend steal RES PF  
 'Zhangsan<sub>z</sub>'s father<sub>f</sub>'s money was stolen by self<sub>f>z</sub>'s friend.'  
 b. Xiaoming<sub>x</sub> (de) fuqin<sub>f</sub> de turan qushi dui ziji<sub>x/\*f</sub>  
 Xiaoming POSS father POSS sudden death to self  
 daji hen zhong.  
 strike-a-blow very heavily  
 'Xiaoming's father's death struck a heavy blow on self.'  
 [adapted from Huang 2000:120]

Huang argues that such data show that UNLIKE English speakers interpreting *himself*, Chinese speakers interpreting *ziji* calculate the interpretation on semantic or pragmatic grounds, NOT on structural grounds. However, the Chinese examples in (16) have equivalents in English (and French), as shown by (17):

- (17) a. John<sub>j</sub>'s father<sub>f</sub>'s money was stolen by his<sub>f>j</sub> best friend.  
 a'. L' argent du père<sub>p</sub> de Jean<sub>j</sub> a été volé  
 DF money of-DF.MSG father of John AUX.PRS.3SG be.PP steal.PP  
 par s<sub>p>j</sub>-on meilleur ami.  
 by POSS.3SG-MSG best.MSG friend  
 (= (17a))  
 b. John<sub>j</sub>'s father<sub>f</sub>'s sudden death was a terrible blow for him<sub>j/\*f</sub>.  
 d. La mort subite du père<sub>p</sub> de Jean<sub>j</sub>  
 DF.FSG death sudden of-DF.MSG father of John

a                    été    un coup terrible pour *lui*<sub>j>\*p</sub>.  
 AUX.PRS.3SG be.PP a blow terrible for 3MSG  
 (= (17b))

In these examples the selected reading for the italicized pronouns is the same as the one selected for *ziji* in (16), although it is true that none of the English/French pronouns in (17) has ever been labelled *reflexive*. So what Huang's examples show is that Chomsky's Binding Theory is inadequate since Chinese *ziji* obviously does not fit in. The data once more indicate that whenever a linguistic form is equally open to two or more interpretations, world knowledge may guide the selection of one available reading over the other(s). But these data do not establish that Chinese is any different from English or French in these respects: the Binding Theory may be shown to be inadequate for English/French AS WELL, cf. Bolinger 1979, Kuno 1987, Zribi-Hertz 2008, a.o.). The crucial contrast between English and Chinese in (14)-(17) lies in the inherent feature content of their available 'pronoun' morphemes: Chinese *ziji* has no equivalent in English; conversely, English *he/him*, as well as reflexive *himself*, have no equivalents in Chinese. In other words, English and Chinese once again differ as to their morphology.

## 2.4. 'Chinese-style' topics

Another property which is claimed by Huang to distinguish SLs from PLs is the existence of what Chafe (1976) called 'Chinese-style topics', which are assumed to be *pragmatically* linked to their associated comment (cf. Chen 1996), and to have no equivalents in such languages as English or French. Chinese-style topics are contrasted with English-style topics, which are ALSO licensed in PLs:

### English-style topics

- (18) a. (Chinese)  
           Nei shou gangqin            zoumingqu Xiaoming    hen xihuan Ø.  
           that CL piano            sonata Xiaoming    very like  
           'That piano sonata, Xiaoming likes (it) very much.'
- b. (Japanese)  
           Kuruma-wa Taroo-ga    Ø    kat-ta.  
           car -TOP Taroo-NOM    buy-PST  
           'That car, Taro bought (it).'
- c. (Korean, adapted from Na & Huck 1993)  
           Cheolsu-neun            Suni-ga    Ø    salanghae-yo.  
           Cheolsu-TOP            Suni-NOM    love    DEC<sup>INF</sup>  
           'Cheolsu, Suni loves (him).'
- d. French/English  
           Cette voiture, Jean la            conduit            tous les jours.  
           DM.FSG car John 3FSG.ACC drive.PRS.3SG every day
- d'. This car, John drives it every day.

[Chinese/Japanese/Korean ex. adapted from Huang 2000: 266]

The two best representatives of so-called Chinese-style topics are labelled by Huang : *Frame topics*, and *Range topics*. Definitions are given in (19):

(19) Two characteristic specimens of 'Chinese-Style topics'

a. **Frame topic**

'A frame topic is one that provides the spatial, temporal, and individual frame within which the proposition (...) holds true.'

b. **Range topic**

'A range topic is one that delimits the range of a variable of which the predication is made.'

[Huang 2000: 270]

Illustrative examples (adapted from Huang 2000: 266-67) are given in (20):

(20) **Frame topic**

a. (Chinese)

Beijing mingshengguji duo.  
Beijing historical-site many  
Lit. 'Beijing, historical sites are many.'

b. (Korean/Kwon & Zribi-Hertz 2005: 183)

I gisugsa-e-neun, yeohangsaeng -eun wis-ceung-eseo  
DM boarding.school-LOC-TOP female.student-TOP upstairs-LOC  
sigsaha-n-da.  
take.meal-PRS-DEC  
'In this boarding school, female students take (their) meal(s) upstairs.'

(21) **Range topic**

a. (Chinese/adapted from Li & Thompson 1976)

Nei chang huo xingkui xiaofangdui lai de kuai.  
that CL fire fortunately fire-brigade come quickly  
Lit. 'That fire, fortunately the fire-brigade came quickly.'

b. (Korean/adapted from Na & Huck 1993)

koch-eun gughwa-ga olaega-n-da.  
flower-TOP chrysanthemum-NOM last.long-PRS-DEC  
Lit. 'Flowers, chrysanthemums last long.'

However, the assumption that 'Chinese-style' topics go unattested in so-called SLs cannot be upheld. As witnessed by the examples in (22)-(23), the 'Chinese-style' topics in (20)-(21) DO have counterparts in French and English:

(22) **Frame topic**

a. A Pékin, les monuments historiques sont nombreux. [cf. (20a)]  
LOC Beijing DF.PL site.PL historical.PL be.PRS.3PL many.MPL

a'. In Beijing, historical sites are many.

b. Dans cet internat, les filles prennent leurs repas  
LOC DM.MSG boarding-school DF.PL girl.PL take.PRS.3PL POSS.3PL-PL meal.PL  
en haut. [cf. (20b)]  
upstairs

b'. In this boarding school, girls take their meals upstairs.

(23) **Range topic**

a. Pour/quant à cet incendie, heureusement  
for/as-for DM.MSG fire fortunately  
les pompiers sont venus tout de suite. [cf. (21a)]

- DF.PL firemen AUX.PRS.3PL come.PP.MPL right away  
a'. As for that fire, fortunately the fire-brigade came right away.  
b. Pour ce qui est des fleurs,  
for that which be.PRS.3SG of-DF.PL flower.PL  
les chrysanthèmes durent longtemps.  
DF.PL chrysanthemum.PL last.PRS.3PL long  
b'. "As {for/regards} flowers, chrysanthemums last long.' [cf. (21b)]

The French/English examples in (22) differ from the Chinese example in (20a) in that the French/English frame topic must be morphologically specified as locative, whereas it is unspecified in Chinese. In Korean, the frame topic is also morphologically specified as locative, as witnessed by (20b), and it is further morphologically specified as topical by the *neun* particle (which has no counterpart in Chinese).

Range topics also involve overt specification in French/English (23), unlike in Chinese, but like in Korean. French/English however contrast with Korean in the way each topic is specified: Korean uses the same topic marker (*neun*) for every kind of topic, further inserting a locative marker in the case of frame topics. French and English specify each type of topic differently: (a) instance topics (English-style topics) involve dislocation (prosodic marking) + an overt topic-bound weak resumptive pronoun; (b) frame topics involve dislocation + locative marking on the topic; (c) range topics involve dislocation + yet another type of prepositional or lexical marking on the topic. What is crucial for the ongoing demonstration is that semantic subtypes of topic-comment relations distinguished by Huang for Chinese are all echoed in both French and English.

In support of the SL/PL distinction, Huang emphasizes the recursive nature of 'Chinese-style' topics. However, this property does not distinguish Chinese from French or English, since multiple topics are licensed in French (as well as in English) — under conditions which would certainly deserve further scrutiny:

- (24) (Chinese/Huang 2000: 271)  
Zhongguo gudu Beijing mingshengguji duo.  
China ancient capital Beijing historical.site many  
'China, ancient capitals, Beijing, historical sites are many.'
- (25) En Chine, pour ce qui est des anciennes capitales,  
LOC China for that which be.PRS.3SG of-DF.PL ancient.FPL capital.PL  
à Pékin, il y a beaucoup de monuments historiques.  
LOC Beijing there-are a-lot of monument.PL historical.PL  
'In China, as regards ancient capitals, in Beijing, there are many historical sites.'
- (26) Marie<sub>m</sub>, Jean<sub>j</sub>, ce livre<sub>i</sub>, elle le lui a emprunté.  
Mary John DM.MSG book 3MSG.NOM 3MSG.ACC 3SG.DAT AUX.PRS.3SG borrow.PP.MSG  
Lit. 'Mary, John, that book, she borrowed it from him.'

Thus, the main contrasts between 'Chinese-style' topics and their French/English counterparts ultimately lie in morphosyntax — the way each type of topic is morphologically or lexically specified, whether the topic binds a resumptive morpheme, and when it does, whether the resumptive is overt or null. Therefore, the properties

which distinguish Chinese-style from English-style topics once again crucially pertain to sentence grammar.

### 3. Concluding remarks: the syntax/pragmatics interface

I am thus led to the conclusion that the distinction proposed by Huang (2000) between SLs and PLs must be discarded as empirically incorrect. The properties on which Huang bases his assumption are actually grounded in morphosyntax, not in pragmatics. As regards anaphora, if Chomsky's Binding Theory appears unable to correctly predict the distribution and interpretation of pronouns and reflexives in various languages (e.g. Chinese), we must conclude that Chomsky's Binding Theory should be revised. But it does not follow that some languages, such as Chinese-Japanese-Korean (CJK), are less than others governed by syntactic constraints. In CJK, as in English or French, pronouns and reflexives cannot be freely inserted and interpreted within sentences, they all abide by sentence-internal constraints: for instance, Chinese zero pronouns, just as English/French weak overt pronouns, seem to resist being bound by a co-argument.<sup>5</sup> On the other hand, in English and French, as in CJK, speakers recourse to world knowledge and pragmatic inference to resolve certain types of ambiguities — whenever morphosyntax delivers two or more equally available structural analyses. World knowledge then guides the hearer in selecting one reading as contextually optimal. As regards topic-comment constructions, they are equally attested in English/French and in CJK, the only contrasts lie in morphosyntax, and the morphosyntax of topic marking is quite different in Japanese/Korean, and in Chinese. This further sheds a doubt on the assumption that CJK should be grouped together in a single category of 'pragmatic languages'

Huang fails to emphasize an important contrast between, e.g., French/English and Korean (and Japanese) regarding the way sentence grammar accommodates Information Structure. A striking fact about Korean and Japanese is that in order to translate an English or French sentence into these languages, one MUST take into account Information Structure. This is not true to the same extent in such languages as English and French. For instance, a French speaker assessing the sentence in (27), submitted to him out of context, will at best perceive the ambiguity glossed in (i) and (ii):

- (27) Marie regarde la télé.  
 Mary watch.PRS.3SG DF.FSG TV  
 (i) 'Mary is watching TV.'  
 (ii) 'Mary is looking at the TV.'

But a Korean speaker asked to translate (27) into Korean will need further contextual information, in order to decide whether to insert GA or NEUN on the external argument, and whether or not to insert LEUL on the object:

- (28) a. Minna -ga telebi-leul bo-goiss-eo.  
 '(Hey look) Minna is watching TV/looking at the TV.'  
 b. Minna -ga telebi bo-goiss-eo.  
 '(Hey look) Minna is watching TV.'  
 c. Minna-neun telebi-leul bo-goiss-eo.

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<sup>5</sup> This general constraint is further discussed in Zribi-Hertz (2008).

- 'Minna, she is watching TV/looking at the TV.'
- d. Minna-neun telebi bo-goiss-eo.  
'Minna, she is watching TV.'

In French, a sentence like (27), uttered under a single prosodic contour, may felicitously translate each of the four sentences in (28). This contrast may suggest that Korean is 'more discourse-oriented' than French. However, this may once again be shown to result from a *morphological* contrast between French and Korean: in Korean, morphosyntax systematically signals the information status of every nominal (cf. Kwon & Zribi-Hertz 2008), while such is not the case in French. This of course does not mean that Information Structure is irrelevant for the syntactic description of such languages as French or English, for there is, as we know, plenty of evidence proving otherwise (cf., e.g., Lambrecht 1994, Erteschik-Shir 1997).

The contrast between Korean and French in (27)-(28) is that French morphosyntax *may* stay neutral with respect to information structure, while Korean morphosyntax *must* not. Like the other properties discussed in the previous sections, this contrast is grounded in sentence grammar, and in no way supports the claim that Korean is 'more pragmatic' than French.

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