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The two sides of Wh-indeterminates in Mandarin : a prosodic and processing account

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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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