# All structures great and small: on copular sentences with shì in Mandarin

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Cover Page

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# English Summary

This dissertation is devoted to the Mandarin copula *shì* 是 and copular structures containing it. It concentrates on three core issues that are fundamental to predication and copular structures: (a) the nature of *shì*; (b) types of copular sentences in Mandarin and their structural relation; and (c) the temporal structure of copular sentences. The book consists of five main chapters.

The first two main chapters provides a comprehensive description of the use of *shì* and the properties of different types of copular sentences. Chapter 2 delineates the basic uses of *shì* in copular and non-copular sentences. Chapter 3 investigates the taxotomy of Mandarin copular sentences, based on a thorough examination of their syntactic and semantic properties. On semantic grounds, a three-way taxonomy of Mandarin copular sentences can be observed: predicational, specificational, and equative. These three types show clear-cut distinctions in terms of the semantic types of the nominals flanking *shì*. In structural terms, this dissertation proposes that predicational and specificational copular sentences are structurally related, while equative sentences should be analysed differently, as they present a number of crucial distinctions from the other two types of sentences. Particularly, Mandarin equative sentences always require an additional adverb, *jiù* 'exactly', which is not necessary in predicational or specificational sentences. Properties of predicational and specificational copular sentences are also investigated in Chapter 3.

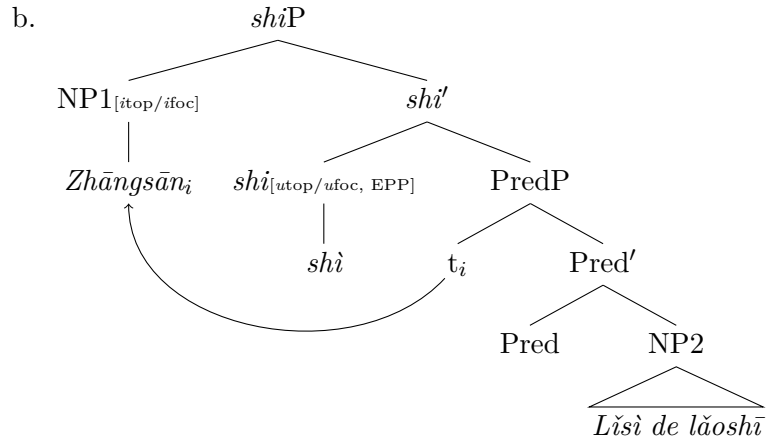The remaining three main chapters provide the structural analysis

of the abovementioned three core issues, respectively. On the basis of compatibility tests of *shì* with aspectual markers and modality and other tests, Chapter 4 argues that *shì* instantiates neither Pred, *v*/V, nor T. In line with the analysis of pronominal copular elements in other languages, it is proposed that *shì* also heads one of the SUBJPs, a functional projection that has been argued for in Cardinaletti (2004), Rizzi (2015), and Shlonsky and Rizzi (2018). In addition, the copular structure contains no VP.

Chapter 5 proposes a unified structure analysis for predicational and specificational copular sentences. The two types of sentences share the same base structure: an asymmetric structure mediated by a functional head Pred. The two NPs flanking *shì* are merged in a fixed word order: the referent nominal is the specifier of PredP, and the predicative nominal is the complement of the Pred head. The *shi*P is on top of PredP. Both of the nominals can raise to [Spec, *shi*P] via A-movement. The derivation of these two types of copular sentences is regulated by information-structural rules. Particularly, a low FocP on top of PredP is additionally proposed for the specificational structure. It is argued that predicate inversion resulting in the specificational structure is motivated by the identificational focus on the referent NP. With respect to the derivation, in the spirit of Mikkelsen (2005), this dissertation proposes that the precopular nominal must bear the [Top]/[Foc] feature corresponding to that of the *shi* head. The closest NP bearing the corresponding feature moves to [Spec, *shi*P] so that the uninterpretable feature on *shi* as well as the EPP feature can be eliminated. When the referent NP moves to the subject position, a predicational/canonical structure is derived; when the predicate NP moves to the subject position (while the referent NP moves to the low FocP), a specificational/inverse structure is derived.

(1) and (2) below present the structures for predicational/canonical and specificational/inverse copular sentences, respectively.
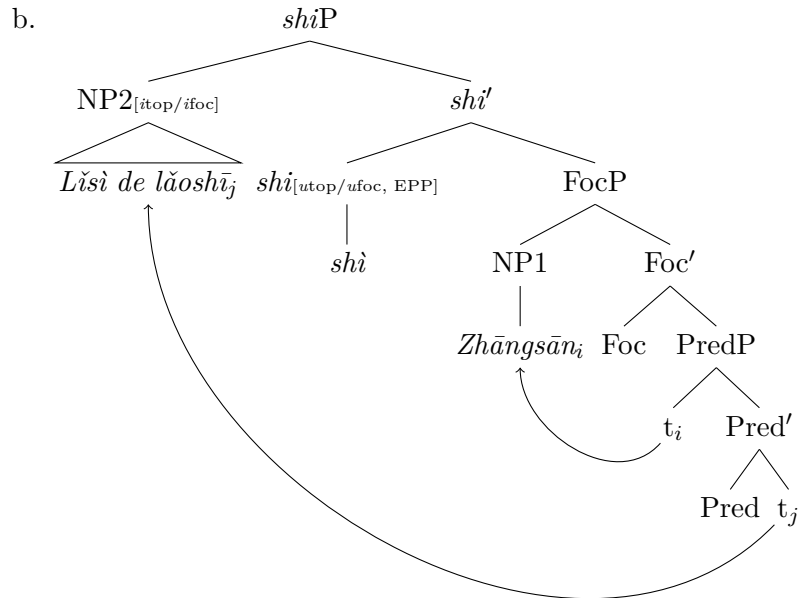
(1)   Predicational/Canonical
　　a. 张三是李四的老师。
　　　*Zhāngsān shì　Lǐsì de　lǎoshī.*
　　　Zhangsan COP Lisi SUB teacher
　　　'Zhangsan is Lisi's teacher.'

b.

shiP

NP1[*i*top/*i*foc] — *Zhāngsān*ᵢ

shi′ — shi[*u*top/*u*foc, EPP] (*shì*) — PredP

PredP → tᵢ, Pred′ → Pred, NP2 (*Lǐsì de lǎoshī*)

(2)   Specificational/Inverse

a. 李四的老师是张三。
*Lǐsì de   lǎoshī   shì   Zhāngsān.*
Lisi SUB teacher COP Zhangsan
'Lisi's teacher is Zhangsan.'

b.

shiP

NP2[*i*top/*i*foc] — *Lǐsì de lǎoshī*ⱼ

shi′ — shi[*u*top/*u*foc, EPP] (*shì*) — FocP

FocP → NP1 (*Zhāngsān*ᵢ), Foc′ → Foc, PredP

PredP → tᵢ, Pred′ → Pred, tⱼ

Chapter 6 investigates the question as to whether the copular structures contain a TP on top of the *shi*P. It is first shown that on a par with non-copular sentences, Mandarin copular sentences also show an individual-level vs stage-level distinction, according to the diagnostics defined in this chapter. The properties of the predicate NPs are decisive. This chapter also shows that, for both copular and non-copular sentences in Mandarin, sentences with a stage-level predicate (SLP) can combine with temporal adverbials, while sentences with an individual-level predicate (ILP) cannot. Moreover, when uttered in isolation, the human subject of an SLP sentence (without a temporal expression) must be alive. In contrast, the subject of an ILP sentence can be either alive or dead. To account for this phenomenon, it is proposed that Mandarin ILP sentences do not have a TP in the structure, in contrast to SLP sentences, which do.