Predication and sluicing in Mandarin Chinese

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Early Chinese linguists have already noticed that nominal phrases can be used as predicates (Lu 1941, Chao 1988, Zhu 1982, and many others). This view is just in conformity with that of some generative linguists, holding that NP in languages such as English can serve as a predicate, while mostly DP is an argument (Stowell 1989, 1991a, b, Longobardi 1994, Szabolcsi 1987, 1992, 1994, Tang 2001, and Li 1998). However, interestingly, the so-called “Mandarin nominal predicate” is not merely a bare N or NP. Instead, we find that ‘not-so-bare’ projections such as NumP, CIP, AP-de, and even ‘X (traditionally called ci ’phrase’) down in the lexicon under ‘X-theory, can be potential candidates of predicate. Within this range, a real nominal predicate still has to meet a prerequisite: the modifier-modifiee pattern, which is traditionally named Pian-Zheng-Shi (偏正式), which scope, however, is still too broad to define the real essence of nominal predicate. Therefore, some constraints are necessary. (i) The combination of lexemes (cisu ‘词素’) under ‘X level are not nominal predicates, excluding elements such as xuesheng ‘student’ and jiashou ‘professor’. (ii) Indefinite/definite DP is not an argument. (iii) The semantic interaction between subject and nominal predicate plays a role in determining the legitimacy of nominal predicate construction. In addition, nominal predicate sentence is not a bare small clause, as Tang (2000) has claimed, but a full-fledged clause with functional projections such as CP, IP, TP, etc.

However, where does the modificational predication come from? To resolve this mystery, nominal predicate construction can be realized as a triangular system: [subject [modifier-modifiee]. (i) Modifier and modifiee: Given Lu’s (1941) notion of phrase-clause transition and the postulation of an implicit verb within nominal proposed by Vendler (1967), Bolinger (1967), Larson (1998, 1999), every nominal predicate can be realized as a “mini” clause [modifiee (V)-modifier], e.g. da yanjing ‘big eyes’ \[yanjing da \] ‘eyes big’ and for those modifier without predication like zui ‘mouth’ in yizhang zui ‘one mouth’ \[zui V-yizhang \] ‘mouth amounts to one’ in the sequence yizhi qinwa yizhang zui ‘one frog one mouth’. (ii) Subject and modifiee: Between them, the relation is either identificational, e.g. ta Taiwan ren ‘he is a person (relating to Taiwan)’ or possessive, e.g. ta da yanjing ‘his eyes (are big)’. (iii) Subject and modifier: The scope of this modifier is determined by subject-modifiee relations. (a) Pure identificational relation: Modifier modifies either subject or modifiee, e.g. ta [ren V-Taiwan] ‘Taiwanese people or He relates to Taiwan’. (b) Pure possessive relation: Modidier reaches only modifiee, e.g. ta [yanjing da] ‘big eyes; *He is big’. (c) Ambigious modifier modifies either event (e) or individual (x) of the modifiee, e.g. ta lao zongtong ‘He is an old president (x) (identificational); He is a former president (e) (possessive).’ From this triangular relationship, inner predication between modifiee and (V)-modifier and outer predication between the matrix subject and nominal predicate compositionally derive modificational predication, in conformity with Rothstein’s (2001) external argument requirement and Williams’ (1983) thematic saturation. Crucially, modifiee plays dual roles of subject and a part of predicate of the matrix subject, as represented below.

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(1) \ (a) \ [\text{subject}(x) \ [\lambda \ x [\text{PredP}(x) \ \text{modifiee}(y) \ [\lambda \ y [\text{Pred'}(y) (V)-\text{modifier}]])] ]] (Post-lexical)
\]
(b) \[ \text{subject} \ (x) [\lambda \ x [\text{PredP}(x) .. [\text{Pred}(x) \text{ modifiee} (y) [\lambda \ y [\text{‘Pred} (y) (F)-modifiee]]])] \] (Lexical)

The above analysis can also interpret aspects of Mandarin sluicing as in (2).

(2) Zhangsan song mouren yixie-dongxi, dan wo bu zhidaoy *shshi/ shi shei (shenmeren
Zhangsan give someone some-thing but I not know be who be what-person
*shshi shenme/ (shi) shenme-dongxi (shi) weshenme/ (shi) (zai) shenmeshihou

be be be what be what be why be at what time
‘Zhangsan gave someone something, but I don’t know who/what/why/when.’

We propose that sluicing in Mandarin is generated neither by deletion nor by copying but by the general notion of predication. The core of sluicing can be represented as a simple embedded clause, [pro (shi) wh-remnant], in which all wh-elements just like nominals can be divided into two broad types: predicative vs. non-predicative. There are three nominal wh-predicates, including [NP Wh-modifier [modifiee]] (‘what-person’), [NP Wh-modifier [empty modifiee]] (‘which one’), and [ClP Modifier [wh-modifiee]] (‘what day/what date/what rank), and two adjectival/prepositional wh-predicates, [pp Preposition [wh-element]] (‘where’) and [AP Wh-modifier [adjectival]] (‘how expensive’) as well as two non-predicative nominal wh-words, shei ‘who’ and shenme ‘what’. If wh-words are predicative, shi ‘be’ is optional and plays the role of emphatic maker and if non-predicative, shi, being obligatory, is an equative verb. The empty pronominal is attributed to the pro-drop parameter and can be further divided into two types: nominal pro and event pro, each of which refers to a fitting antecedent and serves as a connector in the complex Chain [antecedent, pro, wh-remnant]. The nominal wh-remnant is predicated of the subject pro, which, now a nominal pro, must coindex with an overt “fitting” nominal antecedent in the topic conjunct in the overt syntax. By the same token, a prepositional/adjectival wh-predicates is predicated of the subject pro, which, now an event pro, must refer to a covert/overt “fitting” semantic argument of an event predicate in the first conjunct in LF, along the vein of Davidson’s (1967) and Parsons’ (1990) event semantics. The obligatory construal of pro can be further accounted for under Huang’s (1989) GCR and topic-comment predication between the first and the second conjunct. Even if GCR does not require pro to be obligatorily controlled because of its lack of accessible SUBJECT in its potential control domains, topic-comment correlation in turn requires the pro to coindex with a fitting antecedent in the first conjunct, either in overt syntax or in the logical form. As a result, our predicational sluicing analysis respects non-overt wh-movement, unravels the distribution of shi ‘be’, explains the different degrees of island violation and strict/slopping identity in terms of the distinction of nominal pro and event pro, predicts the existence of multiple sluicing, and finally avoids the violation of parallelism. Briefly, Mandarin sluicing is a manifestation of predication, including modificational, shi, and prepositional/adjectival predication and topic-comment predication. This predication feature may stand out as a copula in wh-in-situ and pro-drop languages such as Chinese, Japanese, and Korean, which are considered “predicational sluicing” languages in contrast to “recoverable sluicing” languages.
like English.