Chinese Syntax
A Minimalist Approach
Sentence Types

• Declarative
  我吃了饭
  I eat ASP food "I ate"
• Tag question
  你吃了没
  you eat ASP neg "Have you eaten?"
• Topic-comment

• Yes-no question
  你吃了吗
  you eat ASP Q "Have you eaten?"
• A-not-A
  你去不去
  you go no go "Are you going?"
Sentence Structure

• Typically SVO structure, but there are a number of exceptions to this.

• Another common form is SOV, which along with other normally left branching elements (see later discussion on modifiers) of the language has led some linguists to suggest a left branching tree structure.
Typical Verbal Structure

- **Intransitive Sentence**
  - `fan re le`
  - rice hot ASP
  - `The rice is hot now`

- **Transitive Sentence**
  - `wo qu re fan`
  - I go hot rice
  - `I will go and heat the rice`

- **Ditransitive Sentence**
  - `Zhangsan gei ni zhe ben shu`
  - Zhangsan give you this book
  - `Zhangsan is giving you this book`
• 5 Aspects:

• 1 Progressive
• 2 Durative
• 3 Habitual
• 4 Experiential Perfective
• 5 Culminative Perfective
Aspect is created by particles:

Progressive:
Lisi zai chouyan
Lisi PROG smoke
'Lisi is smoking.'

Durative:
Lisi yiyunbufade zhan zhe
Lisi quietly stand DUR
'Lisi is standing quietly.'

Habitual
Lisi chouyan
Lisi smoke
'Lisi smokes.'

Experiential perfective:
wo qu guo Luoshanji
'I go EXP Los Angeles
'I have been to Los Angeles.'

Culminative Perfective:
Wo chi pingguo le
'I eat apple PERF
'I ate the apple.'
**ba Construction**

wo ba yaoshi wang le
'I forgot the key.'

- The ba construction creates a sentence structure where the object comes before the verb.

- It appears that a feature on BA causes the object to move to a higher position in the tree.
Prepositions

Similar to English:

我座飞机从上海到北京去
wo zuo feiji cong
shanghai dao beijing qu
I sit airplane from
Shanghai to Beijing go

I will take an airplane
from Shanghai to Beijing
Nominals

May include:
• appositive
• determiner
• number
• classifier
• other modifiers
• noun
• more nouns...

• Example:
• "inside those three black cats"

• That three black cats inside
• "inside those three black cats"
Φ-Features

• Plurality marked on humans

• Nominal classifiers
  o long and skinny
  o flat
  o bound
  o animal
  o etc ------------------->

我 (wo) = I
我们 (women) = We

个 catchall
册 volumes of books
层 story of a building
朵 flowers and clouds
架 aircraft, pianos, machines
件 matters, clothing
门 academic matters (courses, majors)
座 large buildings, mountains
条 long, narrow, flexible things (fish, river, road, pants)
辈 lifetime
他们那三个学生

"[They] those three students"

Notice: there is one Φ feature, plurality, marked by -men. This agrees with san, 'three'.

DP vs. CLP Analysis
Number on *san* (Num) and *tamen* (spec DP) agree.
Number on *san* (Num, spec CLP) and *tamen* (spec CLP) agree.

Also rules out stranded numbers:

*I want three*
Thematic Nominals

- Accomplished through modification
- Make the agent into a possessor
- Make the action a possessee

- Transitives use a preposition:
  - 他对我的袭击
  - he to I DE attack
  - "his attacking me"

- No good way to do ditransitives
nP shell or not?

Not
Modifiers

- Adjectives and relative clauses are both marked with *de* and modify nouns through left adjunction:

  ```
  NP
     /\    /
    /  \  /  \  
   \   /   \   /
   lanse  hua
  ```

- Possessors merge in the specifier of NP:

  ```
  NP
     /\    /
    /  \  /  \  
   \   /   \   /
   wo    N
              /
             chengshi
  ```
Relative Clauses:

na ge [dai yanjing de] nanhai
that CL wear glasses DE boy
that boy, who wears glasses

[dai yanjing de] na ge nanhai
[wear glasses DE] that CL boy
the boy that wears glasses
Topic-Comment Construction

Nei  kuai tian  women jia  fei
That  CL  field  we  add  fertilizer
'That field, we fertilize it.'

Zhangsan chi le  yu  le
Zhangsan eat  ASP  fish  PART
'Zhangsan ate fish.'

Zhangsan yu  chi  le
Zhangsan fish  eat  ASP
'Zhangsan ate fish.'
Constituency Tests: Elipsis

Two types of elision:

Elision of sentential subject:
you shuijiao ma
have dumplings Q
'do you have dumplings?'

Noun phrases with no head word:
tamen you pianyi de ma
they have cheap DE Q
'Do they have a cheap (one)?'

*the head of the noun phrase which begins with pianyi de has been deleted.
Constituency Tests:
Cleft/Pseudocleft

regular sentence:
qunian  Zhangsan  biye
last year Zhangsan graduate
'Zhangsan graduated last year.'

pseudo-cleft version:
Zhangsan shi qunian  biye  de  ren
Zhansan  is  last year graduated DE person
'Zhangsan is the one who graduated last year.'

cleft version:
Zhangsan shi qunian  biye  de
Zhangsan is  last year graduated DE
'It was last year that Zhangsan graduated.'

cleft variant version:
Zhangsan shi qunian  bi  de ye
Zhangsan is  last year graduated DE
'It was last year that Zhangsan graduated.'