
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.
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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'

TP

- 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 yianbufade 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 BA key forget PERF

'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.
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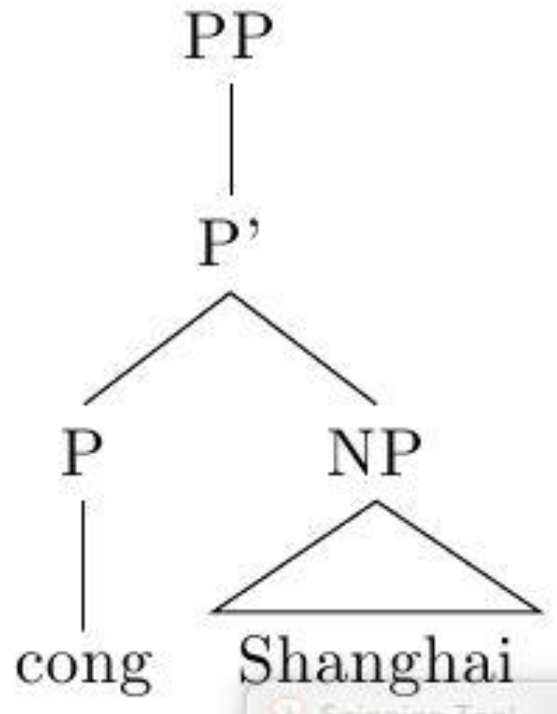
Prepositions

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:

- 那三只黑猫里
 - na san zhi hei
mao li
 - that three CL
black cat inside
 - "inside those three
black cats"
-

Φ-Features

- Plurality marked on humans
- Nominal classifiers
 - long and skinny
 - flat
 - bound
 - animal
 - 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

條 long, narrow, flexible things (fish, river, road, pants)

辈 lifetime

DP vs. CLP Analysis

他们那三个学生

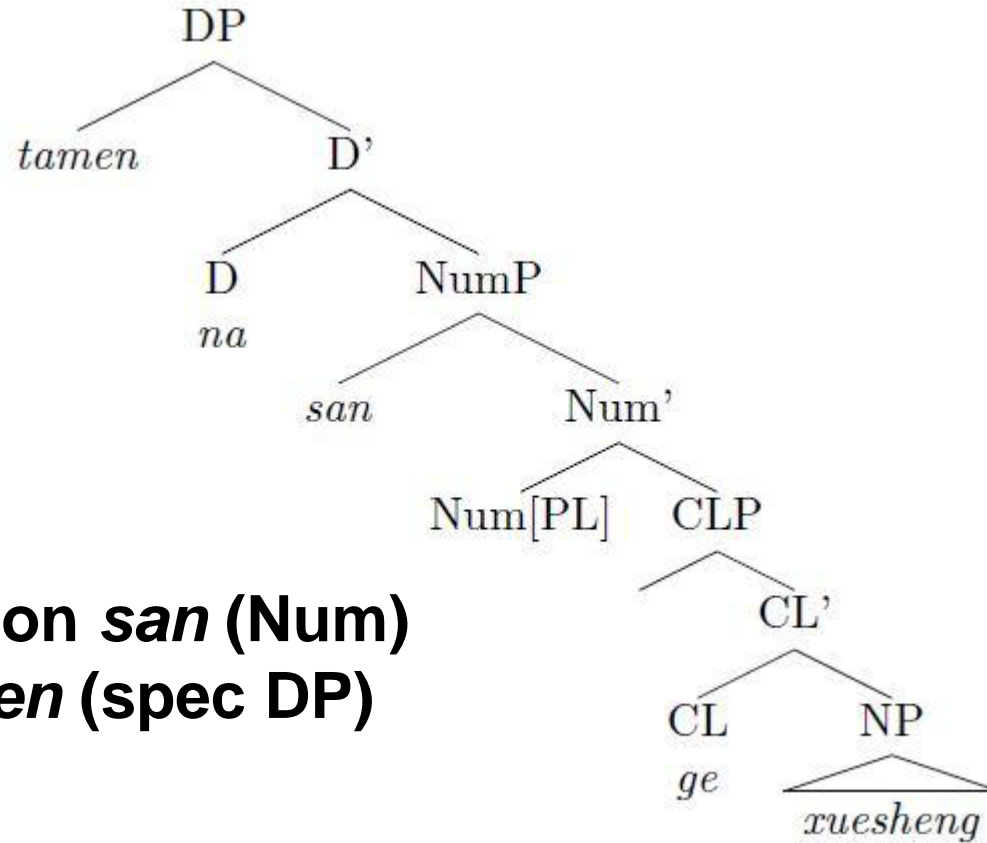
tamen na san ge xuesheng

they that three CL student

"[They] those three students"

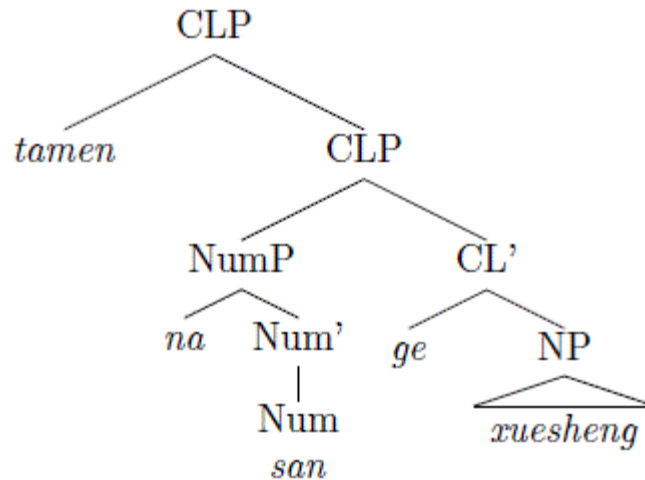
Notice: there is one Φ feature, plurality, marked by *-men*. This agrees with *san*, 'three'.

DP



Number on *san* (Num) and *tamen* (spec DP) agree.

CLP



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

Also rules out stranded numbers:

*我要三

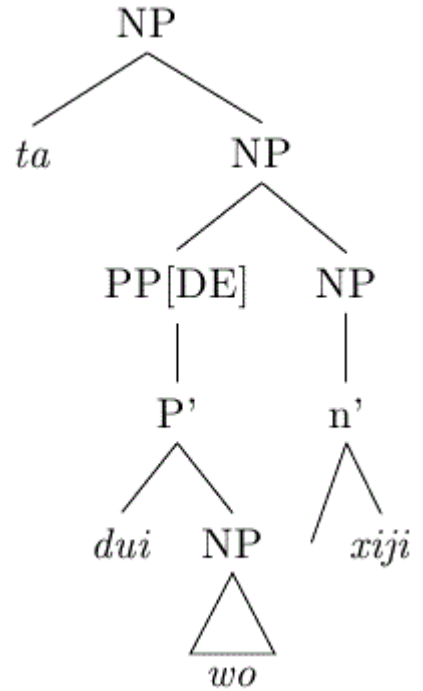
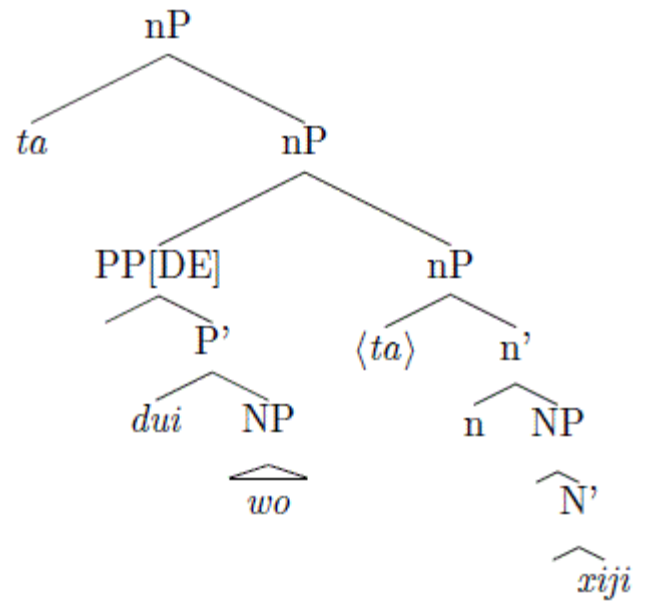
*I want three

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
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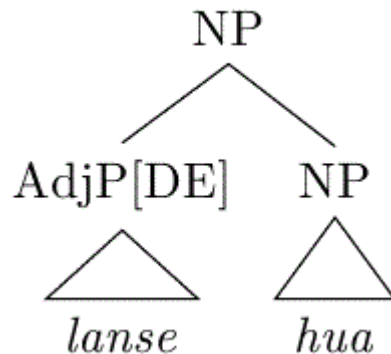
nP shell or not?



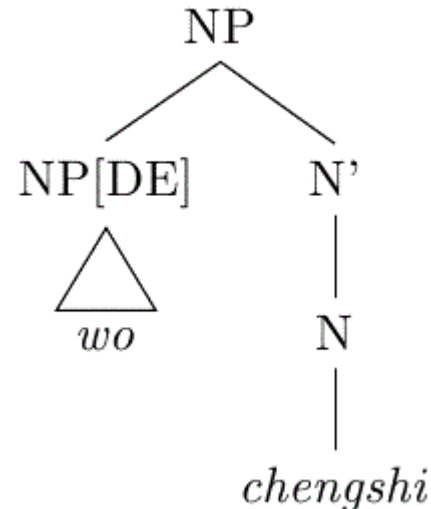
Not

Modifiers

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



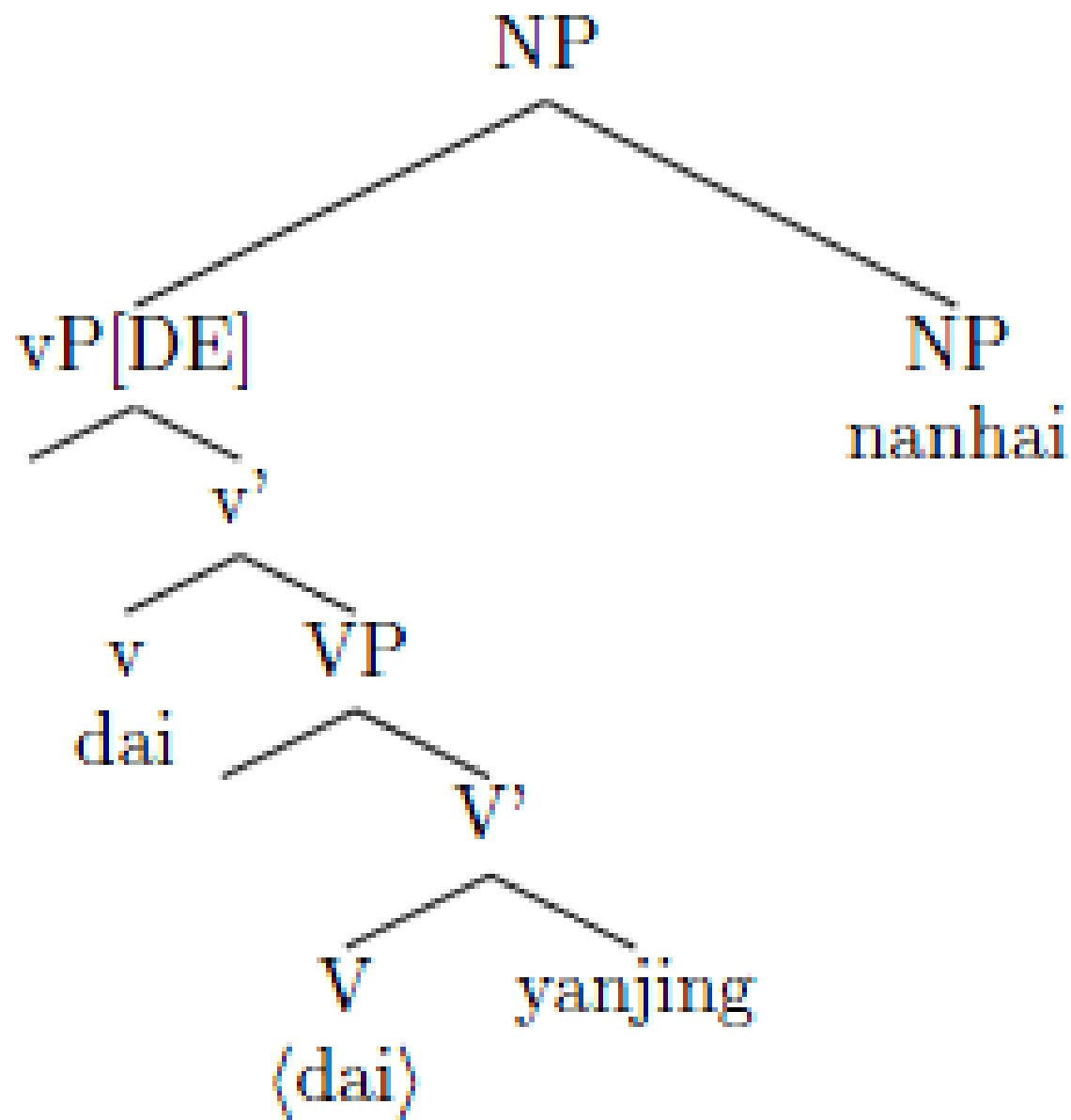
- Possessors merge in
- the specifier of NP:



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

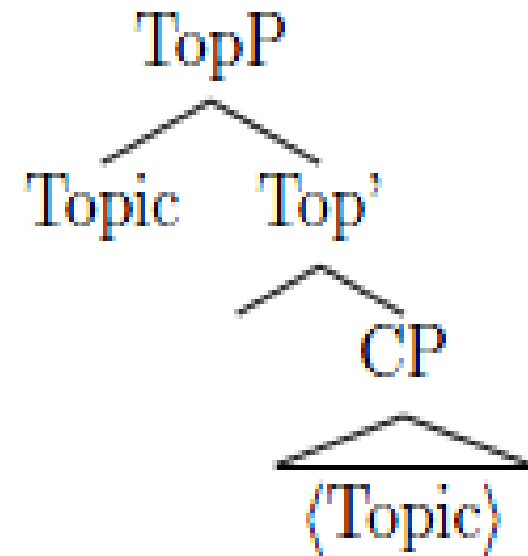


Topic-Comment Construction

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:

Noun phrases with no head word:

Elision of sentential subject:

you shuijiao ma

have dumplings Q

'do you have dumplings?'

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
Zhangsan 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
